

Leviticus 5:1

"If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath,
and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—
if he does not tell it, he bears guilt"

by Don E. Haney

Silence when we ought to speak is not only cowardly; it is a deceitful sin – akin to lying! Let's share a brief study of God's word and see how to apply this Statute of God today, in the letter and in its spirit or intent. We'll even see how Jesus Himself applied this law, setting us the perfect example.

Solomon wisely said, "There is a time to speak, and a time to refrain from speaking." (Eccl.3:7) There are times when the most appropriate action to take, is no action. There are times when all involved in a given matter would be better off if we were to just remain silent and mind our own business. Nobody likes a busybody, and God's Word clearly teaches us not to do that. (1 Pet.4:15 & Pr.26:17) But when someone is harmed by our silence, we bear guilt. Or, if someone is not helped because of our silence, when they could have been helped if we spoke up – that too can be sin to us.

Many of the Proverbs are simply variants of God's Statutes. Look at how this proverb so beautifully fits the principle of Lev.5:1. ***"He who is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He hears the oath but tells nothing."*** (Prov 29:24) Here a man "hears" of an evil that is hurting or will hurt someone, but tells nothing. This proverb is based upon the principle of Lev.5:1. If a man hears an illegal "secret" oath or is otherwise aware of some theft, but protects the thief through his silence, God calls Him a partner in the theft. His action shows hate for his life and disrespect for the life of others. Many have shown little regard for their own life **or that of their families**, through the company they have chosen to keep and even protect through their silence. People often like to think they are innocent, because they are not personally committing the hurtful sins they are ignoring or helping to hide. But God may judge those who hold silence when it hurts others as a partner in that crime or sin! The spirit of this law has many applications, and is not at all limited to the sin of theft. It is a sin to remain silent when you are certain of important facts that would help solve a case in the public interest. The spirit of this law could apply to facts held back, that if revealed could help protect those in need, or even benefit someone if a person stepped forward with the truth. This is not always easy to do and may take real nerve (or should I say it requires FAITH IN GOD), to fear God more than man! How would world history have been altered if more people had kept this Statute during key trying periods of distress? How would our own history in the Church of God been different, if more ministers and more members had kept the spirit of this Statute, when they saw with certainty, heresy coming and knew better – but held silent? Didn't Paul say something about those ***"who suppress (or hold back) the truth in unrighteousness"***? (Rm.1:18) It can be a sin to hold back the truth of God's Word from those who want or need it, just as much as holding back the truth from a neighbor or community in need can. Love covers sin. But love also does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore there is a time to be silent and a time to refrain from silence. This Statute tells us how to know when to do which.

Prov 24:10 If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

11 Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.

12 If you say, "Surely we did not know this," does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

God's laws are TRUTH and they bring TRUTH when kept. (Ps.119:142)

God is watching us. If we love Him, we will love His law. (1 Jn.2:4) David loved God's Statutes, and said they kept him from stumbling. Keeping them brings DEEP WISDOM! (Ps.119:97-112)

Notice the love involved in keeping Lev.5:1! Notice the lack of love for our fellow man when we selfishly do not keep this Statute. God's laws are fulfilled when we are showing love, for love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rm.13:8-10) God's Statutes are God's detailed instructions on HOW we show love to our neighbor and to God! Therefore, love dictates that we not pervert this Statute by using it as an excuse to harp on someone's personal sins or as a platform to attack those with whom we disagree. This Statute is for the public good to protect people from harm or coming danger in a brotherly neighborly way. It is not to badger others for their mistakes or to become a busybody in other people's matters. LOVE is the GUIDE! HUMILITY is the WAY! The STATUTES are the detailed directions of HOW!

Each Passover season, we read passages in scripture where Jesus in His humility, held His silence and did not revile in return or even speak to answer His accusers. But when adjured by the high priest, Jesus broke His silence. Why? What made Jesus suddenly answer, when He had been so silent?

Matt 26:59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death,

60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward

61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"

63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The answer is found in verse 63 "***"I put You under oath by the living God"***". What the high priest did by putting Christ under oath was to call Him as a witness in a public or legal proceeding, thus invoking the Statute (law) of Lev.5:1. Once the high priest did that, the law required Jesus give witness of truth, in a legal or public sense, to the authorities. Earlier Jesus' was not called to witness in any public or legal sense - nor did his silence hurt anyone - so He was not required to speak. He was setting us an example of humbly not reviling in return. (1 Pet.2:19-23) But since Jesus did not and would not sin, once He was called to witness for the public good, He was obliged to answer, as the Statute requires. Jesus was familiar with and kept the Statutes, setting us an example that we should follow. (Jn.13:15 & 1 Pet.2:21)

Let's now review another Statute with some similarities to Lev.5:1.

"You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD."(Lev.19:16)

The Soncino translates this latter part of this verse "***you shall not stand idly by...***" The Jewish translation reads: "***...don't stand idly by when your neighbor's life is at stake.***"

We are not to be a talebearer, but neither should we remain silent while someone's life is ruined by untrue rumor (tale) or character attack (legally or otherwise) when we know better. Neither can we stand idly by while someone is being physically harmed, and be innocent! Faith without works is a dead faith. (Jm.2:20) It's not just that we don't take a stand **against** our neighbor for selfish reasons, but much more. This Statute says we are not to stand idly by while someone's life is being seriously hurt, when we

could help! God's law requires the action of good (love), as much as it requires ceasing from doing evil. Therefore Lev.19:16 applies not only in matters where death could otherwise occur, but also in important matters of LIFE; such as when a person's well-being is being unfairly threatened in an ungodly way, including their financial or physical safety, health and reputation.

This is just like the spirit of Lev.5:1 which teaches against keeping silence, when taking a stand could significantly help someone, or a community in a legal case. Keeping this Statute helps the innocent, while simultaneously putting a hamper on an evil.

Isn't this the whole principle that Jesus was teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan? (Luke 10:29-37) The priest and the Levite did 'stand by' or 'walk by' a man whose life was in danger. In this parable, Jesus was showing today's application in spirit of one of the greatest of all commandments – the Statute of Lev.19:18 to ***“love your neighbor as yourself.”*** All God's Statutes are love in action.

- It is not neighborly to stand idly by while our neighbor's life is being harmed, and it is in our power to help. That is not loving, and therefore breaks God's laws.
- It is not neighborly to keep silent, when our voice could help, OR our silence could hurt. That is not loving. It is sin. Therefore these Statutes were kept by Jesus, but broken by those who stood by at His trial.

Are we loving? Do we keep and teach God's loving Statutes, like Jesus and the apostles did?

There are times when important truths or principles are held back by silence, to the hurt of God's people by the suppression of His Word – when there are people and ministers who know better, but remain silent. This is a great sin. Sometimes it is simply because we don't know better. Other times, some have confused silence with “wisdom,” to protect themselves. But at what cost to others? At what cost to truth? When shepherds are acting faithfully, they will not do that! On our own, it is hard to know when to do what. But God's Statutes are love in action, lighting our path, letting us know what to do and what not to do. In faith, they are a great strength. They teach us the wisdom that we need in life, and in keeping them there is great reward! (Ps.19:8-11) **Let's do it!**