

January 20, 2019

Sunday Evening Service

Series: Deuteronomy

Community Baptist Church

643 S. Suber Road

Greer, SC 29650

© 2019 David J. Whitcomb

## LAWS – SENSIBLE AND DIFFICULT TO APPLY

### Deuteronomy 22

Moses reminded the people of God's rules while they stood on the precipice of entering the Promised Land. Were the people shocked at what Moses said? No. Moses's speech was simply a reminder of the rules that God had laid down forty years earlier. The people should have at least been aware of the laws.

Now we, on the other hand, might be shocked to read some of these amazingly weird laws. It is little wonder that people of a post-modern culture read these things and chuckle at best or maybe even grow angry that anyone would ever believe that such rules could possibly serve any useful purpose.

A sadder response is when professing Christians read these rules and flippantly cast them aside, assuming they are ancient, archaic relics of legalism that are not only useless, but for our own good should be avoided. That is to deny that these words are part of inspired Scripture, or to deny that all Scripture is profitable to equip us for every good work.

Obviously there are principles in these strange rules that will help us post-modern Christians navigate through a world that is every bit as perverse and wicked as the world of the second generation Israelites. In particular, we are going to discover that all of these strange rules pointed to the same important truth: God expects His people to order their lives differently than sinners order their lives. A lot of Christians in our day have never learned that lesson.

## Various Laws Regarding Personal Responsibility (vv.1-12).

The first group of strange laws we find actually seems a bit logical. They require a right attitude about animals. Sometimes laws relating to animals involves your brother's property. You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother (v.1).

Typically, these animals were valuable pieces of property to the owners. For example, sheep provided wool and ultimately meat, and oxen were used for plowing. Losing your ox would be like a modern farmer losing his tractor. Also, if a large animal was loose and wandering around, it might do damage to someone's property. Or worse, the animal would probably be killed by beasts or an accident.

Therefore, the other individuals were responsible to make any effort necessary to return the property, the animal, they found wandering through the fields. In fact, fulfilling that responsibility might even require personal expense. *And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him* (v.2).

This rule applied to any kind of property one might find, whether it is a donkey or a garment. Ignoring the problem was not an option. *And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment, or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find; you may not ignore it* (v.3). The rule was that the people were to be always willing to help restore property to the proper owner.

Also a rule involving animals applied especially when an Israelite saw a fellow Israelite broken down along the way. *You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again* (v.4). Okay, here was a fellow with a flat tire on the side of the road. A good Israelite would not try to ignore the situation. Of course, the exact issue would be a case of a pack animal fallen along the roadside. But it would indeed be much like us helping a person with a flat tire. Do we ever wonder if and how that rule could apply to our circumstances? It is so sad that we know from too many news reports that stopping to help a distressed motorist too often results in robbery,

assault, or even murder. What does the Christian do? We help wisely and carefully.

What was the purpose of this rule? As far as we can tell, in the wicked cultures that prevailed in that day, if a neighbor found a donkey, sheep, or ox wandering through his field, the rule was, “Finders keepers, losers weepers.” God wants His people to be different.

Furthermore, God’s laws about His people’s treatment of animals even applied to insignificant little birds (vv.6,7). *If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long* (vv.6,7). This rule is best understood by an agrarian culture, hunting and gathering culture. The simple rule was: “Don’t kill and eat a mother bird that will produce more birds you can eat.”

Some of you might realize at this point that this law is similar to deer hunting laws in most states. The sport of deer hunting goes way back to a time when most of the people who lived in rural areas depended on taking wild game to provide meat for the family’s subsistence. Even the early settlers understood that it was wiser to kill bucks but not does. That is why most states have a longer season for harvesting bucks and a very short season (a day or two is common) for harvesting does. The does produce future deer.

God’s plan was for His people to be good stewards of the natural provisions God placed under their care. That made them distinct from others. In fact, the laws for maintaining distinctions touched many other areas of life. There was a law for maintaining distinctions regarding clothing. Ultimately, the rule had to do with the prohibition against mixing or confusing of the genders. *A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God* (v.5).

God clearly identifies a distinction between men and women. He expects His people to maintain those distinctions—even in clothing. On one hand, this rule might be a bit confusing because men and women alike wore robes. However, there were distinctions in the

robes. Here the word translated *garment* typically speaks of utensils, tools, implements, or vessels that are built and intended for a specific use. Therefore, we conclude that some garments were for men, and women should not wear them. More specifically, the *woman's cloak* was obviously identifiable as that which women wear. To breach this distinction is an abomination to the LORD. The opinions of a God-denying, perverse culture cannot be the guide of God’s people in matters of clothing.

But what about this rule that required no mixing of fabrics either? *You shall not wear cloth of wool and linen mixed together* (v.11). What did that mean? We honestly cannot see a practical or ethical reason for this rule (though some Bible teachers get pretty creative with this one). Rather, this is simply a rule with spiritual implications. God imposed several of these apparently non-consequential rules to remind His people of the importance of separateness. They were to be separate in many practices from their world full of pagans who worshiped lesser gods. Should we?

But why the tassels? *You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself* (v.12). Again, this was a simple practice pointing to an important spiritual reality. It was a continual reminder that they were God’s covenant people. *And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God* (Numbers 15:39-40).

All of these odd laws serve the same purpose of reminding God’s people that they are distinct from all other people. The rules even touched common farming practices. One rule required the people to avoid mixing various kinds of seeds or plants. *You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited, the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard* (v.9).

Another rule forbid God’s people from mixing farming “equipment” as it were. *You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together* (v.10). To us this would be like a prohibition against using a John Deere tractor and a New Holland disk harrow. But again it was a continual picture of God’s people not being mixed with their world.

That application is so obvious as Paul picked it up in his letter to the Corinthian believers. He wrote, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?* (2 Corinthians 6:14). So if there was a Canaanite farmer plowing with a donkey and an ox, he might look across the way and see an Israelite plowing with two oxen and wonder why he was so unnecessarily strict. That wondering was God's plan all along.

Verse eight reveals a rule intended to provide safety for others in the home. *When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it* (v.8). This rule was necessary because of the most common architecture principles of the day. Flat roofs were common. The flat roof provided a place for relaxation, storage, or work. Without a wall around the edge, a person could inadvertently walk off to his harm or death. That is why the little wall was required. The owner was responsible not to bring the guilt of blood upon himself. To ignore the law could render him culpable in an innocent person's death.

We should note that many of the forgoing laws (back to chapters 20 and 21) dealt with matters of death like the unknown homicide, destroying cities, executing rebels and criminals, and so forth are all rooted in an explanation of the command "You shall not kill." God's people were to be distinct.

### Laws Regarding Sexual Fidelity (vv.13-30).

The laws stated in verses thirteen through thirty are rooted in command number seven which requires, "You shall not commit adultery."

The first law has to do with the accusation of premarital infidelity (vv.13-21). A conflict arose, *If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, "I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity"* (vv.13-14). Sexual purity was a very important distinction between God's people and their pagan sinner peers. Purity was so much the norm that everyone expected evidence of purity on the wedding night could be

produced. In fact, not to be able to produce the evidence would be cause for conflict, the husband's hatred toward his new wife, and accusations of misconduct. That conflict would naturally lead to a conflict with the new groom's in-laws who would be quite sure their daughter had kept herself pure. The whole matter was proved or disproved by evidence. Again, sexual purity was very important to God's people. It was a mark of distinction for them. Too bad it is no longer a mark of distinction for many who claim to be followers of Christ.

But what if things were not as bad as the groom said? What if the evidence proved that he was indeed a liar or at least horribly mistaken? The consequences of lying about the matter were painful and costly to say the least. If the accusing man lied, *then the elders of that city shall take the man and whip him, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days* (vv.18-19).

The sentence required the authorities to have the lying man whipped with maybe as many as thirty-nine stripes, if we depend on the requirement stated in Deuteronomy 25:1-3. He faced not only a painful consequence but a costly consequence as he was required to pay a huge fine (100 hundred shekels of silver) to the girl's father. Common laborers in ancient Babylon earned  $\frac{1}{2}$  shekel per month. Therefore, this fine could have been equivalent to 200 months wages which measured by modern standards would be like a \$600,000-\$750,000 fine. And maybe even worse than physical pain and monetary loss was the demand that this man could never divorce the woman. Now try to imagine how tranquil that home would be. It seems like life would be pretty miserable for both parties. It would also seem like a man would want to exercise due caution not to jump to conclusions.

But what if the accused woman was actually the liar? *But if the thing is true, that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by*

*whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (vv.20-21).*

If the woman had been unfaithful and was impure at her marriage, the leaders of the town were to have the men of the city stone her to death. This was obviously a very serious and demanding law. The reason for the deadly serious law? *So you shall purge the evil from your midst.* Honesty and sexual purity were two traits God required that marked God's people as different.

The following laws that end chapter twenty-two fall into the same category of the broader law number seven of the "Big Ten." Adultery was a very serious matter. God required the death penalty in such cases in order to purge evil from God's people. First was the case of *a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel* (v.22). The evidence is indisputable. The couple were *found lying*. Apparently this was a consensual situation. The response to the sin required the rest of the people to kill both parties.

But there is a bit of a question that arises about this law in light of Old Testament evidence. We find various examples of this kind of situation listed in Israel's historical books (i.e. 1,2 Samuel, 1,2 Kings, 1,2 Chronicles), but no record of the sentence being carried out. Also, it is telling that the Pharisees seemed quite interested in leveling the death penalty against a woman taken in adultery, but nothing was said about the man. Contrary to this law, Jesus dismissed the woman and told her to quit sinning. God is very gracious.

Another form that adultery could take would be a case of someone marrying or having relations with a step-mother. That was prohibited. *A man shall not take his father's wife, so that he does not uncover his father's nakedness* (v.30). This situation sounds very odd or even gross to modern American ears. But with the practice of polygamy, family relationships tended to get quite confusing.

Finally, adultery was involved in the terrible cases of sexual violation or assault (vv.23-28). There might be a case when a young woman could have cried for help but did not. *If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry*

*for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (vv.23-24).*

In this situation an assault occurred in a rural area. The victim is engaged to be married, which was tantamount to already being married in that culture. That is why she is referred to as *his neighbor's wife*. She did not cry out for help. The sentence was execution for both parties. What! Yes, they were to execute the victim because she didn't cry out, which was tantamount to not offering resistance. Obviously, they were to execute the perpetrator because he is hopelessly wicked. The reason for this law is found in the last part of verse twenty-four. *So you shall purge the evil from your midst* (v.24b). God expects His people to be distinct from their pagan, sinning peers.

A second situation might be when crying for help would not be heard. *But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her* (vv.25-27).

In this case, the engaged victim **did** cry out for help. But because she was accosted in a rural setting, no one heard and came to help her. Though in America's cities the victims cries out for help, dozens of people hear her, but no one goes to her aid. The conclusion in this case was that only the wicked, hopelessly perverse perpetrator should be executed.

A third hypothetical situation would be when the young woman who was assaulted was not engaged. *If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days* (vv.28-29).

Here the scenario changes in that the victim is not engaged to be married. Technically then, she is no man's wife. Maybe the assault happens in the city or maybe in the country. Maybe the girl cried out

and maybe she didn't. Whatever the circumstances, the accoster is required to pay the girl's father the equivalent of 100 months wages. And he is never allowed to divorce the woman. That ought to be a happy marriage!

All of these weird-sounding laws are intended to achieve the same end. God sent His people into a land that was inhabited by perverse pagans who had rejected Him as their Creator generations earlier. Because the people rejected the Holy God, they became characterized by perverseness and sin that rots such cultures from the inside out. Therefore, God required His people to be obviously different. Were all these laws necessary in order to maintain an orderly society? Not all of them. But they all served to remind the people continually that they were different, unique, special.

So too, Christian parents or churches impose rules that the sinful, God-denying world thinks ludicrous. You pick the odd rule and the response to it will be predictable. While the rule may not be critical to keep the family or church from disintegrating, it is a good reminder that we are God's people. Specifically, some of the things we do and expect here at Community Baptist Church are not necessarily commanded in the Bible. But the practices are good reminders that we are distinct. To that end, we often say, "When a person walks into a worship service at Community Baptist Church, we want it to be obvious to them that they have walked out of the world."