

Responsibility and Holiness

10.24.2021

Exodus 22:1–31 (CSB)

LAWS ABOUT THEFT

22 ¹When a man steals an ox or a sheep and butchers it or sells it, he must repay five cattle for the ox or four sheep for the sheep. ²If a thief is caught in the act of breaking in, and he is beaten to death, no one is guilty of bloodshed. ³But if this happens after sunrise, the householder is guilty of bloodshed. A thief must make full restitution. If he is unable, he is to be sold because of his theft. ⁴If what was stolen—whether ox, donkey, or sheep—is actually found alive in his possession, he must repay double.

LAWS ABOUT CROP PROTECTION

⁵When a man lets a field or vineyard be grazed in, and then allows his animals to go and graze in someone else's field, he must repay with the best of his own field or vineyard.

⁶When a fire gets out of control, spreads to thornbushes, and consumes stacks of cut grain, standing grain, or a field, the one who started the fire must make full restitution for what was burned.

LAWS ABOUT PERSONAL PROPERTY

⁷When a man gives his neighbor valuables or goods to keep, but they are stolen from that person's house, the thief, if caught, must repay double. ⁸If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house must present himself to the judges to determine whether or not he has taken his neighbor's property.

⁹In any case of wrongdoing involving an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or anything else lost, and someone claims, 'That's mine,' the case between the two parties is to come before the judges. The one the judges condemn must repay double to his neighbor.

¹⁰When a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any other animal to care for, but it dies, is injured, or is stolen, while no one is

watching, ¹¹there must be an oath before the LORD between the two of them to determine whether or not he has taken his neighbor's property. Its owner must accept the oath, and the other man does not have to make restitution. ¹²But if, in fact, the animal was stolen from his custody, he must make restitution to its owner. ¹³If it was actually torn apart by a wild animal, he is to bring it as evidence; he does not have to make restitution for the torn carcass.

¹⁴"When a man borrows an animal from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not there with it, the man must make full restitution. ¹⁵If its owner is there with it, the man does not have to make restitution. If it was rented, the loss is covered by its rental price.

LAWS ABOUT SEDUCTION

¹⁶"If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and he sleeps with her, he must certainly pay the bridal price for her to be his wife. ¹⁷If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must pay an amount in silver equal to the bridal price for virgins.

CAPITAL OFFENSES

¹⁸"Do not allow a sorceress to live.

¹⁹"Whoever has sexual intercourse with an animal must be put to death.

²⁰"Whoever sacrifices to any gods, except the LORD alone, is to be set apart for destruction.

LAWS PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

²¹"You must not exploit a resident alien or oppress him, since you were resident aliens in the land of Egypt.

²²"You must not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³If you do mistreat them, they will no doubt cry to me, and I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴My anger will burn, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will be widows and your children fatherless.

²⁵"If you lend silver to my people, to the poor person among you, you must not be like a creditor to him; you must not charge him interest.

²⁶"If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as collateral, return it to him before sunset. ²⁷For it is his only covering; it is the clothing for his body. What will he sleep in? And if he cries out to me, I will listen because I am gracious.

RESPECT FOR GOD

²⁸ "You must not blaspheme God or curse a leader among your people.

²⁹ "You must not hold back offerings from your harvest or your vats. Give me the firstborn of your sons. ³⁰ Do the same with your cattle and your flock. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but on the eighth day you are to give them to me.

³¹ "**Be my holy people.** You must not eat the meat of a mauled animal found in the field; throw it to the dogs.

Intro. What's the point?

A. Verse 31 provides the purpose for these verses.

1. BE MY HOLY PEOPLE.

2. Holiness means "set apart".

a. Holiness requires a distinction and purpose.

b. **If you are set apart, with no purpose, you aren't holy, you are weird.**

c. If you have purpose, without distinction, that makes you common instead of called.

B. Israel was not to be ordinary.

1. God called Israel, saved Israel, redeemed Israel, and spoke to Israel so that, through Israel, all the nations would be blessed.

2. Therefore, Israel's life was to be markedly different than everyone else.

a. This difference was expressed in every part of life.

b. Every male was circumcised.

c. All people and animals were to rest on the Sabbath.

d. The festivals were different, the worship was different, and Israel was to represent God before the Nations.

C. It wasn't enough for Israel to be religiously different.

1. This statement exposes something we struggle with:
 - a. We are ok with our religious expression being different.
 - b. But we try not to allow that religious expression to make is too different from everyone else.
 - c. Perhaps the Thai expression, "Same, Same but Different" is what most of us try for.
 1. We do not want to be too different.
 2. It seems American Christians are too busy demonstrating how much we have in common with the world instead of demonstrating how different we are.
2. *When we read passages, such as Exodus 22, we are confronted with how God's holiness was designed to impact every detail of our lives.*
 - a. When we give our lives to God, everything changes.
 - b. Our relationships are different.
 - c. The way we spend money.
 - d. The way we treat our neighbors and fellow citizens.
 - e. Every aspect of our life is to be marked by the holiness of God and by our pursuit of holiness.

I cannot possibly preach every truth from this passage today.

Rarely, does time permit to preach everything in a passage, but I always have time to preach what the Holy Spirit wants to reveal in a service.

- a. Warning: We are going to talk about 4 areas that will prove uncomfortable but timely.
- b. We will talk about sex, Halloween, what not to say about people in leadership, and money.
- c. If you are prone to being offended, you picked a good day to be at church.

d. If you will allow me, I will draw our attention to 4 specific areas of responsibility within this passage.

1. We are responsible for our business. Vs. 1-15

A. A lot of attention is given here to the protection or loss of possessions.

1. These details expand upon the Commandments "Do not steal and Do not Covet".

2. Provided here are practical applications of what it looks like to break God's command.

B. The importance of this section can be summarized like this:

1. **When God's people are not responsible, we disgrace God.**

a. Act carelessly with your property or business, you bring disgrace to God's name.

b. When you steal, you disgrace and blaspheme God, your provider.

2. God's people are not called to shirk responsibility.

a. God created humanity and placed them on Earth to be responsible stewards of Creation.

b. Our actions and behaviors are meant to point people to God, and cause them to give God praise.

1. A great example of this is in 1 Kings 10.

2. When the queen of Sheba saw how excellent King Solomon maintained his court and everything in it, she glorified God.

3. God has placed each one of us in a sphere of responsibility.

a. You are called to cultivate, nurture, and care for those things and people within your sphere of responsibility.

b. Failure to do so does not glorify God.

C. Failure of responsibility has real results.

1. Get caught stealing at night, and you die, it was your fault.
2. Get caught stealing animals, the thief pays back at least double if not more.
3. If you accidentally burn a neighbors field, or your animals get out and eat the field, the person had to repay from the best of their own possession.
4. God expected Israel to be upright in all of their dealings and interactions.
 - a. That means being responsible for our actions.
 - b. In a nation that seems void of responsibility, we should remember what Scripture has said.
 - c. To "be holy" involves us being responsible.
 - d. An irresponsible Christian is not a holy Christian.

2. We are responsible for our relationships. VS. 16-17

"16 "If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged, and he sleeps with her, he must certainly pay the bridal price for her to be his wife. 17 If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must pay an amount in silver equal to the bridal price for virgins."

A. First of all, this is not talking about rape.

1. The punishment for rape was death. (Deut. 22:25-27).
2. Deuteronomy is clear that the woman is not at fault and does not deserve punishment in the situation of rape.
 - a. This was revolutionary in the treatment of women.
 - b. Even today, many cultures inflict the woman with punishment when she was the victim.
 - c. Even American culture tends to punish the victim of rape instead of the perpetrator.

B. What is in view here is an unmarried couple who sleep with each other.

1. What makes this situation “tricky” for our culture is understanding the value of virginity and what “bridal price” means.

2. First, did you notice that this section comes under the heading of “robbery”.

a. A father would receive a bride-price or wedding gift that would compensate for the loss of the daughter.

b. Often, a price would be negotiated and when the groom had acquired the bridal-price, he would come, give the gifts and then be married.¹

c. This is why betrothals were legally binding: it was a financial contract.

3. The would-be groom brought the bridal price, and the father of the bride “proved” or attested to his daughter’s virginity.

4. Without her virginity, the price would not be paid or would be greatly diminished.

C. Too often, we get caught up in two traps:

1. Some propose that we should do everything exactly the way they did it back then: It’s in the Bible so that’s what we have to do.

2. Or, we dismiss passages like this saying “That’s OT and only for the Jews, so there is no value to this passage.”

3. Both approaches miss the point of these Scripture.

D. This passage attests to the importance God has placed upon purity, family, and honor.

¹ Cole, R. Alan. *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 2. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.

1. One author put it well:

“There are always men around who would like to have the pleasures of sex without the responsibilities of marriage. Given the chance, they will take advantage of a young woman. But sex should never be separated from a covenant commitment. So in Israel a man couldn’t just sleep around. If he seduced a girl, he had to do the right thing, which was to marry her.”

2. Holiness demands the recognition of right and wrong and our responsibility to do what is right.

a. Notice, also that sleeping with someone did not mean they were married in God’s eyes.

b. The father, upon finding out, had the right to refuse the marriage and still make the man pay the price.

1. This payment of price protected the father and even the woman by becoming her dowry.¹

2. For those who like to declare “I’m married in the sight of God” without getting married through proper channels are wanting the benefits without the responsibility.

3. I know in our day and time that many older people do not want to get married again because they would lose their benefits.

a. I’m sorry that you are put in that position.

b. But do not justify your decision by Scripture.

3. Is virginity still a big deal?

a. For many years, the only discussion of sex within the church was negative.

1. But we talk about sex and purity fairly often in our youth services and in adult services.

2. We do this because we refuse to let the world dominate the discussion what God created: A husband and wife, coming together, and becoming one flesh.

b. I think it is healthy for us to realize that a large-part of the sexuality discussion is the view that virginity is a "social construct".

1. In other words, virginity is what we make of it.

2. And if we make too much of it, then we cause harm and shame.

c. But how are we to talk about this within the realm of redemptive community? How should we talk to each other and our families in a way that is loving and biblical?

1. Talk to your kids about sex as a gift from God.

a. If the only mention of sex is negative, you could be setting them up for major problems for when they are married. If something is always negative, it's hard to flip the switch to it being positive.

b. Value sexual purity: being aware of the shows you watch and the language you use.

c. A certain level of openness about your past can be helpful as your children grow and mature. Your experiences can serve as redemptive examples of how God heals and changes.

2. As a Church, we have to normalize having difficult conversations about sexuality.

a. We need to teach that sexual purity is important.

b. We need to teach that sexual sin is not the unpardonable sin.

c. We need to teach that sexual sin carries a great price and a great pain.

d. But God redeems, God restores, and God heals.

d. "Premarital sex was not permitted, to assure responsibility and to honor and maintain a strong family social structure."²

3. We are responsible for our worship. 18-20, 28.

¹⁸"Do not allow a sorceress to live. ¹⁹"Whoever has sexual intercourse with an animal must be put to death. ²⁰"Whoever sacrifices to any gods, except the LORD alone, is to be set apart for destruction. ²⁸"You must not blaspheme God or curse a leader among your people.

A. God is preparing Israel to live in a land that had been full of idolatry.

1. The inhabitants of the Promised Land had practiced sorcery and participated in cultic activity that involved bestiality.

2. God's holiness would not allow this sort of behavior to continue in Israel's worship.

B. The conversation surrounding the "sorceress to live" is interesting.

1. First, it demonstrates a great tendency for women to be involved in the occult and demonic.

a. Second, Almost every ancient culture had a law that did not permit sorcery or witchcraft.

² Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus*, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, vol. 2, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 107.

b. Even though they did not worship the One True God, they recognized a darkness in witchcraft and sorcery that even they did not want to permit.

2. Deuteronomy provides additional information about what Israel was going to face in Canaan.

Deuteronomy 18:9–15 (CSB)

OCCULT PRACTICES VERSUS PROPHETIC REVELATION

⁹“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations. ¹⁰No one among you is to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens, practice sorcery, ¹¹cast spells, consult a medium or a spiritist, or inquire of the dead. ¹²Everyone who does these acts is detestable to the LORD, and the LORD your God is driving out the nations before you because of these detestable acts. ¹³You must be blameless before the LORD your God. ¹⁴Though these nations you are about to drive out listen to fortune-tellers and diviners, the LORD your God has not permitted you to do this.

¹⁵“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.

C. God recognized a desire within the people to want to know the future.

1. And if God’s ways seemed unclear or too slow, they would turn to whomever would give them the “knowledge” they desired.

a. That is why verse 15 features Moses saying “God will raise up for you a prophet like me...”

b. This prophet is Jesus.

2. The danger with occultic practices is that it opens yourself to real, demonic attack and oppression.

3. **To engage with the demonic is to intentionally exclude Jesus.**

1. This engagement rarely begins with something really overt.

2. It could begin with simpler things like horoscopes and tarot.

4. Would you permit me to speak into your life for a moment in a very direct way?

a. Dear parents, would you prayerfully consider how your family participates in Halloween?

b. Have you considered the origins, the results, and the imagery?

c. Have you considered the dangers of exposing yourself and your kids to emulations of horror such as haunted houses or horror movies?

D. Exodus 22 told Israel to kill the sorceress to avoid exposure to the dangerous reality of the demonic.

1. The New Testament does not condone killing those involved in sorcery, so that part is no longer applicable.

2. However, the first Christians dealt with the power of darkness through the power of light, not by joining and celebrating the darkness.

3. Believers today should prayerfully consider their own involvement in celebrations of darkness, such as Halloween.

E. Exodus 22 also warns us about the danger of cursing leadership.

1. This theme is picked up in the New Testament in Romans and other of Paul's letters.

2. Interestingly, God placed the dangers of blaspheming God very close to cursing leaders.

3. Here's what the Spirit is saying today: BE VERY CAREFUL WHO and WHAT YOU CURSE.

a. This is different than disagreeing.

b. This is different than calling out someone's wrong, or their hypocrisy, or their sin.

c. We are called to judge, examine fruit of believers, and to be wise as serpents.

d. All of this is different than cursing our leaders.

e. However, I encourage all of us to invest more time and effort in praying for people and situations and less time watching commentary and adding our curses to the litany of "idle words" that we will someday give an account for.

4. We are responsible for the vulnerable. 21-27

A. God reminded Israel of where she had come from.

1. Although slavery was not her identity, it was part of her past.

2. My past is part of my story.

a. It tells me where I have been.

b. But my past does dictate where I am going.

B. **God did not want Israel to treat their neighbors like Egypt treated them.**

1. So God often, and repeatedly throughout Scripture, reminds Israel of her responsibility to the poor, the widow, and the orphan.

2. This was vital in a world without social security, government assistance, and many of the safeguards our society has today.

3. However, believers have a responsibility to the hurting and poor around us.

C. The first Deacons in Acts 6 come upon the scene in order to expand the feeding ministry to the widows.

1. The book of James claims that true and faultless religion is one that look after the orphan and widow.

a. In other words, two groups of people who cannot help themselves.

b. No groups were more vulnerable than orphans and widows.

2. But we also see the role of personal responsibility:

a. Paul said "those who don't work do not eat".

b. To Timothy Paul, told the church not to take care of widows who were being lazy and who were not serving the church in whatever ways possible. 1 Timothy 5:3-16

3. We must recognize responsibility that works both directions.

a. This Church has helped hundreds of people over the years.

b. Each time I answer a request, I try to be obedient to what I sense God wants us to do.

c. Sometimes, I'm led to help people even though they aren't "worthy".

d. Other times, I say no because the situation does not seem right.

4. When encountering people, may we always be guided by compassion and wisdom.

Close: Holiness demands giving our best to God.

A. It is our responsibility to not hold anything back from God.

1. ²⁹ "You must not hold back offerings from your harvest or your vats. Give me the firstborn of your sons. ³⁰ Do the same with your cattle and your flock. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but on the eighth day you are to give them to me.

2. This looks very different for us today.

a. You do not have to substitute your firstborn son with an animal sacrifice.

b. You don't have to give your first calf to the temple or to the church.

3. But if you are holding back your best from God, you are not walking holy.

B. What does this look like?

1. Exodus 22 refers specifically to financial and tangible things.

a. The people did not necessarily receive paychecks like us.

b. As an agrarian society, they were to give the first and the best to God.

2. Ladies and Gentlemen, when we withhold from God our tithes, our time, and our talents, we are not walking the way God wants for us.

a. Does not the God who saved us deserve our best?

b. When we read passages such as Exodus 21 and 22, we are confronted with how sinful we are and how good God is.

c. Today, we are reminded that we have responsibilities.

1. God has not called us to nothing.

2. He has called us to be holy.

3. To be set-apart for God's purpose and plan.

May our prayer today lead us to a greater commitment to God.
