

Message #31**Deuteronomy 25:1-19**

As we have been going through Deuteronomy, it is quite clear that God gives His people a series of practical guidelines in a variety of contexts of life because people are not perfect. They have problems because they are sinners. Every once in a while some sinner will cross a line in society and in the family and there needs to be some form of judgment and at times some form of disciplinary chastisement. What we learn from this chapter is this:

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN PUNISHMENT MUST BE IMPLEMENTED, BUT GOD EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIS WORD AND JUDGE WHAT IS JUST, FAIR, EQUITABLE AND RIGHT.

One thing is very clear from Deuteronomy and the rest of the Bible; wicked people are supposed to be punished and wicked people will one day be punished. It is also clear that righteous people are to be exonerated and one day they will be exonerated.

The former Vice President of the United States, Hubert Humphrey, said, “The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.” Now one may not agree with other positions that were promoted by him, but we cannot disagree with this statement because it is not only merciful, it is Biblical.

God wants people protected. He wants those who do bad things punished. Judges are supposed to judge so that the wicked are declared guilty and the righteous are declared righteous.

So in this chapter He sets forth some guidelines for about six different cases and situations:

CASE #1 – How to punish one guilty who has been declared guilty in court. **25:1-3**

Verse 1 is a very important verse that presents a very important doctrine, which is the doctrine of justification. Paul’s concept of justification is taken from this very text. In justification there is a court scene and there is a judge and the judge must declare one is justified or condemned. Now of course Paul asks and answers the question in Romans 3 as to how is it possible for God to justify any sinner when we are guilty? His answer is that God makes a judicial calculation that we are justified and declared righteous the moment we believe in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:26). So God declares us righteous and imputes to us the righteousness of His Son so that He is not unjust in His declaration. This is a very important point.

Now in this context of Deuteronomy, under the O.T. law with the nation Israel, there was no such thing as imprisonment. In other words, if someone committed a crime, he was not sentenced to jail; he was punished for the crime and then life went on.

Under the O.T. law if a dispute broke out between two people and they decided to go to court, there was a judgment that was to be made. Judges had a responsibility to hear the case and make a judicial decision to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked.

Now in this case the dependent idea (protasis) is in **verse 1** and the independent idea (apodosis) is in **verse 2**. The “if clause” of **verse 1** is subordinate to the main clause in **verse 2**.

What Moses describes here is that a very serious “dispute” broke out between men. The Hebrew word “dispute” (rib) seems to indicate that this was a fight that may have come to blows. In fact, in Deuteronomy 33:7 the word “contend” is the same word and it is in the context of a fight with hands (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 767).

So apparently two men got into some heated argument that became a fist fight. We don’t know what caused it but whatever it was ended up in court. The combatants ended up in court before a judge.

The language seems to indicate that this was some sort of civil, criminal case. Someone had done something evil against someone else and that caused the fight and that ended up in court. In this court case it was the expectation that the judge would decide right and wrong and he would justify the one righteous and punish the one wicked. Judges are going to give a very serious account one day before God as to how they judicially operated. Woe to them if they justified the wicked and condemned the righteous.

If the judge determined that punishment was deserved, the man was to be whipped. God sets forth the guidelines for this in **verses 2-3**.

Here were the guidelines:

Guideline #1 - The judge shall make the man lie down in his presence. **25:2a**

Guideline #2 - The judge shall determine the number of stripes according to his guilt. **25:2b**

Guideline #3 - The judge shall determine that the maximum number of whip marks is 40. **25:3a**

Guideline #4 - The point of the judgment is the punishment of the offender and not the degradation of him. **25:3b**

God did not want punishment to be excessive. He wanted it to fit the crime. Now this principle was still being carried out in the N.T. economy. In fact, Paul said that five times he received 39 lashes from the Jews (II Cor. 11:24). They subtracted 1 from 40.

I would hate to be the one who was responsible for deciding Paul was to be punished. I would hate to be the one who decided Jesus Christ was to be punished. They were innocent and an evil, corrupt judge condemned the just and by now that judge has paid.

In our day, there are judges who judge right and there are those who don’t. Sometimes one who has done evil is protected and one who hasn’t done evil is punished.

Now there is a place under God for disciplinary spanking. In the state of Michigan, it is legal for a parent or guardian to spank a child as long as it is reasonable and not abusive. If parents would take their responsibility seriously you would see fewer numbers of juvenile delinquents who end up in court before a judge.

CASE #2 – How to care for an animal who is doing work. **25:4**

God wants what is right and just and fair not only carried out in the court room, but also carried out even with the animals in the field.

When Israel would get into the Promised Land, they would need to plow fields and oxen were used to do that. The ox would pull a “threshing sledge.” A threshing sledge was dragged over ripe grain to cut it and separate the grain kernel from the rest of the grain. An ox would pull the sledge.

The owner of the animal has a responsibility to see to it that the ox was well cared for and well provided for while he was working and pulling this sledge. He was not to muzzle the ox but see to it that the ox could eat as much as he wanted and needed while working. In other words, it was a violation of the law of God for an owner to muzzle the ox and neglect the needs of the animal and cause the animal to go hungry.

Now Paul used this very imagery in regard to taking good care of a minister and his needs: I Cor. 9:9-10; I Tim. 5:17-18. I have no axe to grind on this point because this church has taken tremendous care of Mary and me, more than we deserve.

But I will tell you that there are churches that are not doing this. I have known of churches that send out thousands and thousands of dollars to missionaries on foreign fields who may or may not be doing hard work, when their pastor and his family are struggling to survive. That is not right.

This matter of provision is obviously a key matter in the sight of God, not just for animals but for ministers as well.

CASE #3 – How to protect the family name and land of a man who died and did not have an heir or son for the inheritance. **25:5-10**

Now families in the Promised Land typically lived together in the same assigned land. Land was critical to National Israel and that Promised Land still is. One day God promises that Israel will have every inch of her Promised Land.

The hypothetical situation presented here is that a brother was married and he died and he did not have a son to carry on his name for his inheritance. It was critical that the family name not become extinct because land was assigned to that family. So God set forth seven guidelines as to how you handle this:

- 1) The wife is not to be married to someone outside the family to some strange man. **25:5a**
- 2) The husband's brother is to go to the wife and be her husband so she may have a child. **25:5b**
This would have been the wife's brother-in-law when her husband was living.
- 3) The firstborn son is to be given the name of the brother who died. **25:6**
This was very important. The name of the family was to be preserved and kept intact.
Otherwise, the family name would be blotted out from the history of Israel.
- 4) If the brother does not want to marry the brother's wife, she is to report to the elders. **25:7**
- 5) The elders are to confront the brother to determine whether he does not want her. **25:8**
The point is sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do for the program of God. This was about a Jewish name and a Jewish land inheritance.
- 6) If he does not want her, the brother's wife is to appear before the elders, take one of the sandals and spit in his face and say this man does not build up his brother's house. **25:9**
Taking his sandal would say he doesn't care if the name of his brother walks in this land and spitting in his face would be a sign of contempt.
- 7) The man and his family are to be identified as the family of the unsandaled. **25:10**
Posterity was critical in Israel and this one was to be identified as one who did not care about it.

CASE #4 – How to deal with a wife who touches another man's genitals. **25:11-12**

Under the O.T. law there were certain mutilation crimes in which it was legitimate to mutilate a body part. In Deuteronomy 19:21 we read, "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Now the case here is that two Israelite men are in a fight and a wife of one of the men fighting sees that her husband is losing the fight and she wants to protect her husband and see that he wins the fight so she grabs the man by the genitals. Now she could have used a frying pan and hit the guy in the head, but in this case she decided to do what she did.

According to God's law, if it were true, she was not to be pitied but her hand was to be amputated as a punishment.

Now there is nothing sexual here. If that were the case she would probably be executed. But the point is a man's wife is to not even touch another man's genitals even if it were to protect her husband.

Now of course we would ask the question why so harsh a punishment for this act? Contextually, it may be that this action could potentially prevent a man from being able to produce a child. It is proven medically that one of the main causes of infertility in a man is an injury to this part of the body.

CASE #5 – How to deal in business matters. **25:13-16**

God wants people to be honest in their business relationships. God wants business conducted fairly and right. Business ethics are to be highly maintained. God does not want people cheating in business. He wants business deals fair and honest. **Any other way of doing business is an abomination to Him.**

If a business defrauds or cheats people, it is an abomination to God.

Transactions are to be conducted with honesty. There were to be no differing scales. There was not to be multiple measuring scales. God detests such things.

Donald Grey Barnhouse told the story of a businessman who came to faith in Jesus Christ. The man said the evidence that I came to faith in Jesus Christ is that I stopped weighing my thumb in business deals.

In other words, he had been using his thumb to add a little more to the weight and when he came to faith, he stopped it.

You take your car in for something and they will tell you that you need something else when you don't need it. I just had that happen to me in Florida. A service department told me I needed a part that we had just had replaced. Woe to people who do business like that. **These kinds of things are not just wrong, they are actually an abomination to God.**

If you can find an honest place of business, in any field, you have found a rare place, but you have also found a place that pleases God.

CASE #6 – How to deal with someone who oppressed you previously. **25:17-19**

The Amalekites lived in remote regions SE of the Dead Sea and were not residents of the Promised Land.

The Amalekites targeted Israel as they were moving out of Egypt. They spotted the weak who were lagging behind and killed them. They preyed on the weak and the vulnerable which proved they had no fear of God. So God said in Exodus 17:8-16 that the Amalekites were to be exterminated.

Even though many years had transpired, God had not forgotten about that and neither had Moses. Once the job of conquest was complete and Israel had rest from the enemies. God wanted that score settled. He wanted them totally eliminated and destroyed.

People may think they got away with their sin because nothing serious has happened for years. God is a just God and He is a just judge and God will never justify the wicked. He will justify the righteous and condemn the wicked even if it takes a few years.

There are things that need to be made right and in a God-honoring society, things are made right. As we mentioned, this is a critical doctrinal passage. We are all sinners and there is no way a Holy, Righteous God can overlook this fact. But there is a way that we may be justified. It is by faith alone in Christ alone.

The just one, Jesus Christ, died for unjust sinners and if you will believe on Jesus Christ, you will be declared righteous and His righteousness will become your righteousness.