

## Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-16—Commandments and Statutes

In our last lesson we were looking at commandments that basically applied to business. I want to continue in this same vein in this lesson.

A form of thievery and falsehood that God condemns by commandment is to have diverse weights and measures. Just weights and measures are commanded by God. (Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-15) The principle of course is honest in all your dealings.

Businessmen had certain responsibilities to which the law commanded them to adhere. Most of the businessmen of the time were farmers, but the principles are still the same for all business. They were to provide for the poor, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. This provision was not issued as a welfare check, however. When the farmer harvested his crop, he was to leave the corners, the gleanings, and anything accidentally dropped was to be left. These then, the ones for whom they were to provide, went to the field, the vineyard and the olive trees and gleaned all that was left for themselves. (Lev. 19:9-10; Lev. 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22)

These farmer businessmen also had a responsibility to each other. Ex. 23:4-5 tells us that if we see our neighbor's ox or his sheep go astray, we are to bring him back to him again. Deut. 22:1-3 takes this a little further by telling us that if we don't know whose it is, we are to keep it until the owner comes looking for it and then to restore it to him. We are told that this applies to anything that is lost. Keeping it secret from the owner would be theft, would it not? Also Ex. 23:5 and Deut. 22:4 commands us to help our neighbor lift up his ox or ass which has fallen under its burden. We are not to hide ourselves from him.

One other type of theft we are prohibited from is the taking of bribes. (Ex. 23:8) I think we might all be surprised if we really thought on this one and compared our business activity to it very carefully.

We have all heard OSHA cursed and discussed, but were you aware the principle of what they are supposed to do is in the Bible. Deut. 22:8 tells us, **“When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.”** We are responsible to protect each other from possible hazards, whatever they might be.

We have looked at commandments dealing with family and business, let's now look at commandments dealing with our relationship with each other in general. God is concerned that we don't take advantage of or harass those in a less fortunate position than we. Ex. 22:21; Ex. 23:9; and Lev. 19:33-34 all command us to not vex or oppress the stranger in our land. Ex. 22:22-23 commands us not to afflict the widow or the fatherless child. Deut. 24:17-18 commands us not to pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor the fatherless, not take a widow's raiment to pledge.

Lev. 19:14 includes the handicapped. **“Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear thy God: I am the LORD.”**

Ex. 22:28 says **“Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.”** The word “gods” here means judges or magistrates. This is a very difficult command to keep in times like these, but I believe if you will think on it, a very necessary one.

One problem we have is leadership that should not be there in the first place, according to God's law. The Bible uses the term **“congregation of the LORD”** quite often without defining it. However, since the division of power was leaders over 10, leaders over 50, leaders over 100, leaders

over 1000, etc., it appears to me that each man had a voting right and through his vote, he in effect delegated his leader to vote for him at the next higher lever, etc. In this case anyone with this voting right could become a leader. I believe the “congregation” referred to those with this right to vote. Being cast off from the “congregation of the LORD” or “of Israel” meant either a temporary or permanent loss of their power to vote. There were some people prohibited from being in this congregation. Deut. 23:1 includes one wounded in the stones, or who hath his privy member cut off. Deut. 23:2 includes a bastard even to his 10<sup>th</sup> generation. (A bastard in the Old Testament was a person of mixed race, one who had an Israelite father and a non-Israelite mother for example.) This appears quite harsh, but I think we can see, in the leadership we have today, God’s reason for this.

Another principle most all of us have difficulty with is expressed in the 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment. (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 5:20) **“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”** Ex. 23:1 reiterates this. Ex. 23:2 commands us to not bow to peer pressure of any kind to cause us to do evil or to speak in a cause to wrest or twist judgment. Ex. 23:7 tells us to keep far from a false matter. Lev. 19:16 commands us not to be talebearers and not to murder.

**“Thou shalt not commit adultery”** is the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18) and is reiterated in Lev. 18:20. Deut. 23:17 takes us a little farther commanding that there be no sexual perversion. **“There shall be no whore or the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.”** One thing that we see today that helps lead to this perversion is men wearing women’s clothing and vice versa. Deut. 22:5 commands this not be done, telling us that both are an abomination to God.

One of our greater responsibilities to each other is to help protect each other from bad health or sickness. There are a number of ways we can do this. We have a couple of principles given as commandments. One of the major problems is proper disposal of human waste or sewage. Deut. 23:12-14 addresses this with a simple command, but with a very major principle. Num. 5:1-3 and Deut. 24:8-9 addresses the principle of quarantine. Both deal primarily with leprosy, but the principle of quarantining people with communicable diseases from the rest of the population is God-given.

Another responsibility we have to each other is respecting and protecting each other’s property. We find this principle in the commandment in Deut. 19:14, **“Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor’s landmark.”** We find the same principle in Deut. 23:24-25 in which we are told that if we are in our neighbor’s vineyard or field, we can eat what we pick, but in no way are we to put it in a vessel or take a sickle to it.

What might appear to be an exception to this principle is found in Deut. 23:15-16, which tells us not to deliver unto his master an escaped servant who has come to you.

Perhaps the commandments dealing with our relationship to each other can be summed up in Lev. 19:17, **“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him.”** The Ferrar Fenton translation renders this last phrase, **“You may reprove your neighbor, but not bear ill-will against him.”**

I think the goals for most of us in this life would certainly include happiness, good health, long life, and reasonable prosperity. God gave Israel a number of commandments that are designed to provide these things under most circumstances. Jesus tells us in Mark 2:27, **“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”** With this in mind, it behooves us to understand that keeping the Sabbath is for our benefit, something that we as men need. Not only do we have the commandment to

keep the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments in Ex. 20:8-11 and Deut. 5:12-15, but we have a host of commandments supporting and reiterating this commandment.

Ex. 31:12-17 commands the keeping of the Sabbath and tells us it is to be a perpetual covenant between Israel and God. Anyone working on the Sabbath is to be put to death. Ex. 34:21 commands us to keep it even during harvest time. Ex. 35:2-3 says, **“Ye shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.”**

Ex. 23:10-12 introduces us to the Sabbath year as well. It is to be very seventh year and we are to let the land rest and neither plant nor harvest. Lev. 25:2-7 repeats this law while Lev. 25:8-13 introduces us to the Jubilee, the Sabbath of Sabbath years. Every 49<sup>th</sup> year was to be declared a Jubilee, which was then to be celebrated during the 50<sup>th</sup> year, thus there would be back to back Sabbath years. However, the reckoning would be based on the 49<sup>th</sup> year. The Sabbath year was to be the release we discussed earlier and the Jubilee was to be a Sabbath year, plus all land possessions reverted back to their original owners.

The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16) tells us to honor our father and mother that our days may be long upon the land. Lev. 19:3 tells us, **“Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.”** Deut. 11:18-21 commands, as a basis for this honor and fear, that the parents make every effort to continually teach their children the law of the LORD. The penalty for being rebellious to one’s parents is severe. Deut. 21:18-21 states that if a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or mother, even when they chasten him, they are to take him to the elders of the city and all the men of the city are to stone him to death.

One of the best things we can do for ourselves and those around us is to stay healthy. I think most of us would agree that one of the most common causes of illness is what we eat. God has given us guidelines as to what to eat and not eat and has commanded us to adhere to them. Lev. 11 is the basic text. The fundamental rule, according to Lev. 11:2-8 and Deut. 14:3-8, as to what to eat among the four footed animals is to eat only those that both divide the hoof and chew the cud. Of fish, Lev. 11:9-12 and Deut. 14:9-10 tells us the clean fish are the fish that have both fins and scales. Of fowls, both Lev. 11:13-23 and Deut. 14:11-20 gives a list of clean and unclean fowls. It is a little difficult to determine the clean and unclean by the list, but basically the rule appears to be that a bird that is a scavenger (a flesh eater) is unclean and the rest are clean. All fowls that creep, going upon all four, are unclean. Creeping things that have legs above their feet to hop or leap are clean and all others are unclean. Lev. 20:25-26 commands us to put this difference between the clean and unclean animals. This was not a religious ritual, but rather commandments given for our benefit, our health.

Israelites are forbidden to eat animals that die of themselves, even if they are clean. (Deut. 14:21) However, Lev. 17:15-16 says that if a person does eat it, he shall wash both himself and his clothes and be unclean until evening. If he doesn’t wash, he will have to answer for his sin.

Blood is very strictly and strongly forbidden to be eaten. We find this in Lev. 7:26-27; Lev. 17:10-14; Deut. 12:16 and Deut. 12:23-25. The reason given is that the life is in the blood. A study of the blood sacrifice for sin can be greatly enhanced with knowledge of this fact.

Lev. 7:22-25 gives us further guidelines on how to eat for good health. Fat is not to be eaten. While we will see that the removal and burning of the fat from sacrifices is part of the sacrifice rituals, doing so had a very practical purpose as well.

Lev. 11:29-45 gives us a further list of animals that are unclean. Dead carcasses of these animals and of the unclean animals we've already discussed (Lev. 11:24-28) are unclean. Anyone touching them, or any vessel, raiment, skin, sack, etc. upon which a carcass might fall would be unclean. Anyone or anything unclean as a result must be washed and cleansed.

Uncleanness was a term applied to conditions as well as actual uncleanness, but all had to be cleansed or purified. A woman bearing a child was considered unclean for 40 days after the birth of a man child, and 80 days after the birth of a maid child. Anyone unclean was prohibited from coming into the sanctuary until they were clean. The cleansing or purifying process was sometimes a combination of actual washing and a ceremonial cleansing ritual.

There are a few other commandments that are somewhat health related that we need to mention in passing. Lev. 18:19 forbids having sexual relations with a woman during her menstrual period. Lev. 19:19 and Deut. 22:9-11 tells us not to mix seed in our planting, nor to cross breed livestock with a different kind, and not to mix fabrics in our garments. Each of these, though sometimes hard to understand, have reasons that will affect our welfare if not adhered to.

Deut. 22:10 warns not to plow with an ox and an ass together.

Deut. 22:6-7 tells us that if we happen on a bird's nest where the mother bird is setting, whether it be on eggs or with young, we are not to take the mother. If we take anything it is to be the young. The promise is that this type of attitude will prolong our days.

Lev. 19:23-25 gives a commandment that when trees are planted, the first three year's fruit is not to be eaten. The fourth year, it is to be holy to praise the LORD, and then it can be eaten in the fifth year.

One very important thing to most of us is preserving our heritage. There are a couple of commandments that need to be looked at in this light. Deut. 21:15-17 tells us that if a man has two wives, one loved and the other hated, but the hated has the firstborn son, when the man makes his will or divides his inheritance, he not to set the firstborn of the loved wife above the firstborn of the hated which is the actual firstborn. The actual firstborn is to receive the birthright, a double portion of the inheritance, as well as double responsibility.

Deut. 25:5-10 concerns brethren (family) dwelling together and one dies not having a child. His wife is not to remarry outside the family, but her husband's brother is to take her as his wife and then their firstborn son is to take on the name of the wife's first husband and be entitled to his inheritance.

If the brother refuses to do this, they are to go before the elders and the woman is to declare his refusal and if he testifies the same before the elders, she is to loose his shoe from his foot, spit in his face and say, "**so shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house.**" This will be a shame for that man from then on. The story in the book of Ruth relies on this commandment.

Deut. 24:5 gives the commandment concerning that man who has just taken a new bride saying that he is neither to go to war nor be charged with any business, but that he is to stay home and cheer up his wife for one year.

The apostle Paul tells us in I Cor. 6:18, "**he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.**" Lev. 18:22 forbidding homosexuality and Lev. 18:23 forbidding sodomy are thus forbidding sin against one's own body.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment forbidding covetousness (Ex. 20:17 and Deut. 5:21) deals with each of us in our responsibility to ourselves. While we may steal, commit adultery, etc. as a result of

uncontrolled coveting, coveting itself is a sin that hurts us when we don't control it. It may be natural to coven, but if it couldn't be controlled, I do not believe God would have given us a commandment forbidding it.

This completes our study of the commandments. We close this portion of our study with Deut. 11:8-9, **"Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it; and that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey."**

## STATUTES

A discussion of a couple of facts might help us to better understand the purpose of the statutes before we discuss specific ones. In the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus we have the story of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, coming to visit Moses in the wilderness about the time that Israel reached Mt. Sinai. He observed that as Moses sat to judge the people that there was an endless line of people seeking him. So he went to Moses and basically told him he couldn't do the job of leading the people all by himself. Then he made a suggestion to Moses. In verse 19, he said to Moses, **"Be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee."** In verse 24 we're told that Moses hearkened to his father-in-law and did all that he suggested. This was the way Israel was organized. Later Moses was given extra relief in the selection of 70 more elders to assist him in particular. (Num. 11:16)

Secondly, God told Moses to take Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel that they might minister unto God in the priest's office. (Ex. 28:1) So Moses did this. God first gave Moses instruction to make special clothing for them and to consecrate and sanctify them into the priest's office. He then made it a statute that the priest wear the special clothing anytime they performed their priestly duties. (Ex. 28:40-43)

God then made another statute that the priest's office was to be Aaron's and his son's and their son's etc. for ever, or for the age.

Today we hear a great deal about separation of church and state. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church successfully pressured the Roman emperor to carry out some edicts of the church. Church and state actually became one when the church made the edicts and the state carried them out and enforced them. This went on for over 1200 years and the main reason the early Pilgrims came to America was to escape the persecution that resulted from this type of arrangement.

But, this was quite different from the combination church and state we had when God had completed the organization of Israel into a nation at Mt. Sinai. They had their representative leaders who basically judged the people; the priests who, though they did not judge, were in effect custodians of the law both to teach it and counsel it to the leaders; and the Levites were what we would call

bureaucrats today, and actually did the leg work of both church and government. That this arrangement was to continue is borne out in Deut. 16:18-20 where they were instructed to select judges and officers in each city. The only time there was any sort of centralized government in Israel was in the time of Moses and Joshua, and then only in the office itself that they filled, and then later when Israel demanded and received a king in Samuel's time.

As with the statutes that required special clothing be worn in the performance of their duties and that the priesthood would always remain in the family of Aaron, laws had to be made to which the people as a whole were to be held responsible to. It was not enough to command Aaron to make special clothes and wear them or for his family to always be the high priests. For them to have done so on their own would have been of little consequence without the people as a whole or as a nation being responsible to the law. The law would have meant very little to the people if it had just been given to Aaron and his family. Unless the people recognized their (Aaron and sons) authority, it wouldn't have been worth much. So the law was not a commandment only to Aaron and his sons, but also a law to the whole house of Israel holding them, as a nation, responsible to it rather than Aaron and his sons specifically. The clothing represented the office, or the authority and responsibility of the priesthood. The principle is similar to our police officers today wearing uniforms. The policemen are the ones who have to do it, but we as a city, county, or state as a whole, are responsible to that uniform.

We will see that though the priests are very much a part of the statutes, and thus the government, they did not do the governing, at least as a function of their office. I believe we will see that is why it is necessary for Christ to be both Priest and King.

So for now, let's define a statute as a law that holds the people as a group, city, or nation responsible to it in some way. As such, a statute can also be a commandment, or an ordinance, or all three. We will also find that a statute is very often closely related to a judgment in that it falls to the state, so to speak, to be sure a judgment is carried out. A statute can also have a similar relationship to a commandment.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, "**Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy...**" (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:23-25) is a good example of a statute being a commandment also. The individual is commanded to keep the Sabbath, but as Nehemiah showed us in Neh. 13:15-22, it is the state's responsibility not only to be ready to enforce it, but to accommodate it.

When I use the term state, I am using it to mean whatever constitutes the government for a city or nation, or even a tribe or group as happened sometimes during the time of the Judges. Making covenants with other governments has always been a governmental or state responsibility. Ex. 23:32-33 tells us Israel was not to make covenants with the Canaanites, in fact they were not to even allow them to stay in the land.

Deut. 23:3-6 declares that an Ammonite or Moabite was to never be allowed to enter into the congregation of the LORD. I believe "**congregation of the LORD**" means, as we have already discussed, those men in good standing who were allowed to vote on policy. One could be "cut off from the people or congregation" for a number of reasons, which means, I believe, that they lost this good standing status, either temporarily or permanently. The Ammonite and the Moabite were never to attain it. Deut. 23:7-8 says the Edomite and the Egyptian could attain this status after their third generation.

Ex.34:13-14 specified that Israel was to destroy the altars, break up the images and cut down the groves of the Canaanites. Again this was a governmental leadership responsibility to see that it was done.

God gave the nation of Israel a responsibility to someday avenge Amalek. (Deut. 25:17-19) It is not specified exactly what they were to do, only that they were to not forget, but were to blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

We will continue with statutes in our next lesson by first taking a closer look at the priest's relationship to government. JRL