

We started our series through the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, and as we come to the end of this series, I'd like to return to Deuteronomy. Moses' farewell sermon (chapters 5-26) follows the basic contours of the Ten Commandments. In chapters 6-11 you have Moses exposition of the commandment to have no other God but Yahweh. In chapters 12-13 Moses turns particularly to the condemnation of idolatry and the regulations for worship. In chapter 14 Moses teaches Israel of the holiness of God's name – and its implications for the holiness of God's people. In chapters 15-16 Moses explains the Sabbath principle, and the feasts of the LORD. In chapters 17-18 Moses teaches about authority. In chapters 19-21 you see various laws pertaining to murder and killing. In chapters 22-24 there is some mixing of the laws against adultery and theft.

And here, in Deuteronomy 24:8-25:19

Moses expounds the ninth commandment.

There is certainly some connection to the eighth commandment still, as there are economic issues bound up in the latter part of chapter 24, but you start to see the importance of truth-telling as Moses moves his discussion towards the ninth commandment.

112. Q. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. I must not give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard. Rather, I must avoid all lying and deceit as the devil's own works, under penalty of God's heavy wrath. In court and everywhere else, I must love the truth, speak and confess it honestly, and do what I can to defend and promote my neighbor's honor and reputation.

The Ninth Commandment declares:

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

The point of this law is to preserve the “reputation, dignity, and respect of people within the community, whatever their status or condition within the society.”

(Richard Olson, Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses, p108).

How important is your reputation?

Maybe a better way of saying it is,

How important is someone else's reputation to you?

Moses starts

24:8-9 with the Levitical priests

This law may seem out of place.

What does leprosy have to do with the ninth commandment?

The key is in verse 9.

What happened to Miriam?

In Numbers 12:1-8 we hear that Miriam had slandered Moses—
and God responded by striking her with leprosy
(a rather clear example of the “vengeance is mine” principle!).

The point is that you are to honor the name and dignity of the Levitical priests,
by doing all that Moses had commanded respecting leprosy.

To ignore the priests is to ignore the honored name that God has given them,
and there is an implicit warning:

Remember what happened when Miriam did not honor Moses!!

Your faithfulness to those in authority over you testifies truthfully.

Remember that when Jesus cleansed lepers,

he sent them to the priests to be restored to the community. (Matthew 8:2-4)

Even Jesus honored the office of the priests!

24:10-11 Moses talks about debtors

You honor your neighbor by trusting him.

To go into his house would be to suggest that you don't trust him to come back out.

24:12-13

Even more importantly, if the debtor is poor (and presumably only has one cloak),
then you must restore his cloak to him at sunset every night
so that he will not freeze.

You must honor your neighbor—whether he is the exalted priest, or the lowly poor man.

24:14-15 Moses says that a poor laborer must also be honored
(regardless of whether he is an Israelite or a sojourner).

You must give him his wages every day.

Most of us get paid every month, or every two weeks.

That's fine—since we are not poor, and we don't need the money immediately.

But the point Moses makes is that if your laborer needs the money
that he has already earned, and you withhold it,
it is not merely theft (that's obvious),

it is also slander: you are saying that he's not important.

You are saying that his honor, his dignity, is irrelevant.

24:16 *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.*

This is particularly interesting because there are many biblical examples to the contrary.
Achan, in Joshua 7, was killed together with his family.

The earth swallowed up Korah, in Numbers 16, with all his household.

How, then, can Dt 24:16 say that children shall not be put to death for their father's sins?

There is an important distinction between Dt 24:16 and these examples.

Achan and Korah were not merely breaking one of the commandments.

They were directly challenging the entire covenant.

As such, they were leading their families into apostasy.

Dt 13 makes it clear that if a family member tries to lead you into idolatry,
you must refuse—or else you are guilty yourself.

So the households of Achan and Korah,

by standing against the covenant and siding with an apostate father,
were themselves guilty of covenant breaking, and were worthy of death.

Dt 24:16 declares that as a matter of civil polity,

no Israelite should die for someone else's sins.

But this is also a remarkable teaching as we consider our Lord Jesus Christ.

If "each one shall be put to death for his own sin,"

then the death of Christ was blatantly a travesty of justice.

He had never sinned.

24:17-22 resident aliens, orphans and widows

The name of the sojourner, the orphan and the widow, is especially protected in Israel.

"You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless,
or take a widow's garment in pledge."

Why? Because you were a slave in Egypt.

This has been used frequently to remind Israel to treat the poor with respect.

It is used twice in these six verses (v18, 22)

(Also 20:1; 23:4-7; 24:9; 25:17)

What does it mean to do justice to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow?

Moses spells it out in verses 19-21.

If you forget a whole sheaf out in the field when you reap,

you must leave it there for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.

It would be *unjust* for you to keep your whole harvest.

You must NOT glean your whole field;

you must NOT gather all your olives or grapes.

You MUST leave some of your produce in your field for the poor.

In other words, you may not consider your whole income to be *yours*.

So, again we see that Moses would not have much sympathy

for a libertarian economic system,

where you are free to do whatever you like with *your* property.

"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt;

Therefore I command you to do this."

Caring for the poor is NOT optional.

Neither is it left to the individual to decide how it should be done.

In Moses' day poor relief was a required part of your regular, annual obligations

Caring for the poor is not only a matter of the 8th commandment
(you shall not steal, but help those in need),
it is also a matter of the 9th commandment –
preserving the reputation of others.

In other words,
the Mosaic law suggests that we honor the poor in the land,
by giving a portion of our income for their benefit.
We ought to encourage welfare reform that discourages laziness,
but the principle of welfare is in fact thoroughly biblical,
so long as they are required to work in some form to get it.

In chapter 25 we turn to the courtroom.

You might think, “ah, now Moses will talk about the importance of telling the truth!”

But verses 1-3 once again focus on reputation.

Even the thief must not be dishonored.

If you beat a man with more than forty stripes,
He is “degraded in your sight.”

He has earned his punishment—and he deserves what he gets.

But you shall not dishonor him by thrashing him unmercifully.

Verse 4 is particularly strange in this context:

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”

Do not bear false witness against the creature.

Do not dishonor the ox, which God has made to serve you.

He may take a mouthful of grain while he is treading it out.

The laborer is worthy of his hire—even when that laborer is an ox!

Paul uses this verse allegorically in 1 Corinthians 9:9-11.

“For it is written in the law of Moses,

‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’

Is it for oxen that God is concerned?

Does he not speak entirely for our sake?

It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope
and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

If we have sown spiritual things among you,
is it too much if we reap material things from you?”

(Cf. 1 Timothy 5:18)

Paul points out that this law was given for us.

He speaks somewhat hyperbolically

when he suggests that God is not concerned for oxen,
But his point is that God told us to take care of oxen to teach us something!
If Dt 25:4 is simply about how we treat oxen,
then we will neglect what Dt 25:4 is saying.

The point of the ninth commandment—honoring our neighbor and the whole of creation—
is that we see the end for which our neighbor and the whole of creation was designed.
Paul applies this to why the church should pay their pastors.
Those who proclaim spiritual things--the gospel of the new creation—
should reap material things.

In 25:5-10 we hear the provision for levirate marriage.
Once again, it is all about reputation.
If a man dies without children,
then his brother should marry his widow and raise up children for him,
so that his name “may not be blotted out of Israel.”
His brother cannot be forced to marry her,
but if he refuses, then he will be publicly humiliated.
His brother’s widow will pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face
before the elders of the city!

Reputation has a generational aspect to it.
If you have no children, who will remember you?

That is why Moses deals with the private parts-grabbing wife in this context (25:11-12).
You don’t imperil a man’s procreative ability just to win a fight.
That would be the ultimate slam against his reputation!
-- the ultimate emasculation!

More common aspects of bearing false witness are found in verses 13-16,
as Moses discusses the importance of fair weights.

You have to remember that in those days there was no such thing as standardized scales.
Every merchant has his weights.
And the dishonest merchant would have two sets of weights:
one for buying and one for selling.

They might look identical – but one was just slightly smaller than the other.
Over a days business, weighing out grain and figs,
it could make a big difference.

Dishonest business practices are an abomination to the Lord.
It is not only theft,
it is also bearing false witness,
misrepresenting the truth for selfish gain.

In verses 17-19

Moses exhorts Israel to remember what Amalek did –
how they ambushed the stragglers of Israel.
And so he commands them to deal with Amalek –
“you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

Once again, the common thread in this text is the issue of reputation.
Amalek deserves destruction because they have attacked the people of God.
The Amalekites did not fear God

In its basic form, bearing false witness is simply a matter of the tongue.
We are most familiar with the slander of the tongue–
the gossip who spreads rumors and bad reports.

And I should point out that even when the rumor is true, it may still be slander,
because the person whose reputation is being attacked
has no opportunity to repent and correct the fault!

If you are concerned for your brother’s reputation,
then you will not spread an evil report.
You will go to him and allow him the opportunity to correct it!

And if you hear someone spreading an evil report
if somebody starts to tell you something bad about someone else,
just ask them, “have you dealt with this according to Matthew 18?”
If they say no–then send them back to deal with the issue.
If they say yes, then that means that either the person has repented
(and the offended person has forgiven them–thereby closing the case forever)
or the person has been disciplined by the church,
(which makes the offense public).

I admit that it can sometimes be more complicated than that.
But the point is that gossip and slander occurs when people are unwilling to follow Mt 18

But bearing false witness through our actions is just as much of a problem.
You can dishonor your neighbor by how you act towards him as well.
You bear false witness every time you treat someone worse than he deserves.
Because when you mistreat someone,
you are implying that they do not deserve to be treated well.
This is the marvel of our Savior, Jesus Christ.
It would not be false witness for Jesus to stand at the throne of God,
and tell the Father about our sins.
He would be a true witness if he stood there and testified to our wickedness.
But this is not what he has done.

Instead, he humbled himself, took to himself the form of a servant,
and suffered the penalty for our sins.
And now, he has been raised to the Father's right hand,
where he intercedes for us,
vindicating us before the Father.
Every time the Father looks at the Son, he is reminded of that sacrifice.
Why?
Is it simply the scars on his hands and feet?
That is part of it.
But there is something far more basic as well.
It is because the Eternal Son of God *has* hands and feet.
The eternal Son of God sits at the right hand of the Father *still* in human form.
Yes, he has been glorified with the glory which he shared with the Father before all ages.
It is undoubtedly the *second person of the Trinity* who sits there.
But he is at the same time, a man.
And every time his Father sees him, he sees at once the Eternal Son,
and the Second Adam, the Seed of Abraham, the Son of David,
who has brought humanity to the right hand of the Father.
And it is he who testifies of us:
"This one is mine!"
"This one is *not* guilty—because I bore his sins on the cross."
There is no sign of the covenant more powerful than the resurrected body of Jesus Christ.
There is no witness more eloquent to the justice and mercy of God.

Therefore may we, who are called by his name, live before him,
exhibiting that same justice and mercy to those around us.

And so let me ask you:

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