

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Jehovah God is a God of justice. For Moses said about him, **“For I will proclaim the name of Jehovah. Ascribe ye greatness to our God. The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he”** (Deuteronomy 32:3-4). Indeed, the psalmist said about him, **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne. Loving kindness and truth go before thy face”** (Psalm 89:14).

In the sight of God crime is a violation of justice and the result of a moral choice that must be punished with the application of justice. Crime is not a disease to be treated or a behavior disorder to be corrected, as is the claim of our modern court system which is guided by the false values of humanism.

Moreover, in the sight of God the victims of crime must be recompensed for their loss and the suffering it caused. And that recompense must be made by the criminal not by the innocent citizens of the society.

### Theft

The eighth of the ten commandments says, **“Thou shall not steal.”** God gave various penalties for theft to his people Israel, depending upon the nature of the theft. But in every case, the penalty for theft involved recompense to the victim for their loss and the suffering caused by it, as well as punishment for the guilty.

One law says, **“If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it, he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep”** (Exodus 22:1). The larger amount for the ox was probably because it was a working animal. An equivalent law in America, God’s way would require a man who wrecked or otherwise disposed of a vehicle he stole to repay five vehicles of equivalent value.

A law like that strictly enforced would virtually eliminate the theft of vehicles. In modern America the innocent citizens are required to buy insurance that is used to replace stolen vehicles; they pay the costs of theft. The innocent pay for the crimes of the guilty. In America, thieves are rarely obligated to replace what they stole. Justice is not done. But it would be in America, God’s way.

The law God gave to his people Israel goes on the say, **“If the theft is found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or donkey, or sheep, he shall pay double”** (Exodus 22:4). That no doubt means if what he stole was unharmed. Double is still a large penalty, especially if it is something of high value such as a vehicle. But remember, the victims of theft, especially of something like a vehicle, suffer adversely more than the simple loss of the item. There are things like the frustration experienced by the loss, and the labor involved in finding a replacement.

There is another law God gave about theft where the penalty was only twenty percent of the value of what was stolen. That law says, **“If a soul sins, and commits a trespass against Jehovah, and deals falsely with his neighbor in a matter of deposit, or of bargain, or of robbery, or have oppressed his neighbor, or has found that which was lost, and deal falsely by it, and swears to a lie, in any of all these things that a man does, sinning by it, then it shall be, if he has sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took by robbery, or the thing which he has gotten by oppression, or the deposit which was committed to him, or the lost thing which he found, or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall even restore it in full, and shall add the fifth part more to it. He shall give it to him to whom it pertains, in the day of his being found guilty”** (Leviticus 6:1-5). The guilty man was also required to make some animal sacrifices.

Why the penalty in that law is so much less is not clear. Of course, the thief was also to restore what he stole in full and unharmed. The difference in this case versus the penalty of double was probably if the thief had voluntarily confessed and returned what he stole unharmed. The double penalty may have been if he was discovered before confessing. There is always more work involved when crimes of theft must be investigated and solved. Therefore, it is just to penalize the thief more.

#### *Forced labor for thieves*

The law that God gave to his people Israel also says, **“A thief shall make restitution. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft”** (Exodus 22:3). What that implies is the thief was to be subjected to forced labor until he paid the penalty. That could also easily be applied in America, God’s way. Part of a man’s wages could be taken until his debt was paid. And if he could not or would not work voluntarily some kind of forced labor could be imposed. There are many things in the land that could be done by forced labor to pay for such penalties. All of that assumes applying justice God’s way

#### *Many ways to steal*

As with every law of righteousness the command against theft should be generalized. For there are many legal ways to rob a man of what belongs to him. James wrote about rich men who defraud their workmen of just wages: **“Behold the wage of the workmen who reaped your fields. The man who was defrauded by you cries out. And the outcries of those who reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts”** (James 5:4).

Excessive usury is another example. It was formerly called loan-sharking, and was condemned. But it is now commonly done with things such as credit cards. Even when the Federal Reserve rate was about one percent or less, credit card rates were about ten percent or higher. And the lowest income families are hurt the most by such charges, for they have the hardest time avoiding them.

The reason interest rates are so high on credit cards is because in pagan America the innocent must pay for the defaults of the guilty. It would not be that way in America, God's way. Those who default should be treated like the thieves they are.

Another example of stealing in principle is to make excessive charges for goods and services, especially when people have little or no other choice. If farmers would unite like some other groups, they could set prices (like some other groups) and soon own the country.

The top executives of some companies are also guilty of stealing in principle, because of the enormous amounts of money they pay themselves. However, the worst offenders against the principle of stealing are probably members of the communication media and the entertainment business. It is common for many of them to be paid tens of millions of dollars per year, some even hundreds of millions. Some people have even become billionaires doing nothing but entertaining.

Years ago when I was a young man I read a book about wealth. The author said a man could never become rich on a salary. The entertainment industry made that rule obsolete. Dear reader, because something is legal does not make it right. Money does not grow on trees. The exorbitant salaries of those people comes from the pockets of laborers. And exorbitant salaries clearly violate in principle the command not to steal.

The online encyclopedia Wikipedia has an interesting article about the history of maximum wage legislation. Such laws are necessary when men will not voluntarily do right. And this generation certainly needs something to control such runaway greed. For the polarization of wealth is growing in this country that had for so long a great middle class. However, there is so much crookedness in government that such controls will never be created until we have enough honest and courageous rulers. And that will not happen until our citizens return to righteousness. No such forms of thievery would be tolerated in America, God's way.

Regarding modern lawsuits, true justice always demands *proper* recompense for everything involved. And these huge modern awards now given in many lawsuits are almost always legalized robbery. That too would not exist in America, God's way.

There are many ways to steal from people legally in modern pagan America. That is another reason why in America, God's way we must have righteous judges with freedom to apply justice without having their hands tied with legalities. Justice would be done in America, God's way, where our rulers and judges would be senior Christian men who have proven their wisdom and their commitment to righteousness.

### *Just Measures*

One area where justice seems to be strictly enforced in America is with measurements in business transactions. For example, gasoline pumps are regulated and inspected by our government to ensure the gallons measured

are accurate. There are laws against altering any weight or measuring scale used in transactions. And there are laws requiring proper labeling of the quantity of goods.

The law that God gave his people Israel says, **“Thou shall not have in thy bag diverse weights, a great and a small. Thou shall not have in thy house diverse measures, a great and a small. A perfect and just weight thou shall have, a perfect and just measure thou shall have, that thy days may be long in the land which Jehovah thy God gives thee. For all who do such things, even all who do unrighteously, are an abomination to Jehovah thy God”** (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). I praise our country for enforcing the justice of those things.

### *Landmarks*

Another law promoting honesty forbade altering landmarks. The law that God gave his people Israel says, **“Thou shall not remove thy neighbor’s landmark, which they of old time have set, in thine inheritance which thou shall inherit, in the land that Jehovah thy God gives thee to possess it”** (Deuteronomy 19:14). Removing landmarks is not common in highly developed countries because careful records are kept about exact locations. However, it was no doubt more difficult to control in the ancient world, especially in the rural areas. As with many other laws that God gave his people Israel no specific penalty was assigned for violations. There will always be the need for righteous judges.

### *Bribery*

The law that God gave his people Israel, says, **“And thou shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds those who have sight, and perverts the words of the righteous”** (Exodus 23:8). Bribery is very commonly practiced throughout the world, although some countries are worse than others. Generally those countries where the Bible has the greatest influence are the least offenders.

By its very definition bribery is illegal. Yet in many places bribery is considered a legitimate way to get what you want, especially from government officials. It is a symptom of the lawlessness of a society. And it has greatly increased in America since it became pagan. For example, the system of lobbying in government has often become a disguised method of bribery.

God commanded the sons of Israel against bribery, and he is still against it. As Solomon said, **“A wicked man receives a bribe out of the bosom, to pervert the ways of justice”** (Proverbs 17:23). Therefore, the growing practice of bribery is just another burden added upon righteous souls. For there are many places and many circumstances where the only way to have something done is with a bribe. Hence, they present walls and temptation to the righteous.

The Bible mentions how a Roman governor hoped the apostle Paul would bribe him to be released from custody: **“And after some days, Felix having arrived with Drusilla, his wife being Jewish, he summoned Paul,**

**and heard him about the faith in Christ. ... He also hoped simultaneously that money would be given him by Paul so that he might free him. And so, summoning him more frequently, he conversed with him**" (Acts 24:24-26). Paul never bribed anybody no matter how dire were his circumstances. Nevertheless, I have heard about some Christian missionaries in foreign countries paying bribes, and they pacify their consciences with many excuses.

Even though the practice of bribery is growing, responsible educated men all condemn it (at least publicly) as a corrupting element. It is one of the things keeping many countries poor. God said **"a bribe blinds those who have sight."** Those are, of course, figurative words. A bribe blinds men to what is right and just, and it encourages the darkness of lawlessness. Organized criminals love bribery, for bribery and extortion often go together.

God also said a bribe **"perverts the words of the righteous."** One way that bribes pervert the words of the righteous is what bribes do to rules and regulations. Rules and regulations are words intended to promote order, justice, and righteousness, but bribery makes a mockery of them. Another possible way is when a bribe causes an otherwise honest man to violate his word about something. Whatever those parts of the scripture mean, they say bribery blinds men, and perverts good words. There are several other scriptures about bribery in the Bible, none of which condone it.

There are two proverbs of Solomon that some have misinterpreted to mean support for bribery. One says, **"A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men"** (Proverbs 18:16). That proverb is simply about generosity, and how it enhances a man's reputation. A gift is not a bribe unless it is used to buy something unjustly.

The other proverb says, **"A gift in secret pacifies anger, and a present in the bosom, strong wrath"** (Proverbs 21:14). That suggests the gift was compensation for some kind of offense, a non-criminal one. And that would not make it a bribe unless it was done unjustly. Giving the gift in private is simply a prudent way to try to correct the wrong that provoked the anger. That Solomon condemned bribery is shown by this proverb: **"He who is greedy of gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes shall live"** (Proverbs 15:27).

See the chapter *Use of Speech* for laws about false witnessing.

## Assault

### *Retribution*

The general principle in the law that God gave to his people Israel about harm done unjustly against someone else is an eye for an eye. In other words, exact retribution. One passage says, **"And he who smites a beast mortally shall make it good, life for life. And if a man causes a blemish in his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him: injury for injury, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, as he has caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be rendered to him. And he who kills a**

**beast shall make it good. And he who kills a man shall be put to death”** (Leviticus 24:18-21).

The law of retribution, known as an eye for an eye, is true justice. Those who hate justice condemn the law of retribution. But God loves justice, and so he commanded it of his former people. And if our people want to be America, God’s way they must apply the justice of retribution.

A common misconception is that Jesus taught against the law of retribution. In fact, when he contrasted his teaching with the law of an eye for an eye he was making retribution even more severe. For example, if I deserved my cheek slapped, I should go beyond it and offer the other. If a court decided I owed a man my coat, I should offer him my cloak as well. What Jesus taught was an eye for an eye plus. He said to go beyond what was required. It was like his command about adultery; you sin even if you desire it in your heart.

Another passage with the law of retribution was about harm to a pregnant woman. It says, **“And if men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follow, he shall be surely fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then thou shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe”** (Exodus 21:22-:25).

If a man hurt a woman with child and no harm came, he was still punished. In this case with a fine. However, if harm came (to mother or child) he was to experience the exact same harm, exact retribution.

Of course, retribution is warranted only if the injury was unjustified. It seems clear a man who sought retribution would need approval from the judges before administering retribution. Not doing so would make the man very vulnerable himself to retribution if it was later determined he was not justified. Righteous judges will always be needed to determine if and how retribution should be applied.

### *Assault against your father or mother*

One of the ten commandments says we are to honor our father and our mother. There are other commands that are against assaulting them, either physically or verbally. One says, **“And he who smites his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death”** (Exodus 21:15). The other says, **“And he who curses his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death”** (Exodus 21:17).

The act of striking or cursing our father or our mother was a capital crime in the law that God gave to his people Israel. God knows how destructive to society such disrespect toward parents is, and the penalty he commanded was appropriate. Disrespect and disobedience to parents are now common in pagan America, and are often praised. And look at the

many evils that have grown and multiplied in the country as a result of such evil behavior.

### *Other kinds of assault*

Many assaults do not result in the loss of an eye or a tooth or something else where the law of exact retribution would be appropriate. For example, non-determined internal injuries can result that impair a man. In such cases the law God gave to his people Israel required the offender to pay for whatever costs were involved in the injured man's recovery plus the loss of his time.

There were other laws about assaulting servants. Assaulting a servant that caused his death was treated as murder. However, if the servant recovered from the assault there was no punishment. The justification for it was that his servant was "his money." Men were not often going to injure their servants any more than a man today would attack and injure his car. It would take severe provocation. And remember, servants were allowed to escape and remain free.

If a man struck his servant and destroyed an eye or a tooth, he was required to give him his freedom. And if you consider the cost of years of labor, that would have been a large financial loss to the man. Of course, an eye and a tooth were irreplaceable. Nevertheless, it was the Lord's judgment that the servant be given freedom rather than his owner suffering the loss of his own eye or tooth.

The following passage mentions injury to a servant caused by an ox: **"If the ox gores a man-servant or a maid-servant, there shall be given to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned"** (Exodus 21:32). That fine for injury was probably required whether there was any negligence by its owner or not. No doubt the death of a servant caused by negligence was treated like any other; namely, capital punishment.

The Arabs have a law that requires a thief to have his hand cut off. There is no such command in the law God gave to his people Israel. Such punishment is excessive, cruel, and unjust. However, there is one law God gave to his people Israel which required that specific punishment. It says, **"When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draws near to deliver her husband out of the hand of him who smites him, and puts forth her hand, and takes him by the privates, then thou shalt cut off her hand. Thine eye shall have no pity"** (Deuteronomy 25:11-12).

That would have been a very aggressive act by a woman against an Israelite man. Moreover, a man's private parts are easily damaged, and injury can cause sterility. Those may be some of the reasons why the penalty God gave was so severe.

Regarding the assault of rape, I mention those laws about rape that God gave his people Israel in the chapter about marriage and sex.

## The Killing of Men

### *Murder*

The sixth of the ten commandments says, **“Thou shall not murder.”** The worse kind of willful harm a man can do to another man is to take away his life. The law God gave to his people Israel commanded murderers be put to death. However, that command from God is much older than the law God gave to his people Israel. God gave that command to all mankind at the beginning of the new world, after the great worldwide flood. He said to Noah, **“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God he made man”** (Genesis 9:6). That means capital punishment for murder.

Murderers must pay the ultimate price—the loss of their own lives. That punishment provides some psychological compensation to the family of the victim, as well as having a great deterrent effect.

Although murder is a major crime that requires capital punishment for justice, whether something is a murder or not often requires judgment. Consider the dilemma of the Hebrew mothers who were commanded by Pharaoh to throw their baby sons into the river (see Exodus 1:22). And men often kill each other by the thousands in wartime.

There are so many shades of grey when it comes to applying laws. Even in wartime some killing is considered a crime. For example, killing prisoners indiscriminately is considered murder by the more civilized nations. But what about the killing of women and children in their homes by bombs? If soldiers fired a cannon at a non-threatening house killing unarmed women and children, would that would be considered murder?

Did President Truman commit murder when he ordered atomic bombs dropped on cities filled with civilian men, women, and children? I think not. Those bombs caused thousands of deaths. Yet it was probably the best way he had to prevent far more deaths on both sides from a prolonged war. At least that was the motive for his judgment. That problem is just one more example of the inferiority of strict legalism to promote righteousness. Justice will always require righteous judges.

The best way to cope with such problems is for men to have righteous hearts, and want to do good and act justly as God determines. The chaotic world of war often provides many occasions where such judgments must be made. The imposition of legalism upon soldiers, such as the modern “rules of engagement,” is another yoke for them to bear.

Later in the laws that God gave to his people Israel he made a distinction between a murderer and a manslayer (the definition of which is not the same as in modern law). Murder is when a man willfully kills another man without justification. The manslayer is when a man kills another man by accident. Some manslayers were considered guilty and some not, depending upon circumstances such as how careless the man was.



Lawyers in modern America have increased those classifications. Most of their schemes seem to be used to reduce guilt and punishment. They have also invented a host of legally admissible excuses employed to defeat punishment for killing (as well as other crimes).

God loves justice, and laws are supposed to enforce justice. But in pagan America our legal system has degenerated into a game of winning or losing “cases,” where justice is considered irrelevant, or at most secondary to the game of sparring with rules and manipulating juries. I read a book written by a retired lawyer and judge entitled *Justice Overruled*. That title describes how the courts of our now pagan country operate.

The law God gave to his people Israel had a wonderful way of bringing justice against murderers. They were to be killed by a man called the avenger of blood. Those who suffer the most from murder, besides the victim, are the members of the victim’s family. And Jehovah gave them the right to execute the murderer. (Our modern laws give victims of crime and their families no rights.) After the judges determined who was guilty, a member of the victim’s family was given the responsibility of putting the murderer to death.

Execution that way for murderers was commanded by Jehovah: **“The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death, when he meets him”** (Numbers 35:21). That was not optional, for there was to be no forgiveness. The law says, **“No one set apart, who shall be set apart from among men, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death”** (Leviticus 27:29), and, **“... ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death”** (Numbers 35:31), and, **“Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shall put away the innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee”** (Deuteronomy 19:13). Therefore, it was not an option of the avenger to spare the murderer.

And Jesus never commanded forgiveness for murderers. His command for us to love our enemies refers to our law-abiding enemies, such as business or political opponents, athletic competitors, and adversaries in other lawful ways, even those who persecute us—if they do it lawfully. For the apostle Paul spoke about authorities not bearing the sword in vain:

**Let every soul be subject to offices of authority that rank higher. For there is no office of authority if not by God, and the offices of authority that are by God are those that have been instituted. So that he who resists the office of authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those who have opposed will receive condemnation to themselves. For rulers are not a source of fear to the good works, but to the evil. And do thou desire not to fear the office of authority? Do what is good, and thou will have praise from it.**

**For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil. Therefore there is a need to be subordinate, not only because of the wrath, but also because of the conscience** (Romans 13:1-5).

And no man has the right to forgive murderers. For they have sinned not only against the victim, but also against God. And God said, **“Vengeance is for me, I will repay, says the Lord”** (Romans 12:19). And he uses the offices of authority to apply his vengeance. Remember, Paul said, **“For he is a helper of God to thee for what is good. But if thou do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a helper of God, vengeful for wrath to the man who commits evil.”**

The law God gave to his former people also says a murderer could not be put to death at the mouth of a single witness. That was, of course, long before the development of cameras, fingerprints, DNA, and other evidence from forensic science. There are now forms of evidence that are even more reliable than witnesses. Therefore, in principle multiple witnesses can now include evidence provided by things besides eyewitnesses.

Jehovah was very strict about the execution of murderers, because, like sins of sex, murder pollutes the land. As he said, **“So ye shall not pollute the land in which ye are, for blood, it pollutes the land. And no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, but by the blood of him who shed it. And thou shall not defile the land which ye inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell, for I, Jehovah, dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel”** (Numbers 35:33-34).

Nevertheless remember, laws do not guarantee justice (Of course, that does not mean they are unnecessary.) Uriah was one of ancient Israel’s faithful soldiers. While Uriah was fighting in a battle David committed adultery with his wife. He then gave the commander of his army an order that led to Uriah being killed by the enemy.

It was not murder in the legal sense, and apparently the Israelites could not prove he was guilt of adultery. Therefore, by strict legalism David could not be condemned. God does not intervene to command men to punish every guilty act according to the law. Nevertheless, God himself punished David by placing him under a curse for the rest of his life. God has his own ways to apply justice when men cannot or will not.

### *Killing a thief*

Another law God gave to his people Israel, that was mentioned in the book of Exodus about theft, was if the thief was killed in the act. The law said if he attempted robbery at night he could be killed in the act. However, there would be blood guiltiness if he were killed in the daytime. In other words it would be murder. Allowing the thief to be killed if he robbed at night was no doubt because of the greater danger he posed.

Generalizing from that law I am convinced a robber should be executed if he used any violence against a person or any threat of violence in his crime, such as using a knife or a gun. Indeed, any man who threatens the life of an innocent man should be punished with the death penalty. Those who flee from the police in their vehicles, should definitely be given the death penalty. For they threaten the lives of many people. There are so many things that could be done to establish peace and order to America, God's way.

### *Child sacrifice*

The common form of human sacrifice mentioned in the Bible involved infanticide. It was called giving seed (children) to Molech, which was a Moabite god. It was also called passing them through the fire to Molech, which meant burning them on an altar to him. It was strictly condemned by Jehovah, and was forbidden in his law for the Israelites. Anyone guilty was to be stoned to death by the people.

Jehovah said that evil practice defiled his sanctuary and his holy name. And if the people hid their eyes from such a man, and did not put him to death, then he himself would set his face against the man and his family, and would cut him off from among his people.

Most people today recoil from the idea of sacrificing children to an idol. Yet they think nothing of killing their pre-born sons and daughters and disposing of them as garbage, or cannibalizing their body parts for medical treatment and research. In truth killing children, whether before or after birth, is murder. In ancient times they no doubt did it for the same reason they do it now, because they do not want them. They want to indulge in sexual pleasure, but they do not want to raise the children that result. Jehovah said if men did not avenge their deaths, he would.

Nevertheless, there can be extenuating circumstances. For example, I am convinced from what I know about the word of God that it would not be wrong to abort the pregnancy of a child conceived by rape. In my judgment a woman is under no obligation to carry the child of a violent criminal who impregnated her against her will.

There are numerous examples in the Bible when children were put to death because of the sins of their fathers. Those of Sodom and Gomorrah come to mind. You can be sure God will judge the souls of such children mercifully. It is great cruelty to require a raped woman to bear such a child. Abortion to save the life of the mother is another decision that righteous judges must make.

### *Unsolved murders*

God gave his people Israel another law that describes what should be done after a murder was committed but the murderer was unknown. They were first to gather the elders and judges of the community nearest the crime. Those elders were to select a heifer that had never been worked with or yoked. They were to break the heifer's neck in a valley that was neither plowed nor sown and that had running water. Afterward the

priests who were the judges were to come near. Then the elders were to wash their hands over the slain heifer, and say, **“Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Forgive, O Jehovah, thy people Israel whom thou have redeemed, and allow no innocent blood to remain in the midst of thy people Israel”** (Deuteronomy 21:7-8).

Moses then said the blood would be forgiven them. That meant forgiven the elders, not the unknown murderer. And that indicates authorities are held guilty by God if they do not avenge murder properly. Moses added, **“So shall thou put away the innocent blood from the midst of thee when thou shall do that which is right in the eyes of Jehovah”** (Deuteronomy 21:9).

How differently murders are seen by this pagan generation of Americans. Our leaders give the job of crime investigation to law enforcement authorities to solve if they can. Unsolved crimes including murders are recorded, filed away, and usually forgotten. And no sense of guilt is felt by our rulers. The sense of value of human life has plunged since our country has officially abandoned Christ.

Based upon the principle of that law, America, God’s way should, therefore, require some kind of ritual performed by the appropriate judges and rulers. As a suggesting, perhaps performing a ritual of burning a significant amount of new unused money in the sight of the public, while proclaiming their innocence of both the crime, and their ignorance of the murderer, would emphasize to the people the value of the loss of an innocent man’s life.

### *Death caused by negligence*

An example of the death of a man caused by negligence is given in the law. It involves livestock. Since the time of Abraham the primary occupation of the Hebrews had been raising livestock. And the example mentioned was about oxen, which were the most powerful of the animals they possessed. The passage says, **“And if an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted.**

**“But if the ox was accustomed to gore in time past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death. If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid upon him. Whether it has gored a son, or has gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him”** (Exodus 21:28-31).

In that example an ox was the killer. Nevertheless, its owner was considered guilty as well if he knew it was dangerous but did nothing to prevent an attack. The penalty in that case was death for the ox and its owner. However, the passage also says he could give a ransom for his life, but what the law means about goring a son or daughter is not clear.

Children were no doubt more likely to be killed when gored, and God may have been inclined to be more tolerant if children were the victims.

Whatever it means, the negligent owner could redeem his life by giving whatever was **“laid upon him.”** That was no doubt determined by the family of the victim and the judges. However, that provision says, **“If a ransom is laid upon him ... .”** The word “if” suggests a ransom was not always an option for the man. The victim’s family and the judges apparently were permitted to allow the owner of the ox to ransom his life, or not allow him, depending upon the circumstances of the case.

That law was obviously a mere example of deaths caused by negligence and was not intended to be limited to oxen. In modern times cases of killing by a vicious dog are more common, but should be treated the same way. Pure legalism does not promote justice, and justice is what God wants. The principle of that law teaches that the death of a man caused by negligence is a capital crime, unless the circumstances of a particular case are judged such as to warrant payment of a ransom instead.

There are countless extenuating circumstances that are possible with accidental deaths. Nevertheless, the law gave no provision to ransom a murderer. Remember this passage: **“... ye shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death”** (Numbers 35:31).

There was another law about accident prevention. It says, **“When thou build a new house, then thou shall make a guard rail for thy roof, that thou not bring blood upon thy house, if any man falls from there”** (Deuteronomy 22:8). Houses in those days typically had flat roofs that were used as living space for various purposes. Failure to add a guard rail made a man responsible for any injury or death caused by a fall from the roof. Hence, any failure to make provisions to prevent accidental deaths would cause guilt similar to the law about dangerous oxen.

### *The manslayer*

The law also made provision for unavoidable killing. An example was given of an axe head flying loose and killing a man. If somebody killed his neighbor unawares, without hating him in the past, he was not to be stoned as a murderer. He was called a manslayer, and he was required to flee to one of the cities of refuge. And any time he departed prematurely from his city of refuge he could be killed legally by the avenger of blood.

The manslayer was required to remain in his city of refuge until the death of the current high priest, which would have averaged many years. In America, God’s way such a requirement would be the death of the president who had been in office at the time of the accident. Such a law provides a great incentive for men to be very careful not to kill anybody even accidentally. Remember, the term manslaughter in modern American law is not exactly the same thing as described here.

One passage about that law says, “... **the congregation shall judge between the smiter and the avenger of blood according to these ordinances. And the congregation shall deliver the manslayer out of the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge where he fled**” (Numbers 35:24-25).

The avenger of blood was required to accept the judgment of the congregation (the community involved) before he had the right to attack the manslayer. That would help insure justice was done. For they needed to decide whether the death was a true accident, or was caused by the negligence or carelessness of the killer.

Accidental deaths as a result of negligence or carelessness were to be treated as murder not manslaughter. A common example of that is death caused by drunk driving. Such killers are as guilty as murderers, and should be put to death. For such deaths are fully preventable. America, God’s way could prevent every year the death of thousands of innocent Americans killed by drunkards with such a law. But now too many of our judges and rulers are liquor-loving sinners themselves.

If a manslayer normally dwelt in one of the cities of refuge he was probably required to flee to one of the others. Otherwise, his inconvenience would have been far less than what others would have experienced. And the inhabitants of a city of refuge would have had less incentive to be careful about the life of another. The law does not mention that possibility, but it is impossible to describe every circumstance of every law. That is what judges are for, and there will always be the need for righteous judges.

Jehovah said the sons of Israel were to choose three cities as cities of refuge. And he said if he enlarged their border they should choose three more. Not long before the sons of Israel invaded their promised land two and a half tribes settled on the eastern side of the Jordan. Consequently, three cities were chosen there as well as three for the western side. Thus, there were eventually six cities of refuge. America, God’s way would need many more such cities, because our land is so much larger than the land of Israel.

### *Punish only the guilty*

In the sight of God every man is responsible for how he lives and behaves. In order to promote the justice he loves, Jehovah gave a law to his people Israel forbidding them to put any man to death for the guilt of another. He said, “**The fathers shall not be put to death for the sons, neither shall the sons be put to death for the fathers. Every man shall be put to death for his own sin**” (Deuteronomy 24:16).

That law, as with most every law, has its range of applicability. It was not intended to cover every situation. For example, the sons of Israel were commanded by God to exterminate certain wicked peoples. They were to destroy every man, woman, and child. No doubt there were some innocent young children who perished with their sinful fathers.

That seems wrong to us in our very limited perspective, but God never does anything wrong. We, like Job during the time of his great suffering, cannot understand all of God's purposes. It is our duty to trust and obey him, whether we understand the justice of everything he does or not. God is always just, and he has promised a fabulous reward for all who trust and obey him.

The fact is, throughout history in the wars of the world, innocent souls have been killed, sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently. It is impossible to prevent. What is most important to us is the destiny of our eternal souls, and not what may happen to our bodies. And God will never allow an innocent soul to suffer beyond what is experienced in this life.

Regarding that law, many if not most modern Christians claim that God commanded Jesus to endure being crucified as punishment for our sins. But God would never have done such an injustice. The above command in the Law God gave to his people Israel shows what he thinks about anyone who is innocent being punished for the guilt of someone else.

God commanded his Son Jesus Christ to endure that suffering (1) so that he could prove his moral and spiritual superiority over everyone else (except for God the Father), and (2) to earn the right to redeem all who belong to him from the condemnation of our sins. For Paul said about us, **“Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which ye have from God? And ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which is of God”** (First Corinthians 6:19-20). Jesus paid our debts to God with his blood. And only he could do it, because only he was without sin.

### **Kidnapping**

There were two laws about kidnapping. One says, **“And he who steals a man, and sells him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death”** (Exodus 21:16). The other says, **“If a man is found stealing any of his brothers of the sons of Israel, and he deals with him harshly, or sells him, then that thief shall die. So shall thou put away the evil from the midst of thee”** (Deuteronomy 24:7).

Apparently a kidnapper could escape the death penalty if he did not abuse his captive and voluntarily released him (quickly). However, if he was caught with the captive, or if he had abused or sold him, that required the death penalty. I have never heard of a kidnapper receiving the death penalty in America, unless he murdered his captive. And even those men are not often put to death.

### **Harm to Other Things**

Since Israel was an agricultural nation its laws were focused on things relevant to agriculture. And the laws about harm to other things dealt with livestock and crops. The general principle of those laws was that of compensation for damages caused, and examples are given. One law was

about harm caused by negligence. It says, **“And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit and not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to the owner of it, and the dead beast shall be his”** (Exodus 21:33-34).

Another law was about one ox goring another. It says, **“And if one man’s ox hurts another’s, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the price of it, and the dead they shall also divide. Or if it be known that the ox was accustomed to gore in time past, and its owner has not kept it in, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his own”** (Exodus 21:35-36).

The law about harm to crops says, **“If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall let his beast loose, and it feeds in another man’s field, he shall make restitution of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard. If fire breaks out, and catches in thorns, so that the shocks of grain, or the standing grain, or the field are consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution”** (Exodus 22:5-6). The law of retribution (true justice) was always to be applied.

## Criminal Speech

### *False Witnessing*

The ninth of the ten commandments says, **“Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”** That law was not intended to be for court testimony only, but for every situation involving the transmission of information. Court testimony is only one example. Various acts of deception to gain advantage are other examples. Slander is another.

Notice Jehovah did not say thou shall not bear false witness period; he qualified it to our neighbors. As part of an answer to a Pharisee, Jesus quoted the command that he should love his neighbor as himself. When the Pharisee asked Jesus who was his neighbor, he told him the story we call the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:30). That example of a neighbor was an innocent man who was in dire need. The Samaritan came to his aid after the man had been seriously injured by bandits.

I mention that because of the tendency of some men to claim it a sin to bear false witness to anybody, even mortal enemies in wartime. God never intended for this command to support evil. And we are not bound to testify truthfully to every wicked man or enemy soldier.

Probably the greatest offenders of the command against false witnessing are those who engage in slander. Slander is easy to employ, hard to defend against, and rarely punished. It is a major practice of the devil and his disciples. In fact, the literal meaning of the Biblical word devil is “false accuser.” I have seen slander employed numerous times. Typically, if and when the truth becomes known, much damage has already been done to the reputation of the victim, and the slanderers just shrug their shoulders and



move on. It is now a standard practice by many politicians and their allies in this adulterous generation of Americans.

Slander usually begins with what is considered harmless gossip; although gossip is never harmless. I suspect many otherwise good men are inhibited from speaking out and opposing evil for fear of gossip and slander against them. For it can destroy a man's life. As Solomon said, **"The hypocrite destroys his neighbor with his mouth, but the righteous shall be delivered through knowledge"** (Proverbs 11:9). Yet we should never shirk our duty to God. Remember the words of Jesus: **"For whoever wants save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it"** (Matthew 16:25).

There is another marvelous law of justice that concerns false witnesses. That law says **"If an unrighteous witness rises up against any man to testify against him of wrong-doing, then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before Jehovah, before the priests and the judges that shall be in those days, and the judges shall make diligent inquiry. And, behold, if the witness is a false witness, and has testified falsely against his brother, then ye shall do to him, as he had thought to do to his brother"** (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

I have never heard of that being done in modern America; it may have been done in the past. O that it would be done always and everywhere. False witnessing is a serious problem in our land now because it is an effective way to attack someone with little chance of being punished if exposed. It is commonly used in marital disputes, especially in contests about the custody of children.

If that law of Moses were applied in America to false witnessing I have no doubt its frequency would greatly diminish. For as soon as Moses gave that law, he said, **"So shall thou put away the evil from the midst of thee. And those who remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil in the midst of thee. And thine eyes shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot"** (Deuteronomy 19:20-21).

### *Slander*

Slander is defined as making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's character or reputation. Written statements of slander are called libel. Slander is actually a form of false witnessing, which God condemned. Few people know that the literal meaning of devil is slanderer. The devil, before he was cast out of heaven, the devil continually slandered us to God.

Consider the example of Job. Here is what Jehovah said to Satan about Job: **"Have thou considered my servant Job? For there is none like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil."** And here is Satan's reply: **"Does Job fear God for nothing? Have thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has, on every side? Thou have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth**

**thy hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will renounce thee to thy face” (Job 1:8-11).**

Jehovah took Satan’s challenge, and allowed the devil to destroy all that Job had. After which, the record says, **“And Jehovah said to Satan, Have thou considered my servant Job? For there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although thou moved me against him, to destroy him without cause.**

**“And Satan answered Jehovah, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man has he will give for his life. But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce thee to thy face. And Jehovah said to Satan, Behold, he is in thy hand, only spare his life.**

**“So Satan went forth from the presence of Jehovah, and smote Job with severe boils from the sole of his foot to his crown. And he took a potsherd for him to scrape himself with it, and he sat among the ashes” (Job 2:3-8).** Job suffered severely for probably several months. And he was completely ignorant of why he was suffering that way. Yet he remained faithful to God, proving that Satan had slandered him.

Solomon said about slander, **“He who hides hatred is of lying lips. And he who utters a slander is a fool” (Proverbs 10:18).** It can be tempting to slander someone, but sin not against some innocent soul by uttering slander. Solomon said that he who does is a fool. A slanderer makes himself like the devil, and he will reap the punishment of the devil.

### Speaking Ill of a Ruler

One of the laws of Moses says, **“Thou shall not ... speak ill of a ruler of thy people” (Exodus 22:28).** Paul quoted that law when he was being tried by the leaders of the Jews. The record says, **“And Paul, after looking intently at the council, said, Men, brothers, I have been a citizen in all good conscience to God until this day. And the high priest Ananias ordered those who stood by him to strike his mouth.**

**“Then Paul said to him, God is going to smite thee, a whitewashed wall. Thou even sit judging me according to the law, and violating law, thou command me to be struck? And those who stood by said, Thou revile God’s high priest? And Paul said, I had not known, brothers, that he is a high priest, for it is written, Thou shall not speak ill of a ruler of thy people” (Acts 23:1-5).**

Speaking ill against our neighbors is bad enough, but it is even more destructive to peace and order when it is against a ruler, because it encourages rebellion. If a ruler is thought to be guilty, then those with the proper authority should examine him. And those who have evidence against him can then testify. Such testimony is clearly not included in the command against speaking ill of a ruler.

Paul called the high priest a whitewashed wall because that priest violated the law during the court hearing. It was not his accusation of violating the law that he apologized for; it was calling him a whitewashed wall.

There are several passages of scripture that tell when prophets rebuked sinful rulers. Here is one by Isaiah: **“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers who write perverseness, to turn aside the needy from justice, and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!”** (Isaiah 10:1-2).

Here is one where Jehovah commanded Ezekiel to rebuke the rulers of Israel: **“And the word of Jehovah came to me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord Jehovah: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the sheep? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe yourselves with the wool. Ye kill the fatlings, but ye do not feed the sheep”** (Ezekiel 34:1-3).

Here is one by the evangelist Stephen who was being tried before the high priest and the council of the Jews: **“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers, ye also. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold about the coming of the Righteous man, of whom ye now have become betrayers and murderers, who received the law at directions of agents, and did not keep it”** (Acts 7:51-53).

### Witnesses

Men of Israel could not be convicted of wrongdoing on the evidence of a single witness. The law of Moses required at least two: **“One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins. At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall a matter be established”** (Deuteronomy 19:15). In the book of Numbers Jehovah had commanded two or three witnesses to convict a murderer. This command in Deuteronomy extends that to include charges of any kind against a man. Two or three witnesses were required, and those witnesses were sufficient to convict.

In modern times there are many reliable sources of evidence available about crimes. And in my judgment, those sources are equivalent to witnesses. Therefore, the practice of accepting the testimony of a single witness seems to me acceptable if there is other supporting evidence that is as good as, or better than, another witness. Indeed, it may not be necessary to have even a single eyewitness if other kinds of evidence are sufficient to reveal the truth. The whole purpose of laws like these is to help insure truth and justice, to convict the guilty and acquit the innocent. And the risk of convicting falsely is greatly increased when evidence is limited to only one witness.

## About capital punishment

Nine times in the book of Deuteronomy Moses said they would **“put away the evil”** if they punished the offender. Eight of those times were about the death penalty, which is much opposed by many during these evil times, when the devil has led so many people astray from the truth.

Here is one example from those eight: **“And the man who does presumptuously, in not hearkening to the priest who stands to minister there before Jehovah thy God, or to the judge, even that man shall die, and thou shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously”** (Deuteronomy 17:12-13). Notice how the scripture gives the value of capital punishment: **“... thou shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.”**

Many sinners love the guilty more than the innocent. Contrary to the lies of the devil, swift capital punishment has a great deterrent effect. That is perhaps its greatest value: putting fear in the hearts of people so as to discourage future violations, putting away evil from the country.

## About corporal punishment

The rulers of Israel could apply various form of punishment, including capital punishment, whipping for minor offenses, fines, and exile. Imprisonment was only used briefly until a court decision could be made. The Church of Jesus Christ was never given any kind of authority by God in worldly matters.

Regarding whipping, the law said, **“If there be a controversy between men, and they come to judgment, and they judge them, then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the iniquitous. And it shall be, if the iniquitous man is deserving to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his iniquity, by number. He may give him forty stripes. He shall not exceed, lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem debased to thee”** (Deuteronomy 25:1-3). Notice such punishment was nothing like the brutal beatings according to the propaganda portrayed by the entertainment business.

Corporal punishment was used in America before they began to rely more on fines and imprisonment. The false ideology of humanism claims imprisonment is more “humane” and civilized than corporal punishment. If those humanist hypocrites really believed in freedom of choice, why not let the offender choose which he would prefer? There are many countries in the world that still use corporal punishment.