

February 10, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 24.

1. What attitude should we have as learn about and apply these hard to explain laws?
2. Is there any way to apply the “one and one” law about divorce to our culture?
3. Talk about the practicality of the “make your wife happy for a year” law.
4. Should kidnaping in our day be punishable by death, or what other crimes should receive capital punishment and why?
5. In what ways can employers oppress employees?
6. What should be our attitude toward immigrants?

LAWS REQUIRING JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS **Deuteronomy 24**

We Americans are big on blind justice. Justice for all. We hate laws that treat the needy unkindly. However, a quick look at the incredible number of laws that are newly enforced each year might cause us to walk back some of our baseless conclusions. I read this week that Jerry Brown, the governor of California, left office January 7, having signed into law over 1,000 new laws and restrictions in just his last year in office. A quick review of many such new laws reveals

that American citizens, and citizens of California in particular, have lost more freedoms than they can imagine.

The various laws listed in Deuteronomy 24 help us understand that God’s laws were not the cold and calculated enforcement of so-called blind justice. God requires the application of justice with eyes wide open. We will discover in this chapter that all these laws seek to protect the needy, the helpless, the women, children, and immigrants who lived in Israel.

A brief study of these laws will remind us that God does not apply His rules for living to us in a cut and dried, black and white list fashion. God’s people tend to apply laws or rules in that fashion. We tend to know the rules and make what we think is right application without ever stopping to consider that there might be circumstances of which we are unaware. Or we know a rule and expect everyone to understand it and live by it whether they are spiritual babes or spiritually seasoned saints. Maybe the most important lesson of our text is that God applies His rules with compassion. Sometimes He left the applications vague so that we, His people, can learn to practice His compassion.

Laws Affecting Marriage (vv.1-5).

Simply put, this rule means one and done (vv.1-4). First, let’s review the principles by which God has established His assessment of marriage. God stated His plan in the beginning when He introduced Eve to Adam. *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24)*. That rule is easy enough to understand. Therefore, based on this first principle, God’s second rule is that He hates divorce. *“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (Malachi 2:16 NASB)*. And in case we had any doubt about this rule, God the Son reiterated the plan when the Pharisees called it into question. *He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh’? So they are no*

longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

That is the background behind this rule in which we learn that God prohibits a “redo” of a marriage. Here is the situation. A man sends his wife away with a certificate of divorce. *When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house (v.1).*

As we can see in this case, the man is not pleased with his wife because of some indecency. What is that? Conservative Rabbis interpreted *indecency* as fornication or adultery. Liberal Rabbis applied the word to everything from the wife burning the husband’s meal to the wife caught talking to another man in public. The Hebrew word literally means “the nakedness of a thing.” If it only meant adultery, the wife in this case was supposed to be stoned and conflict became a mute issue. Either this law assumed stoning was not going to be enforced or indecency means something else.

Whatever the indecency was, divorce in such circumstances is not commanded but only assumed in this particular case. This is the issue the Pharisees latched onto when they tested Jesus. *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (Matthew 19:3).* Jesus reminded them that this response was due to hardness of heart – which is not a good thing. *He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8).*

In this situation where there has been a divorce and a remarriage, the remarried woman was “out of bounds” to the first husband for life. As Moses put it, *And if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled (vv.2-4a).*

For the first husband to remarry the remarried first wife was an abomination. *For that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving*

you for an inheritance (v.4b). It is difficult for us to understand why God concluded that this was an abomination that brings sin. Maybe it was because such action treats the very idea of commitments lightly. Faithlessness in human relationships tempers the spirit for faithlessness toward God.

Divorce is less likely to happen if the husband would be careful to enact the next law in his relationship with his wife. He is responsible to establish happiness in the marriage from the beginning (v.5). *When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken (v.5).*

This very practically required the husband to take on no outside obligations the first year of marriage. In the first year of marriage a man was not permitted to go to war. We already saw how that was one of the exceptions we saw in Deuteronomy 20:7. As far as I know this is still a rule in Israel. I also know that all men and women over the age of eighteen are expected to serve in the Israeli military for two years. But the year of marriage allows for an exemption.

Also, in this law we read that the newly married man could not be enlisted in public duty for the first year. Communal responsibilities were shared duties by all adult males. Some were important, like sitting in the gate with the elders. Others might be caring for the poor and such.

Instead of going to war and being a wonderful social servant during the first year of marriage, the husband was supposed to work on making his wife happy. I know that such does not seem to be the requirement according to the ESV text. I think the ESV translation is probably not an accurate rendition of the original. Literally, the last phrase in the verse is: “. . . for one year he makes rejoice the wife of him.” The NASB reads, “. . . he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” The KJV reads, “. . . he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken.” Gods Word Version, a very accurate and literal English translation reads, “*For one year he is free to stay at home and make his new wife happy.*”

This is a wonderfully great idea. Applied to our setting, it requires that young couples be careful not to become too obligated to extra-curricular duties during the first year of marriage. Notice that

the need for happiness applies to the wife. There is good reason for that. She is being transferred from the care and oversight of the chief male authority in her life – her father. Now she will be cared for and loved by a different male authority figure. Sure she loves her husband, but he is different than Dad. And nearly all her circumstances and surrounding environment also changes. It takes time for her to adjust. So the husband dedicates especially that first year to learning what makes his wife happy and doing it.

Miscellaneous Laws of Justice and Equity (vv.6-22).

The first very practical law in this section required God’s people to be just in taking collateral. That meant that they could not take a person’s means for a living as collateral. *No one shall take a mill or an upper millstone in pledge, for that would be taking a life in pledge (v.6).* We already know that loans were permitted among God’s people. And often those loans were not just money but seed or something practical and necessary to an agrarian culture. The plan was to pay back in kind at harvest.

We also know that charging interest on loans to fellow-Israelites was prohibited, but allowed on loans to foreigners (Deut. 23:19-20). In that setting, one was expected to offer collateral to guarantee repayment for a loan. It would be like taking something of value to the pawn shop and exchanging it for money, then returning to pay off the loan and retrieve your collateral. In that process, God forbid taking an implement necessary for survival (one of the millstones with which grain was prepared for food) as collateral. It was a simple law that required compassion toward the borrower so he could continue to live.

And when collateral was taken, the creditor was responsible to restore collateral quickly. *When you make your neighbor a loan of any sort, you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge. You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you make the loan shall bring the pledge out to you. And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God (vv.10-13).*

This rule did not allow you to go in and view a man’s possessions and thus determine what you will take as collateral. Rather, let the borrower decide and the creditor should be satisfied. Nor could the creditor keep a cloak as collateral overnight because the poor man used it as a blanket. That makes us wonder that if you can’t keep collateral until the loan is paid, what good is collateral? Probably technically the creditor could go back each morning and retrieve the collateral. It seems more likely that this rule stresses the attitude of mercy and compassion even in making loans to needy people. That is no doubt the meaning of the words, *and it shall be righteousness for you before the LORD your God (v.13b).*

The similar rule stated in Exodus helps us understand that in giving loans one was to be compassionate like God is. *If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate (Exodus 22:26-27).*

The second rule in this group of laws required God’s people to punish kidnaping severely. *If a man is found stealing one of his brothers, of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (v.7).*

The law applied to fellow Israelites first, in that it was against God’s law to steal a *brother, of the people of Israel*. Second, it was against God’s law to treat the stolen brother as a slave or to sell him. This rule must be understood against the background that God did allow Israelites to “steal” pagans as booty in war with the implication that they were made slaves (Deut. 21:14). But even then those people could not be sold or bought (no instruction about this might be argument from silence).

The penalty for kidnaping was severe on purpose. The penalty for kidnaping was execution. It is stated again in the laws found in Exodus. *Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death (Exodus 21:16).* The reason for the harsh punishment was to purge evil from the society. Either God was mistaken about the connection between harsh punishment and purging of evil, or our modern thinkers and influencers are mistaken. The answer to that contrast is pretty obvious in the chaos

that has come to pass in our culture. The so-called wise teachers of our day who avoid all punishment for crime like a plague have created a disaster out of what was once the greatest nation in the world.

The third rule is about how to deal with lepers (vv.8-9). Put quite simply, the people were to follow the priests' directions. *Take care, in a case of leprous disease, to be very careful to do according to all that the Levitical priests shall direct you. As I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do (v.8)*. God gave detailed commands about how to deal with leprosy in Leviticus 13:1-14. There we learn briefly that the person who found a strange blemish on his skin was required to go and show it to the priest (v.2). The priest was to examine the blemish and make a judgment call (vv.3-4). The patient was to be quarantined seven days and then return to the priest for a second opinion (vv.4b-5). If the blemish spread, it would be diagnosed as leprosy and the person was isolated from society. And so the process of checking and rechecking continued until the priest pronounced the person clean.

Now we learn in our text that God required the priests to carry out these rules in detail so that others would not be infected. It was a matter of righteousness and compassion for others for the person with a blemish to obey God's rules.

At the end of the statement of this rule God challenged the people to remember the example of Miriam. *Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way as you came out of Egypt (v.9)*. It is true that Miriam's leprosy was a well known story. But the bigger story in Miriam's legacy was the reason she got leprosy in the first place. She had defied the God-ordained authority of her brother Moses, and God judged her with leprosy in response to her rebellion.

Therefore, Miriam was more a lesson on submitting to the rules God gave about human authority than a lesson on how to deal with leprosy. We actually show compassion to others by submitting to the authorities God has ordained, like parents, governing officials, spiritual leaders and such. When we cause disruptions, factions, anarchy by refusing to submit, we are not showing compassion to people who suffer because of us.

The fourth rule required God's people to treat employees fairly (vv.14-15). They must avoid oppressing brothers or immigrants. *You*

shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns (v.14). To oppress is to defraud, cheat, or deal with deceitfully. Laban's treatment of Jacob would be a good example. Jacob and Laban agreed to the terms of Jacob's employment. But Laban kept changing the rules. Jacob pointed out to his shyster father-in-law, *"These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times" (Genesis 31:41)*. God forbid His people to act like that.

This prohibition applied to either a fellow-Israelite or a sojourner. A sojourner was equivalent to modern day immigrant in America. Most ancient nations did not have laws of citizenship, but the citizens enjoyed privileges non-citizens did not. For example, a non-Jew was outside the law and covenants and barred from worship, feasts, promises, and many other of God's blessings. Also by example, a non-Roman did not enjoy the freedoms and privileges of a Roman. That truth was demonstrated by Paul's conversation with a Roman ruler: *So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth" (Acts 22:27-28)*. God's compassion was to be shown to fellow-Israelite and immigrant alike (though laws and privileges were not shared alike).

Along with not oppressing employees, God required His people to pay wages when they were due. *You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin (v.15)*. This law did not require that an employee had to be paid daily. Rather the argument was, "If you hired a man to work for a day, pay him at the end of the day." Our idea of weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly pay periods are matters of convenience. The rule is that we don't withhold what we agreed to pay for the finished work. To do so would permit the aggrieved employee to level a grievance against you with God.

Fifth was the law that required death to the sinners! *Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin (v.16)*. This principle obviously deals with sin

deserving capital punishment. This was punishment for sins like blaspheming God, adultery, some acts of fornication, murder or kidnaping. Only the criminal received capital punishment. It is a picture of God's justice.

This is the same principle we find elsewhere in the Bible: The soul that sins shall die. *Behold, 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 18:4)*. This means that only the sinner will answer to God for his or her sins. However, while God does not level judgment on a person for another person's sin, people's sins will have an impact on others. For example another principle states, *The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation (Numbers 14:18)*. That is not to say that later generations are punished for the previous generation's sins. Rather, later generations will be influenced by the previous generation's sin and will be punished for their own sins that they commit because of that influence.

Sixth, God's law required His people to deal justly with needy people (vv.17-18). Three specific kinds of needy people are listed in this rule. The immigrants, orphans, and widows. *You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge (v.17)*. There are certain justices, rights due to these three classes of needy people. But nowhere does God say that all classes and kinds of people need to live on the same financial level. Rather, we who are able should be willing to help those who are needy and destitute. It is not our duty to help them be wealthy, but to keep them from need.

There are a couple of important matters that offer help in applying this rule. First, you cannot help a person who refuses to learn personal responsibility. The intentionally irresponsible person will always be needy and will typically drain useful help from others. Second is the principle that justice or help is not always financial. It can be emotional, practical, spiritual support that we offer.

A motivation for helping the needy was for the people to remember that they were once very needy. *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 (v.18). The Israelites needed to always remember that they had been needy slaves before God released them and blessed them. We need to remember that we were slaves to sin and children of the devil when God released us into His blessings.

A very practical way to help the needy was for the Israelite families to provide for the survival of these people by leaving food for them to gather. Here is the rule: *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 sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow (vv.19-21)*.

This is not the same as provide food for them. Our culture has a very large number of people who feel entitled to wealth and pleasure at other people's expense. That kind of socialism was never God's law and never demonstrates God's compassion. Leaving crops that the poor could glean required the poor's efforts to fend for themselves on that which others provided. The people would do this if they remembered their own need. *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this (v.22)*.

God's laws are not a body of strict rules to be applied without compassion or consideration. Nor do God's laws permit people to become lazy, entitled, and irresponsible.