

RCF Pastors' Conference  
April 16-18, 2013

**Topic of Paper:** The significance of God's **judicial laws** for the framers of The Westminster Confession of Faith and The Savoy Declaration of Faith, and the general equity of these laws for Christians and nations today. The threefold division of God's law is: **moral** – summarized by the Ten Commandments, **civil or judicial**, and **ceremonial**.

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My two questions to address are: (1) **What does “general equity” mean in chapter 19, paragraph 4, of the Westminster Confession,**

“To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other, now, further than the general equity thereof may require.”

**And the Savoy Declaration,**

“To them also, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people; not obliging any now by virtue of that institution, their general equity only being still of moral use.”

And (2) **How does one escape both theonomy and antinomianism in applying it?**

In his book, God Is Just, Steve C. Halbrook provides a valuable service to modern readers of The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and The Savoy Declaration of Faith (1658), by giving a historic look at how mainstream Puritan writers of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century approached God's civil laws and the general equity of these laws. Halbrook maintains there are **three prerequisites** for correctly understanding chapter 19, paragraph 4,

**Prerequisite 1.** “. . . the puritans, including the Westminster Divines and their predecessors, divided the judicial law into two basic categories. In the first category were the sundry laws special to the “body politic” of Israel and which expired with it. Often these fenced the ceremonial law, some related to health and others to inheritance, etc. The second category was perpetual, part and parcel of the moral law and had application to all nations at all times.”

This second category of God's civil laws were variously referred to as laws of common equity, general equity or moral equity.

To support this statement, Halbrook quotes from Thomas Cartwright, William Perkins and Thomas Hall, all of which lived just before the WCF and SDF were written. When speaking of the first category of God's civil laws, Cartwright (1535-1603) states,

“Nowe albeit those lawes gyven unto the Jewes for that land doo not binde the Gentils in other landes, for somuche as the diversitie off the disposition off the people, and state off that country gave occasion off some lawes there, which would not have bene in other places and peoples . . .” [i.e. Levirate Marriages, forbidding the wearing of clothes of mixed materials – Leviticus 19:19]

Of the second category of God’s civil laws Cartwright writes,

“ . . . there are certein Judiciall lawes which can not be changed . . . .”

William Perkins (1558-1602) was equally clear on the two divisions of God’s civil law,

“Therefore the judiciall lawes of Moses according to the substance and scope thereof must be distinguished; in which respect they are of two sorts. Some of them are lawes of particular equity, some of common equity.”

**Prerequisite 2.** The first category [civil laws pertaining specifically to Israel] were viewed as the judicial law proper or sometimes referred to as Mosaic or Mosascal. The second category, because of its moral nature and application to all nations, was viewed as an appendage to God’s moral law.

William Ames (1576 - 1633) writes concerning the second category of judicial law,

“Those Lawes therefore which are usually reckoned among the Judiciall, and yet in their nature beare no singular respect to the condition of the Jewes more than any other people. Those are all of the Morall and Natural Law, which are common to all Nations.”

**Prerequisite 3.** We must acknowledge that although the two categories of civil law were ideally distinct, “there was recognition by the divines that the actual laws of Scripture may overlap the idealized categories. Thus, many first category laws were, in the final analysis, grounded on moral or general equity, and this could not be ignored. Similarly, some second category laws prescribed capital punishment by stoning. Stoning was an accidental feature of the law.”

With these prerequisites in mind, we should be able to better understand the fourth paragraph of chapter 19 as the framers themselves understood it,

“To them also [Israel], He gave sundry [various, or a number of] judicial laws [of the first category], which expired together with the state of that people [Old Covenant Israel is no more – Hebrews 8:13]; not obliging any other now by virtue of that institution, their general equity [those of the second category] only being still of moral use.”

I believe this is the proper and better understanding of paragraph 4, rather than the notion that all of Israel’s civil laws were temporary in nature, or even worse that all of God’s law is done away with under the New Covenant age of grace [antinomianism].

Let me briefly support the wisdom and equity of the penalties prescribed in God's civil laws which are attached to the moral law. Exodus 22:3-4 gives the following instructions, "A thief must certainly make restitution . . . If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession – whether ox or donkey or sheep – he must pay back double." Obviously thieves violate the Eighth Commandment – "You shall not steal." The penalty God requires is for the stolen animal to be returned to its rightful owner, and what the thief did to his neighbor is done to him – one of his animals is taken and given to the man he robbed [this punishment follows the principle of "as you have done, it will be done to you"– Obadiah 15]. There was no prison term for a person who stole his neighbor's sheep. The thief made things right with the person he wronged. This promoted reconciliation between the two parties.

If the thief was malicious and killed the animal he took, then the following regulations were laid out in Exodus 22:1, "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it . . . he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep." Why five head of cattle for the slaughtered ox but only four sheep for the slaughtered sheep? Probably because the owner of the ox had invested time training that animal to pull a plow and tread his grain. The investment of his time was to be reimbursed. The United States is not as much of an agricultural society as Old Testament Israel, but there are principles in these laws that are wise and should not be ignored.

This takes us to the second question addressed in this paper: **How does one escape both theonomy and antinomianism in applying paragraph 4 to peoples and nations today?**

Let us focus on the problem of antinomianism first, which is far more widespread than theonomy.

A Reformed college professor, who graduated from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, bluntly stated, "None of God's law is necessary for Christians. We can trust the Holy Spirit to direct us as to what is right and wrong." He also stated that "The threefold division of God's law is man-made. All of God's law stands together. If any part of it is done away, it is all done away." There are some Dispensationalists who agree with that conclusion. This seems very strange in light of the fact that God's law is written upon the minds and hearts of New Covenant believers [Jeremiah 31:33]. Why would Christians want to ignore what is written on our hearts? I agree that the Holy Spirit can be trusted to lead believers into agreement with God's law. Unfortunately, Christians can grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, and thus find ourselves at odds with God's law.

The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels – edited by Joel Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, gives a slightly different slant on God's law by maintaining that God's laws which are **repeated in the New Testament** are still applicable to believers today; but only those that appear in the New Testament. One of the weaknesses of only following laws of God repeated in the New Testament is that bestiality is absent. Does that make bestiality acceptable?

Puritan scholars recognized great continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Examples of

discontinuity are specified in the New Testament: circumcision [Galatians 6:15], food laws, feast days and a Saturday Sabbath day [Colossians 2:16-17].

Reformation scholarship believed that God's law is one of His great gifts to mankind. Many modern Christians are pitting God's law against God's grace, when in reality they are two sides of the same coin of God's blessing. The Apostle Paul states in **I Timothy 1:8**, **"We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully [or properly]."** The unbelieving Jews that Paul debated all his life, used God's law unlawfully in two primary ways: (1) The rabbis encapsulated God's law with their man-made traditions and wrong interpretations; and (2) they tried to use their twisted, externalized version of God's law as a means of justification before God. This second abuse is what Paul addresses in **Acts 13:38-39**,

"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

When Paul was a Pharisee he was taken in by both abuses of God's law, as we read in **Philippians 3:4-6**,

"If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel . . . in regard to the law, a Pharisee . . . <sup>6</sup> as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless."

The only reason Paul had dared to think he was blameless before the law, was because of what the Pharisees had done to God's law. Jesus addresses this problem in **Mark 7:8**, **"You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."**

After Paul met the ascended Lord Jesus, he gained a proper understanding of God's law and states one of its purposes in **Romans 3:20**, **"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."** God's law is like the friend described in **Proverbs 26:6**, **"Wounds from a friend can be trusted . . ."** Sometimes a friend has to tell us hard things about ourselves. God's law reveals our sinful attitudes and actions so we can repent and seek God's forgiveness. Only people who know they are sinners, know they need a Savior. Another purpose of God's law appears in **I Timothy 1:9-11**,

“We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,<sup>10</sup> for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine<sup>11</sup> that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”

Paul saw no conflict between God’s law and the gospel. God’s moral law helps to define right and wrong, and God’s judicial laws help to equip civil leaders with proper guidelines in punishing wrongdoers – which serves as a restraining force upon wickedness. The underlined part of that statement constitutes the primary conflict among believers concerning God’s law. This conflict existed when the Westminster Confession of Faith and Savoy Declaration of Faith were written. Here is the crux of the matter: Most modern believers are embarrassed and scandalized by the numerous death penalties spelled out in God’s civil laws. This embarrassment has caused many sincere Christians to shout, “Thank God we are no longer under the law!” All Christians agree that we are not under the eternal condemnation of God’s law. Jesus Christ paid the penalty of our sin in full. However, if I go out and rob a bank [a clear violation of the Eighth Commandment], I will receive an earthly penalty for that sin and God’s civil law helps to define what that penalty should be. Yet, as the saying goes, “The devil is in the details.” Here are some of the details that upset many believers today:

**Exodus 21:14**, “. . . if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately . . . put him to death.”

**Exodus 21:15**, “Anyone who attacks his father or mother must be put to death.”

**Exodus 21:16**, “Anyone who kidnaps another . . . must be put to death.”

**Exodus 22:19**, “Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death.”

**Exodus 22:20**, “Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the LORD must be destroyed.”

**Exodus 31:14**, “Anyone who desecrates it [the Sabbath] must be put to death.”

**Leviticus 20:10**, “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife . . . both the adulterer and adulteress must be put to death.”

**Leviticus 20:13**, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman . . . they must be put to death.”

**Leviticus 20:27**, “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death.”

**Leviticus 24:16**, “Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death.”

We can be certain that all of the behaviors listed above are odious to God and were destructive to Israel. We may wonder why violating the Sabbath was so serious? It is important for us to remember that when the Israelites received God’s law, they had just been freed from slavery in Egypt, where they were forced to work seven days a week. Having a day of rest was an important testimony to the surrounding nations that worshiping the true and living God sets people free. On the other hand, working seven days a week shortens peoples’ lives.

We must note that none of the capital offenses in God's civil law resulted in vigilante deaths. A death sentence was only to be carried out after a thorough investigation was conducted by civil authorities. **Numbers 35:30** states, ". . . **no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.**" **Proverbs 25:2** states, ". . . **to search out a matter is the glory of kings.**"

There is a very important observation to be made concerning capital punishment crimes. We read in **Exodus 21:29-30**,

"If [a] . . . bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death.<sup>30</sup> However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded" [underlining is mine].

If we stopped reading at verse 29, the owner of the bull would be a dead man. Verse 30 demonstrates two important truths: (1) There was mercy in God's Old Testament law; and (2) God's law points us to Christ, which is exactly what Jesus told Jewish leaders in **John 5:46**, "**If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.**" God's civil law helps to point ruined sinners to their need for substitution, which directs us to Christ.

There are solid reasons to believe that substitute penalties were allowed for other death penalty deeds. For instance, our Lord Jesus cited adultery as a legitimate reason for divorce [Matthew 19:9]. If the death penalty was always required for adultery, there would be no need to divorce a dead spouse. It should also be noted that righteous Joseph, who lived under Old Covenant law, did not contemplate having Mary put to death for her seeming adultery [Matthew 1:19]. Nor did God-fearing Nehemiah execute Sabbath breakers in his day [Nehemiah 13:15-22].

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that substitute penalties were allowed for many capital punishment crimes when we consider an offense that resulted in a mandatory death sentence – without the possibility of redeeming one's life. Listen to **Numbers 35:31 and 33**,

"Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death . . .<sup>33</sup> Bloodshed [cold-blooded murder] pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it."

The fact that God specifically forbids a substitute penalty for murder, indicates that substitute penalties were allowed for other death penalty crimes. Dr. Ray Sutton, in his book **Who Owns The Family**, writes, "The death penalty is only mandatory in the case of one capital offense: murder." Steve Halbrook also writes, "There were Westminster divines who believed the death penalty was a maximum rather than a mandatory penalty."

Rushdoony concluded that God carried out most of the death penalty crimes in Israel. We have already noted that in the case of cold-blooded murder, if there was only one witness, the murderer went free [Numbers 35:30]. God would rather have a guilty man go free in a court of law, than for an

innocent man to be wrongly condemned. But we must not think that a murderer escaped justice because there was only one witness. God can and does punish guilty people. John Calvin highlights this reality in his sermons on Deuteronomy 27 and 28. God's active role in punishing wrongdoers is the underlying principle behind the law of a suspicious husband recorded in Numbers 5:12-28,

“If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him<sup>13</sup> by sleeping with another man, and this is hidden from her husband and her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act),<sup>14</sup> and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife . . .<sup>15</sup> then he is to take his wife to the priest . . .<sup>19</sup> the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, ‘If no other man has slept with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you.’<sup>20</sup> But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have defiled yourself by sleeping with a man other than your husband . . .<sup>22</sup> May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells and your thigh wastes away.’ Then the woman is to say, ‘Amen. So be it.’<sup>23</sup> The priest is to write these curses on a scroll and then wash them off into the bitter water.<sup>24</sup> He shall have the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and this water will enter her and cause bitter suffering . . .<sup>28</sup> If, however, the woman has not defiled herself and is free from impurity, she will be cleared of guilt and will be able to have children.”

God is saying to Israel, “Test me in this and see that I am not a far off, distant God – but a God who is near and very involved in the matters of life.” God states this same principle in regards to tithing in Malachi 3:10. In 2013, both unrepentant fornication and homosexuality carry a death penalty – and it is God who carries it out. This is a logical deduction because unrepentant fornicators and homosexuals often contract venereal diseases, which shorten their lives. For example, in the United States the median age of death for practicing female homosexuals is 45, whereas the average life span of women in our general population is 75.

Under God's civil law, there were very few homosexuals put to death by Israel's civil leaders. Why? Because it always took two witnesses to convict of person of guilt – and homosexuals undoubtedly committed their deeds in the privacy of their homes. Deuteronomy 24:10-11, stresses the importance of respecting the privacy of a person's home,

“When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge.<sup>11</sup> Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you.”

God's law, both moral and civil, is just. Unfortunately, many modern Christians have been taught that God's law was given only for Israel and Israel was a never to be duplicated theocracy. Therefore we have people who rant and rave when a cold-blooded murderer is put to death. These loud protests

occur even though the murderer has been clothed, housed, fed and medically attended for 15 to 20 years at tax-payers' expense – and some of those taxpayers are the parents, siblings, or children of the murdered victim. Talk about cruel and unusual. Antinomians are accurately described in **Proverbs 12:10** [NASB], “. . . **the compassion of the wicked [lawless] is cruel.**” Not surprisingly, the same people who oppose the death penalty for proven murderers, insist that a woman who has been raped and becomes pregnant, should not be expected to let the child live. This clearly ignores what God commands in **Deuteronomy 24:16**, “**Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sins.**” Did the baby commit any sin? It is the father who is to be punished, not the child.

Because biblical law has been given so little attention in our seminaries, Bible colleges and pulpits, it is necessary to explain that when God's civil law speaks about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, it is not dictating that a person who knocked someone's tooth out in a fight, must have one of his teeth knocked out. We read in **Exodus 21:18-19**,

“If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and he does not die but is confined to bed,<sup>19</sup> the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff; however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.”

A man who struck another with his fist or a rock, was not struck with a fist or a rock in return. There were financial penalties assessed. Again we read in **Exodus 21:26-27**,

“If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye.<sup>27</sup> And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.”

It should also be pointed out that if two neighbors quarreled and one struck his neighbor and destroyed a tooth, the procedure was for the elders at the gate to assess the value of the tooth and the assailant had to pay that assessment to the person he wronged. If he knocked out one tooth, he was not to be fined for three teeth – even if he had a lot of money. Today, we have outlandish settlements given to individuals who have been injured at work. Often times the justification for these large penalties is because the corporation has a lot of money and therefore it takes a large fine to get that company's attention [McDonald's hot coffee case]. Of course the company often passes that outlandish expense on to its customers, and insurance companies raise their prices. In other words, many people are adversely affected by this unbiblical practice.

Let's apply the principle of substitute penalties upon the case law of **Deuteronomy 25:11-12**,



“If two men are fighting and the wife of one of them comes to rescue her husband from his assailant, and she reaches out and seizes him by his private parts,<sup>12</sup> you shall cut off her hand. Show her no pity.”

Many Christians use this as a proof text that Old Testament law was harsh. It is a serious matter to charge the God of the universe as being unreasonable and harsh. Modern Christians need to understand that the woman could redeem her hand by paying a financial penalty. This highlighted mankind’s need for substitution, which always points us to Christ.

I believe that the principles and precepts of God’s civil laws, properly understood and applied, are far wiser than some of the laws we are presently seeing in our halls of legislation and in our courtrooms. If we are embarrassed by God’s civil laws, it means we have not been well instructed, nor have we meditated upon them; which has resulted in our becoming conformed to the thinking of our age.

Let’s now address the issue of theonomy. Many Christians greatly fear the words theonomy [God’s law] and theocracy [the rule of God]. Just in case we have forgotten, God sovereignly rules over all the world, whether we acknowledge it or not. However, I understand why so many Christians reject theonomy, given the extreme views on this subject [Islam being one]. Even John Calvin rejected the extreme form of theonomy held by the Anabaptists of his day because they used it to justify a bloody revolt in Munster, Germany – killing many innocent people.

Others fear theonomy because they have a pessimistic eschatology. This seems to be the case for Alan Cairnes, in his Dictionary of Theological Terms. His reasoning goes as follows: If only a small minority of people are ever going to come to Christ, then no nation will ever choose to be a theocracy and therefore theocracies have to be imposed upon nations.

John Calvin was optimistic in his eschatology and therefore believed that a time will come when so many people will have embraced Christ as Lord, that even nations will desire to live under the blessings of God’s rule and God’s law. Calvin understood that Israel became a theocracy because they chose to be a theocracy. Exodus 24:3-7 clearly records it,

“When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’S words and laws, they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the LORD has said we will do.’<sup>4</sup> Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar . . .<sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.’”

I am a theonomist light, in line with Calvin [although Calvin did preach that counterfeiters rightly deserved the death penalty]. I am also a preterist light. I believe that the final advent of Christ is the grand event that awaits the Church. There will not be heaven on earth until Jesus Christ ushers in the final new heaven and earth. But one of the reasons I look forward to the final advent of Christ, is

because of the great things that will happen on earth before Jesus comes for His completed Bride. I am utterly thrilled that I get to spend eternity with God, but I also believe that as a descendant of Abraham through faith in Christ, I am supposed to bless all the nations while on my way to heaven. I do not believe in my lifetime that the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more; but I do believe it will happen and I want to do my part in seeing God's wonderful plans carried out.

I believe the focus of the Church must always be to make disciples for Christ, who make disciples for Christ. The Apostles knew exactly what Jesus meant when He told them to make disciples. It simply meant that they were to do for others what Jesus had done for them. Jesus let his disciples come close to Him and He poured His life into theirs. When two people meet together for mutual encouragement and grounding in the faith, and then each of the two find another person to meet with – the two become four, and then the four become eight and so on. When a penny is doubled everyday for 30 days, the end result is \$5,368,709.12. This principle of multiplication will help the descendants of Abraham to possess the cities of our enemies and bless all the a nations of the world [Genesis 22:16-18]. The Apostle Paul clearly teaches in Galatians 3:6-9, that believers in Christ are the offspring of Abraham who will bless all the nations of the earth through the gospel. **Galatians 3:29** states, **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”** An area of ignorance in churches today is in regards to God’s law and God’s design for limited civil government. The most important government found in the Bible is the self-government of individuals. This is why the highest priority of Moses was to teach the people of Israel God’s law [Exodus 18:20]. God was not in a hurry to give Israel a king because He first wanted the Israelites to learn to be self-governed. If a nation does not have self-governed people, then all the king’s horses and all the king’s men, will not be able to create a citizenry that honors God and receives the blessings of Deuteronomy 28. Self-governed people require very little civil government. John Calvin understood this.

How do people learn to be properly self-governed? We must measure our attitudes and conduct by the proper measuring stick – which is God’s law. This is ironic because when people honestly evaluate themselves by God’s moral law, everyone discovers they fall short [Romans 3:23]. However, it is by admitting we fall short, that we see our need for a Savior – which is very good. The bottom line is that no one can keep God’s law well enough to go to heaven; but by God’s common grace everyone can keep God’s law well enough to live with their neighbors in a peaceful and orderly way.

What about people who do criminally wrong things to their neighbors? This is where civil government comes into play. The two major responsibilities of godly civil government are: to commend righteousness and punish lawlessness [Romans 13:1-4]. Important ways civil leaders commend righteousness is by being examples of righteousness and by upholding righteous laws. This means that nations should appoint civil leaders who honor God’s law, which is the standard of righteousness for all nations. Listen to **Exodus 18:21**, **“But select capable men** [men of

experience and proven ability] **from all the people – men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain – and appoint them as officials . . . .**” Secondly, civil government has been given authority by God to protect law abiding citizens from law breakers by the means of carrying out just penalties upon the wrongdoers. Because of this authority, civil leaders must be careful to accurately identify the law breaker by means of thorough trials. Only then is civil government to enforce just punishment.

How do civil leaders determine what is just and equitable punishment for wrongdoers? Within God’s law we find just punishments for various forms of wrong doing. What a blessing that is for nations. This is why God told the Israelites after giving them His laws, **“Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations** [all of which were pagan], **who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’”** [Deuteronomy 4:6 – even unbelievers can recognize good laws].

Civil leaders must never view themselves as above God’s law. **Deuteronomy 17:18-20** states,

“When he [the king] takes the throne . . . he is to write for himself . . . a copy of this law . . .

<sup>19</sup> It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees <sup>20</sup> and not to consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left.”

We see this principle very clearly in I Kings 21. King Ahab of Israel wanted to buy the vineyard of a man named Naboth, because it was located close to his palace. There was nothing wrong with that desire. However, when he discovered that Naboth did not want to sell it, Ahab became angry and sullen and laid in bed refusing to eat [what an example of maturity]. His wife Jezebel, an unbeliever, whose father was the pagan king of Tyre, was utterly amazed that her husband simply did not take what he wanted. After all, he was the king of Israel and kings should be able to do what they want! That is how it worked in Tyre, but that is not how it works in a nation that honors God. A king has no more right to violate the eighth commandment, than anyone else. Even if Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard so he could plant a community garden in order to feed the poor, he did not have the right to forcefully take it.

In sharing this with you, I have laid out a major area where our nation has taken a wrong turn. We veered off course over a hundred years ago, when civil government began taxing citizens who earned more money at a higher rate than those who made less. We justified this because our government leaders told us that they are simply taking more money from rich people in order to give it to those who are less fortunate. This is forceful redistribution of wealth, and you simply will not find that in God’s law for the nations. **Deuteronomy 27:17** states, **“Cursed is the man** [even if he is a civil leader] **who moves his neighbor’s boundary stone.”** Our governing policies are calling down God’s curses upon our nation. The biblical way of helping the poor is for voluntary generosity from self-governed people who have worked hard and are willing to share with others. The best way to help people is face to face; not through government entitlement programs. It was documented back in the nineties that less than thirty cents of every dollar earmarked for the poor, actually goes to the poor when our civil government is in charge of

helping the poor. Over seventy cents of every dollar is swallowed up in government bureaucracy.

The good news of the gospel tells us more than how to get saved and go to heaven. The gospel also teaches us how to live in a God-honoring way while we are here on earth. The gospel is big enough to bless entire nations if enough people embrace Christ as Savior and King.

Isaiah 51:1-8 “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; <sup>2</sup> look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many. <sup>3</sup> The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing. <sup>4</sup> Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations . . . <sup>7</sup> Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have my law in your hearts: Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. <sup>8</sup> For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.”