

JUDGMENT IN THE GATE

Chris Calton of the Mises Institute relates the following sad story:

In 1991, Maui police officers showed up at the home of Frances and Joseph Lopes. One officer showed his badge and said, "Let's go into the house, and we will explain things to you." Once he was inside, the explanation was simple: "We're taking the house." The Lopeses were far from wealthy. They worked on a sugar plantation for nearly fifty years, living in camp housing, to save up enough money to buy a modest, middle-class home. But in 1987, their son Thomas was caught with marijuana. He was twenty-eight, and he suffered from mental health issues. He grew the marijuana in the backyard of his parents' home, but every time they tried to cut it down, Thomas threatened suicide. When he was arrested, he pled guilty, was given probation since it was his first offense, and he was ordered to see a psychologist once a week. Frances and Joseph were elated. Their son got better, he stopped smoking marijuana, and the episode was behind them. But when the police showed up and told them that their house was being seized, they learned that the episode was not behind them. That statute of limitations for civil asset forfeiture was five years. It had only been four. Legally, the police could seize any property connected to the marijuana plant from 1987. They had resurrected the Lopes case during a department-wide search through old cases looking for property they could legally confiscate.

(<https://mises.org/wire/joe-biden-father-drug-wars-asset-forfeiture-program>)

In many cases, the state seizes a person's property without ever charging the owner with a crime. Such is the case of Stephen Lara. When Lara was driving on the highway, a law enforcer stopped him for following too closely the car in front of him. The enforcer searched Lara's car for evidence of a crime, but found none. Nevertheless, he took possession of eighty-seven thousand dollars in cash which Lara had in his possession. The enforcer did not arrest Lara, and Lara was never charged with a crime. There are countless stories like these. By this practice, called Civil Asset Forfeiture, the state seizes property they suspect was used in a crime. This brings the federal government, to say nothing of other levels, a revenue of nearly three-billion dollars a year. Ostensibly designed to promote justice, this practice harms the innocent, especially the poor. Many poor people do not use banks, and rather keep cash, and the state deems large quantities of cash to be evidence of crime. The practice is evil because it presumes guilt, not innocence. In some cases, because the state does not charge the person with a crime, he has no trial by jury, and, in order to recover his property, he must sue the state in civil court. On average, such cases require the plaintiff to miss four days of work, and he must pay an attorney to represent him. The cost of recovery is so prohibitive for some, that they decline to reclaim their stolen property. This is unjust. This is but one state practice which is unjust, and victimizes especially people without means. Some people love money so much that they will lie, cheat, and steal, even under color of authority to get it. The Scriptures say that if one would have eternal life, then he must be willing to give up everything for the sake of gaining Jesus.

After the Exodus, the Lord gave His people His law, founded on the Ten Commandments. The sum of the law of God is that a man shall love God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40) Loving one's neighbor means helping

him with his needs, giving him what he is due, and not taking what belongs to him. In the Book of Leviticus it says:

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:9-13)

Judges are to judge impartially, favoring neither rich nor poor, and witnesses are to tell the truth. It says:

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people. Leviticus 19:14-17)

The sum of it is, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Leviticus 19:18) In the book of Deuteronomy, it says:

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee. (Deuteronomy 24:14, 15)

To do justly is to give every man what he is due. To do unjustly is to withhold from a man what he is due.

In the days of Samuel the prophet, the children of Israel, not content to have Samuel their judge, and desiring to be like the heathen, demanded that Samuel give them a king. Samuel was displeased that the people had rejected him, but it was the Lord they had rejected. When Samuel brought to the Lord their demand, the Lord told Samuel to give the people what they desired, but to warn them of the unjust manner in which a man would rule over them. (1 Samuel 8:4-9) So, Samuel said to them:

This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your

vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. (1 Samuel 8:11-18)

Even with Samuel's sobering warning, the people insisted on having a king, so Samuel gave them Saul. (1 Samuel 8:19-22) When Samuel reached the end of his life, he was still smarting smarting the people's having rejected him, and he said to them:

Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. (1 Samuel 12:1-3)

The people, to their shame, admitted that Samuel had been a faithful judge over Israel, and that he had never treated them unjustly. (1 Samuel 12:4) They also confessed that they had sinned in asking for a king. They said, "Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king." (1 Samuel 12:9) Samuel told the people that the Lord would not punish them for their foolish and impulsive demand. He did exhort them, however, that the Lord would punish them if they were not faithful to Him. He said, "Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king." (1 Samuel 12:24, 25)

After the death of Solomon, son of David, the kingdom of Israel was divided. Rehoboam, son of Solomon ruled in the south, and Jeroboam, son of Nabat ruled in the north. Although the kingdom was politically divided, it was religiously united. Jeroboam, fearing that the religious unity of the people would lead to a unified kingdom, and the loss of his power, he cut off his subjects from the temple in Jerusalem, and established in Dan and Bethel, the two ends of his kingdom, the worship of golden calves. (1 Kings 12:25-33) Although God had taken the kingdom away from the house of David and given it to Jeroboam, the king betrayed the Lord. So, the Lord would take the kingdom away from him. Because of his great wickedness, he became known as the one "who did sin, and who made Israel to sin." (1 Kings 14:16) Jeroboam was not the only wicked ruler, however. There were many others, and they used their power to cheat and to steal. Ahab, king of Israel, coveted Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth did not wish to part with it. So, Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had two men falsely bear witness that Naboth had blasphemed the Lord, and so the Jezebel's accomplices stoned Naboth to death, and Ahab took possession of that poor man's property. Some generations later, Jeroboam II, son of Joash, became king in Israel, and he did worse than his namesake. The Scriptures say, "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." (2 Kings 14:24) Jeroboam was wicked, and so also were the people of his kingdom. They, like so many before them, loved money, and oppressed the poor. It seems that the women, like Jezebel, would use power to fulfill their lusts. To these wicked people, God called Amos to prophesy. The law forbade one Israelite to enslave another. It says, "And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto

thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant.” (Leviticus 25:39) The people of Amos’s time disregarded this law, and for a small debt would put their kinsmen in bondage. The Lord said, “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes.” (Amos 2:6) And again:

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? (Amos 8:4-6)

The Lord called the women fat cows who demanded that their husbands get them luxury by defrauding the poor. He said, “Ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.” (Amos 4:1) Wicked people made themselves rich by injustice, but God would not allow them to profit from their sins. He would not allow them to enjoy their ill-gotten gains. He said:

Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. (Amos 5:11, 12)

The times were evil. Wicked men would not listen to righteous men, and good men kept silent. The Lord said, “They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly... Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.” (Amos 5:10, 13)

It was not too late for the people to repent, and so avoid judgement. The Lord said to them:

Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. (Amos 5:14, 15)

Although the people were wicked, God had blessed them with prosperity. The people foolishly took this to be a sign of God’s favor. It was because of His grace, not because of His justice, that He prospered them. If they would repent of their sins, then they could rightly say that the Lord blessed them because He was pleased with them. If they did not repent, then He would destroy them. If they would live, and not die, then they must seek good, and not evil. If they would hate the evil and love the good, and establish justice in the courts, then God would be gracious to them, and not punish them.

A rich young man once asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. (Mark 10:17) Jesus answered him, “Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.” (Mark 10:19) The man replied that he had kept all of the commandments. (Mark 10:20) Saint Mark comments that Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus was not displeased with the man. He did not accuse him of self-righteousness. He did not rebuke him for hypocrisy. He recognized in the man a genuine desire to do what is necessary to obtain eternal life. So, Jesus would put the

man to the test. The law of God is summed up in loving God with all one's heart, and loving one's neighbor as himself. Jesus told the man, "One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." If the man loved God with all his heart, then he would, at the command of the Son of God, freely part with his money. If he loved his neighbor as himself, then he would, and the command of the Son of God, be glad to give what he had to the poor. If the man truly sought eternal life, then He would give up everything to gain Jesus. The man went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus told His disciples that a man who trusts in riches does not trust in God. The disciples thought that, if this be the case, then no one can be saved, because some men have riches, and they that have none desire to gain them. Jesus reassured them that, although a man left to his own devices cannot be saved, God by his sovereign grace changes men's sinful hearts.

Saint Peter remarked that he and the other disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus. Jesus said:

Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. (Mark 10:29-31)

A man may leave all to follow Jesus, but Jesus will not leave that man destitute. If he has left family, Jesus's followers will be his family. If he has given up possessions, then Jesus's followers will provide for his needs. However, following Jesus means also suffering persecution. If a man gives up everything to follow Jesus, Jesus will give him, not only what he needs in this life, but, more importantly, He will give him eternal life.

Let us love God and not money. Let us be just in our dealings with our fellow man, Let us always be willing to give up everything for the sake of possessing Jesus.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.