

# Henry Vellema

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Page 1 of 5

"If the law was so serious in the sight of God that it would require the death of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, to make atonement for man's sin, it seems strange for God then to proceed to abandon the law! The goal of the law is not lawlessness, nor the purpose of grace a lawless contempt of the giver of grace.

The increasing breakdown of law and order must first of all be attributed to the churches and their persistent antinomianism. If the churches are lax with respect to the law, will not the people follow suit? And civil law cannot be separated from Biblical law, for the Biblical doctrine of law, includes all law, civil, ecclesiastical, societal, familial and all other forms of law. The social order which despises God's law places itself on death row: it is marked for judgment." ~~ RJ  
Rushdoony (Institutes 1, page 4)

## **Eighth Commandment "Though shalt not steal"**

"Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life;" Proverbs 29:24a

"When you saw a thief, you consented ('ran') with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers."  
Psalm 50:18

## **Can the thief be the civil magistrate currently ruling over you?**

Isaiah 56:9-11 says, "All you beasts of the field (prd...metaphor for hostile nations), come to devour, All you beasts in the forest. <sup>10</sup> **His watchmen are blind**, They are all ignorant; They are all dumb dogs, They cannot bark; Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. <sup>11</sup> Yes, *they are* greedy dogs **Which never have enough**. And they *are* shepherds Who cannot understand; They all look to their own way, **Every one for his own gain**, From his *own* territory."

Deut. 17: 14-17 says, "When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,' <sup>15</sup> you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses;... <sup>16</sup> But he shall not multiply horses for himself,... **nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.**" As Rev. Dr. Joe Morecraft writes, "This text is directly concerned with civil magistrates who are more devoted to seeking their own ease, profit and pleasure than they are with seeking the welfare of the nations committed to them." *Five Volume Authentic Christianity; An Exposition on the Theology and Ethics of the Westminster Larger Catechism. Volume 4, page 595*

Rulers and kings will often steal by taking the proceeds of your labor simply to keep you enslaved to them. Ignoring the wiser advice of Jereboam and the elders Rehoboam's hard and unreasonable demands on the people of Israel in 1 Kings 12 - making the people's yoke heavier (that is, stealing their labor) – as Pastor Morecraft wrote, "led to the rejection of his authority by Israel who seceded from Rehoboam's government."

Government stealing eventually destroys the legitimacy of the government and often leads to war. Stealing by printing paper money just takes a while longer.

In Lev. 27:32 God requires us to give a tithe (10%) of our annual production - income. God is offended when the King implies he is equally sovereign to God by demanding an equal amount...10%. It will be raised by a new tax, or worse, they propose to rob God of His tithe due the Church. Samuel warned God's people who were demanding a King in 1 Samuel 8 that they

would have to give 10% of their grain and vintage to the army (v. 15) and 10% of their sheep and they'd be servants to the King (v. 17). If this was an offense to God - though initially they'd cry out - in the end they were willing to endure, so as to have the security of an earthly ruler (v.19-20). How much more is God offended when the state, today, steals 30, 40, 50% or more through taxation?

**Yes modern governments today are routine thieves.**

I am standing before you today in large part because of God using the living witness of a Christian farmer (Dutch Calvinist) whom I was privileged to be a pallbearer for at his funeral in 1983. He turned my life irreversibly in a different direction.

### **His name was Henry Vellema.**

I first got to know Henry as his banker. I later came to realize that Henry was the first theologian I had ever met....one who, as far as I know, had never even heard the term, nor heard of Rushdoony, Bahnsen, North nor any of the others. Henry loved studying God's Law from the Bible and joyfully working to apply it. His was a lifetime of growing in sanctification.



**Mr. & Mrs. Henry Vellema**

He was born in Holland in 1915. His father died and he later immigrated to America with his mother and family. His mother died in Bigelow, MN when he was 9 years of age. Around 1932 he left Iowa for California to work on a dairy farm in the Bellflower area. And about four years later he brought his savings back and made a down payment on an 80 acre tract of land in Osceola County, Iowa. He was in his early 20's. He had an eye on a young woman in church, even before he left for California. When he came back he married Bertha, survived the Great Depression and prospered, while overcoming many challenges. It was clear, as I got to know him, that Henry left any of Abraham Kuyper's socialistic bent (i.e. Tax funding of public schools) back in Holland.

He was sitting in my bank office one day in the early 1980s while I was reviewing some paperwork for him and he was thumbing through his postal mail, waiting on me. Soon I heard him grumbling about a letter he received. I asked, "Anything wrong, Henry?" He said, 'Oh...that Social Security computer system! Somehow they started sending me monthly checks a couple of years ago.' To which I said, "So what's wrong with that?" Here was his reply.

"I have spent many years studying God's Word and I find three ways in it that He will materially bless us here on earth. 1. He will add the increase to the righteous use of our hands and mind applied to the calling He has placed before us. 2. There is also a place for lawful inheritance of earthly wealth to be passed down to one's heirs. 3. Finally, if I would find myself and family impoverished, pride would not hold me back from going to outside family members or the church deacons to request the charity needed to provide for my family while explaining my circumstances. To the extent they are able, that is their duty." All of these, Henry said, would be tied to our faithfulness to Christ and our obedience to His Law.

Henry continued. "I don't see in the Bible where receiving monies from any other source would be obedient to God, especially if it is brought to me as "free" money from the government. In the 1930s I wrote my congressman and said, "You can't take care of the retirement of the elderly with

Social Security. You will bankrupt the system, leaving future generations impoverished and providing incentive for the current generation to abandon their proper duty to provide for themselves."

He concluded his remarks to me stating, "This is not "free" money. The Social Security checks are funded by stealing from my neighbors and by stealing from future generations. **And the Bible forbids me from receiving stolen property.**" (Prov. 29:24, Psalm 50:18)

I asked, "So what are you saying you do about it?" "Every few months I gather up these checks and mail them back to the Social Security office in Des Moines and tell them to keep their stolen property," he replied. He was serious and I...was stunned.

Was this just one peculiarity in the life of Henry Vellema? Not at all. He never took one nickel of stolen government money to subsidize any aspect of his farming operation or his family needs his entire life. Yet he paid all of his income, social security and property taxes.

On life's journey he and his wife, Bertha, raised 11 children on the farm and sent them to Christian schools....this was before the days of home-schooling. But this wasn't all. Henry and his family were known to visit the widows and orphans. His family often would often go to nursing homes on Sundays and read the Bible and pray to God with residents and then visit about the 'ole days', especially memories of their departed spouses always reminding them of God's goodness to us through the death and resurrection of His son.

In his day-to-day business affairs, he was continually encouraging the young men he made contact with in farming or in commerce (myself included) to love their wives, to be faithful to them, provide for them, warned of wandering eyes, and admonished us to read the Bible and pray with them daily, if possible. He was never nosy with these men, just earnest for the things of Christ while caring about their families. I ran into a local plumber a year or two ago and he spoke of Henry Vellema and how he used to ask about his then-young marriage and loving his wife. He brought this up 32 years after Henry passed away.

A story was told that a neighbor of Henry's had such a problem with alcohol that his wife and children once found themselves in a bitter Iowa winter night with the heat off, pipes frozen and water pouring on the floor and very little winter clothing. Henry heard about it the next day and took some of his children to the man's home. Before he left his farm he called the propane dealer and told him to fill the drunk's propane tank and put it on his (Henry's) bill, he called the plumber and asked him to come over, fix the pipes and light the furnace and put it on his bill, and he sent his wife into town to buy some winter clothing and whatever else may be needed. And when he got to the home he set about cleaning up the water mess. When all things were restored, he then pulled the alcoholic out of bed, poured some coffee into him and informed him that he was coming over the next morning at 4 o'clock and would be getting him up to take him to their dairy barn to begin to teach him how to read God's Word and how to work.

Long story short, the alcoholic became a productive worker, who, in time, sobered up and passed away years later a professing believer in Jesus Christ. What was so special about that dairy barn? In one corner Henry and this man would spend nearly an hour (starting at 4am) reading the Bible and praying; by 5am they were milking cows and by 6:30am they were busy feeding his other cattle. I imagine breakfast came after all that. Henry followed through and taught the man Christ, His Law and how to work.

Henry stood up for injustices both in his church and in the community. When the sexual revolution came to Henry's small town in the 1970s, he did not take it quietly. One night he was driving a harvest wagon thru a neighboring community and stopped at the local bowling alley to use the restroom and to get a sandwich so as to continue with his late-night harvest. Much to his dismay he found a newly installed contraception machine in the men's restroom, there for the high school

boys to access. He went to the owner of the bowling alley and informed him that his effort to get teenagers to start fornicating was not acceptable and that he must take the machine out as soon as possible. He told the owner that he'd stop back in a few days to make sure it had been removed. The owner didn't take it lightly.

Days later as Henry drove through the community again he went back in the bowling alley. He saw the machine still there and being a farmer with pliers in a leather pouch fastened to his hip, he pulled it out, splayed the pliers open to use as a small crowbar, and tore the machine off the wall.

That night turned out to be 'ladies bowling night'. Henry left the men's restroom and walked on the return-ball gutters going to the very front of the bowling alley, turned around and asked all the ladies to stop for a moment. When he had their attention, he informed them of what the owner of the bowling alley was doing to help corrupt their young sons and daughters, that he would have none of it, and asked them to let the bowling alley owner know they objected too. He then laid the machine down in front of some pins and walked out of the bowling alley.

When I asked him, "What did you say to the County Sheriff when he showed up at the farm to talk about your vandalizing private property?" With his trade-mark twinkle in his eye Henry looked at me and said, "I never heard from the Sheriff, Paul. Never did." I seriously doubt the owner of the bowling alley wanted to show up in court and face Henry Vellema over a contraception machine. And I believe if there had been a trial and the court found in favor of the bowling alley owner, Henry would have taken the jail time as opposed to paying any fine. ***(Another version of the account I was told recently, was that he walked the ladies through the men's restroom and showed it to them. The one above is the one I recalled as Henry told me.)***

Henry loved buying small feeder calves from ranchers in western South Dakota. The annual trek to the Faith, SD sale barn was seen as a special treat to Henry, though I never understood until years later. He would go out a few days before an auction and visit the ranch families and look over the calves, being gathered in for auction. Years later, I served many of those western ranch families in that area, helping organize three different successful fights against oppressive local government. I have yet to be in any other political meetings where they open by standing together, bowing their heads and covering their hearts with their cowboy hats and professing their right fear of their Holy God and their complete dependence on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ....at political gatherings. With my own eyes and experiences I came to understand why Henry enjoyed his treks to western ranch country.

Henry took the baptismal vows made for his children seriously, as well as those children in the covenant community of his church. When a high-school girl from his church moved out of her parent's home in with an unbelieving young man, out of wedlock, it was Henry who went to her door and in love called her to repentance. He urged her to move back home, repent to God, her parents, and elders. He told her that the elders need to spend time disciplining this man and if he comes to saving faith in Christ and also repents for this illegitimacy then maybe your father and elders can bless a future marriage. But if you do this contrary to God's Law, you **will** grow apart from Christ, this relationship will not be blessed and will not likely endure.' She did not heed. From what I've seen, every warning Henry gave her in her youth has come to pass.

When it came time to build a new church building for the local congregation Henry stood up and opposed the plan to make one side brick and the other three sides steel siding. He rooted his opposition in the Biblical doctrine of the 'first fruits' like in Nehemiah 10:35. Henry told me that some of the members built their homes out of better quality construction material than they proposed for the church building. He couldn't recognize such lack of gratitude to his living God....when they wanted to build a church that looked like a "Morton farm building".

These are some of the stories of the life of Henry Vellema – he loved Christ so passionately that he dared not live in fear of the system, nor take their unjust money. When he passed away he left,

I'm certain courthouse records would show, an earthly inheritance worth (in today's values) several million dollars. His spirit while telling me these stories, was one of instruction - never once expressing any pride. It's like he knew he was not going to be long on the earth and wanted them left behind for the glory of Christ....and I was a 27 yr. old sponge, soaking them up, even prodding him for more.

Henry agreed with Ezra and shared openly his sorrow over the sins of the church, but one thing he believed passionately, as Ezra taught, "...The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity.... **never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever.**' Ezra 9:11-12

Let us not seek their peace and prosperity, especially prosperity built on something God declares to be an Abomination (Prov. 20:10)! In so doing we and our children can become strong and will have much to inherit. I am personally moved by the testimony of God's people under "burdens", "judgments", "taxes"....you name it, from their oppressors in Exodus 1. What was their response? They had more babies! They grew....against great odds. This was Henry Vellema. And we do the opposite today!

My life underwent a permanent change after experiencing the witness and life of Henry Vellema and his love for Christ. Every battle I have waged against an unjust state law has always been on the foundation of not being a recipient of any of their stolen property.

I recognize the extreme pressure that our Marxist system places on Christian families. But I have seen far too many effective victories, for the glory of Christ, against this statist, debt-driven system by my family (and others) when people are often willing to materially risk their reputations and their fortunes. Let us not count the costs of refusing government money too highly. God so often provides and protects.

When it gets to the point that the state has to punish Christian charity, church schools, Christian doctors and hospitals, (all of which should take no government money), food kitchens, etc. the battle - in the hearts and minds of the community - will often come our way! My former Pastor, his father-in-law and the men of their church in the late 1980's battled the state of Nebraska over their Louisville, NE Christian school. Their battle made national news. Their victory - while facing down a phalanx of lawmen (who had seized their church and Christian school) and the Nebraska Attorney General - was beyond imagination. In the midst of the battle you will often find opportunities to prosecute their corrupt system in the court of public opinion and evangelize your enemies (Philippians 1:12-14).

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Measure your Kingdom advancing mission, pray for guidance and direction, think years of labor toward its end, repent of any past thievery, count the costs, dump their stolen property and then engage - the results (often stunning) will be in God's hands.

A book that addresses the spiritual issue of such thievery from Scriptures is ***Larceny in the Heart*** by R. J. Rushdoony. Though they had troubles of their own - as all redeemed sinners still do - Henry and Bertha Vellema were not troubled by such larceny common in Christendom today.