

Study Guide for Deut. 25.

Meditation: “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, Fear God, . . .” (I Pet. 2:17)

1. Society is governed by laws which are administered by judges: (Deut. 25:1-3)

God provides for a judicial system that seeks to uphold justice when disputes arise. These instructions call for:

- A) A trial: Members of the community do not arbitrarily take justice into their own hands, but submit to system of laws.
- B) Supervision by the judges who decide the case and determine the punishment.
- C) The punishment must fit the crime. There is a sense of proportionality.
- D) A limit on punishment. Corporal punishment is accepted but within standards. Note how in II Cor. 11:24 Paul reports that he had five times received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. They gave him the full beating the law allowed.

For further study: Note the importance of a fair judicial system in Israel.

Ex. 23:6-7: “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for the I will not acquit the guilty.” (says the Lord.)

Pr. 17:15: Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both.

Pr. 17:26: It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their integrity.

Pr. 18:5: It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the innocent of justice.

Pr. 21:15: When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

Pr. 24:23b-25: To show partiality in judging is not good: Whoever says to the guilty, “You are innocent”—peoples will curse him and nations will denounce him. But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come upon them.

Consider:

- 1) What examples can you point to of justice finally winning out?
- 2) What can you do to work for justice within our community and society?

2. Don't muzzle the ox: (Deut. 25:4)

Muzzling the ox would prevent the animal from eating while it worked for the farmer. The law calls the farmer to be considerate of his worker – even if it is just an animal.

Note how the following laws also command consideration for working animals.

- A) Deut. 5:14: The ox, donkey and other animals enjoyed rest on the Sabbath.
- B) Pr. 12:10: A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but . . .
- C) Jonah 4:11: But Ninevah has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I (the Lord) not be concerned about that great city?

Consider: How should we show Biblical concern for animals today?

This text is important because it illustrates into how Paul applied the O.T. to the church.

A) I Cor. 9:7-12: Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?

B) I Tim. 5:17-18: The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain, and "The worker deserves his wages."

Paul is not allegorizing or finding some hidden spiritual meaning. Rather he has discerned the underlying principle of the law and applies it beyond the context of the farm. If God requires fair treatment of working animals, how much more does he require fair payment to working human beings and especially those who work for the sake of the gospel or in teaching the church? Paul had read Deut. 24:14-15 and knew that the poor, needy and alien who worked day by day needed to be paid each day. So, while in I Cor. 9:9 Paul asks "Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" and the assumed answer is No! You must understand that Paul has is making that statement in light of the larger principle of the law – namely, that God is concerned that all workers: animals, mechanics and pastors receive fair compensation for the labor.

Consider: What can you do to make certain those you employ are justly compensated? Are you financially supporting the work of the gospel—here and beyond the church?

3. Levirate Marriage (from the Latin *levir* – brother-in-law): (Deut. 25:5-10)

This law, expressed in a variety of cultures, works to ensure. . .

- A) Security for the widow and the hope of removing the stigma of being without a son.
- B) Prevention of the loss of property (the land allotted to the family would go to others).
- C) The legacy of the dead man's name in Israel.

Vs. 5-6 summarize these aims of the law (illustrated in Gen. 38 and Ruth - Naomi / Boaz)

Vs. 7-10 describe the social pressure put on a man who refuses to fulfill this obligation.

Public scorn (spit in the face) and an ongoing stigma (sandal removed). He who is unwilling to raise up his brother's name, will have his name brought down to the dirt.

Understand: In our day we express concern for widows differently. The early church was at the forefront of providing an extended family to them. Paul warns believers to care for family members lest they be considered worse than unbelievers. (I Tim. 5:3-8)

Consider: How well do we care for bereft family members and widows in the church?

See here a process of public “discipline” like what we are called to exercise in the church today. First the woman approaches the brother-in-law and calls him to fulfill his duty in light of God’s law. If he refuses, she summons the town elders who apply added pressure for him to do what is right. If he still refuses, then the matter goes public. Will the unwilling brother-in-law still hold on to his selfishness in light of the public scorn that will come upon him? Hopefully not! The threat of this humiliation should motivate him to action, if nothing else will.

In the church: The threat of public shame through exposure and discipline must be real. The overall witness is compromised if individuals faith to live up to their responsibilities. To vindicate the innocent (the widow) and leave her free to be remarried, if the brother-in-law is unwilling, he must bear the blame and shame for his action. We must be courageous and wise within the church to do the same.

4. The maliciously grasping woman. (Deut. 25:11-12)

This text has by some become a source of derision and a proof text for discounting Holy Scripture. Yet, it fits within the flow of thought in this chapter and once again sets boundaries on how respect is to be shown, even in difficult circumstances.

The previous law set boundaries on a man who refused to fulfill his obligation to carry one the family of his deceased brother. Now we encounter a woman who maliciously takes justice into her own hands. The result is an attack upon the covenant of God with Israel. First, the dispute should be settled in the court (vs. 1-3), not by hum reaction. Second, the woman’s response is an attack upon the place where the covenant was sealed. The woman doesn’t merely “grab” but seizes with strength (to the point I sense of rendering the other man unable to produce off spring). Recall that in Israel, hope rested in the descendants – especially the one descendant who would come from the seed of the woman and crush the serpent’s head. By attacking “below the belt” she is in effect attacking the covenant.

The punishment fits the crime. There is debate whether this is actually physical mutilation (although the added phrase, “Show her no pity” emphasizes the seriousness of her crime) If her hand is cut off, it would be the only instance of such punishment in the Bible. And note: Jesus spoke metaphorically in Matt. 5:30, “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

This law balances out the stipulation for levirate marriage. Neither man (through omission) nor woman (through commission) should interfere with God’s plan to carry on the family lines within Israel.

Consider: Within the church, are we failing to fulfill our responsibility to build up the next generation? Are we acting in such a way as to prevent the next generation from coming to maturity?

5. Deal honestly with one another: (Deut. 25:13-16)

This is simple to understand but dismissed by so many in our culture, unfortunately, even by some Christians. God – who is the standard for truth and honesty – calls his people to deal honestly with one another. Greed can so subtly poison our hearts and taint our dealings with one another. Listen to how frequently these matters are addressed:

Lev. 19:35-36: Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt.

Prov. 11:1 The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.

Prov. 20:10 Differing weights and differing measures—the Lord detests them both.

Length of life in the land for Israel, is conditioned on the call for honesty in dealings with one another. God detests people cheating one another (and so do we).

ILLUSTRATE:

APPLY: Are you dealing honestly in all matters?

6 Erase the memory of God's enemies: (Deut 25:17-19)

Israel is told to “blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!” First recall who Amalek was: They were a nation not only opposed to God's people (Ex. 17:8-16, Numb. 14:44-45), but they attacked in an inhuman way. They came behind Israel and killed the weak, the young, the sick, the elderly. These are the very people God has been highlighting in Deuteronomy as warranting special attention and care. They are accountable to God (as are all people) for their atrocities against mankind.

Ex. 17:14 “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

There are those who oppose Christ and the advancement of his Kingdom. II Thess. 2 speaks of the man of lawlessness who will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped. . . but the Lord Jesus will overthrow (him) with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”

ILLUSTRATE:

APPLY: