

Deuteronomy 15: 1-18

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Date: 12 January 2022

[0 : 00] Deuteronomy chapter 15, starting in verse 1 and reading down to verse 18. Again, just a continuation, if you remember, there's been all these truths that resonate about their harvest and the tithes and how they were to praise the Lord their God with their harvest and they were to praise Him and to share their tithes with everyone and to have this great corporate worship but also this private worship, you know, that God dictates what they put on their table, how they were to eat around the table fellowship together.

Deuteronomy 15, starting in verse 1, says, At the end of every seven years, you shall grant a remission of debts. This is the manner of remission. Every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor.

He shall not exact it of his neighbor. And let me just back up. I'm just so completely off right now because I'm hearing myself. And I'm talking to myself a little loud. So if you don't mind, just turn me down just a little bit.

I'm trying not to be so loud that I blow you guys underneath the speakers away and that messes with me, okay? There we go. That sounds a little bit better. Thank you, brother. Let me start all over. And now I can talk in my big boy voice and not try to be so calm, okay?

At the end of every seven years, you shall grant a remission of debts. This is the manner of remission. Every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed.

[1 : 30] From a foreigner you may exact it, but your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother. However, there will be no poor among you, since the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess.

If only you listen obediently to the voice of the Lord your God to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but will not borrow.

And you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns, in your land which the Lord your God has given you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand from your poor brother, but you shall freely open your hand to him and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need and whatever he lacks.

Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of remission, is near, and your eyes hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing.

Then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.

[2 : 45] For the poor will never cease to be in the land. Therefore I command you, saying, You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and the poor in your land.

If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is so to you, then he shall serve you six years. But in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed.

You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat, and you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you.

Therefore I command you this today. It shall come about if he says to you, I will not go out from you because he loves you and your household since he fares well with you. Then you shall take an awl and pierce it through his ear in the door, and he shall be your servant forever.

Also you shall do likewise to your maidservant. It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man.

[3 : 46] So the Lord your God will bless you in whatever you do. I know this passage seems a little odd to us, and it seems a little out of place, but it is something that would be very beneficial and even practical to the nation of Israel as they were getting ready to go into the promised land.

And I know that there also seems to be a contradiction here because God says that there would be no poor among you, but then he says later on, just a few verses later, that there would never cease to be any poor among you.

But read it in context, okay? And I'll go ahead and answer that question first, and then we can get into the application of the text. The first way to answer that is God says there would never be any poor among you if you obey.

I do these things I command you. And then a few verses later, God says there would never cease to be the poor among you. Why? Because he's God, and he knows we're not going to walk in absolute perfect obedience, right?

The sad reality is even the simple truth that is proclaimed here never shows itself as being exercised among the nation of Israel. This is one of the primary reasons the nation of Israel was led to Babylonian captivity.

[4 : 48] This is why the number of years in Babylonian captivity was 70. This is why it was declared that it would be so. Because they failed to keep the year of Jubilee, the seventh year.

And for every year of Jubilee they missed, they were held away into the land of captivity. They were put in the Babylonian captivity for 70 years so that the land would experience its rest that the nation of Israel failed to give it.

But what I want you to see from the passage this evening is the concern of fellow man. They were to live with the concern of fellow man. Now we know that it is in truth speaking of their concern for one another as they live as a nation of the Hebrew people or the Israelite people.

How they were to have concern for their fellow countrymen or their fellow man or one like them. And it was to be that thing which set them apart. And they were also, you know, not to exclude the aliens or the sojourners or the people who were not like them.

They could charge them interest and they could charge them the debt in that year of Jubilee. But all God is doing is showing a distinction between his people in covenant relationship and the people who are outside of that covenant relationship in order to draw others.

[6 : 02] Right. Because if I am there and I say, hey, every seventh year, their debt is forgiven, but I still have to pay mine. There's something about that covenant. Right. There's something about living among the nation of Israel as an Israelite or living with the Lord, their God as my God.

So this is just something used to further attract and to draw people in. But really, the attractant is not just that your debts are forgiven. It is the concern for fellow men that they were to exercise that really goes against everything that society at that time was doing.

And it even goes against what society does today. It is putting the concern of others over personal concern and personal well-being at times and especially over personal gain.

It is looking to others with the heart that God has looked towards us. Jesus would say it this way. By this will people know that you love me, the love you have for one another.

Right. The love that you display towards others is a testimony of the love that you have for me. James said it this way. James said, how can you say you love the Lord your God whom you have not seen and do not love your brother whom you have seen?

[7 : 09] By the way, those New Testament references are not to brother of the same flesh, not to brother even same mind. It is just to your fellow man. Right. Which seems to be all inclusive. So we are reminded of this.

This is not just an Old Testament truth that we can kind of count as archaic and dismiss as something that we don't have. We see the full picture of this or the fuller fulfillment of this resonating in the life of Christ.

He would say in Mark chapter 10, Mark 10, verse 45, The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to give his life a ransom for many. And he came with a heart of concern for those who are dying and perishing and those who are hurting.

The testimony that he gave to the disciples of John the Baptist who came. Are you the Messiah? He said, go and report to John what you see. The blind see. The deaf hear. The mute speak. Right. The dead are raised.

The neglected. The needy. The cast out are cared for. What will we see in Matthew chapter 8 this coming Sunday? And I'm so excited about it. It is part of a message I preached many, many years ago.

[8 : 10] Carrie brought this box in to my office today. I don't know where I had hidden it here. And I'm sorry if it was in anybody's way. And she brought it to me because she was down here cleaning. And she just dropped it in my floor.

And it's like stacks after stacks after stacks of CDs and cassette tapes of old sermons that I preached. And I was like, man, nobody's ever listening to those. I found some from like the first year I preached, 2006.

I was like, man, it's a cassette player. Hopefully none of you guys have a cassette player and you're not listening to it, okay? So I was like, man, these things are bad. A bunch of bad sermons in that box. But I know in that box there is one sermon called The Untouchables.

And it would have been from 2006. And it is the reality that Christ came and touched those nobody else would touch. We'll see that in Matthew chapter 8. When he heals the leper, he touches him.

Now that's a taboo. That's a no-no. No, you're definitely supposed to stay away from them. But you're never, ever, ever supposed to touch them. And he does. I'm not going to give you that message. We'll get to that Sunday if the Lord allows us to.

[9 : 10] But we see this resonating concern, right? And that's the standard that we're held to. That this is how we show the love we have for God. By our love for fellow man. And it finds its roots here.

The nation of Israel was to live with a concern for fellow man. Three truths I want you to see. I'll try to make my way through them quickly so that we can do the things that we need to do as well tonight.

Number one, we see that this is commanded. I know it sounds simplistic, but it is a reality. This is commanded. God is not making a suggestion here.

He is making a commandment. Unfortunately, the nation of Israel sees it as a suggestion. And they never do these things. They never, ever.

It's never practiced. We don't ever see it historically recorded. This is one of the judgments that God has against his people. But what we see is that God is declaring a commandment here. Okay?

[10 : 06] God does not suggest that they should live with a concern. He commands that they live with concern. And we know it's a commandment because he ties blessings to their obedience of it.

If you do this, the Lord your God will bless you. As you share with them, you will be blessed. As you provide, you will be blessed.

Now, do you know where else we find God's blessings connected to the obedience? With the law and the commandments, right? Moses says that if you obey these commandments, the Ten Commandments, or what we call the Decalogue, or the Law of Moses, if you obey this, then you will be blessed, right?

If you do these things, then your fields will be fertile. Your livestock will bear offspring. All these things will happen. The rain will come. If you obey his commands, then these blessings will come.

Now, it's not a name it and claim it. It is just a direct result of living faithfully in obedience to a covenant God. So it's not saying, well, God has to do these things. God is just saying, normally and naturally, these things will happen, right?

[11 : 09] They will come about as a result of your obedience. And God ties blessings to their obedience to this commandment. Paul declared to the churches this need in Jerusalem.

Remember the need in Jerusalem? He's writing, I think it was, come on, Billy Joe, you've got to go back to me. I have to go back. I don't know if it was the church at Corinth or the church at Philippi. I don't know if it was in Corinthians or Philippians.

I have to go back and look. But there's this great famine that's going on in Jerusalem. Some of you reading through the book of Acts know that Agabus stands up and says there's going to be a famine in Jerusalem. And it happens. And there's this stuff that's going on.

And so Paul is gathering a collection. We see that in Acts, right? Paul and Barnabas bring the collection for the saints to the church at Jerusalem. And then that's when they start their missionary journeys. Well, Paul is reminding the Gentile churches, okay, the non-Jewish churches, because they were prospering at that time.

And Paul reminds them to take the collection on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, and to send it to the knees for the saints. And he tells them this. He says, because God's blessings upon you are for their benefit.

[12 : 16] God's blessings on you are for the benefit of others, because you're standing on his blessings on them spiritually. You're benefiting from their spiritual blessing.

Now let them benefit from your physical blessing. And all these blessings are tied to the obedience of living with concern. And this shows us, biblically and accurately, this is a command of God.

It's not just a good thing that we're concerned. We are commanded to live with a concern for fellow man. We are commanded to live with a concern for all man.

And it is clearly taught over and over and over again. And Moses here declares, this is what you shall do. Now we are faced with that.

Well, then what will we do? Because once the commandment is declared, then it's up to the people of God to respond to that commandment. Right? Secondly, we see not only is this commanded.

[13 : 26] Secondly, we see it is consistent. It is consistent. God was so adamant about this reality that he put it on the calendar for them. Right? God declared when it should happen.

And he declared how it should happen. And God set it up. He set the calendar. As we move through Deuteronomy, as a matter of fact, as we get into the next chapter, the end of chapter 15, and get into the first part of chapter 16, we will read of the three annual feasts.

There's the Passover, the Feast of Booths, or the Pentecostal Feast, the Feast of Harvest, and then the Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Booths, at the end. So there's your three feasts, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

And these are the feasts that men were to come, every Jewish male was to come to the place where God had called his name to dwell once a year. This is how the Jewish people set their calendar, because the first month of the year was Passover.

Once you put the sickle into the harvest count, 50 days, that's what Pentecost means, from the first time the sickle goes into harvest, so that's like the mid-year for them. And then the first tabernacles was the end gathering, so that would be the end of the year for the nation of Israel.

[14 : 33] So God set their calendar based upon these festivals, but he also put on their calendar this special time every seventh year. Every seventh year. It's called the year of Jubilee.

In the seventh year, you weren't supposed to plant anything. You weren't supposed to harvest anything. Part of that's trust, because you're going to trust that God provided enough in year six to get you to year eight.

Right? So it's trust. You're going to let the fields rest. By the way, science and agricultural practices have shown us that's a really good practice, because the ground builds its nitrogen and all that stuff back up when you don't do anything with it, when you let a ground, we call it today, live fallow.

It's amazing. God declared something that actually works, right? That's why you do crop rotation. That's why they tell you not to plant the same thing in the same field all the time. God was giving them practical advice. Following Christ is a very practical thing.

He knows what he's talking about. So anyway, you're not supposed to plant anything, but then you're supposed to forgive the debtors. Now, I will go ahead and say, just to be fair, scholars are kind of caught between the two.

[15 : 38] We don't know, because it's an agricultural society, so most debts were repaid with harvest, right? So you didn't pay, you know, money. You paid in harvest, or you paid in grain, or you paid things like that.

So most people are kind of caught between the two, or they are caught between the two. We don't know if this means it's like a year of remission, that you're just supposed to not pay this year. You don't have to pay this year because we know you're not planting anything this year.

Therefore, we know there's no harvest to pay us. So you don't have to pay. But now, for the foreigner, you could do that. That's why they kind of get that, some see that interpretation, because the foreigner is planting and harvesting.

So they're not celebrating the year of Jubilee. So, hey, you have the money to pay, you're going to pay. Okay, others see this as a complete forgiveness of, I fall into second camp, okay? I believe it is a complete forgiveness of debt.

And the reason I believe that is because it is laid parallel next to the forgiveness that God extends to his people, right? God doesn't just say, oh, well, this year you're forgiven. Next year we'll have to readdress the situation.

[16 : 38] He doesn't say that. It's this year of Jubilee. It stays consistent. So I believe it's a complete forgiveness. Now, what's amazing is that every 50 years, you would have another year of Jubilee.

Now, I'm not a very good math expert. Some of you are better than me. But if you're counting by sevens, you get to year 49. And then there's year 50. So the year 50 would be two years in a row that you were just to not plant, not harvest.

By the way, they never do this. They don't trust God this much. And God says, oh, you don't trust me this much. This land is going to lie fallow for 70 years. That's how long they didn't do it. You do the number of years. And he put them in Babylon for that.

But what God was doing was giving them a calendar to know when they could forgive the debts. It's consistent, right? Every seven years. But not only was it consistent in timetables, it was also consistent across that timetable.

So Moses declares to them here, say, last year was the year of Jubilee, so I forgave everybody's debt. And you come to me this year and you need to borrow something. And, well, this year I'm like, hey, I still have six more years until the next year of Jubilee.

[17 : 43] So, yes, I will lend you because for six years you're going to repay me and we're going to try to work this out. But say you come to me in year five and you want to do it. And I'm like, in my mind, I'm thinking we're only two years away from the year of Jubilee, which means whatever I lend you, you only have to pay me back a portion for two years.

And I can't charge you interest because you're not supposed to charge a fellow Jewish individual interest. So you only have two years of repayment and then you're going to be forgiven. God knows the tendency of man's heart because God says be careful if one comes to you and it's near the year of Jubilee that you don't give to him who asks.

You know what this tells us? Your concern is to be consistent no matter how much you garner to gain from the situation. Even if you're not going to gain as much, he says, don't withhold.

Don't keep back. Give to whoever asks of you when they're in need. That's a hard practice. These are truths, just to be honest. As a pastor, you wrestle with because you realize some people play the church game.

So you have to wrestle with, I want to be as wise as a serpent but gentle as a dove and I don't want to let anybody abuse the church's financial situation but we also want to be consistent.

[19 : 01] So there's this thing. It says, even if you may lose a little bit, he says, be consistent in your heart. Be consistent in your concern and your care.

And then he takes it a step further in his consistency. He says, say a fellow Hebrew, male or female, gets to the place. Now, don't think American slavery, okay?

Gets to the place where they're just so destitute, they sell themselves to you as their slave. Now, the better word here would, I mean, slave is the right word but it's kind of like an indentured servant, right?

I have nothing. I have bills. My crops failed. A lot of times it would happen with ladies when their husbands died and they had no sons. They were hopeless, right? Or there's this downward turn.

Again, everything's based on agriculture. So if things are going bad, then they would sell themselves. It would be the picture we see in Ruth with Ruth going behind Boaz's reapers, right?

[20 : 05] And taking in some of the grain and just really relying upon the care. So he says, even if they sell themselves to you and they become your slave, you be concerned for them consistently too.

Because they're only going to serve you six years. It doesn't follow the year of Jubilee. It just means if you have six years of serving me and then you're free. You don't overwork them.

But the concern is supposed to be so consistent. He implies the truth that you could so care for them, you could so respect them, that at the end of six years they could say, I don't want to leave.

I love my master. I love my household. And they say, I want to stay with you forever. And then that's when you'd pierce their ear with all in the doorposts.

Now that's a great picture because what we have found with Jesus Christ is he is our Lord and master, but he's such a master. We are his slaves, but he is such a master. I allowed him to pierce my ear because I love him so.

[21 : 04] I have found I fare better in his household serving him as a slave than I ever did on my own in my own freedom. That picture is intentional, by the way.

Because the master's care is to be so consistently good that he shows a concern for those who serve him. It's consistent.

So not only is it commanded, it's consistent. Third, it's considerate. Considerate. It kind of goes hand in hand with this whole, and I'm wrapping up here with this consistency.

Slave was not looked at as a slave in our mindset. It was looked at with respect. It was looked at with love.

It was considerate. And we see that it's considerate because he tells you that after six years of service, you're to let that servant go. And he said, don't be upset.

[22 : 04] Don't get mad. Don't say, well, I shouldn't have to do that because he says, be careful to guard your heart. Don't get upset about this because he says, who are you to get upset? Think about this. Because you got twice as much service from a servant than you would have ever gotten from a hired laborer.

Which means that they labored and worked for you harder than anybody would have. So you be considerate of that. And you rejoice. Today is your day of freedom. Six years you have served me. Today I set you free.

But then he takes a little bit further in our consideration of those that are being released. He said, but don't send them away empty handed. Did you see that? If someone has served you for six years and now they're free to go and they can leave at their will.

And they can leave. Now, if it's a man. I know this kind of, we'll get into this later. If it's a man and he came into your service and he served you for three years and he met one of your female servants. And he's like, hey. You know, and they end up getting married and they had kids together.

If he chose to leave, he couldn't take his wife and kids with him. So a lot of them said, well, I'm going to stay here because my wife and kids are here. That was just society. Okay. So, but anyway, if they could leave and if they wanted to leave, Moses commands them, don't send them away empty handed.

[23 : 16] Rather, you are to enrich them when they leave you. You ought to provide for them as they are departing. And he tells them, much like God provided for you when you left Egypt.

Remember how they were enriched? You are to enrich your servant when he leaves you. What he is saying is you ought to be so considerate of those who have served you. You ought to be so considerate of fellow man that you're going to make sure you're setting them up where they won't fail again.

They won't go back into servanthood. You're going to provide for them from your abundance because he says, Because the Lord your God has blessed you so that you may give to them.

And that when they leave you, they were better off than when they came to you. Now, this is a genuine concern for fellow man.

It understands God has commanded it. It understands that it's got to be consistent. It doesn't matter if it's in the form of a servant or a slave or just a needy person or whoever it may be, regardless of how society looks at them or, hey, I have six years to gain from you or two years to gain from you.

[24 : 28] It is consistent. We're going to show the same concern across the spectrum. This concern is to be extended to the foreigner even, but we get to see that later on.

And it is to be considerate. It's not to look down and go, Oh, well, I'm so mad I have to give them where they are. My heart is not really into the giving of them right now.

He says, Be careful that your giving and your concern flows from the heart. Looking at the individual and realizing here is someone God has blessed me with the opportunity to show demonstrable concern for.

And to allow them to enjoy that provision. Because, as we said in the book of James, how can we say we love the Lord our God whom we have not seen and not love our brother whom we have seen?

God's people have always been called and commanded to live with genuine, authentic concern of fellow man.

[25 : 43] And it is to be one of the hallmarks of their life. If the nation of Israel had done this, think how much this would have stood out in the land of Canaan.

If the church today was to really, genuinely, authentically do this, think how much it would stand out in the land of America.

But unfortunately, even among our churches, we find some of the most unconcerned individuals.

While God has clearly called us to be concerned. Deuteronomy chapter 15, verses 1 through 18. Thank you, brothers. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[28 : 14] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.