

## Holy Regulations (Leviticus 24:1-23)

I was unable to finish the message last week (09-13-2020) in the allotted preaching time during the worship service. However, I believe that the last portion of Leviticus 24 speaks to issues which are discussed and debated among Americans today. Therefore, I am giving you the last point of last week's message in written form.

### 3. The reality of God's justice. (Lev. 24:17-23)

It is my opinion that the most repulsed aspect of God's nature in current American culture is God's justice. Most people want a loving God (which He is), but not a just God (which He is as well). This statement is illustrated by what has happened in our country over the last few months. Certain groups have used legitimate injustices as an occasion not to peaceably protest, but to riot, loot, and murder. Further, these groups are openly promoting a culture of lawlessness, and are seeking to tear down the God ordained governing authorities in our country. However, the Bible makes clear in the Old and New Testaments that God is a God of justice. **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” (Romans 1:18)**

God's justice is not only expressed in the manner in which He has acted towards the evil and wickedness of man, but His justice is also expressed in the law which He has given in His Word.

Verses 17-22 in Lev. 24 are known as the “law of retaliation.” However, the clear principle of the verses forbids personal vengeance or revenge, which is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments. The principle is for the governing authorities to exact a punishment fitting for the crime. In giving this principle, the Lord addressed key issues of the sanctity of life, especially human life, capital punishment, and personal vengeance.

Dr. Charles Ryrie gives an excellent summary in the notes of his study Bible. “The law of retaliation, *lex talionis*, provided for exact justice, not revenge, and concerned public justice, not private vengeance.”

- the sanctity of human life (vv. 17-18, 22)

The sanctity of human life is established at creation when God declared that he would make man in His own image. **Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27).** Therefore, human life is to be preserved and protected at all costs. It is sad that human life has been so cheapened in modern, American culture. We have rampant abortion which is the slaughter of unborn, human life. Our large cities have homicide rates that are “off the charts.” Movies, television shows, and video games, in many respects, cheapen human life and glorify murder and senseless killing. This media works to desensitize our minds to the sanctity of human life.

The church is now the lone voice in American culture to remind us that all human life is precious because all human beings have been created in the image of God. We must make our voices heard in the public square and, most importantly, at the ballot box when human life is at stake. We must diligently teach our children and grandchildren the sanctity of human life as early as possible and continuing into adulthood. (see Deut. 6:4-9). We must have the courage to model for them by our actions our commitment to the biblical doctrine of the sanctity of human life. For example, I would never want to receive medical treatment with the use of stem cells harvested through the abortion process. How hypocritical that would be! Human life is precious because God designed it so when He created man in His own image.

- **vengeance belongs to the Lord/punishment fits the crime (vv. 19-20)**

It is the natural inclination of human nature to retaliate when wronged, and many times, not just to retaliate in like fashion, but rather in greater fashion. We are familiar with the axiom, “Revenge is a dish best served cold.” However, we must realize that the Bible never sanctions or encourages personal vengeance. In fact, it is the opposite, believers are told not to seek personal vengeance, but to leave vengeance in the hands of the Lord. (see Proverb 20:22; 25:21-22; Luke 6:27-29; Romans 12:17-21)

The Lord also gives the principle for public punishment of crimes. The punishment is to “fit the crime,” and it is the governing authorities’ role to carry out the punishment. The Bible does not teach believers to become helpless victims of crime. Believers are allowed to seek legal justice. Believers are to work through the legal system that the Lord has placed us under. Believers must also realize that we are not above the law although our commitment is first to the law of God. If we should commit crime, we should expect to receive just punishment for that crime if proven guilty. (see 1 Peter 2:20; 3:17)

- **validity of capital punishment (vv. 13-14, 23) (see also Romans 13:1-7)**

The subject of capital punishment has been hotly debated in our country over the last few decades. The fact of the matter is that God has deemed some crimes worthy of capital punishment. The blasphemer is put to death by the community at the command of God. *We should think twice before developing a sanctimonious attitude that questions infinite God in his establishment of capital punishment.* The truth of the matter is that all of humanity are guilty sinners before God deserving of death. Therefore, the gospel of Jesus Christ is truly good news and the ultimate expression of God’s mercy toward mankind. Jesus received our death penalty!

Further, it should be noted that capital punishment is the God ordained role of governments. **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; for it [government] is a minister 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 minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Romans 13:3-4)** (emphasis mine) This teaching leaves no room for vigilantism. Righteous government is to adjudicate the wrath of God upon evil and unrighteousness until He ushers in His eternal Kingdom.