

Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson

Justice and Mercy (Sanctity of Life)

Deuteronomy 19

January 20, 2019

Situational Context: When Israel was about to enter the Land, the Lord issued instructions concerning murder and manslaughter and accidental death.

Deuteronomy 19:1-3 (NIV2011) ¹ When the LORD your God has destroyed the nations whose land He is giving you, and when you have driven them out and settled in their towns and houses, ² then set aside for yourselves three cities in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess. ³ Determine the distances involved and divide into three parts the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, so that a person who kills someone may flee for refuge to one of these cities.

Lesson Theme: Life is a gift from God; no one has the right to take this gift away without due process, for man is the only creature made in God's image; this God has delegated to human government. These words were for God's people. God's people should always be a defender of innocent blood.

Deuteronomy 19:8-10 (NIV2011) ⁸ If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as He promised on oath to your ancestors, and gives you the whole land he promised them, ⁹ because you carefully follow all these laws I command you today—to love the LORD your God and to walk always in obedience to Him—then you are to set aside three more cities. ¹⁰ Do this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed.

Lesson Theme: Life is a gift from God; no one has the right to take this gift away without due process, for man is the only creature made in God's image. This God has delegated to human government. These words were for God's people. God's people should always be a defender of innocent blood.

Interpretation: The law of manslaughter is given first in Ex 21:13, then more fully in Nu 35:6-28. This passage repeats some matters given in Numbers. Other regulations are added, such as the provision for building access roads to the cities of refuge. Also, this passage specifies three extra cities in Canaan if the nation's territory is greatly enlarged. But it is plain in both Numbers and Deuteronomy that a man guilty of premeditated murder must die. The death penalty is grounded, not in disrespect for life, but in intense respect for the life of the innocent victim, made in the image of God.

Supporting Texts:

Exodus 21:12-13 (NIV2011) ¹² “Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. ¹³ However, if it is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen, they are to flee to a place I will designate.

Genesis 9:6 (NIV2011) ⁶ “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

Joshua 20:5 (NIV2011) ⁵ If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought.

Discussion Starters:

What does it mean that man was made in God’s image?

Why is an attack upon man an attack upon God?

Are non-believers going to be held accountable to this?

What are the implications of Exodus 21:13?

Why was there even allowed an avenger of the blood?

2. Love God, Love Life: Deuteronomy 19:8-10 (NIV2011) ⁸ If the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as he promised on oath to your ancestors, and gives you the whole land He promised them, ⁹ because you carefully follow all these laws I command you today—to love the LORD your God and to walk always in obedience to Him—then you are to set aside three more cities. ¹⁰ Do this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed.

Interpretation: The shedding of innocent blood is an offense against God and defiles the land.

Supporting Texts: Numbers 35:33 (NIV2011) ³³ “ ‘Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed 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.

Genesis 4:10 (NIV2011) ¹⁰ The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.

Mark 12:30-31 (NIV2011) ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Romans 1:28-31 (NIV2011) ²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

Discussion Starters:

This is part of Israel’s civil law code. What principles apply to believers?

How does this apply to a baby in the womb?

What is the result of God’s wrath?

3. Justice: Deuteronomy 19:11-13 (NIV2011) ¹¹ But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbor, and then flees to one of these cities, ¹² the killer shall be sent for by the town elders, be brought back from the city, and be handed over to the avenger of blood to die. ¹³ Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you.

Interpretation: God has granted as an image bearer to meet out justice to human government and human beings. The death penalty for murder is a God ordained will of God for man.

Supporting Texts:

1 John 3:15 (NIV2011) ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

Genesis 9:4-5 (NIV2011) ⁴ “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. ⁵ And, for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting

from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

Discussion Starters:

In our country, abortion is not unlawful. What should be our attitude concerning both the man and woman caught up in abortion? Is the man guiltless?

What is the cause of all this blood shedding?

Can Christians support the death penalty?

Is our system of justice really fair and impartial?

How can Christians work for both justice and show mercy?