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Righteously Ordered – Part 2

Deuteronomy 19-26

Series: Loving God in Every Way

Introduction: Take your Bible and turn with me to Deuteronomy 21, Deuteronomy chapter 21.

Last week we took off in our exegetical jet and climbed to about 10,000 feet above the text of Deuteronomy. We did that so that we can gain perspective on what is going on in this part of Moses' sermon to his people. As he prepares them to enter into the Promised Land, he takes these 8 chapters to review some of the specific laws that they will need to keep in order to have a society which honors God. Instead of taking 8 or 9 weeks and going through each of these specific laws – which might be better suited for a Sunday School classroom – I have chosen to take you to cruising altitude in order to give you the big picture.

And in looking at the big picture, what we have seen is that each of these specific laws are rooted in the 10 Commandments. We could draw a distinct line back from each of these laws to one or more of the 10 commandments given to us in chapter 5. But more than that we have seen that each of these specific laws is Moses' instruction to the people for how they are to actually work out the Great Commandment in everyday life. The great commandment is also connected to the greatest truth communicated in this book, the Shema: Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. What Moses is doing in this 8-chapter section of Deuteronomy is to teach them more of how to work out this love for God in every way once they get into the Land. And they love God most when they are living in ways which reflect His character, His truth, and His holiness. And that is what the Law is for them. It communicates to them the way to live in everyday life in light of the holy and righteous character of the God they love.

This means then that the greatest profit we as New Testament Christians can receive from these Old Testament Law codes is to see what they teach us about the character and nature of God. And since this character of God is unchanging, we see these same truths in how Christ calls his Church to live under the law of love. And we see these laws kept perfectly by only one man – the Lord Jesus – who then gives that perfect life as a ransom to purchase sinful man out from under the crushing condemnation of this Law. And this Jesus is returning to this world to establish a Kingdom in which these Laws will be perfectly kept. And this Millennial Kingdom will give way to an eternal Kingdom in which all present in that Kingdom will be perfect Law keepers by God's grace and will forever glorify Him in righteousness and truth. So, I said to you last week that this section of Scripture has great profit for us – which is counter intuitive for most of us. We get to this section of our Bible reading plan every year and we wonder what the point for us actually is. And so, my prayer, and my goal last week and again this morning is to show you the great profit of the Law by exalting the character of God to you, extolling the life of Jesus to you, and exhorting the Law of Christ to you.

I have organized our study of these 8 chapters by pulling out 7 truths they teach us about God's character. Obviously, there is so much more to be said here. The Scriptures are an endless well full of the precious water of truth about God, and this section of Scripture is no different. But these are the most obvious and overwhelmingly present truths about God in this section of Scripture. Last week we saw that God values life and loves truth and is holy. This week we will find that God loves the family, is pure, compassionate, and sovereign.

On the outline before you there is a ton of information – we are covering 8 chapters in 2 sermons after all. We will not have time to cover everything in the outline, nor do we need to. But maybe you can keep the outline in your Bible and use it as a resource the next time you are reading this section of the Law for your own time in the Word. The danger here is that this becomes academic as I just pass on information to you. So, let's dive in with a heart posture of humility before the Lord and His Word that we might see more of his great glory.

- I. **God Values Life** – *and orders a society which prizes life*
 - a. By Preserving Justice in Death – 19:1-13
 - b. By Providing Atonement in Unsolved Murder – 21:1-9
 - c. By Preventing the Spread of the Curse of Death – 21:22-23
 - d. By Prospering the Abundance of Life – 22:1-12; 23:15-25
- II. **God Loves Truth** – *and orders a society which upholds truth*
- III. **God is Holy** – *and orders a society whose conduct is holy*
 - a. By Conducting Holy Warfare – 20:1-20; 23:9-14; 25:17-19
 - b. By Conserving the Holy Gathering – 23:1-8
 - c. By Condemning Unholy Actions – 25:11-12
- IV. **God Loves the Family** – *and orders a society which honors His design*
 - a. The first truth about God from the Law this morning is that God loves the family and therefore he orders a society which honors his design. From the very beginning God gave clear emphasis to the preeminence of the marriage relationship and the home that marriage would form. The home is the first building block of human relationships and therefore it is the first and primary relationship that our rebellion against God harms and destroys. God is unwilling to let sin go unchecked for his people. He rather calls them to walk in accordance with his laws relating to family life so that the home is protected and society functions in a way that honors the Lord. This, by the way, as with all of these laws, is fairly contrary to the societies of the pagan nations around them. Their laws and their ways did not value the family or honor God's design.
 - b. In these 8 chapters let me quickly explain three texts in which God calls his people to uphold his design. And remember that these are realistic texts, texts which will seek to govern a broken and sinful people.
 - c. By Prohibiting Favoritism – 21:15-17
 - i. In 15-17, God prohibits the favoritism that will come about when the family unit gets broken down. *Read 21:15-17.*
 - ii. This is the perfect example of a law from God which regulates the fallout from one man's sin and seeks to keep it from provoking more sin in the

family unit. So, the case presented here is a husband with two wives. We know right there that he is an emotionally unstable man who has set himself on a projection in life which does not honor God's clear pattern set in Genesis 2 – one man, one woman, joined together inseparably for one life. The reality of this arrangement will likely lead the man to love one wife over another, and therefore to love her children more. This may lead to the favoritism that we see in the life of Jacob in the book of Genesis. And so, God commands them that his laws of inheritance going to the firstborn son are not to be set aside on the basis of this emotionally unstable man and his latest whim. God is to be honored and favoritism is not to be tolerated. And in this way, even in a messed-up situation, God's design is upheld.

d. By Punishing Rebellion – 21:18-21

- i. The next one is found in verses 18-21 and God commands them to punish the rebellious son. *Read 21:18-21.*
- ii. We talked extensively last week about the text in chapter 20 that the New Atheists love to use to attack the morality of God and the Bible. Well, this is another one of those texts that they love to grab out of context to charge God with a harsh and immoral handling of rebellion. I mean, at first reading it seems a bit harsh to command the death penalty for a son who won't obey, doesn't it? But the text itself really helps us, if we let it.
- iii. The son is described as stubborn and rebellious who will not obey the voice of his father or mother. They discipline him and he will not listen. He is also described in verse 20 as a glutton and a drunkard. So, this is not an 8-year-old with an attitude. This is a son who has passed into manhood, which traditionally in the Jewish community is the age of 13, but who is still in the parent's household and is wickedly rebellious. They have tried to steer his heart to obedience and to be a productive member of their home and of society, but it has all been to no avail.
- iv. The parents have come to this hopeless situation where nothing they do has any effect in the son's life. So, they bring him before the elders of the city. Notice how communal this whole thing is. The family is well known in their community and the reputation of this rebellious son is definitely known by all. The charge of hopeless rebellion is brought by the parents themselves as they full well know that the result is going to be the capital punishment of their son.
- v. So, this is a dire situation in which the community has knowledge of his ways and the parents see no hope for his change. The result of this condemnation under the Law is to purge the evil of rebellion from their midst and thereby bring fear to all the people.
- vi. The clear statement of this law is the value that God places on the nuclear family. Sons and daughters are to honor their father and mother. God knows they will not do this perfectly, but they are to seek to love Him in

this way more and more. But God also knows that there will be children who simply will not submit and will not hear and will not obey – no matter how well the parents parent. That cancerous pattern must be removed through drastic means. God is serious about the family unit honoring him.

- e. By Preventing Multiplied Sin in the Breakdown of the Family – 24:1-4
 - i. Then in chapter 24 we come across that classic text which governs divorce in the covenant community of Israel. And what we find when we rightly understand it is that God upholds his design for the family by preventing multiplied sin when the family breaks down.
 - ii. *Read 24:1-4.*
 - iii. This text's point is to govern the fallout when the marriage breaks down. The wife cannot return to her first husband after a divorce and remarriage because, in God's society, that would multiply sin. In the pagan societies around them marriage was a very fluid and flippant thing. A man could divorce his wife if she burnt the toast and he no longer liked her – kind of sounds like our day and age where divorce can be sought for no truly good reason. And in those pagan societies, since marriage was so denigrated by this loose approach, sin was multiplied. Marriage was more of a contract of convenience that could be ended when the convenience ended.
 - iv. And that is the worldview and temptation in the human heart that is unaffected by grace. Marriage is convenience and not covenant. It is a contract which can be discarded when one or both parties are no longer in agreement. But that is not God's way. And that is what he upholds here in these 4 verses. They cannot divorce their wife for any old reason – only if they find impurity in her. And when they do, they must send her out with a certificate proving the divorce so that she can remarry and be provided for in a society in which her welfare depended largely upon her being cared for by a husband.
 - v. And if her second marriage ends in divorce or death, then the first husband cannot take her back to himself for this would greatly dishonor God's plan and multiply sin in the land. The reason for this is the glibness of marriage that is happening in that scenario. It is a take or leave it, convenience-oriented approach – which God completely detests. If marriage didn't work the first time, then just end it. If it might work now between the same two people, well, then let's try it again. But you know, if it doesn't work again, they can just divorce again. It's all so frivolous! So, in this law God manages and prevents the multiplication of sin when a marriage falls apart and thereby upholds his design and expresses his love for marriage.
- V. **God is Pure** – *and orders a society which pursues sexual purity*
 - a. The next truth we learn about God from these chapters is that he is pure – God is pure. This is closely connected to his love for the family, and to his holiness,

which we already covered – but this is a little bit different. God is pure. And we know that is true because his law orders a society which must pursue sexual purity. Just like the conversation about marriage – so too it is here with sexual purity. The cultures around them had a laissez-faire approach to rules about sexual expression and relationships. It was a free love approach which has taken our own culture by storm. It was the anything goes approach. It was the “what does God care what happens in my bedroom” approach that is so popular today. And this creates a society which fuels self gratification of the basest desires in the human existence while thumbing our nose at God’s good design and plan. Does God care what we do with our sexual desires and practices? Well, of course he does – and he says a lot about it.

- b. This is another one of those sections of the Law where the New Atheist or the progressive Christian would come and say – well, there is obviously no concern for the woman in those texts and there is no morality there in how those sexual sins are dealt with, so we must reject the whole thing as unjust and immoral. They would use this text as proof that the Bible doesn’t have a voice when it comes to the conversation about human sexuality. But when we rightly understand these texts, we actually see the exact opposite. God’s moral code is inescapable and his justice rules and reigns in righteousness over each situation described here. Each specific law we will look at calls God’s people to pursue purity as a reflection of God’s own pure holiness.
- c. By Protecting Women from Defilement – 21:10-14, 22:13-19
 - i. The first set of laws does that by protecting women from defilement. That is what is at stake in 21:10-14. The text describes how a woman is to be treated when she becomes a captive of God’s people once they are in the land. This goes back to 20:11 where they offer terms of peace to a city they are at war with and the terms are accepted. The people of the city then become subservient to them and do forced labor for them. What we have in verses 10-14 is what should happen with those captives if there is a woman whom one of the men desires to make his wife.
 - ii. Before we go any further, just imagine that situation and imagine what would happen in a godless/pagan/idolatrous society. They would just take the woman and do with her as they so pleased. But God graciously and mercifully intervenes in how mankind would naturally handle that situation and gives guidelines so that the woman is not defiled. The man is not to just take her and rape her and go on his way. Nor is he just to take her and make her his slave or even his wife. Those are the options apart from God’s intervention. Rather, she is to come live in his house and cut ties with her former way of life for a full month. If after that time, if the man still desires to marry her then he is allowed to do so. But if not, then he is to let her go – not sell her as a slave to another – but let her have her freedom.
 - iii. Followed rightly and with the other laws governing behavior, this was a gracious offering to a woman who would otherwise live out her life as a

captive in the land. God is providing a way for her to become one of his people through marriage to this man who shows interest in her. And he protects the process with these laws.

- iv. We don't have time to look at the other example of this is 22:13-21, but that text again goes to great lengths to protect the woman from a false accusation of impurity, while also judging her justly if the charge is true. This pattern of God's concern for the woman is unprecedented in pagan cultures and shows God's righteous purity in these matters.

d. By Prosecuting Immorality Justly – 22:13-30

- i. And that is the reality also in verses 22-30 of chapter 22. Immorality is not a minor inconvenience in the community. In a society ordered by God, sexual immorality is an offense of the highest order. The first situation dealt with is just straight adultery. The punishment for this verified case is capital punishment by stoning.
- ii. The next case dealt with is that of a betrothed virgin who is found in a consensual relationship with a man inside the city. Both the man and the woman are to be put to death. And then the next one is if that happens out in the countryside where no one would hear the woman screaming for help. Only the man is to be put to death in that situation because it was rape. Then in verses 28-29 we come to one of the toughest texts in the Law. This is one that will get referenced the quickest by someone trying to disprove the Bible. Look at those verses – *read 22:28-29*.
- iii. So, from our 21st century, me-too informed culture – this text smacks us at first as pretty unbelievable really. The man forces himself on this young woman who is not betrothed, and he gets to pay fifty shekels of silver and she has to become his wife. So, what happens with the unbelieving skeptic is that when they are confronted with some aspect of the Biblical sexual ethic they point to this passage and say – oh, is that how you want society to work – that a young woman who is raped must be the wife of her attacker if he pays a fee to the father? Well, of course not – but that is not exactly what is happening here in this text. Let's be honest though – this is a tough text to make complete sense of – but there are really helpful things we must know which help us understand what's going on here.
 - 1. First – we must know that there is a parallel passage to this one found in Exodus 22:16-17. In that text the man seduces the young woman and the command there is that he must give the bride price to the father.
 - 2. Second, in Exodus 22, the father has the full right of refusal of this man to marry his daughter.
 - 3. Third, the 50 shekels of silver was a significant amount of money to pay, and it would be given to the father to keep in case the man divorced his daughter, or she was widowed, so that the father could provide for her.

4. Fourth, if the father refuses to let the man marry his daughter, then the man still owes the large sum of money – the bride price.
 - iv. So, all of this adds up to a clearer picture of how God is actually protecting the woman in this whole terrible situation. Through this law he is providing a way for this woman to be cared for in the best way in a terrible situation. God is pure and loves purity and he orders a society through his law which must pursue purity and justly judge impurity. The casual approach to sexual intimacy in human culture is not tolerated in God's law. If his approach to justice and standards of purity were followed, then women would be honored, purity would prevail, and true self-sacrificing love would be the gold standard in healthy marriages. God's way is truly best here.
- VI. **God is Compassionate** – *and orders a society which cares for the least* – 24:5-25:10; 26:12-15
- a. We also learn from these 8 chapters that God is compassionate. He cares for the least in society – the ones that everyone else is prone to forget. We see that primarily in the bulk of chapters 24 and 25, and a little bit in chapter 26. You can see how they are broken out in the list on your outline but let me give a quick overview.
 - b. God commands that a newly married man stay home from battle for the first year of marriage so that his new wife is not widowed before they can even make a life together. He commands that when someone gets into financial trouble and needs to borrow money that they not have really important things like the millstone used to grind wheat taken as a pledge for the loan. And if someone is so poor that they give up their outer garment, or their cloak, as pledge for the loan, you are to give it back to them every night, so they have a blanket to sleep under. And God commands that they are not to steal one of their weaker fellow Israelite and turn him into a slave or sell him into slavery. And God commands that they are to carefully follow the Levitical priests in the dealing with leprous conditions so that they do not spread the disease to others. And God commands that the boss is to pay the employee who is poor on the day they do the work so that they have what they need for the day because they are that poor. And God commands that the one who commits the crime punishable by death shall be put to death, not his father and not his son – each person is accountable for their own breaking of the Law. And he commands that they do not take advantage of the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow, but rather that they leave grain standing in their fields when they harvest so that the poor and needy can glean what is left. Do you see how concerned the Lord is for the least among them? He orders their society in such a way that the poor and needy and vulnerable are not further trampled on, but are rather given compassion and help and a way forward out of their plight.
 - c. By Preventing Early Widowhood – 24:5
 - d. By Protecting the Needy – 24:6, 10-13
 - e. By Protecting the Vulnerable – 24:7
 - f. By Preventing the Spread of Disease – 24:8-9
 - g. By Protecting the Employee – 24:14-15

- h. By Protecting the Innocent – 24:16
 - i. By Providing for the Needy – 24:17-22
- VII. **God is Sovereign** – *and orders a society which expresses dependence on Him* – 26:1-15
- a. And then, the last truth we will look at from these 8 chapters about God is that he is sovereign. And because He is in control of all things at all times, he orders a society through His law which expresses their dependence upon Him as their sovereign Lord. We see that primarily in chapter 26 where he reiterates how they are to handle the offerings and the first fruits of their harvest. He even tells them specifically what they are to say when they bring that first offering. They are to rehearse their slavery in Egypt and how they were rescued by the Lord's mighty hand and brought into this land that has given them such an abundant harvest.
 - b. This rhythm of giving their first fruits of their harvest to the Lord set a cycle where they would be constantly reminded of their dependence upon their Lord to meet their needs. In fact, if you look at verses 14-15 that is what they are to say after they have given the offering to the Lord. That they have obeyed his command given as he has required, and now they are to ask the Lord to bless them and the land they inhabit. It is an act of worship that fosters ongoing dependence upon their Lord. So, God orders a society with this law which fosters a dependence in the people upon Him as the Sovereign provider and protector of their land. It is a beautiful design really.

Conclusion: And that is the thing we often miss when we look at these Old Testament Laws. We often think about how thankful we are that we don't have to live under these specific laws – and there is truth to that. But these laws, if they had been followed, would have created the best society possible on Planet Earth. The Law of the Lord is indeed perfect and wise and pure and righteous altogether – as Psalm 19 says. In a world where fallen humanity is plagued by sin, this system of government with God as the ultimate authority and with love for God as the key ethos of the system – this Law would have created the best society possible. So, the problem with the Old Testament Law is not the Law. The problem is our sinful hearts which are exposed by the Law as sinful. And when the Law exposed that behavior as sinful, the Law also then acted as a preservative, or a guardian, over God's people to keep them from destroying themselves through sinful behavior until the appointed time of the true Law Keeper – Jesus Christ himself. So, the Law condemns, and the Law keeps, but the Law never saves.

The only one who can save is the God who became flesh and dwelt among us. The Son of God put himself under the Law and kept it's every requirement so that he could rescue His people out from under its condemnation. And he came preaching a Kingdom in which this Law would be upheld, not just outwardly, but inwardly. He spoke of a Kingdom in which sexual immorality would not be tolerated outwardly only, but also, the immorality of the heart will be expunged and all who enter will be completely pure because they will have been washed by the blood of the Lamb who was slain for them. That is why, when Jesus appears to John and gives him the vision recorded in the book of Revelation – John is presented with an eternal Kingdom which will be free from all the sinful expressions the Law condemned and restrained. As he says in Revelation 21:5-8: And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things

new.” Also, he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”⁶ And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus. Will you be in that eternal kingdom? Have you been washed by the blood of the Lamb through faith in His finished work on the Cross of Calvary? One of the sure evidences that you are in Christ by faith is that you keep His law of love more and more. Each of these characteristics of God shape how He expects his church to live today too. We are between the Old Testament Kingdom of God and the coming Millennial and Eternal Kingdom of God. We are kingdom representatives – we are citizens of that Kingdom, but we are not yet in that Kingdom. So, how should we live in this in-between time? We must live in line with God’s character as directed in the New Testament. He loves the family unit; therefore, we must honor marriage and keep the marriage bed pure and holy. Husbands must self-sacrificially love their wives as Christ loved the Church, and wives must submit to their husbands as to the Lord, and children must honor and obey their parents. God is pure; therefore, we must know this is His will for us – that we flee from sexual immorality and have nothing to do with the wicked practices of the ungodly. God is compassionate; therefore, we must care for the least around us – especially those of the household of faith. God is sovereign as our great Provider; therefore, we must give generously as an expression of our confident trust in His ongoing provision. And in all of these ways we evidence our heavenly citizenship as we grow more and more in the likeness of Christ Jesus our Lord. May God help us!