

Chapter 21

IV. The LAW (*condemnation*), Chapters 19 - 24

C. Social legislation, 21 — 24

Introduction...

1. Chapters 21-23 begin the next section of the Law.
 - a. This section is called the *section ordinances*, as the opening verse of chapter 21 tells us
 - It concerns the basic civil rights of Jewish society.
 - In these laws you have the rights of individuals.
 - And the consequences for the violation of those rights.
 - Many of these laws are reflected in our laws today.
 - b. As we move through this section, we will take time in places to examine the laws in details, especially as they may relate to Christ or NT Law.
 - But we will not stop and study each law in equal detail.

Verses 1-6...

1. The first section of the ordinances deal with the rights of slaves in Jewish society.
 - a. Immediately, we are struck by an apparent contradiction over how rights could be expressed in the context of slavery.
 - Isn't slavery wrong to begin with and therefore, why does God seem to condone here?
 - Answer... our notion of slavery and the kind of slavery that is in view here are totally different.
 - b. First, notice that the slavery discussed here involves a Hebrew slave... v.2
 - One Hebrew is "bought" by another Hebrew and becomes a slave.
 - Question...How does one Hebrew come up for sale within the nation of Israel?
 - The answer provides our first distinction between slavery in the Law and the form of slavery practiced in our nation and elsewhere.
 - The Hebrew becomes a slave because he places himself up for sale.
 - In other words, the person volunteers to become a slave (or servant) of another Hebrew
 - c. Why would a Hebrew sell himself to another man as a servant?
 - In most cases, it was to settle a debt.
 - If a Hebrew had indebted himself so much that he could not pay the debt with his assets, then he had to work off his debt.
 - Since his debtors demanded immediate payment of the debt, the man couldn't wait to earn the money through normal employment.
 - So instead, he sold himself as a slave.
 - In a sense, he was taking his wages in advance and then received no pay for his work
 - But he also gave up his rights as a free man.
 - d. A Hebrew slave was the property of his owner, since he was bought with a price.
 - He worked for free because his wages had already been paid up front when he was purchased
 - Obviously, such an arrangement could be easily abused
 - A desperate debtor might agree to very unfair terms.
 - So the Law stepped in to limit the number of years someone could remain a slave.

- At the end seven years, the slave must be set free.
 - Obviously, this law also limited how much someone could sell themselves for, since the buyer was limited to seven years of labor.
 - The Law further clarified that families were not be broken up
- e. If a man entered with a wife, he left with his wife
 - If the man took an interest in one of the masters daughters or other servants, then he could marry.
 - But if he did so, he could not automatically take those people with him when he left slavery
 - The slave must redeem his new family by paying a bride price to the master.
 - Or he could leave them behind to work off that price, just as he had worked off his own debt.
 - Or he could stay with them and remain a permanent member of the household with his family.
- f. Now if this doesn't sound fair, give careful thought to how this circumstance would play out
 - First, a slave new these rules existed.
 - So when he decided to accept a wife from the master, he knew he was setting himself up for a difficult decision at the seven year point.
 - He was a slave, so he likely wouldn't be able to pay the bride price.
 - So essentially, he was taking on more debt by accepting the wife.
 - This meant he was marrying knowing he would need to leave his wife and children behind until he could redeem them.
 - Obviously, this would be a severe hardship, so having a family would be a strong incentive to remain in the master's house.
 - So a master had incentive to offer a good slave a wife.
 - He knew this would make it less likely that the servant would leave after 7 years.
 - So in vs.5-6, the Lord makes a provision for a slave to voluntarily becoming a permanent servant in the household.
- g. He would announce his intentions to stay permanently.
 - Essentially, the man was applying for permanent, life-long employment.
 - He would have the care of his master.
 - He would never worry again about housing, food, or unemployment.
- h. This was a decision that couldn't be reversed.
 - So a permanent mark was made by piercing his ear with an awl nailed through the ear to a doorpost.
 - This designation makes this servant a "bondservant" or bondslave.
- i. This is why the NT epistles authors frequently refer to themselves as bondservants of Christ.
 - We have been bought with a price to become slaves of Christ
 - But in our walk as disciples of Christ, we are also voluntarily committing ourselves to following serving and obeying Jesus forever.
 - We are slaves, in the sense that we can never again be released from our relationship with Jesus.
 - But we are bondslaves because our service to Jesus is a conscious choice we make in our walk.
 - These rules applied to male slaves, but female slaves had different rights
- j. So the ordinances regarding female slaves differed

Verses 7-11...

1. To understand this passage, we need to appreciate what the words mean and the expected customs.
 - a. Vs.7... we hear of a father selling his daughter, as a female slave, and this sale would also have been done for similar economic reasons.
 - He was in debt, and his daughter was of marrying age.
 - So he sells her as a servant to another man to cancel a debt.
 - Why would a father do this?
 - Well, in reality he was doing what any father would do with his daughter, at least in a sense.
 - He was finding his daughter a husband.
 - b. Marriages were a two part process in ancient times
 - First, every bride was “bought”
 - A price was paid to the father for the privilege of taking his daughter as bride.
 - Commonly, fathers bought brides for their sons.
 - Sometimes, a groom bought a bride for himself, as in cases when his father had already passed away.
 - Later, the wedding night occurs, and the marriage is consummated
 - The two events were usually separated by months or years
 - But in the meantime, After the price was paid, the girl was betrothed to her groom and belonged to the one who bought her.
 - We see this situation play out in the story of Isaac and Rebekah
 - c. Abraham’s servant goes to Haran and buys Rebekah for Isaac
 - At that point, Rebekah belongs to Abraham until she marries Isaac.
 - So there was always money exchanged in some form when a bride was taken.
 - d. In this case, the Law is speaking of a situation when a master takes a woman in exchange for the cancellation of debt.
 - He doesn’t pay for the woman with a cash payment.
 - Because she is taken in this way, her status in the new household is different.
 - She is a slave girl or servant in the house, not a daughter.
 - Because the girl was received in forgiveness of debt, she carries a lower status.
 - On the other hand, if she marries the master’s son rather than another servant, then the Law says in v.9 that she is to be treat as a daughter in the family.
 - e. So while the servant girl waits to marry, she serves as a slave girl or handmaiden in the household.
 - But what if the girl is never given in marriage? What are here rights?
 - The law in v.7 addresses the rights of a slave girl who is not permitted to marry.
 - If the delay stretches to seven years, the freedom rule doesn’t apply according as it does for a male servant.
 - The woman can’t leave her servant status.
 - This may sound harsh, until we remember that a woman was always under the authority of either a father or husband.
 - Since her father sold her, she was now under the authority of her master and future husband, so there was no divorce possible.

- f. Vs. 8... the Law says that if the master is displeased with her and won't allow her to marry, then he must allow another man to purchase her for marriage.
- But he cannot sell her to a foreign husband.
 - The woman must be married to another member of Israel
 - If he will not marry her or sell her into marriage, then she must be released without a payment required so she can marry someone.
 - In summary, an unmarried woman cannot be held in limbo indefinitely
 - She must be married to the one who paid the bride price.
 - Or the master must allow someone else to purchase her.
 - Finally, the culture considered this slave wife to carry a different status than a free woman.
- g. Like Hagar and Sarah, the slave wife (or concubine) was considered secondary to a free wife
- So a man who took a slave girl as wife would often seek for a 2nd wife who was free
 - And when he took a 2nd free wife, the slave wife was considered less valuable to the husband.
 - Both the husband and the free wife would look down on the slave wife.
- h. Vs.10-11... the Law addresses how a husband must treat his servant wife (a concubine) if he took another free wife.
- The slave wife must continue to receive all necessary provision, like food and clothing
 - And the man must continue to do his duty as a husband to her and not deny her conjugal rights.
 - Clearly, these laws were intended to protect the slave wife from a vindictive free wife
 - We see these sins evident in the way Jacob's four wives quarreled with one another
 - The Law is regulating the way men cared for concubines, but it isn't endorsing the practice of multiple marriages.
- i. God's law is acknowledging the reality of multiple marriages without endorsing it or approving of it.
- This is one of the purposes of the Law.
 - To regulate the sinful hearts of men.
- j. We might ask why God doesn't outlaw multiple marriages directly in His word**
- In fact, He does when He defines marriage as one husband, one wife, one flesh.
 - And in the testimony of scripture, multiple marriages are consistently portrayed as negative and harmful to the family.
 - Furthermore, NT teaching reinforces the importance of taking only one wife when it declares an elder must be "a man of one wife".
 - However, when a man chooses to take a second wife, his sin doesn't render the second marriage invalid.
 - Like in the case of divorce, the second marriage is formed through an act of adultery, but it is still a one flesh relationship.
 - Therefore, the man must honor his second marriage just as he should honor his first.
 - Once again, we're not saying that multiple marriages are appropriate...they're not
 - But once a marriage is formed, it must be honored.

- Nor is this acknowledgment intended to be an endorsement of multiple marriages.
 - In fact, by the time of Jesus day, multiple marriages were no longer permitted in Jewish society even though this provision still existed in the Law.
2. Finally, it's worth reiterating that the rights of slaves in Israel far exceeded the rights that other nations afforded to their slaves.
- a. The institution of slavery as defined in the Bible isn't sin, so long as we are talking about a very specific form of slavery.
 - Biblical slavery practiced under the Law in Israel was a voluntary state, in which a man chose to enter to avoid paying a debt or to ensure life-long employment.
 - Their prior choices put them in a position where slavery was their only escape, and they were grateful for the option.
 - Today, we have a concept of *bankruptcy*, which brings its own consequences in our society
 - b. Scripture teaches that debt to others brings consequences, and when we have debt we are essentially the slave of another.
 - c. Furthermore, slavery in the Biblical sense didn't involve mistreatment
 - If a slave was mistreated, the master was guilty of a crime (which we will see in v.20)
 - This is very different to slavery as it was practiced in the early years of our country or in many other places in the world.
 - Slaves didn't enter slavery voluntarily
 - They weren't set free after seven years
 - And they were mistreated terribly
 - This form of slavery is never allowed in scripture and is sinful
 - d. So these laws are a reflection of God's grace in the way He provided for the slave's interests
 - And that's why the Bible acknowledges the reality of slavery as an institution.
 - Under the Law's regulation of slavery, it becomes more of a job or employment opportunity than the thing we typically think of today.

Verses 12-36...

This next section of the ordinances...deals with Personal Injury

1. First part... regards *Homicide*...premeditated Murder
 - a. Various kinds of homicide are addressed here
 - First... premeditated murder always results in death
 - The death penalty for murder is a legitimate & required penalty under the Law of God
 - V.14... we're told that this penalty should apply to everyone, even if you find the guilty party serving before the Lord's altar.
 - b. If the act was not premeditated...we call *Manslaughter*, then a different penalty applies
 - That person would be sent to a city of refuge...vs. 13
 - It was refuge in the sense that it was a refuge from the death penalty.
 - Don't think these cities were a way to avoid punishment; on the contrary
 - The people in these cities never left, or else they could be rightly killed by their victim's families.
 - As long as they stayed in the city, they could remain alive.
 - But they were isolated from family and the world forever.
 - They were serving a sentence of life in prison.

2. **Vs.18-27...List of Personal Injury law...** general theme/“do the right thing by your neighbor”
- a. When you harm someone, make restitution
 - If you fight and hurt someone, you compensate them for what they lost.
 - And you care for them until they are well again
 - Unless they die, in which case see v.13
3. **Other Capital Offenses...**
- a. **Striking parents & Cursing parents** was punishable by death.
 - The Hebrew word for strike... means to attack
 - Any attack against a parent was cause for death
 - Striking another adult carried a lesser penalty
 - There was no provision in Jewish law for treating minors differently than adults
 - If the child was mature enough to attack a parent in a deadly way, then he was old enough to pay the penalty.
 - We can safely assume that these penalties were effective in discouraging such crimes
 - And kidnapping punished by death
 - b. We can see how man’s penalties for these offenses have eroded from where God established them.
 - Perhaps this is why Paul says in 2Tim 3 that the last days will experience an outbreak of unprecedented evil including “disobedience to parents”.
 - When Paul includes disobedience to parents in the same list as unholy, treacherous, haters of good, brutal, and others, then we know how serious the Lord views disobedience to parents.
4. Vs.20-21... the **Rights of Injured Slaves** is covered
- a. Slaves couldn’t be murdered but they could be disciplined by the master for rebellion or criminal acts.
 - If the discipline resulted in immediate death, the master was punished like any other murderer
 - If the person doesn’t die right away, then law looked upon the injuries differently
 - The master’s penalty would only be loss of the slave
 - The presumption is that the master hadn’t intend to kill his slave, or else he would have died right away
 - So the master’s mistake is paid for in the loss of his servant
 - b. Remember, slaves became property of the master because they had entered into the arrangement voluntarily.
 - Also, remember that Jesus Himself used the picture of slave to explain our relationship to Christ.

Read Luke 12:42-48...

- c. Before we judge God’s word for its willingness to accommodate slavery in scripture, consider that He allowed the institution so that we might have an accurate picture of our relationship with Him.
 - Without the institution of slavery, we would struggle to understand how bound we are to Christ.
 - And how we are obligated to obey Him.
 - And what the penalties will be for disobedience

5. *Rights of a mother who is injured and forced to give birth prematurely... Vs. 22...*

- a. If the baby survives, the woman is compensated for the injury and the premature delivery
 - If the child is injured or dies, then a proportion punishment follows
 - If the child dies, the person is to die as well
 - If the child was injured, then the person was to lose use of a similar function in the body
 - The exact punishment was decided by the husband, but it must be approved by a judge
 - In all cases, a man guilty of injuring someone could avoid the physical punishment if they paid a ransom as explained in v.30.
 - But either way, they lost something of value for taking something of value from the other
- b. These rules on harm to unborn children give rise to a couple of interesting observations
 - First...** unborn baby has standing apart from his mother.
 - The child is not considered an extensions of the woman's body.
 - The child is a separate life protected under law.
 - This counters arguments by abortion proponents that the unborn child is merely part of the woman's body until birth.
 - Secondly...** if the baby is not delivered alive, the person causing the injury is guilty of murder.

6. The *Principle of Proportion...* is summed up as "an eye for an eye"...Vs.23-35

- a. This principle in the Law was intended to limit retribution, not encourage it
 - When someone is wronged, the wronged party should expect no more compensation than was lost in the injury.
 - Masters how harm slaves lose their slave, for he is set free.
 - Owners whose animals harm another person, lose their animal.
 - And notice they don't get to enjoy the meat either.
 - And if the owner knows the animal is dangerous and does nothing, then when it kills again the owner is guilty of murder and must pay a price.
 - Either he dies himself
 - Or he pays a ransom as demanded
- b. When negligence takes someone's property, you compensate them and you keep the property you damaged.
 - But the compensation should not exceed what was lost.
- c. Our modern court system has lost this sense of proportion.
 - We invented forms of loss like "pain and suffering" that the Law of God never recognizes.
 - Life is full of pain and suffering, but demanding payment of a ransom doesn't erase the pain.
 - Only if there was true loss was a payment required.

Chapter 22

IV. The LAW (*condemnation*), Chapters 19 - 24

C. Social legislation, 21 — 24

The section concerns the basic Civil Laws of Jewish society

1. Chapters 22-23...continue to address property rights, negligence, false testimony, and sundry issues of civil society.
 - a. Consider that before this law was given to men, the nation of Israel lacked a comprehensive code of this type.
 - While it's true that society in general was guided by law of the culture, this document is by far the most complete and ancient record of civil law in existence.
 - And since it is God's law, it should be no surprise that modern law finds its roots in this law.
 - Although in many ways we have departed from these principles.
 - And as we have departed, we have diminished the value of what's provided.

Verses 1-4...

1. *Crimes of Theft...*

- a. When someone steals something, he will be required to pay back in a greater amount than he tried to take.
 - If the animal is gone by the time the man is caught, then he owes 4 or 5 times as much as he took.
 - If the property is still in his possession, then the penalty is double.
 - If he can't afford the penalty, he was sold into slavery.
 - Remember, slavery was a type in indentured servitude.
 - So the person was working in slavery to pay off the debt.
 - They wouldn't spend more than seven years in slavery.
 - In that way, it was like a work release program.
 - The point of these penalties is to deter potential thieves from their crimes.
- b. If you stand to lose more than you gain, then it should influence your thinking.
 - This is an important principle in God's law and should be a part of any effective law.
 - The purpose of law is to expose and convict people of their sin
 - And to be effective in that regard, law must require a penalty significant enough to cause men to think twice before sinning.
- c. **Romans 13:1-4**
 - 1) The governing authorities are to be respected, Paul says, because the Lord has invested government with the power to punish.
 - In fact, God gave government the right to take life if needed so that bad men might have an incentive to control their worst instincts.
 - That power should instill fear in men, and in so doing, society is better off.
 - Obviously, government can become abusive and corrupt and harmful, because all government is administered by sinful men.
 - But God is control of all government rulers
 - And we are told to respect government as a representative of God, at least until it comes into conflict with God's law.