

Veritas Class
March 16, 2014

Righteousness and Truthful Witness
Deuteronomy 19:15-21

- A. The Declaration: Moses' Call for Multiple Witnesses in Criminal Legal Cases (v. 15)**
1. The Reasonableness of the Principle
 2. The Necessity of the Principle
- B. The Problem (v. 16)**
- a. A Malicious Witness
 - b. A False Witness (*la'anôt bê sārâ*)
- C. The Solution (vv. 17-19a)**
1. The accuser and accused appear before YHWH (represented by the priests, functioning as judges; (v. 17).
 2. The Priestly adjudicators are to investigate the matter thoroughly (v. 18a).
 3. The false witnesses is to suffer the punishment of the crime for which he gave a false testimony (vv. 18b-19a).
- D. The Rationale (v. 19b-20)**
1. To Purge the People of the Evil (v. 19b)
 2. To Serve as a Deterrent (v. 20)
- E. The Required Disposition (v. 21)**
1. No Pity (v. 21a)
 2. A Commitment to Equity (v. 21b)
- F. A Closer Look at the Principle of *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation")**
1. The Form of the *talion*
 2. Ancient Near Eastern Counterparts
Sumerian "Laws of Ur-Nammu" (2100 B.C.)
Hammurabi Law Code (1750 BC)
 3. Biblical Counterparts
- G. Is this a tit-for tat ethic? (cf. Matthew 5:38-42)**
1. According to the rabbis, these directives were never intended to be applied literally.
 2. Milgrom: The message is, whoever injures another person has disfigured the image of God. (Law of blasphemy is linked to *lex talionis*.)
 3. These are formulaic demands that punishment be proportional or suitable to the crimes; they actually put limits on the punishment.
 4. There is no place for personal vengeance; it is reserved for YHWH (Deut 32:35 and Rom 12:19).
 5. The issue in 19:21 is different; v. 21 fleshes out v. 19.
- H. How may Christians keep this law?**
1. When called upon to testify in private or public, in the interest of righteousness the godly will always speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
 2. We recognize that slander in the courts and in private is an evil that destroys the victim and defiles the community.

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3. We must take decisive action against those who would hurt others through their lies in order to punish the criminal, deliver the victim, purge the nation, and deter others within the community from spreading this cancer.
4. Crimes against a fellow human being are crimes against God.
Proverbs 14:31; Proverbs 17:5; 1 John 4:20
5. When Jesus calls on New Testament believers to turn the other cheek toward those who would abuse them, rather than to retaliate with "eye for eye and tooth for tooth" vengeance (Matt 5:34-42), he is not establishing a new ethic. Rather, he is reminding his followers that the lives of God's redeemed people are governed by a distinctive ethic.
6. The present law is a warning to would-be perjurers against verbal violence.
7. The law of *talion* neither condones nor promotes a culture of retaliatory violence.

Lex Talionis Texts in the Pentateuch

Exodus 21:23-25	Leviticus 24:17-21	Deuteronomy 19:19,21
<p>Context (21:22)</p> <p>22When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine.</p>	<p>Context (24:16-17)</p> <p>16Whoever blasphemes the name of YHWH shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.</p> <p>17Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death.</p>	<p>Context (19:16-20)</p> <p>16If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, 17then both parties to the dispute shall appear before YHWH, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. 18The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, 19then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. 20And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.</p>
<p>23But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life,</p> <p>24eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.</p>	<p>18Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life.</p> <p>19If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it shall be done to him,</p> <p>20fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth;</p> <p>whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.</p> <p>21Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death.</p>	<p>21Your eye shall not pity. life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.</p>