

"You Must Not Hide Yourself"

The law of God is understandably full of dos and don'ts. Often it's the "don'ts" and the "thou shall not's" that get the most attention. We tend to focus on what we should *not* be doing. Even in this passage, there's a clear prohibition, one that I even used as the title of this sermon. Verse 3, "You must not hide yourself," referring to not turning a blind eye to your brother's need. And yet as with most prohibitions, there's really something positive being advocated. When the Bible tells us something not to do, there is usually something good we should be doing instead.

Well, in this passage, the focus is not so much on the negative but the positive. The focus is not so much on what you shouldn't be doing, but on what you should be doing. Here it deals with ways to positively treat our brother and his property. We can define sin as commission and omission. Commission is breaking an explicit command. Omission is failing to do the good things that we are called to do. So take for example here this passage in light of the eighth commandment. The eighth commandment is thou shall not steal. Stealing something of our brothers is prohibited. But now this passage helps us to see what our positive duty is. If we are not to steal our brother's property, how ought we to treat his property? We could spend a lot of time answering that question. Today's passage gives us two scenarios in which we ought to help take care of our brother's property. According to the strict wooden reading of the Ten Commandments one might argue this is going above and beyond our duty. But this passage reminds us of God's own heart. It's not enough just to not steal against our brother. We ought to look to do good to our brother.

Jesus tells us this in the gospels, of course. He put it in an easy to remember rule. We call it the Golden Rule. The memorable wording is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The exact wording is in Matthew 7:12, Jesus says, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Jesus is saying that the principle for the Golden Rule comes from the Old Testament; from the law and the prophets. That principle is seen in a passage like this from Deuteronomy. It's not enough just not to sin directly against your neighbor. We ought to also to proactively look to take care of our neighbor when an opportunity comes before us. We ought to treat our brother and the things of our brother with the same care and concern that we'd want them to treat us and our things. To not do this, would be a sin of omission. This passage reminds us of this.

So let's consider this now by looking at this passage. You'll notice that there are two different scenarios envisioned in this passage, but both present similar sorts of obligations for us. The first scenario is in verses 1-3. This scenario imagines that your brother has lost something. It could be a straying animal. It could be a lost garment. The straying animal would have represented something of some significant value; this would have been part of their livestock and livelihood. The garment may or may not have represented the same sort of value; and yet if it were the garment of a poor person it might have been very important to them. But the point is the complete scope: regardless of the value, regardless of the item, the concern here according to verse 3 is about anything your neighbor might lose. This passage tells us what to do if we find this thing that belongs to your neighbor.

The command then becomes to us to recover the lost property, and return it if we are able. If you can't return it, you are to safeguard it until it can be returned. In the case of the straying animal, you are to go after the straying animal. You are to proactively capture it and then proactively take it back to your brother. If the owner is far away or if you don't know who they are, then you can have them come and get it from you. But that doesn't absolve you from your responsibility. You have to instead take the animal into your midst and care for it until the owner comes looking for it. Then you have to return it to the owner.

We've heard the saying, "Finders keepers, loser's weepers." This passage says that's wrong. That's not righteous thinking. We've also heard the adage, "Possession is 9/10ths of the law." Well, if you use that to try to justify not returning something you found to its proper owner, then again that's wrong. Righteousness says that if you find something that's not yours, you look to restore it to the rightful owner. If you can't restore it to the rightful owner, then you take that item into your care until it can be. For some, that might seem like going above and beyond the duty. God instead says it expresses his own standard of righteousness.

Now obviously there are limitations to what's being requested here. This assumes you are presented with an opportunity. You encounter the straying animal. You discover the lost garment. It's not saying that we have to proactively go out looking for things that could be lost. But if we do find ourselves in a situation where we discover a lost item, then we are to secure it and return it. That requires proactiveness, but it does limit the proactiveness required. But the point is that when an opportunity presents itself, we act.

In the same way, there are limitations here about returning the property. If you know who the owner is and they are close by you are required to proactively bring the lost item to them. In that case, you don't wait for them to come get the item. However, if they are far away, you are not required to make a long journey; at that point it is appropriate to have them come and get it. And yet, I think it's safe to assume that in this situation you'd be expected to alert the owner in some way; maybe send a message to them. Of course, if you don't know who the owner is, you can't do either; you can't return it to them, or contact them to come get it. That's another limitation here; we're not required to then proactively go out looking for the owner. We are required to proactively take the property into our possession and safeguard it though until the owner does come looking for it. I think it would be implied and appropriate in that case to somehow spread the word that you found some lost item. And so this passage does limit your responsibility on proactively seeking out the original owner. But you are to proactively safeguard your neighbor's property until it can be returned.

That's the first scenario envisioned in this passage over helping your neighbor. The second scenario is envisioned in verse 4. If you are passing along and you see your brother's donkey or ox fall down along the road, you're to proactively stop and help your brother. You're not to help only if they flag you down. You should proactively seek your brother in this crisis and offer your assistance. In this situation, the donkey or ox would have been heavy enough of its own, and yet in this situation it surely assumed that it had a load on its back, which is why it's having trouble getting up in the first place. In other words, this would have been a very heavy donkey or ox. It would have been a lot of trouble to lift back up for just one person. Your neighbor is going to need help. If you have the opportunity, then help him.

Of course this scenario applies to any sort of crisis or emergency that your neighbor might find himself in. Just like the first example applied not just to a

straying sheep, so too this second scenario has broader applications. If you encounter in public your neighbor having an emergency, go and offer your help. Maybe today it's not a downed donkey, but a car broken down on the side of the road; or your neighbor's sprinkler breaks and starts gushing water all over the road. The applications can be endless.

Again, this passage doesn't require you to proactively go out looking for those in trouble. It doesn't require you to spend your days roaming the roads looking for fallen donkeys. But if you are presented with the opportunity you are required to act. This doesn't say you might *consider* helping. It *requires* you to act. Again, righteousness dictates that you act. That's why it says in verse that you "shall surely" help. It adds the word surely because the Hebrew is emphatically worded in the original. It's emphasizing the requirement here. To not act in that situation would become a sin of omission, not doing your duty here to help someone in the midst of their crisis.

Well let's spend a few minutes now assessing these two different scenarios given in these four verses. We are studying them together because the text clearly is relating them together. They both have common elements and common obligations.

First notice that both scenarios assume you have observed or discovered something. Neither scenario here require you to go out looking for these situations. That's not your obligation. And yet this passage assumes you might notice certain needs of your neighbors, and upon noticing them, you have certain obligations in that situation. Verse 1 talks about you seeing a straying sheep or ox. Verse 3 talks about you seeing or discovering something lost of your neighbors. Verse 4 talks about seeing your brother's fallen donkey or ox along the road. You see, that's the common setting for each of these two scenarios. Once you as an individual observe a need of your neighbor, you are now obligated to help. You weren't obligated before. And yet when an opportunity comes before you, your obligation changes. You see, as a human being, we all have responsibilities. Sometimes those responsibilities are things we choose to take on. Other times they providently fall into our laps. When God places the opportunities before us, we are called to take responsibility. That's our positive duty in all of this.

You see that's the other common element in these two scenarios. Both of these situations prohibit us from ignoring these needs that come to our attention. The same word appears three times in this passage. It's where we get the title of our sermon. It's a word of concealment. It's talking about not hiding yourself when you observe your brother's need. Verse 1 says don't hide yourself from the straying animals. Verse 3 says you must not hide yourself from the lost property. Verse 4 says you must not hide yourself from your brother in need along the side of the road. That's the direct prohibition in all of this. Do not hide yourself. Basically this is saying, don't ignore the situation. Don't ignore the problem. Don't pretend you didn't see it.

Now I don't know about you, but I know this is something I've been guilty before of. We live in a society that doesn't like to be bothered. We don't like to be bothered with somebody else's problem. But that attitude is not a righteous attitude. It's not God's attitude. God calls us to proactively come to the aid of your brother, not pretend you didn't see his need. If you see his need, then you are to come to his aid. His problem has become your problem in that case. That's the righteous thing to do. That's keeping with the golden rule. That's what you would want someone to do for you.

Of course realize what's being asked of you here. You're being asked to go out of your way. If you help in these scenarios, there's going to be at least some cost

to you. If you capture the straying animal and take it back to the owner, you'll have least spend some of your time and energy doing this. That's time and energy taken away from your other jobs. If you have to take care of an animal until the owner comes looking for it, there's going to be a cost involved there too. If you've ever owned a small pet, you know it costs a lot of money to feed it and care for it. Let alone a big donkey or sheep! Of course if you stop by the road to help lift the donkey up, you'll again be committing your time and energy that would have otherwise been used on something to benefit yourself. Helping others proactively like this, instead of ignoring their needs, will involve some cost to you.

And of course, living this out in today's society can be even more tricky. In today's age it can even be dangerous. People have been kidnapped or murdered or abused because they stopped to help someone along the side of the road. I don't have easy answers for you on this. You'll need to assess the situation and employ some wisdom today whenever you make a decision to help or not. You'll have to check your heart and see if your decision has been a righteous one or not. Today many people might not even want your help. You could see someone in need, go to try to help them, and be told to get lost. In that case you've done your duty; you always need to respect people's boundaries so that you don't go from being a good neighbor to being a busybody. Yet despite the difficulties and dangers today, being proactive when you discover a neighbor's need is the right thing to do.

Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. That parable illustrates the theme of our passage today. The parable is really another example of the second scenario in our passage for today. It's an example of helping someone in a crisis situation. In that parable an Israelite was attacked by thieves and left for dead along the side of the road. Both a priest and a Levite walked by and ignored the dying man. The parable explicitly says that they saw him and then passed by on the other side. Do you see what these first two men did? They did exactly what Deuteronomy tells us here not to do. They observed their neighbors need and ignored it. Their walking along the other side of the road was their way to hide themselves from the problem; to ignore it. But do you see how wrong that was? When God wrote verse 4 of our passage, was it really for oxen that he was concerned? Isn't God ultimately writing for our sake? For the sake of human beings? Yes, he is! And so the Samaritan then in the parable shows what should have been done.

Of course the Samaritan was the unlikely hero here. You would have expected the priest or the Levite to keep the heart of the law here and help the dying man. But they didn't. The Samaritan helped instead. And his help took not only time away from his journey, but cost him financially as well. But that's what the Bible calls righteousness. That's how we should love our neighbors, even our enemies.

My friends, all of this reveals God's heart. Jesus told us to love others radically, and by doing so, we love as God loves. Jesus said in Luke 6 that even sinners can do good to those who do good to them. We can fall into the trap of calculating whether we should do good to someone. If we stand to benefit from it, then we do it. Otherwise, we just walk on by, not wanting to be bothered. That's maybe how the world loves. But it's not how God loves. God calls us to love as he has loved.

And we've seen that love in Jesus. Think how Jesus lived this out with the cross. The cross represented great cost to Jesus. But why did he do it? To recover the lost and fallen. God chosen people had become lost and fallen. Those who belong to God had become lost and fallen. Christ in the greatest act of love endured the cross to recover and restore us unto God. Don't forget Luke 15 which we read last

week. Jesus likened his work as the shepherd going after the straying sheep. We who are God's elect belong to God. And yet we had become lost and fallen because of sin. Jesus went to the cross to save us. To restore us. To return us to God. It caused him much suffering and humility. It required him enduring death on the cross. But he did it out of love. He saw the opportunity and showed forth the greatest act of love.

We were the lost sheep. We were the lost garment. We were the fallen donkey. Christ has found us. He has picked us up. He has brought us to the Father. Praise be to Christ. We are called to believe in Jesus; and when we say that we have found him, we realize that it was really he who found us. Praise be to God. Let us each believe in Jesus and be found by him!

And so let me make this clear, brothers and sisters. The Golden Rule is not the gospel. The Golden Rule is part of God's law. What we have here in Deuteronomy is one expression of the Golden Rule in the Old Testament, and it's in a book of law. The only human who has fully kept the Golden Rule is Jesus Christ. He kept that rule throughout his earthly ministry. He lived this out most radically at the cross. His radical keeping of this Golden Rule was part of how he secured the Gospel for us. This gospel says that we are saved by his righteousness on our behalf.

And so we don't keep the Golden Rule in order to be saved. No, because we've been saved, we strive by God's grace to keep the Golden Rule. We were once lost but now we've been found. Because of this we strive to keep the Golden Rule. Because of this we look to our brothers needs.

And so my exhortation to us all today then comes from Galatians 6:10. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." As we have opportunity. We've talked about opportunity today. That's what these two scenarios in our passage assumed. Opportunities that are presented to you. Opportunities that could be ignored. Opportunities in which we'll be tempted to ignore.

We know how it is. We know our human tendencies. We'll be tempted to not be bothered. We'll be tempted to not get involved. To not be bothered. The reality is that in this fast paced world we can say that we're just too busy to help. In reality, we very well may be too busy. And yet how often we can use that as an excuse when an opportunity comes to help others. We'll say, "Oh yes, this is an opportunity, but I'm just too busy to help. I've got an appointment to make. I've got to be somewhere." Busyness can become our reason for not being the Good Samaritan God calls us to be.

You know I think we can tend to think of how being a Good Samaritan is going above and beyond our duty. That means we tend to think that we can just step up to the plate to help every so often, but that it's okay to ignore most of the opportunities. But that's not how this passage presents it. It's not presentable as merely a commendable thing. It's presented as the right thing. It's the right thing to not ignore someone in need. It's the right thing to look out for our neighbor and his property. Now surely doing the right thing is commendable, but the point is that this should be basic righteousness for God's people. We shouldn't praise ourselves for the rare occasions where we are a Good Samaritan; it should be our expected default action whenever we are met with an opportunity to do good to our neighbor. Again, this passage says we ought not to ignore opportunities to come to the aid to our brother. Let us instead confess to God today all the reasons we might ignore our brother's needs around us. Pray that God will give us his heart for doing good unto others.

Of course, if everyone in the world did this, the world might be a pretty good place. Of course that's a temptation that can come into our mind as well. We know that not everyone will do this. Not everyone will do unto others as they would have done unto them. That can tempt us to hold back our good. That can challenge our motivations. You see, the Bible doesn't say do good unto others in order that others would do good unto you. Our motivation should not be to do good to others, only if you know that will then be more likely to reciprocate. The Golden Rule isn't, "Do unto others so that they must do it unto me." It's, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." It's treat them how you'd want to be treated, regardless if they ever do end up treating you that way.

But of course this just reminds us of our real motivation as Christians. We do good unto others because Christ has already done this unto us. We mimic the heart of God who loves not just those who have loved him. God has radically loved those who were at the time enemies when Christ died on the cross. God calls us in turn to love others in this way.

And so as we are given opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Let us do it out of love; love Christ has shown us. Let us not do it for human recognition. Let's do it out of gratitude for Christ, and simply because it's the right thing to do. As Christians let's not ignore what is the right thing to do; let's excel in doing what's right, by God's grace. Amen.

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