

BIBLE

PARALLEL

LINES

Leviticus 27:28 *“But nothing that a person owns and devotes to the Lord—whether a human being or an animal or family land—may be sold or redeemed; everything so devoted is most holy to the Lord.”*

This might be the most dangerous parallel line in the Bible. What vow do you make to the Lord? God said in Exodus 13 that every first born among the Israelites must be dedicated to the Lord. In Leviticus 27:2 the verse mentions a dedicated vow to the Lord. The word dedicated can mean a variety of things in Hebrew. Generally, it is a singular action. Some descriptions of this word lean towards actions that are open ended. That means they could be changed. Some other laws of God allow for the first born to be returned to the family if the father dies. Yet, to God a vow cannot be made or broken without payment.

I believe that the trouble with the vow is in its intent. Suppose you had only one son. He could have been dedicated unto the Lord by the law. You can only redeem him if you pay the temple payment to redeem the vow. Yet, if you didn't pay (and kept the boy) then the penalty is death. God is very serious about your vow. This practice went further for animals and land. You could get it back but not without a price. For God, all our actions come with a price. It was a way of making sure our yes was yes and no was no. This is character building 101 from the Lord.

Matthew 5:33-37 *“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear*

an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

The parallel line goes straight from Leviticus to Matthew. Jesus takes this whole vow thing a step further by saying not to make a vow. That seems to be rash. Yet, Jesus was telling the people plainly that God was sick and tired of people breaking their vows. I suspect that people began to make vows a thing to say. Imagine someone saying "by heavens will, I will do it." Yet they don't. Maybe someone swears to dedicate themselves to God if they don't die. I will give money to a church and then a bill comes in and they recant. God and Jesus both are asking us to let our yes and no answers to be honest and final.

There is a strange story in Acts 5 that gets a ton of attention from the pulpit. It's the story of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple dedicates a piece of land to the Lord. In the process they choose to sell it and give the money to the church. Somewhere along the way they also decided just to give some of the money and keep the rest for themselves. In Leviticus 27 there were provisions to take the land back. The problem occurs with Ananias and Sapphira when they sell the land and keep some of the profits. I suspect there was a bunch of scams going on in the early church. People wanted the benefits of God but calling themselves Christian was also a good hiding place for swindlers. Being Christian looked good.

Acts 5:4 "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

People love to say that God is a hard God. That He is stringent and unloving. Yet, the parallel lines say that even in the Levitical laws there were ways out of a vow or dedication. Peter points out to the man that keeping some of the money did not need a deception. Just offer what you wish to give. Yet, they chose to lie and appear to give big bucks just to look good. I wonder how many other people in that church ran for cover after this couple dropped dead? I am betting this story is here for a reason. The Christian church was in its infancy. God needed to set the ground rules and remind them that a vow is a vow unto the Lord. That had not changed.

We see Jesus say that he came to fulfill the old laws. He did not come to remove or change them. I wonder if some people thought that the old ways were gone and freedom from sin meant freedom from Gods judgment. In some ways we can see that. Jesus said that He came to free us from the penalty of sin. To redeem us. God has been constantly checking sin at the door. You must pay for your vow. You must pay for your sin. Even though Jesus died for our sins, we still will pay a price. What is our price? It's not being like the world. We need to invite in Christ like character. Keeping our vows honest. We will get away with nothing under Gods rule if we claim to be Christian. Have you ever wondered why so many Christian leaders have been exposed over the years? A vow is still a vow to God.