



Deut. 24:14-22

The Least of These My Brethren

14 " 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.

15 "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.

16 "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.

17 " You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge.

18 "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.

19 " When you reap 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.

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.

21 "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.

22 "And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.

The world is constantly trying to associate themselves with the rich, famous, and powerful. We are constantly name dropping. Even in the Reformed Community – although there the names we drop are RC Sproul and John Piper. These are the people we want to know and rub elbows with. But amazingly the Lord doesn't do that, as Peter put it, he is no respecter of persons. Instead he does exactly the opposite he associates himself with the weak, the defenseless, the poor, the landless, the orphans and widows and in particular the weakest amongst the brethren.

Psalm 146:9 The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

Psalm 68: 5 A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation.

It is no coincidence that when God the Son and became man and dwelt amongst us, he was born into poor and lowly circumstances, and did not even have his own home. Christ's association with the poorest of God's people is so strong that in the final judgment he will count good deeds done by the righteous to poor and needy believers as good deeds done to Himself:

Matt. 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?

38 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?

39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

So here once again it should not surprise us that the Lord established laws in the civil law of Israel like those in these verses designed to defend the *least of these my brethren*:

1) Laws that protected what we could day laborers, laborers who worked as hired labor in the fields and flocks of the rich: These Laborers usually had no land of their own and were likely to be incredibly poor. These laws applied regardless of whether they are Israelites or aliens, that is migrant laborers

These Hired servants were paid at the close of the day; and for a master to defraud the laborer of his hire, or to withhold it wrongfully for a night, might have subjected a poor man with his family to For the rich master it would mean very little, but for the poor servant, it would mean that his family could not buy bread the following day.

This was not merely a legal issue but a spiritual wrong, if they do not pay them, they will not only have sinned against the laborer they will have sinned against the Lord, and the Lord will hear their plea. For although they may think no one sees the injustice, Psalm 73:11”And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" the Lord does indeed see and know.

James 5:4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

Ezek. 9:9 Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!'

The Lord says that as Calvin put it “it follows, that if a hireling suffers from want because we do not pay him what he has earned, we are by our very delay alone convicted of unrighteousness.”

Moses warns us here that this tyranny on the part of the rich shall not be unpunished, if they do not supply their workmen with the means of subsistence, even although no account shall be rendered of it before the tribunals of men. God will do them right if men do not.

2) Parents were not to suffer capital punishment for the crimes of their children, and vice versa, each man is responsible for his own crime.

This was a rule that the nations frequently violated, when a man committed treason against the crown, it was often the case that not only he, but his entire family, would be put to death. Frequently when a crown changed hands, the previous ruler's family was wiped out. In fact this became so common amongst the Roman Emperors Tacitus wrote that it became a standing policy for the successor to execute the men who had killed the family of his predecessor, regardless of whether they were his friends and supporters, in order to dissuade people from executing his own family when in due time HE was overthrown.

Nor should we think this was a crime only found amongst the rich. In both the French and Russian revolutions, for instance, entire families were put to death because of the "crimes of the fathers." The Czar may have been found guilty of being "an enemy of the people" but what justice was it to shoot all of his children with him?

We do have good examples of this law being kept by Amaziah for instance: ***2 Kings 14:5 Now it happened, as soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, that he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king.***

6 But the children of the murderers he did not execute, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, in which the LORD commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall be put to death for his own sin."

None should be responsible for the crimes of others, let them die for their own sin; "but though God, the sovereign Lord of life, sometimes visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, especially the sin of idolatry, and when he deals with nations in their national capacity, yet he does not allow men to do so." - Calvin

3) The fatherless and the widow who were the most needy and defenseless had to receive particular protection. In a court of law they would be particularly needy. Protected from creditors, the widows garment could not even be taken in pledge like an Israelite mans:

The reason in particular that they were to be kind to them was that they themselves had once been slaves and oppressed. Although they might be rich now, they had all once been equally poor and miserable, and yet the Lord had heard their cry and delivered them from their misery. It is particularly grotesque when someone who has received mercy will not extend it to others.

4) Gleaning:

Though they had no land of their own, yet it was the Lord's desire that they might still benefit from what was left in the land. Note also, the wisdom of this provision. The land owners were not required to hand over a portion of their goods to the poor on a yearly basis. If they had been forced to do this, where would be the righteousness in it, where the charity? Instead of doing it gratefully as an act of worship and gratitude to God for his deliverance and provision, they would do it grumblingly and constantly seek to give less than was required. Also note that the poor were not simply to be handed the produce as a dole. They had to go into the fields and work themselves gleaning what was left. Thus their dignity was safeguarded and the principle: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." (2 Th. 3:10) Several false gospels, most notably Marxism, have overturned both these principles and in doing so do great harm to both charity amongst the wealthy and industry amongst the poor.

Every forgotten sheaf in the harvest-field was to lie; the olive tree was not to be beaten a second time; nor were grapes to be gathered, in order that, in collecting what remained, the hearts of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow might be gladdened by the bounty of Providence.

The rich are commanded to be kind and charitable to the poor. Many ways they are ordered to be so by the law of Moses. The particular instance of charity here prescribed is that they should not be greedy in gathering in their corn, and grapes, and olives, so as to be afraid of leaving any behind them, but be willing to overlook some, and let the poor have the gleanings, v. 19-22.

Application 1: One never knows what the results of a simple act of kindness like this will be. For instance, one rich man allowed a poor woman to glean extra in his fields, giving her more than was commanded and reaped an unexpectedly wonderful harvest himself. That man's name was Boaz:

Ruth 2:15-16 "15 And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her.

16 "Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.""

The woman's name was Ruth and Boaz's goodness to Ruth in allowing her to glean extra was abundantly repaid. From this act of uncommon kindness he gained an excellent wife and an heir for his household. Ultimately it was from his line that David and then ultimately Christ would come. What an amazing result from a simple act of Charity. Imagine though what might have happened had he driven her off, or left so little that she found that gleaning in his field was futile.

Application 2: *We say where is the day of justice?*

"Wherefore, although the earthly judge may absolve us a hundred times over, let us not therefore think that we have escaped; since God will always require of us from heaven, whatever may have been unjustly excused us on earth." - Calvin

NKJ James 5:1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Application 3: Perhaps religion will help if I have broken these laws! Example of the bosses and The Robber barons and their charitable giving:

Religion with Evildoing will do no one any good:

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:

11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.

12 "When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?

13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies -- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.

14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.

15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood

What is needed is Repentance and FAITH which will bring forgiveness:

16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,

17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

18 " Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

19 If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land;

20 But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.