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Deuteronomy 24-25 "The Civil Law Reveals God's Heart" June 22, 2016

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Deuteronomy 24 as we continue our journey through the Bible and in our favorite book - Deuteronomy. Atta boy. There you go.

It was the last message Moses ever delivered before being taken by the Lord, and he sat for forty days - with these 2½ million folks, at 120 years old - as God's wonderful servant who sought to rally the troops. He wanted to rally them to faith and to obedience to their awesome God that had brought them so far. He spends a lot of these chapters warning them about the failure of their parents to go forward and how that they shouldn't fail, how faithful God has been, and that they can possess the land that God has chosen for them. He talked to them about the power that they had seen. You know, after thirty-eight years, they headed back towards the Land of Promise, to the border, and God used them to wipe out some brutal tribes on the east side of the Jordan. In fact, from the north all the way down to the Dead Sea - but on the other side of the Jordan - they were able to overthrow these brutal enemies, much stronger than they, because they had just been faithfully walking with God. So they'd proven that God would do even as He had said. So by the time they get to Kadesh Barnea, this border town near Jericho where, in a few weeks, they would cross in and have to walk by faith, they'd had a year of really tasting and seeing what God could do. It wasn't just believing. No. You can see what God has done.

Moses' teaching method in this book is pretty simple. He reminds them. He reminds them of who they are, where they've come from, what God has done, what their forefathers had failed to do, how God was expecting them now (in obedience) to follow Him. They had come to know the Lord personally, and God had done great things. And so the whole message is - remember and obey, remember and obey; that God's greatest joy from your life is your obedience to Him, more than anything else. More than whatever you might do, whatever ministry you might be in, whatever things you think you've accomplished for His name's sake, the greatest joy He has from you is your willingness to believe Him. Lord, I trust You. I'm going to obey You. I'm going to do it Your way. "If you love Me," Jesus said, "keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

Besides the book of Psalms (which has one more quote than Deuteronomy), Deuteronomy, by a long margin, is the most quoted book in the New Testament; is the most quoted book by Jesus - more than any other, except for Psalms, which has one more verse. So, put those two together, and you get a lot of quotes; and by a wide margin. And the reason is pretty simple. God calls us to know Him and to love Him. It's a thread that's drawn through every book of the Bible, isn't it? It's all about relationship with God and faith in Him. And obedience is the way that we love God. Obedience is the way that you love God. You can say it all day long. You don't do it, He's not buyin' it. It makes sense. Right? The proof is in the doing, and it is the way of life for the saints.

Well tonight we continue in Moses' sermons. We've taken two chapters that we're going to look at - chapters 24 and 25. There's only one more week or so of the civil law before we are back in and away from these short, sometimes, addresses of things that they needed to consider. But these are laws to consider. And you should know by now that the Law of God in the Old Testament fell under three categories. If you don't know that, learn it, because it'll help you as you go forward.

There was the civil law. The civil laws that God gave to Israel were because God was their ruler. They were a monarchy. They were the only nation upon the planet that listened to what God had to say, or they should have. And so God gave them a prescription of a way of life, for a nation being God's people. And He delivered that to them. It was a monarchy whose laws came from God. In that sense, those laws are not in force with you and me, but the principles that directed them certainly are.

The ceremonial laws, which was the second "c" if you will, were designed to govern your approach to God so that you couldn't come without a blood sacrifice; there needed to be a priest in the way, if you will; there needed to be confession of sin; you couldn't get so close to God's presence. And all of those things - the lamb, the bloodshed, God's holiness, our sinfulness, the cost of drawing near to Him - were designed to get you and me thinking about what Jesus would come to do. So, if you read the book of Hebrews, you find Paul arguing with the Jews, who are contemplating leaving Christ to go back to the Law because it was safer, that it would be a foolish thing to go back when those things back there pointed you to Christ. And so, the ceremonial laws are not in force for us. They were all fulfilled in Jesus. There's no need for a temple now. There's no need for blood sacrifice.

There's no need for those kinds of things because now, in Christ, you have the Lamb without spot - given His life for you and me. So there's a civil law that governs the nation. There's a ceremonial law that governs their worship and their approach to God.

And then there was the moral law. The moral law is encompassed in the Ten Commandments. They are very much in force. Now they apply in a hundred different ways, but it is the moral law that God speaks to every heart to convince man of his sin and his need for salvation.

So there was the civil law, the ceremonial law and the moral law which, like I said, is still very much in force. But it drives you - the moral law - to ask for a Deliverer, One who could forgive and restore. And so that law is constant. Now what you learn from the ceremonial law is your relationship with God through His Son - the cost, the blood, the sacrifice. What you learn from the civil law is God's heart. If you really want to know how God would run the nations, how God would run people, if you will, in His kingdom, this is the heart of God's love. And they are commandments that are, like I said, you can't really pick them up and say, "This is what the church has to do now." No. These were civil rules. But at the same time, they are ones that are often quoted in the New Testament and given spiritual application for us, and there are principles there that we can't change. And we'll run into several of those tonight. So, civil, ceremonial and moral. Is there a third "c" for moral? What do you think? Conscience, maybe. How about that? Civil, ceremonial and conscience. That's where God speaks to you. So that's what we'll look at tonight. Like I said, we have one more week of civil law, which you kind of go, "Well, that doesn't apply to me." Well, it doesn't in many ways. But it does because it shows you what God's heart is like, what His desire would be. And if He was the Ruler of the earth, and He will be - He's coming to rule and reign, these are the civil laws that you certainly are going to find apply.

Well let's go back to chapter 24 now and begin in verse 1, where God speaks about the sanctity of marriage, first, and the consequences of divorce. Verse 1, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then

her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance." So the law of divorce - four verses. Women in pagan cultures, and it's certainly in this time that we are reading, had little to no rights at all. The male-dominated culture - not biblical, by the way, but certainly pagan in its origin, man ruling, if you will, in sin - found that women had, like I said, very difficult times maintaining themselves in the culture. Here's an example of that. She was taken in marriage, and then her husband divorced her for what appears to be every imaginable reason; a simple note, "I divorce you. You're a bad cook. You look terrible in the morning. Your make-up's insufficient." And some even worse, and you can read about them, certainly, in historical books. In Jewish homes, dowries were paid - almost like alimony in advance - in case a woman would be so mistreated by her husband that she would have money to continue providing for herself and her family. But the culture wouldn't allow women even to work outside the home. So she was really at the mercy of her husband or of her father. Here's God's Word to God's people about God's rules for their life - in a civil sense. And though they were going to be encircled by pagan nations, God valued the woman and wanted her cared for and protected, as you might remember from chapter 23 where He talked quite a bit about that last time. Unfortunately, like most nations that abandon what God has to say, the Jews, over time, turned their focus from the seriousness of marriage and the protection of women and the consequences of divorce - which are mentioned here in just a few short verses, which are the essentials - to an argument about what the word "uncleanness" meant in verse 1; so that they could determine what, then, would be the proper paperwork to hand over. And this idea of God protecting women in marriage, and the sanctity of it, and the seriousness of divorce, was reduced by those who would just say, "Well, what does God mean when He says, 'They found no favor in her, she's got some uncleanness, and then make sure you write this certificate of divorce'?" And everything turned to those two things. Not seeing God's protection for the wives, they marched out to make this about writing official documents, being sure the divorce could go forth honorably.

Now, two thoughts developed as time went on in regards to this, led by two leading rabbis in the country by the time that Jesus came upon the scene. There was a fellow named Rabbi Hillel. If you go to Israel today, there are about fifteen "Hillel" streets that are still named for this rabbi. He was a very liberal guy. He believed that as long as the written notice was properly written, the divorce was legal before God no matter what the uncleanness was. That was his teaching. It's

written down. You can go find it. If you don't smile enough, just write that in there. "She doesn't smile enough." If she burned the toast, "Burned the toast." And this rabbi, who took this position, died about twenty years before Jesus began His public ministry. And Rabbi Hillel, as you might suspect amongst the world, was as popular as ever in a society dominated by men who didn't give women the rightful place they deserve to have. So he was a champion for men's abuse of women. There was another fellow named Rabbi Shammai (there aren't twenty streets named after him), on the other hand, who took a very strict interpretation of the word "uncleanness." He thought that the marriage vow and what was sacred and the divorce issue, one that was to be taken not lightly, and he determined that the word "uncleanness," there (and the word in Hebrew is "*ervah*," and "*ervah*" means something that is naked or indecent) was some sexual immorality or promiscuity short of adultery because adultery, by the law of God, demanded death. Now that wasn't always carried out. But we learn from God's heart that that brings death, doesn't it? So Rabbi Shammai took that word "*ervah*." The only other place, by the way, it's used in the Bible is in the last chapter (23) in verse 12, where it talks about sanitation directions when you're out in the field, and it talks about this indecency, the "*ervah*." It is these verses that Jesus was asked about by the religious opposition in Matthew 19. If you were with us when we did that series on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage, we went over that in great detail; and those are in the book store. I think we did six weeks on how does the Bible look at marriage, divorce and remarriage. But they came to Jesus and publicly asked Him, "Is it all right for a man to divorce a woman for any cause?" And before Jesus had time to answer, "Why does Moses then say....?" they quoted this thing about writing a bill of divorcement. And Jesus spoke to them, "Hey, haven't you read the Bible? This wasn't so from the beginning, and that wasn't God's intention." Even His disciples were wondering about it. In fact, the religious opposition wanted Jesus to take Shammai's stand - the strong stand against divorce - because everybody else loved that Hillel guy; and they just thought, "We can make a lot of enemies for Him. He's taken the wrong side of things. He's taken the less-popular side." And they knew that was the side He would take because He'd mentioned it in the Sermon on the Mount. This was not new news; this was old news.

Well Moses in actuality, here, as Jesus will explain in Matthew 19, limited divorce rather than facilitating it. In other words, despite the scriptural twisting of Hillel and his followers, Moses limited divorce to something unclean, vile, naked and shameful. Like I said, the word couldn't refer to adultery because that was, in the civil law, punishable by death (Deuteronomy, two chapters back). But Jesus said,

"Moses allowed it because of the hardness of your hearts" (or of man's heart). This was God's concession to limit the sinfulness of man and the abuse of women. In fact, it was a divine concession for a human weakness. But the Lord said, "From the beginning, that wasn't God's intention; it was one man and one woman - married for life." And when the disciples heard this, and they understood what He said (in Matthew 19), they said to the Lord, "Well, if that's the case, maybe nobody should get married." They thought that was unbelievable - that that would be God's idea. And Jesus said, "Well that's very good for those who are called to be single. But singleness is not most people's calling. And so marriage is, indeed, God's best. But it's going to take some real commitment." But here's what Moses said, "If you divorce your wife, and give her a writing and send her packing, and she marries someone else, you can never have her back. There's no fixing that. You've left her. And so she's to be left alone - not used, not coming and going as you see fit. There's some protection built in for her." So this was part of the civil law that God presented to the people. And Moses reinforces the seriousness of divorce and having to live with the consequences of it by saying, "She is left alone now. You can't go back." And the fellow might say, "Well I wrote the letter. I wrote the Deuteronomy 24. I filled in all of the paperwork." But legal doesn't mean right. Legal doesn't define God's righteousness. They follow the rules but not the heart of God.

So here's the deal - God's people were going to go into a land filled with the world's ways. But He wanted them to be different, didn't He? These were His people. So they were to walk differently than the world around them, that they would discover going forward.

Then He said one more thing about marriage, "When a man has taken a new wife," verse 5, "he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken." Happy wife, happy life. It's right in the Bible. So here's the Lord's Word to the people getting married in the nation - take a year off and have a honeymoon. I think that could be the ruin of some. The first year of marriage is usually a tough year of adjustments. You don't go to war because you're going to be at war at home. (Laughing) "Who threw their underwear behind the door and not in the basket? Who left the water running? Who.....?" It's a fun thing to watch marriages the first year. It's all kinds of adjustments. Right? You're all excited. "We're going to have two kids and a dog in the yard and our own house." Yeah, okay, that'll work. But wait till you have to live together. There's a real adjustment period. And

here's the Lord's advice - you guys, on your first year of marriage, devote yourself to making your wife happy. Know her, love her, serve her. Then, years two through whenever will be just fine. You'll have learned to do things right. Happy wife, happy life. Biblical. Civil law of God. Don't miss this, guys. Unhappy wife, not much of a life. I'm telling you - this is what it says. Right here.

Well then we are given these various civil laws that reflect - because we need to learn from God's heart - that His love is driven to action, and He wants that love to be found in the hearts of His people. For example, verse 6, "No man shall take the lower or the upper millstone in pledge, for he takes one's living in pledge." A millstone - and there were two parts, the upper and lower - was used to crush grain. They (the parts) would rub together. They would be turned upon each other. So to take someone's ability to provide food for themselves was to really not treat them in love. Oh, they may owe you something, and you may have a right to it; but, again, legal doesn't define "right" with God. Love does. You might say, "Well, it's legal." Well, there're a lot of legal things that don't please the Lord. And here is one of them. Be merciful when you lend; kindhearted as the Lord is in dealing with others. It'd be like stealing half of someone's dentures. You can't chew anymore. "Just give me them dentures till you cough up what you owe me." Be merciful!

Verse 7, "If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die; and you shall put away the evil from among you." So kidnapping and the abuse of those taken comes with deadly consequences in God's economy. Remember what Joseph's brothers did. They envied him; they thought about killing him; they finally just sold him into slavery and then had to live for years with the consequence of it in their hearts. And every time something went wrong, here's what they said, "The Lord's gettin' even with us. The Lord's gettin' even with us." Whether it was the famine or their inability or the loss of their other brother, there was always that shaky ground upon which they stood, suffering the guilt of those many years of activity. But eventually Joseph meets with them, and he makes himself known to his brothers, and he said, "God overruled your wickedness. You meant it for harm, God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). But they were in that position that, by the Law, they should have been killed. And they knew it, and so they suffered with it. When slavery was abolished in America, godly people rejoiced. God hates slavery. Unfortunately today, if you're at all involved in the understanding of human trafficking, there are still 30 million people in the world (estimated) as slaves to

others - 78% of them for labor, 22% of them in the sex trade. There are many good organizations around that are working tirelessly to help those caught up in it. If you are looking for a place to serve, that's a good work that you might want to get yourself involved with. But notice what God's Word says - that the punishment for these perpetrators should just be death. Apparently the terrorists of our day don't have a god who says the same thing.

Verse 8, "Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you carefully observe and do according to all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do. Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!" So, "Be careful to follow the prescribed laws regarding leprosy" - isolating the folks, making sure it didn't get spread, if you will, that the priests would determine who really was sick. The big chapters about leprosy (in the Old Testament) - Leviticus 13-14 - and 14 is the cool one because it says this is the law of the LORD in the day of the healing of his leprosy, and it was incurable. But God brings life where there is no life, doesn't He? And so Moses adds the example in verse 9, "Remember what God did with Miriam." And you might remember the story from Numbers 12, where she and her brother, Aaron, started complaining against Moses. "Hey, how come you're in charge all the time? We're in the same family. We have the same parents. Give me the ball for a while." And Moses could have cared less. "Well, you can have the ball if you want." But God put Moses in charge, and so, in their rebellion against his oversight, the Lord struck Miriam with leprosy. And she had to be put out of the camp, and for a week she sat outside. And 2½ million people sat and waited to move forward because Miriam had messed up. "Thanks a lot, Miriam. Now we're here another day, I guess." And Moses had to pray for her, and the Lord healed her, and then they were able to move forward again. But just listen. Be obedient. That's the call, right? Obey the work of the Lord, and obey His Word, and listen to what He has to say. God did cleanse her as everybody sat and waited.

Verse 10, "When you lend your brother anything, you shall not go into his house to get his pledge." Can you imagine that? You just bust into the guy's house, "I think I'll take that jacket over there, that chair, and I want that lamp! That'll be your collateral." No. "You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you," mister break-the-door-down. Verse 12, "And if the man is poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before the LORD your God." So,

if a poor man owes you, don't take his coat overnight. That's his blanket. He's going to freeze! Yeah, he owes you. But legal doesn't mean right! He says it again and again. It's the attitude. Not, "Hey, let him freeze for a few days. He'll know I mean business." No. You be gracious. God is honored. It's righteousness when you are willing to love others and to be sensitive to their needs. Even though you have a right, don't take advantage of them.

Verse 14, it continues that same thought. It says, "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you." So if you mistreat someone and they tell the Lord, the Lord's going to deal with you. "Do not take advantage of the poor. They are the most vulnerable. And especially the foreigner in their midst, who's at an even greater disadvantage because he doesn't know the language, he doesn't know the culture. But you make sure you pay him what he is owed. Don't misuse his labor." Legal is not right.

Verse 16, He changes topics again. These are like miscellaneous rules, if you will. "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin." I like the idea that there's personal responsibility for personal sin. The proverb of the day in the days of Ezekiel was, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). Translation: it's my parents' fault; his diet did this to my teeth. And the LORD says, "As I live, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. All souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:3-4). God will hold you responsible. Here's the good news about going to stand before the Lord - you're going by yourself. No scapegoats going with you. Not your neighbors. Not your boss. Not your children. Not that wicked husband of yours or that mean-spirited wife. You're going all by yourself. You and the Lord. And He's going to deal with you according to your decisions. That's good news, isn't it? I'm so thankful for that. You never want to come to a place - and in Jerusalem, that proverb, and in Babylon, it was always the problems come from the sins of my family, my upbringing, my situation. I never want to admit personal sin or personal liability. Adam started it. He blamed God, and he blamed Eve - "the woman that You gave me." That's blaming everybody that was around, wasn't it? Except for the elephant and the aardvark, he went after everyone; he got to Eve, he got to God.

It's everything and "not my fault." And the woman goes, "Well, it was that serpent." It's always somebody else's fault. "I'm an alcoholic because my father was an alcoholic. I have a temper because we're Irish! We Irish have the tempers, you know. It's in our genes." Really?! "I was destined for a life of crime. I grew up in the ghetto and never had a break." Really?! Is that what you're goin' with? Go back to Joseph. He comes from the ultimate dysfunctional family. He turned out just fine. It was the dysfunctional family that didn't do so well. But Joseph did just fine. The Bible teaches that sin is a matter of personal choice. We are accountable for it personally. So let God correct any aberrant thinking. There is no shifting-blame game with God. And you can change the pattern. You can just begin to walk with God, and everyone around you will then have that influence. We do have weird lawsuits today, don't we, in our culture. We now have to put on hot coffee - "Be careful, it's hot." Well, no idiot doesn't know that! It's got steam coming out. I can barely hold it. And then I drink it, and I blame you. "You gave me hot coffee, and I burned my lip. I want \$1 million." And the judge goes, "All right. That's a good idea." Really??!! That's not the way God operates. Look, it wasn't easy for the children of Israel, later on, to be in captivity and impoverished and looking at years of the same in some resettlement community; and all they did was blame others.

Now the Bible does say that God visits the sins of the parents on the children (Numbers 14:18). And in the sense that the effects of sin can pass on from generation to generation, that is so. Example - lifestyle, choices. However, I don't know about you, but I grew up in a family that was religious but not saved, and I got saved. I mean, God has a way of just bringing you out. Doesn't He? You can put an end to whatever it is. And rather than blaming someone else, don't blame anyone. The Lord said, "From now on, I don't want to hear this anymore. I don't want to hear that kind of mentality. I'll be the Judge. I know the Father, I know the Son. I'll be honest, and I'll be fair. But you're going to answer to Me." That's what He said. That's fair enough, isn't it? So, the Lord, speaking to the people, says here, "Look, quit blaming somebody else. You're going to be responsible for your behavior." It's the sinner who dies for his sin. I'll be honest with you - I see it lots, even in our culture, where the current generation gets blamed for the sins of the past - for the bigotry, for the racism. That may have happened years ago. It doesn't necessarily mean it happens now. Or it's your fault. It's the politics of the past. God's just going to deal with you, which is all that we need to know.

He says, in verse 17, "You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing." So, "Take no advantage of those with little or no defense, provide for them because you used to be poor and needy, and God came and got you. Now you go help somebody else."

He then has His welfare program for them when they enter the land. "When you reap," verse 19, "your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." Leave some behind so God might bless you. He's already blessed you. You had more than you need. You can leave some behind. But God wants to continue to bless you. Verse 20, "When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing." So, harvesting the crops, pulling up the sheaves, whatever it is, leave some behind. God's welfare program is - let the stranger and the fatherless and the widow go and pick what's left over. Let them work. How different is that from our welfare program today, where everyone's entitled, they want something for nothing? And it just ruins the esteem of a person's heart. Look, this is dignified and honorable. Even to the poor who are struggling in need, there's a way out, man. You want to work? You can eat. You want to go out and work in the fields? Come in and take what's left there. And God used it. Let them pick it for themselves. Don't fully reap your land. The poor maintains their dignity, they move ahead. Today, we have handouts - that steals motivation. It reduces self-esteem. It creates classes without love. There's no work, you don't eat. We've done it to ourselves. But here's God's Word to His people. And look how different God would do things than we would do them in the world. And notice, in verse 22, He repeats what He said in verse 18 - the motivation is God has done for you, now you do for others. His love and care for you ought to motivate you to love and care for others. Right? It's all about reaction. He first loved us. "I love Him because He first loved me" (1 John 4:19). I give because He's given so much to me. It's all a matter of, in one sense, we owe, don't we, everything we have to the God who loves us so.

Chapter 25, continuing on, verse 1, "If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight." Now, here's a great idea for court - let the just go free, punish the wicked, and do it now. Here's the interesting thing about God's economy - there was no prison system, death penalty for some, punishment for others or indebtedness for others, lashes to fit the crime, your debt was paid for immediately, and you were restored - with dignity - back into the society. You paid your debt. It was dealt with promptly. And you can get back to doing and hopefully have learned not to do it again. Pretty interesting concept, isn't it? According to verse 3, the number of lashes was limited so that the individual who was being punished could maintain his dignity after paying for his crime. He wasn't a dog to be degraded or beaten. When his debt was paid, his honor was supposed to be given back to him. Now think about that - God's view of things - and how we do things in our culture without God, where punishment drags on, no end in sight, appeal after appeal, no real sense of justice. People die before they see their case resolved. Millions of dollars are spent. We've made wealthy lawyers out of the system. And yet there's no dignity that comes with it. I love the Lord. Just keep it simple: get to the bottom of it, issue the judgment, and move on. If the punishment is due, let the punishment fit the crime. And here's the interesting thing - let it be carried out in front of the judge who made the decision. Not the judge gives the decision then runs off to play golf. No. He stays there to administer the very things that he's decided upon. He realizes the seriousness of it, and he's able to restore the person as well. So, lashes sound brutal, but I'll tell you what. It's over. Right? You can heal and move on. In a spiritual sense, obviously, Jesus took all of the lashes, didn't He? And we're free because He was punished, if you will. By His stripes we've been healed (1 Peter 2:24). But I have to believe that a nation is best served with swift and accurate justice, as quickly as you can deal with it, not these protracted fifty-year deals where who knows? Anyway, here's God's economy - He wants it dealt with, He wants the sinner to pay a price but yet to be restored. He doesn't want to just carry that on forever and ever, just kind of never making an end to it.

Verse 4, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Now, at least in the times of Moses, putting wheat on a threshing floor was designed to break the

husk. Wheat husks are pretty strong, and removing the chaff can be pretty hard work. And so eventually they figured out that an animal was brought in to tread on the grain, and he would break it up as he was milling around, and it would make taking the husk off easier. Well, in doing so, under foot, the animal would do what any of us would do. "Hey, I'd like some of that. That looks like sunflower seeds. I'd like to have me some of that." So the Lord says, "The animal that's running around, trying to crush the grain for you, doing the work for you, be sure that he's allowed to eat what he's been working on." Or, "Let him enjoy the fruit of his labor," if you will. I guess it'd be like if you worked in a restaurant. Usually they give you meals to eat - I hope they do, at least discount or something - you get to eat there; which is why you move restaurants, because the same food for a while, that's hard.

Well Paul picks this very verse, when you get to the New Testament, and applies it to pastors working in churches full-time and their salaries. And he says, "They dispense spiritual knowledge and counsel and service. They are to be given financial remuneration." And then he says, "Just like the ox treading out the grain." He uses this very verse, there in 1 Corinthians 9:9. Work in the gospel, live by the gospel is what Paul will tell these Christian leaders. The point God is making is that one who is laboring needs to be supported by the work he produces. Right? By the fruit that comes from his labor. So, if you're working, you should be paid for it; you should be cared for as much as you can. The problem, of course, comes when people want to be paid, but they're no longer producing. "Yeah, I'd like some of the wheat." "Yeah, but you haven't been treading." "That's all right. I just want some anyway." Little bit of a problem.

Verse 5, "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, 'I do not want to take her,' then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who will not

build up his brother's house.' And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed.' " Tough love, huh?! This one and the one regarding gleaning, we have just seen, are two laws you'll want to remember when we come to the book of Ruth. This one is called the Levirate marriage. The word "*levir*" comes from the Latin, meaning "husband's brother." Thus the word. But here's the gist of it - if you're married, as a man, to a woman, and you die, and you don't leave any male children, your name could effectively be lost genealogically. And God gave land to people based on their affiliation with a tribe and with a genealogy. So, by you not being able to carry on the name, if you will, that land allotment for the future, as well as your representation, would be gone. So God made a law that the next of kin, a brother, had the obligation to marry this widow, to bear children with her, and that the first child - not all of the children, but the first son that was born to him - would be named not for him but for his brother so that the name would be carried on in the land. He qualifies, though, as we will read later, only if he is not already married. In Hebrew, the term "husband's brother" is the Hebrew word "*goel*." It is mostly translated kinsman redeemer - one who is near in relationship who comes to redeem. Now we'll see that clearly when we get to the book of Ruth (I know we'll get to it eventually, it's just back here, somewhere), as Boaz, you might remember, was not a brother to Ruth's dead husband, Mahlon, but he was a near relative to her. But there was someone even closer, that was even closer in relationship. So, when Ruth came looking for covering and for that care of the next of kin, and she and Boaz began to talk, Boaz said, "I would love to redeem this land that your husband owned and pay the debt off" (which was the other part of that responsibility) "so you can have it back in your family. And then I would love to marry you and raise up children - one of them after Mahlon. But, I'm not the first in line." And so they went to the fellow that was more related, if you will, than Boaz and said, "Ruth's come back. Her husband died. And this land needs to be bought back from the creditors, and if you'll do that, you can have the land." And he said, "I'd like to do that. It's a good investment for me." And Boaz said, "Okay. But when you do that, you've got to realize you've also got to marry Ruth because she doesn't have any sons, and now someone needs to carry forth the line." And the guy said, "Well, no, I already have a family. I can't do that." And Boaz said, "Then I would like to do that." And he said, "Then you go ahead," and Boaz moved to the head of the class. But he did so in direct obedience to this law of the Levirate marriage that you find here in the Scriptures. And so the door opened for Boaz, who loved Ruth with all of his heart. It's a wonderful love story, but it revolves around this little law that we just read here in six verses, verses 5-10.

And the law became a topic used (in fact, if you read Matthew 22) by the Sadducees who came to Jesus and tried to trap Him. And the Sadducees didn't believe in a life after death. The best way to remember that is they were "sad you see." They had no hope for the future. And they came to Jesus to try to trap Him, and they said, "Teacher, Moses said if a man dies and has no children, that his brother should marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Right?" And the Lord said, "Right." And they said, "Well, now, there was a guy we knew who had seven brothers. And the first died after he was married, and he had no offspring. And he left to his brother, and the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. And finally, they died, and now there're still no kids. When they get to heaven, who's she going to be married to?" They thought, "Ah, we trapped Jesus now, big-time." And Jesus just shook His head and said, "You're not understanding the Scriptures. In resurrection, there's no marrying or given in marriage. You're just ridiculous. I'm the God of the living, not the God of the dead." So He puts them in their place, biblically, but they come with this same kind of understanding, if you will. And I should tell you - if I was in the situation, and my six brothers had died, I would not go forward. (Laughing) She's doing something to the food, I'm thinking. But ultimately this portrait is, again, this picture of Jesus. He's our near kinsman. He's God. He comes to take His flesh. He's like one of us. "He's tempted in every way like we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), and He goes to sacrifice Himself so that we can become God's children. He's the perfect picture of the kinsman redeemer, the "*goel*," if you will.

Notice that, in verse 7, if you were to refuse, you were a villain. You had a name tag attached to you. You were not a godly man. You were the one who had his sandal removed. You got spit in your eye in front of the elders of the city. You were marked for who you were.

By the way, I should tell you that this law was already practiced - without it ever being written down or established - way back in Genesis 38, way before Moses showed up, way before there was this law of God. And you might remember the story of Judah, who gave his eldest son, Er, to Tamar. And when Er died, Onan, who was the next brother in line, refused to take his appointed role. So, even before this was codified and written down through Moses, God had already made this practice clear to His people - that there was this succession responsibility. And God killed Onan, and the Bible says He just took him out. Well then there was a third son, the only son (named Shelah) left, and it was Judah who said to the Lord, "Could we just wait a little while? That's my last boy." And he didn't want to

put his son in a precarious place. So you can read the whole story. I won't tell you the whole story, but you can read the story and how it ends in Genesis 38. It's a good lesson.

But the point is that already there was an understanding of the obligation to carry forth a brother's name. No force. You didn't have to do it, but a real pressure in duty and honor because doing the right thing or being known for doing the wrong thing - legal does not mean right. God has a way of making sure of that. So, serve others for the sake of the glory of God.

Verse 11, "If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her." This is the Bible version of "hitting below the belt." (Laughing) I guess don't do that.

Verse 13 (I know when to keep reading), "You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD your God is giving you. For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD your God." So God's weights and measures laws - He loves honesty. And His promise is attached to it. You want to stay in the land, you want to be successful, you want God to bless you? Then be honest in all of your ways. Now, there's something about dishonesty that we kind of tend to draw to. "I gave him a \$10. He gave me change for a \$20. I really cooked today." No. You just give it back. "Well, then I'm out \$10." No. Then you're ahead with God. Right? There's a world way, and there's God's way. God hates crooked dealings. You want to extend your ways in the Lord? You want God to bless your life? Just do everything properly, correctly. He loves perfect weights and perfect measures. And then God will bless you because, verse 16 says, to do anything else is to be an abomination. And you never want to read your name with the words "abomination to the Lord." You don't want those two things together.

Verse 17, "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all

around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget." The Amalekites, as you might recall, had resorted to dirty tactics in pursuing the children of Israel as they were coming out of Egypt. They were in a place called Rephidim. It was a wilderness area. You can read about it in Exodus 17. So they hadn't even gotten to Mount Sinai yet. It was the first six weeks of leaving Egypt before they got to Mount Sinai; it was a six-week trip. They weren't even there yet. So it was early on. And these guys came and just tried to take out the people that were the weakest, the slowest, the ones kind of hanging around in the back of the pack. They focused on the weak. The enemy always does this, doesn't he? I mean, the enemy targets those hanging around the back. I don't mean in the back of the church - you that are in the back row - but living your life far from the center of God's will. Arm's length with God is not a good place to be. You're kind of picking for the enemy. The frontlines are the safest place to be. The outskirts are not. You really want to be safe? Get as close to the frontline as you can.

Well, just to kind of look back and think about the story, when these guys came to attack, the children of Israel were absolutely unprepared; they weren't warriors, they were wanderers. They'd gotten out of 430 years of captivity, and they'd been out for less than a month - going through the parting of the Red Sea, and they were waiting for food to fall from the skies and water out of the rocks - they didn't have any implements of war. And yet the Lord said to Moses, "Take the men and begin to fight these very stubborn and difficult and powerful men, the Amalekites." And Moses sends Joshua out, his helper. "Hey, Joshua, you go handle it." Smart move, Moses. Well, when Moses goes up on the hill, and he holds out the staff that God has given to him for God's blessing upon the people in the battlefield. And while that staff is held out there, the people do really well. But Moses is 80 already. He's tired. So he goes like this after a while (his arm falls down). And then the battle would go the other way. "Oh, sorry. Sorry." He finally calls a couple of guys up there - Aaron and Hur - and says, "Could you just hold up my arms? Because we need God's blessing." And then they defeated them soundly that day.

Well, in biblical typology, when you read through the Old Testament, Amalek is always representative of the battle that you and I face with our flesh. It's always there, it's always opposing, it's not fair, it doesn't consider what God has to say. And, as you go back and read Exodus, you'll hear the Lord say that He will promise

us one day that we will be delivered from Amalek. And you will. We were talking about Chuck (Langstaff) being so sick tonight and maybe going home to be with the Lord tonight. He'll be delivered from Amalek tonight. There won't be any more battles for him. He's not going to be hurting at all. We won't like missing him, but God'll like having him, and we'll have another face in heaven we can relate to. So, there is a day coming when Amalek gets defeated. Your body gives up, and you take off, and you leave this old thing behind. But until then, there's a battle. There's a battle. In fact, the Lord said to the children of Israel and to Joshua, "You will always be fighting that battle with Amalek. But there's one day coming when you'll be delivered."

So, Saul learned that. You can't make provision for the flesh. You can't let it live. It'll catch up to you. When Saul was sent by the Lord, he was told to go wipe out everything that smells of Amalek (1 Samuel 15). "Wipe out the Amalekites." And Saul didn't. He went, and he kept the king (a guy named Agag). He kept a bunch of sheep. When Samuel, the prophet, showed up, and he was blind by then, he said to Saul, "How's the battle going that the Lord sent you to?" And Saul went, "Oh, it's great, man. We're cookin'." And Samuel said, "Well, if you're cookin', how come I'm hearing the bleating of sheep in my ears? The Lord said destroy everything." And he said, "Oh, no, no. We got the king for negotiation, and we got the best sheep to give to the Lord later. It's going to be great." He left vestiges of the flesh behind. And it becomes this great picture of - you can give your life to the Lord, but the more you let the flesh in, the less victory you have. There's always that battle. Well, later on, Saul is killed on the battlefield by a descendant of King Agag; he happened to be an Amalekite. The guy he had let live killed him. If you let your flesh live, it'll kill you spiritually. You'll lose the battle.

So, "Remember what they did to you on the way out. Remember them when you get into the land. Blot out the remembrance of them from under heaven." Don't forget what the flesh can do to you, and don't give it any room to move. Good advice, right?

Well, next week we're going to look at two more chapters of law. I hope you'll read ahead. And then we're going to get to some really cool stuff. You're going to enjoy it. Because it's our favorite book. Did you know that? It is. Our plan after we finish Deuteronomy, which I believe is next communion (not this communion but next communion) is to have a question-and-answer night. We'll bring you some questionnaires (you can get online, too), and we're going to have you stump the

pastors. It'll be great. And they'll answer questions for an hour. Then, the following week, we're going to spend a couple of months on Hebrews 11. And the reason we're sticking that in there before we go to Joshua is the whole book of Joshua is about faith and walking in faith and entering by faith and taking by faith and what faith means to God. We use that word a lot. But what does it mean? So we have these forty verses in Hebrews 11 that define the kind of faith that pleases God. So we want to go through them, kind of systematically, with you - week in and week out, go through those forty verses so we have a really good handle on the kind of faith that pleases God. And then we'll come back to Joshua, and we'll run with them into the land, and it'll be a lot of fun to cross the Jordan. It'll be something we'll look forward to.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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