

January 10, 2021

Rules about Relationships

Deuteronomy 24

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

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|-------|---------------|--------|---------------|
| Jan 3 | Genesis 8-11 | Jan 7 | Genesis 22-24 |
| Jan 4 | Genesis 12-15 | Jan 8 | Genesis 25-26 |
| Jan 5 | Genesis 16-18 | Jan 9 | Genesis 27-29 |
| Jan 6 | Genesis 19-21 | Jan 10 | Genesis 30-31 |

Lesson Idea: God commands His people to honor marriage and care for the needs of the underprivileged.

Deut. 24:1-5 Law of Divorce

1 *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens, if she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, that he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her away from his house, 2 and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, 3 and the latter husband turns against her, writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand, and sends her away from his house, or if the latter husband who took her to be his wife dies, 4 then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

5 *“When a man takes a new wife, he is not to go out with the army, nor be assigned any duty; he shall be free at home for one year and shall make his wife whom he has taken happy.*

NOTES:

This is an important passage for us to examine, because divorce is rampant in our society and even in the church. God does allow divorce in certain circumstances, but it is not the ideal. In Deuteronomy 24:1, the Law said a man was allowed to divorce his wife if he *“found some indecency in her.”* The word *indecency* has a root meaning of “nakedness” and could relate to some kind of indecent or shameful exposure or some type of indecency or improper behavior.

J.G. McConville in the *New Bible Commentary* explains:

1-4 This law takes for granted the practice of divorce in Israel, in spite of the Lord’s hatred of it, recorded elsewhere (Mal. 2:16). (Notice, however, the two exceptions to the man’s right to a divorce; 22:19, 29.)

This law makes no attempt to justify the practice in general. The reason for the man’s wish to divorce (he finds something indecent about her) is not clear; it may be some ritual impurity, or a failure to bear children, or sexual immodesty. It is not, in any case, said to be an adequate reason for divorce. The point of the law is merely to prevent a return to the first husband after a second marriage of the divorced woman has ended. (Je. 3:1-5 presupposes this point.) The aim may have been to make divorce so solemn and final that it would not be entered upon lightly.

The Jeremiah 3 passage that McConville noted may give some explanation of why God forbade them to remarry someone they had previously divorced. In a spiritual sense, God did not want His people thinking they could leave Him to unite to false religions and just return to Him anytime and anyway they desired. He wanted them to know their commitment to Him was permanent (like marriage was supposed to be). **Jeremiah 3:1 explains:**

*God says, “If a husband divorces his wife
And she leaves him
And becomes another man’s wife,
Will he return to her again?
Would that land not be completely defiled?
But you are a prostitute with many lovers;
Yet you turn to Me,” declares the Lord.*

Divorce was never a desired outcome for God’s people. Marriage was designed to last a lifetime. In fact, marriage was so valued in God’s eyes that it exempted a newlywed man from military service for his first year of marriage (Deut. 24:5). Jesus emphasized the sacredness of marriage in **Matthew 19:3-9:**

3 Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” 4 And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no person is to separate.”

7 They said to Him, “Why, then, did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

8 He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Many of the Pharisees believed that the Law of Moses (passages like Deuteronomy 24 and especially Numbers 5) gave men the right to divorce their wives “for any reason at all” (v 3). Jesus moved the conversation from the problem to the ideal – instead of discussing divorce He wanted people to embrace the purpose and permanence of marriage. He maintained that the only reason God allowed divorce is because people had hard hearts and would not treat each other right, even in marriage (v 8).

In the New Testament, marriage was used as a metaphor for Christ’s relationship with His Church. Ephesians 5:22-33 makes it clear that the way we treat each other as spouses should reflect the way that Christ loves the Church and the Church submits to Him.

22 Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. 24 But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. 28 So husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; 29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, 30 because we are parts of His body. 31 For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless, as for you individually, each husband is to love his own wife the same as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.

Deut. 24:6-15 Rules of Fair Treatment

6 “No one shall seize a handmill or an upper millstone as a pledge for a loan, since he would be seizing the debtor’s means of life as a pledge.

7 “If someone is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen of the sons of Israel, and he treats him as merchandise and sells him, then that thief shall die; so you shall eliminate the evil from among you.

8 “Be careful about an infestation of leprosy, that you are very attentive and act in accordance with everything that the Levitical priests teach you; just as I have commanded them, you shall be careful to act. 9

Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way as you came out of Egypt.

10 “When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not enter his house to take his pledge. 11 You shall stand outside, and the person to whom you are making the loan shall bring the pledge outside to you. 12 And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep with his pledge. 13 When the sun goes down you shall certainly return the pledge to him, so that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it will be righteousness for you before the LORD your God.

14 “You shall not exploit a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your strangers who are in your land in your towns. 15 You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets—for he is poor and sets his heart on it—so that he does not cry out against you to the LORD, and it becomes a sin in you.

NOTES:

This section contains random rules about how to treat others. Verses 6 and 10-15 deal with business practices and instructs lenders and bosses not to exploit or take advantage of the poor or foreigners. The bottom line is not the bottom line when it comes to Christians in business. Colossians 4:1 reminds “masters” to be kind and compassionate to those who serve them, because they “also have a Master in heaven.” Everything we do in life should be viewed under Christ’s authority, not what makes us the most money. Remember, the Law and the Prophets were summed up by Jesus with the command to love God supremely and love your neighbor as yourself. Even in business, Christians must prioritize the rule of love over the rules of finance.

Verses 7-9 puts the needs of the majority over the needs of the individual. In verse 9 God calls them to execute anyone who would kidnap and sell one of their countrymen. God’s reasoning was to “eliminate the evil from among you.” Capital punishment was to be a deterrent to keep evil behavior in check. Romans 13:1-7 says that keeping order in society is an authority that God has given to the state, to the government, and that as Christians we should submit to the rule of law in the land (as long as it does not cause us to be in conflict with God’s demands on our lives – see Acts 4:18-20).

Romans 13:1-7

1 Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a servant of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; respect to whom respect; honor to whom honor.

In the case of verses 8-9 in Deuteronomy 24, a leper was supposed to be carefully handled according to the Levitical rules found in Leviticus 13-14. This was for the good of the community to keep them from infecting others. The priests were instructed in God's Word what to look for and how to deal with different types of skin infections. Moses reminded them that he knew the pain that this separation could cause. In Numbers 12:10-15 he had to exclude his own sister, Miriam, for a time when the Lord struck her with leprosy (see Numbers 12:10-15).

Society has debated over the past year the pros and cons of quarantining and physical distancing to slow the spread of Covid-19. The principle taught in these verses are that whatever we decide, we must do so with a view towards the good of others. We are not to look after just our own interests but those of our neighbors around us (see Philippians 2:4). Romans 14 teaches us to give grace in debatable matters. In all things, we are to let love reign supremely (see 1 Corinthians 13; Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 4:7-8).

Deut. 24:16-22 Rules of Justice

16 "Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin alone.

17 "You shall not pervert the justice due a stranger or an orphan, nor seize a widow's garment as a pledge. 18 But you are to remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

19 "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you are not to go back to get it; it shall belong to the stranger, the orphan, and to the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives off your olive tree, you are not to search through

the branches again; that shall be left for the stranger, the orphan, and for the widow.

21 "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you are not to go over it again; that shall be left for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. 22 And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.

NOTES:

In these verses fairness, justice, and compassion are emphasized. Verse 16 stresses that individuals are accountable for their own choices and sins. A father was not to be punished for his son's wrongdoings and vice versa (see Ezekiel 18). Each person was responsible before God for being obedient to His commands and statutes. This applied to wrongdoings here, but the opposite truth was just as valid. No one could get credit before God for the righteousness of his father or his child. We must all stand before the judgment seat of God alone. Fortunately as believers, we have an Advocate in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verses 17-22 again addresses caring for the less fortunate in the society. J.A. Thompson in the *Tyndale Commentary* points out:

The Old Testament insists that the protection of the weak is a duty not only for kings (Ps. 72:12-14) but also for the whole of society (Deut. 10:18; 27:19; Exod. 22:22; 23:6-9; Lev. 19:33; Prov. 22:22). Specific reference is made to the confiscation of the widow's garment given as a pledge. Once again the reason given for such a concern for the weak and defenceless [*sic*] is that Israel was a defenceless slave in Egypt, and Yahweh redeemed (*pādâ*) her. In other passages the Levite is included (14:29; 16:11-14).

God provided for the weakest in the society to receive true justice and provisions. It is interesting that the poor would have to work for their provisions by gleaning the leftovers in the fields. The owners would instruct their workers not to take everything or make a second pass over the crop, but the ones who needed help would have to come and glean it themselves (see Ruth 2:1-7). This not only provided for their sustenance but also helped them to retain their dignity. Foreigners were also welcome in their society and aided in the same way.

Deuteronomy 24 helps us see again that the overall theme of God's Law is Love. We are to love our spouses and honor marriage (Hebrews 13:4). We are to love the poor and protect them in our commerce and courts. We are to love God supremely and demonstrate it by loving our neighbors as ourselves.