

Do Not Steal, And... - Deuteronomy 23:15-25

Introduction – It's a simple commandment, "You shall not steal." But like all the other commandments, it works itself out into all kinds of areas of life and community. Paul said it well, "*Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need*" (Eph 4:28). Moses is giving the same kind of positive commands to the eighth commandment here. Put another way: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Do Not Exploit Freedom (vv15-16) – A refugee slave from a foreign land was to be granted asylum; a man seeking freedom from paganism is not to be exploited. He would be in a very vulnerable place and should not be oppressed; he is to be allowed to live "*in your midst.*" Paul would say, "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" (2 Cor 3:17) and this should shape God's people.

When you consider this law, the sentiments of Job (Job 31:13-15), and the teaching of Paul (Gal 3:28), you see the liberty offered to all, especially the vulnerable, in the gospel. The gospel is the most potent enemy of all kinds of slavery. These laws were not only incredibly humane compared to ancient pagan law, but to modern pagan law as well. Men who are enslaved to God are not easily enslaved by men; men who refuse to be enslaved to God are easily snookered into all forms of slavery.

The Right Kind of Holiness (vv17-18) – Cult prostitution, common in pagan societies in the OT and the NT (1 Cor 5:15ff), is forbidden, as is any connection to the ongoing sex-slave industry. In the Hebrew, whore is literally the same word as "holy one," that is, one set aside for sacral prostitution. Reasoning from this, the harlot should not come in and tithe from her wretched business. And from this we learn the principle that you cannot buy God off.

"Perverted one" is a sodomite (v17) and a "dog" (v18) is a male cult prostitute. Sodomite dogs are excluded from the New Jerusalem as well (Rev 22:18) and, it follows, so are all those who participate in trying to say this language is a hate-crime. This is not hate-language. God is Love and this language must be used to deliver men and women from such bestial slavery. The communion of saints is a communion of washed sinners and so there is no unlawful discrimination going on here: everyone needs Christ, but unrepentant sinners will find themselves condemned (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Do Not Exploit the Needy (vv19-20) – This has to do with poverty loans to a brother, as opposed to a foreigner which are allowed (parallel passages include Ex 22:25, Lev 25:35-37). The restriction again is against exploitation of the vulnerable. If someone is down and out, this is not your opportunity to make a buck; it is the opportunity for you to give and help. Deacon's Funds are a wonderful way to help, but so is personal care, be it in the form of gifts or loans to those faithful brethren you know have particular needs.

Perform Your Vows (vv21-23) – We are not required to make freewill offerings or vows to the Lord, but they are a natural way to render thanks to God. We are encouraged to see God's blessings as from the Lord and to praise Him through vows (Psalm 56:12, 61:5, 8). We are even encouraged to do so while the trouble is still before us (Psalm 66:13-15). But we must be careful not to make a rash vow and then fail to follow through (Prov 20:25, 2 Cor 9:1-7). As Jesus said, "let your "yes" be "yes"," lest you break the eighth commandment and be guilty of theft.

Take an Inch, not a Mile (vv24-25) – Sometimes, it's not stealing, and so common sense and cultural practices need to be considered. Over-scrupulous minds thought the disciples were breaking the Sabbath because they were "harvesting" (Mark 2:23-24) but they simply did not understand these verses or the principle. It is simple: God gives an inch; do not take that as license to take a mile. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Summary – Another summary verse: "*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others*" (Phil 2:4). Exuberant Christian living looks beyond the letter of the law and the percent of the tithe. This is true Christ-like, Spirit-wrought liberty and liberality. Learn to follow the law of God in such a way and with such a heart that you use the law to give freedom, to release captives and addicts, to raise the downtrodden and vulnerable, easing the difficulties of others' lives, because that is what God is doing with His law.