

When Leprosy Spreads – Deuteronomy 24:8 – 25:3

Introduction – The ninth commandment says that we are not to bear false witness, which is centered on public and judicial deceit and corruption. Lying is a subset of this commandment and God will judge liars (Col 3:9, Rev 21:8); but the emphasis for a new community and kingdom is upon judicial honesty and especially for the sake of the vulnerable.

Many Applications – There are a number of laws here. We will look at each briefly and then cull out some principles and applications.

The Spread of Leprosy (vv8-9) – Miriam's story is cited where she opposed Moses with a false testimony (Num 12:1-3). Her outer leprosy symbolized her inner corruption at this point. Add to that the teachings in Leviticus 13-14 on leprosy and we see the importance that such corruption must be put out of the camp or it will spread to all corners, at which point the whole house would have to be torn down.

Dignity for the Poor (vv10-13) – People can be poor for many reasons. It may be because of hard providences, poor decisions, laziness, or any of a number of combinations. When we seek to help with a loan (which we can do – Deut 23:19), we may not charge usury, but we may take collateral. However, even in doing this, we do not have the right to enter his house (invade all his privacy) nor to keep his cloak at night and humiliate him (make the man "pay" for this loan in a grinding way – see Amos 2:8).

Do Not Withhold Wages (vv14-15) – When you are in a position of financial superiority, it is easier to bend the rules in your favor (i.e. large businesses holding back on paying smaller suppliers to make a couple bucks more on interest). The poor tend to live hand to mouth, and so scheduled payments that meet those needs are a sign of cultural faithfulness. Withholding wages is considered fraud (James 5:4), and Jesus includes it in the list of big sins (Mark 10:19). Christian businessmen are to be men of integrity notably in their business actions.

Avoiding Clan Wars (v16) – The courts of man are to be limited to the guilty party only and not to his family as well. It is fraudulent to bring the consequences of a man's crime upon successive generations. This is different than the courts of God Who "*visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me*" (Deut 5:8). God is competent to do that and we are not, proven by the fact that we are incompetent to show "*mercy to thousands*" of generations, as the Lord also does.

Perverved Justice upon the Vulnerable (vv17-18) – Those who have economic, judicial, or political power must remember that it is all a gift from the Lord and they must not treat those in vulnerable situations as prey to take advantage of. Put another way, it is a godly government that structures its laws (normally written by those in a place of power) to protect those who are particularly vulnerable.

Private Property and Public Welfare (vv19-22) – Private property is assumed throughout the scripture, but it is never an absolute right, it is a gift from the Lord, like everything else. Why does God allow some to become rich (1 Tim 6:17-19)? One of the reasons we can see the godliness of Boaz (Ruth) is because he left an unfinished harvest lying around on purpose for the poor to help themselves. There is much for a society to learn here about caring for the poor, leaving some work for them to find, providing first steps graciously for them to provide for their own.

Public Beatings and Dignity (vv1-3) – We turn to instruction from Proverbs regarding spanking our children (Prov 10:13, 13:24, 26:3) and so we should. But some of these verses are speaking about what is being dealt with in Deut 25:1-3. How many foolish young men might see their spiritual lives greatly improved if this consequence was put in place? But even here, the discipline is to be done out of dignity and respect for the man receiving the discipline. Gal 6:1 would even have a bearing in this kind of judicial thinking....

Which Leads to Some Applications and our Difficulties – We actually have the shell of this kind of judicial system in our Constitution and legal systems. This is because we built upon a view of law that comes from King Alfred and centuries of Christian thinking about law, justice, mercy, property and responsibility. Panicking as we see those systems get corrupted and see the corruption spread, we think we can rebuild the walls of "conservative" protection. But we cannot. The leprosy must be dealt with.

What is the Leprosy? – The leprosy is corruption that spreads because of unbelief and lack of submission to God's Word first. We cannot simply vote in conservative, even Christian, values and laws without the fundamental law of belief – faith in God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot have honest principles in our legal, monetary, and political systems until we first turn back as a nation to the God who instructed us in how to live. Corrupt hearts cannot hold and keep honest systems.

The Reason for Such Laws – This is tied to the only sustaining reasons for having laws which require us to consider those who might be vulnerable and curb us from taking advantage of others through fraudulent practices. "...and it shall be righteousness to you before the LORD your God" (Deut 24:13). "...lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you" (v15). "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 thing" (v18). "...that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (v19, also 22). What motivates men to do good, to do so from a pure heart, and to do so consistently as a community and over time? Only the grace of God at work, evident and displayed and remembered, by His people as they establish His kingdom in His name.

And Personally? – But there is personal application as well. You have been greatly blessed – economically, legally, politically, generationally. God has freely given to you. Freely give. What time, talents, treasures has the LORD entrusted to you? Out of gratitude to God, look to generously give to others in His name and for His kingdom.