

OpenTheo

Exodus 20:18 - 21:11



Exodus - Steve Gregg

In Exodus 20:18-21:11, the Israelites react with fear to God's power and commands at Mount Sinai. The Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21-23 reveals God's ideas about justice in society, with a focus on treating slaves humanely and respecting women's rights in marriage. Though some of the biblical laws regarding physical discipline and polygamy seem strange to modern society, they provide insight into God's perspective on justice and respect for human life. Christians should not mistake the New Testament's emphasis on personal salvation as an indication that God no longer cares about justice, as it remains a core theme in Christ's program for establishing his kingdom.

Transcript

Our last three lectures were focused on the Ten Commandments, which are in Exodus 20, and we didn't even cover all of Exodus 20 because the Ten Commandments only occupy the first 17 verses, and so we're going to pick it up at verse 18. It should be understood that the Ten Commandments seem to have been uttered out loud from the mountain. Remember, Israel had come to Mount Sinai and they were camped there at the foot of the mountain, and God had told Moses to put up boundaries around the mountain.

Nobody was allowed to come up there except Moses and whoever else God told to come up there. And so they put boundaries up there. Anyone who would touch the mountain, even an animal that touched the mountain, would be put to death.

And then at the top of the mountain, there was fire, there was smoke, there was thunderstorm, there was loud trumpet sounds, apparently emanating from some supernatural source. And then there was, I believe, the booming voice of God uttering the Ten Commandments. But that is the only part that Israel heard God speak.

It says in verse 18, Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking. And when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, You speak with us and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die.

And Moses said to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you and that his fear may be before you so that you may not sin. So the people stood afar off and Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was. Now, the people fearing to hear God's voice, that's really a that's really a tragic thing.

It seems to me like that'd be a really rare opportunity to be able to hear God speak with a booming voice from from the cloud. But the people were not really very loyal to God. As it turns out, we find out because the golden captain said that would come up a little later.

And they they must have known their own hearts. They must have known that they could not face God quite so directly without perhaps incurring judgment upon themselves. And we read in Hebrews chapter 12 about this.

Because in Hebrews, the author is trying to teach his Jewish Christian readers. That they should not consider going back to Judaism, even though they have received persecution ever since becoming Christians and they would and this persecution comes from their Jewish neighbors and family. And so there was a temptation on the part of the readers.

To depart from Christ and to return to Judaism and throughout the book of Hebrews, the author is trying to persuade them that's a really bad idea. And in the midst of well, near the end of his discussion in chapter 12, verse 18, he says, For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire. To the blackness and darkness and tempest and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

For they could not endure what was commanded, and if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it should be stoned or thrust through with an arrow. And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, I am exceedingly afraid and trembling. By the way, we don't have record of Moses saying, I am exceedingly afraid and trembling, except in the Septuagint in Deuteronomy 9, 19.

In the Greek, in the New Testament, I mean, the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, Moses words are quoted from there here. But we see that the writer of Hebrews said this spectacle scared them so much, but it says they also could not endure what was commanded in verse 20 here. They begged that the words not be spoken to them directly anymore, and they could not endure what was commanded.

Now, the writer of Hebrews is pointing out that the Old Covenant was scary. The Old Covenant was demanding, even would require someone to be killed if they infringed it even so much as to touch the mountain. But he goes on to say, but we've we've come to Mount Zion and he talks about the wonderful things that we've come to.

And obviously, as an incentive to his readers to not go back to Mount Sinai or not go

back to Judaism. And so we read here in Exodus 20 of them having this reaction. They don't want to hear God's voice anymore.

Let Moses go and hear from God for them, and then they will hear from Moses. I guess that is the religious sentiment of many people. They really want somebody else to hear from God for them.

And this is something that some people are just disposed that way, and some are disposed the opposite way. I'm the opposite. I'd rather hear directly from God if possible.

I'd love to have God speak directly to me. And sometimes he has not quite like we read about here. But obviously, Jesus said, my sheep know my voice and follow me.

And I believe that it's normative for Christians to hear directly from God, at least at times. And yet many Christians would rather just let the preacher do the hearing and repeating of what he thinks God wants them to hear. And to the degree that people are that way, to that same degree that religious leaders become authoritarian.

And, you know, people lose their ability to know what God wants because they just listen to human messengers. And not all human messengers are as faithful as Moses was. In the book of Numbers, we'll find God saying about Moses that Moses was faithful in all of God's house.

But not all ministers are. And I think Christians are to have the privilege of hearing directly from God, which was something that the Old Testament people did not generally do. That's the benefit of having the Holy Spirit given to us in the new covenant so that he resides in us.

And Paul said, as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Over in Romans chapter eight, I believe it's 14. Yeah, Romans 8, 14.

As many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God. So it's not God's desire that individuals have to depend upon some intermediary human being to hear from God and then repeat back what God has to say. Well, that's what the Israelites chose.

And perhaps that's what some people choose today because there's too much responsibility involved in having to hear from God for yourself. It's so much easier to let someone else hear from God, since it is often sometimes difficult to discern whether what you think you're hearing from God is God or not. But there's nothing more valuable to cultivate than that ability.

And perhaps it takes a lifetime to become very adept at knowing when it's God speaking and when it's something else, some other impression in your life. But in any case, this is what our life on earth is for, is to get to know God and therefore to get to know his voice as well. The children of Israel were not going to get to know God very well, as it turns

out.

And one of the reasons was seen in their attitude here. Don't let God speak to us. Moses, you speak to us instead.

Verse 22, Then the Lord said to Moses, Thus, you shall say to the children of Israel, You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to me with me to be with me. Gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves.

Now, Moses pointed out to them over in Deuteronomy, chapter four and verse 12, that at the mountain, God did not show them any image of himself in Deuteronomy 4:12. Moses said, You always spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but you saw no form, you only heard a voice.

Now, what are you saying there is therefore, you must not try to make an image of him since you don't have any idea what he looks like. He did not reveal his appearance to you. Now, later on in the book of Numbers, we find that God apparently did appear to Moses in a way that Moses could know what he looked like, but Moses was reliable and faithful and would not be one that would make images of him.

But in Numbers chapter 12, Numbers 12, when God is rebuking Miriam and Aaron for their momentary rebellion against Moses. And because Miriam was a prophetess, too, and Aaron was a priest, they thought that they should share some of the leadership with with Moses. And they complained and God spoke in Numbers 12, six.

Then he said, Hear now my words, if there is a prophet among you. I, Yahweh, make myself known to him in a vision and I speak to him in a dream, not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.

I speak with him face to face, even plainly and not in dark scenes. And he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? So Moses actually saw the form of God.

He is unlike other prophets. And why did God let Moses in? Because he was faithful in all his house and he knew that Moses would not be tempted, therefore, to make images of God, having seen what God looks like. But as we saw in Deuteronomy 4, 12, Moses said to the people, you didn't see any form.

You heard the voice. You heard the noise that God did not show you what he looks like. And that is because, of course, God doesn't want anyone to try to depict him.

And so in Exodus 20, 23, you shall not make anything to be with me. Gods of silver, gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. Now, the last few verses of chapter 20 are a little strange in that it talks about making an altar.

And yet within a few chapters, he's going to tell them how to make a brazen altar and a golden altar, which are to be used regularly in their worship and their sacrifices. And yet apparently at this point, they were supposed to be building altars, perhaps on special occasions or maybe just at the foot of the mountain. We're not told exactly what the setting is for the use of the altar is about to describe or the time frame.

It's possible that even after the tabernacle was built and they had the brazen altar for offering sacrifices, that people who lived too far away from where the tabernacle was erected would have to offer occasional sacrifices elsewhere. And so he tells them if you're going to build altars, here's what you have to build them like. In verse 24, an altar of earth you shall make for me and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen in every place where I record my name, I will come to you and I will bless you.

And if you make me an altar of stone, you should not build it of hewn stone, for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it, nor shall you go up to it by step to my altar that your nakedness may not be exposed on it. Now, I'm not sure exactly, as I said, if this is for the whole congregation to have one altar or if he's just talking about whenever you make altars in various places, make them out of earth or you could make them out of stone as long as you don't carve the stones, you'll profane it if you carve the stones.

Now, it's interesting how the sentiments in this particular paragraph differ from the sentiments of so many in church history in terms of architecture. In the Middle Ages, of course, great cathedrals were built that are still marbles and tourist attractions and so forth and still used by the Roman Catholic Church and similar ornate buildings by Protestant denominations, too.

I guess they think it's really honoring to God to have fancy architecture. But God seemed to think that the things that are built for the purpose of worship should be not the kind of things that draw attention to themselves, not ornate things, not fancy things. Those are the kind of things that distract people from God.

If you're going to come to an altar or a building or something that man has built as a as a gathering point for worship, God seems to want it to be something that is not going to be very flashy, something that's not going to distract you from what you're there for, that you're not going to marvel at the beauty of the altar or the beauty of the building. He says, don't even carve the stones, just use rough stones right out of the ground or just make it out of mud, make the altar out of earth. Now, it's funny because in the tabernacle, the altar and the ark and all things were very elaborate, but the average person was not really spending time worshipping there.

The average person did not go inside the tabernacle. They would see the brazen altar out in front. But all the really elaborate gold and stuff was inside the tent where only the priest would go.

Apparently, God did not want the average worshiper to associate worship with fancy furniture, fancy buildings, even the even the tabernacle itself, though on the inside it was beautiful because its walls were gold plated. Its ceiling was a tapestry of red and blue and purple, but that tapestry was covered over with three other layers and the outside layer of the tabernacle was just leather, just beaten animal skin. It was a weather tarp over it so that on the outside the tabernacle looked very ordinary, not colorful at all.

You go inside and it's gold, reflective gold walls and and colorful ceiling. It'd be beautiful in there. But you look on the outside and it's just very plain.

And so, again, although the priests were allowed to go inside, other people were not. And that suggests that God didn't want the Israelites to be looking at the tavern and say, look at that beautiful masterpiece of a building that we've built. Now, in Solomon built the temple, it seemed to violate that principle.

And yet we are told that he had received plans from David, a blueprint for the temple, which David had received by revelation. So maybe God, I don't know why God did it different in the days of Solomon, but it's very clear that here he's interested in simple, natural, undistracting designs for the altar and also on pretentious because he says in verse 26, you shall not go up to it by steps. That is, don't build the altar up really high where the person has to go up on steps to get to it.

It's amazing how some churches were constructed just the opposite of this and had the pulpit up high and almost like a balcony, a little balcony box where the preacher would ascend by steps and preach from there, perhaps mainly for acoustical purposes. But it seems to me like it would have the effect of elevating the minister to something of a higher spiritual plane in the side of the people. And I think that's what God is against.

Now, he said here that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it. And this is understood one of two ways. Some feel that if they're talking about literal nakedness, that a person's private parts might be visible from those at ground level as he goes up on the steps because they wore these garments that were essentially skirts.

And that it might put the person in a position for his undergarments, at least, to be exposed, his nakedness to be exposed. But it's very probable that nakedness here is figurative because there's many times the term nakedness is used, not in a literal way, as when Joseph told his brothers, saying they were spies, that they had come to spy out the nakedness of the land or the vulnerability of the land. In other words, the Bible says in Hebrews, all things are naked and open before him with whom we have to do.

And it's possible that this is saying your nakedness would be. You would be exposing yourself to be pretentious. If you try to elevate yourself in worship by going up steps to a high altar, that God will expose you for what you are and your nakedness may be exposed.

That is to say, you will be, God will expose you for the hypocrite or the whatever, that you're pretending, the pretentiousness of what you're pretending to be will be exposed. It's not entirely clear. This is a very strange paragraph, but its general sentiments in verses 24 through 26 clearly are not anything elaborate.

Not anything fancy. Now, in chapters 21 through 23, we come to what's usually called the book of the covenant. It's called that because it's called that in the book.

Later on, it refers to God, to Moses, writing down the book of the covenant, which is these laws in these chapters. And so in chapters 21, 22 and 23, we have a lot of miscellaneous laws. For the most part, they can be recognized as applications of the Ten Commandments to specific case law, but not always.

Some of them, it's not really clear what direct effect they have on the Ten Commandments. But they do reveal God's ideas about justice in society. And we need to remember that that is something that God is concerned about.

All the prophets, when they came to Israel, complained that Israel was neglecting justice. They were being unjust. And this injustice was often reflected in what the courts were doing and how the regular citizens used or abused the courts.

The judges were quite capable of being bribed in many cases. And so a person who had enough money to bribe a judge would usually get what he wanted in court, rather than what justice would require. A judge's justice, his clear vision, would be perverted by a bribe, the Bible says.

I actually said that in these laws here. And therefore, widows and orphans, who were people who usually had less money, were often taken advantage of in court by rich neighbors who wanted to take their property or in other ways, you know, disadvantage them. And so the prophets were often complaining about how the widows and the orphans do not receive justice in the courts in Israel.

And now that Christ has come, it's a mistake for us to think that God no longer cares about justice. He just wants us all to get people to go to heaven. Because that's not what the New Testament teaches.

It is sort of the mentality that many Christians have. In fact, if you talk too much about social justice, people think you're teaching a social gospel. And the social gospel is sometimes a term that's used for a liberal, bloodless gospel, a gospel that doesn't require personal salvation or a personal savior or a blood atonement.

But rather, the social gospel sometimes is a term used for the teaching of some liberal churches that what Jesus came to do is to establish political justice and to overthrow oppression, institutionalized oppression. And therefore, people like this move into the realm of what they call liberation theology many times, which amounts to basically

supporting communistic revolutions against what are regarded to be oppressive governments and, you know, popular movements of the people rising up. And there's a lot of the priests in Latin America have signed on to what's called liberation theology, and they lead some of these movements to overthrow dictators and so forth and establish more of a communistic state.

And liberation theology is unfortunately very closely wedded to communistic, economic and political theory. And therefore, evangelicals who are aware of this often want to avoid the social gospel, as they call it. And yet the social gospel, well, the real gospel is a social gospel.

Certainly, it's not just about the way we relate with God. It's also about the way we relate with people. And that's a social issue.

Jesus said that there's two commandments of apparently equal weight. One, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. And the second is like it.

He said, you should love your neighbors yourself. Well, we in the evangelical churches often have emphasized the first of those, the need to have a relationship with God properly. And that's a good thing to emphasize, because a lot of people in churches don't have a good relationship with God and need one.

But we have to remember that Jesus said the other commandment is like that. There's a similar obligation to love your neighbor as you love yourself. And the way you love your neighbor is in practical terms.

And the law of God is one of those is the place where we see what justice is. And justice is a part of love. You cannot love somebody and be unjust to them deliberately.

If you look at Isaiah chapter 42, just for a moment, this is a prophecy about Jesus. It's even quoted in the New Testament. It's one of the prophecies of Jesus quoted in the New Testament in Matthew chapter 12 at verse 18.

But Isaiah 42, one says, behold, my servant, that's Jesus, whom I uphold, my elect one in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.

He will not cry out, nor raise his voice, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break. A smoking flax he will not quench.

He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth. And the coastland shall wait for his law.

So this time about Jesus and it's quoted in Matthew as being fulfilled in the preaching of Jesus. At least, you know, beginning to be fulfilled. This is talking about what Christ's

program is ultimately going to accomplish.

Not just to bring a bunch of people to heaven. Of course, everybody who follows Christ after they die, going to be with the Lord is where they'll go. But it's clear that this lays out the Messiah's program as one that has an interest in establishing justice.

Look at how many times it says it. Verse one, he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. In verse three, it says he will bring forth justice for truth.

And verse four, it says he will establish justice in the earth. Now, how does Jesus establish justice in the earth? Does he overthrow governments and raise up popular communistic revolutions to overthrow oppression? No, he brings justice by bringing justice into the lives of individuals and making them into just people so that they behave justly. And the more people who become disciples and who follow Christ's command, the more we will find justice being lived out in the earth.

Now, the idea is for Christ to be Lord of all, for every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus is Lord. And if every person were to confess Jesus is Lord, then justice would be the predominant feature of society. And God is very concerned that justice be practiced because that is love.

Justice is love in action. And so when we come to the laws of God in the book of the covenant, Exodus 21, 22 and 23, we're reading those laws about which Paul said. Remember, we saw it in Romans 7. Romans 7, Paul said, we know that the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good, just and good.

So when we read God's laws here, we're reading that which is just. Now, I say that because we're going to immediately run into things that don't seem just to us. And there's a reason why they don't seem just to us.

And that's because our thoughts are conditioned more by modern culture than by God's laws. That's why David said he meditated day and night on the law of God. He was the king of Israel.

Every king should meditate on the law of God. You meditate on it. And in fact, we should meditate on these laws because it says that's how we become like a tree planted by rivers of water by meditating day and night on the law of God.

It's because although we do not apply some of these laws in the same way in our society, for example, laws about slavery or certain other laws. And because also we are not a the Christians, the church is not a political state. And therefore, Christians don't run a criminal justice system of their own.

Therefore, the penalties that are prescribed here for certain sins or crimes, we don't we don't execute people. That's not our role. But even if it's not our role to execute people,

these laws still will tell us what God thinks about these things.

For example, if we think it's a small matter to curse your parents and we read that a person who cursed his father and mother was to be put to death, we realize that in the perfectly just laws of God, there are no penalties that are excessive. And therefore, when we read a penalty that seem excessive to us, it only means that we have underestimated the magnitude of the crime. We don't realize how great a sin certain things are until we find out that the penalty God has put on them is much more severe than we would have thought.

And that doesn't mean that God was somehow barbarian. It means that we have become out of touch with the sinfulness of sin. And while we don't go out and execute witches, for example, we're going to execute adulterers.

Yet when we see that God has said they should be put to death, we realize that those sins are ranked among the most heinous of sins that God could list. And so the penalties in God's law are not penalties that we insist upon executing. In fact, we don't want to execute anybody.

In fact, there is a law in this code and I for nine, a tooth for two. And it's a good law. It's a good law for the courts to follow.

But it's not it's not a law that Christians wish to use in their personal relationships with other people. But it does mean, of course, that we recognize that every person is equal in value to every other person. That's what law for an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth points out that my eye and your eye are of equal value.

You take mine, you got to lose yours. Unless I don't press charges. But if the courts get a hold of the case, they take your eye for my eye.

Because you and I are of equal value when we have a criminal justice system that allows people to injure other people without receiving a commensurate injury back. We have a justice system that is diminishing the value of the victim and so not treating everybody as equal. But we'll get to that issue when we come to those laws that are specifically about that.

One thing that we find immediately as we read chapter 121, excuse me, and verse one and following, we find that slavery is a is an institution taken for granted immediately. We think that's not just. But then we have to ask ourselves, well, why do we say that? Let's look at what it says.

Now, these are the judgments which you shall set before them. If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years. In the seventh, he should go out free and pay nothing.

If he comes in by himself, he should go out by himself. If he comes in married, then his

wife should go out with him. If his master has given him a wife and she has born him sons and daughters, the wife and her children shall be her masters and he should go out by himself.

But if the servant plainly says, I love my master, my wife, my children, I will not go out free. Then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door or to the doorpost and his master shall pierce his ear with an all and he shall serve him forever.

Now, like I said, the whole idea of slavery is odious to modern Western civilization, and that's because we feel that we are more enlightened than than the people in biblical times. Now, we are, in many respects, more enlightened. Christ obviously brought more light on the on what it means to love, but Christ did not abolish slavery.

And even after Christ was gone, the apostles did not abolish slavery. Both Paul and Peter addressed slaves and masters. And the slaves were told to be submissive to their masters, the masters were told not necessarily to release their slaves, as one might think a Christian should do, but rather to treat them justly, to treat them kindly like a member of the family, as a brother.

Now, it bothers some people that God permitted slavery in the Old Testament and that even the New Testament permits slavery and that Paul didn't speak against it. The commentaries on Exodus often are mealy mouthed about this. They say, well, you know, although the New Testament doesn't specifically forbid slavery, it teaches principles which makes slavery inconsistent and impossible to continue.

Now, the confusion comes from the fact that when we think of slavery today, we have a particular model of slavery in mind that was very different than the slavery in biblical times. We are thinking specifically of what is usually called Atlantic slavery, the historical slavery of the of the early centuries of this nation's history, where European kidnappers would go to Africa and would kidnap black people and bring them as slaves to the Western world and would sell them. And of course, they were treated very badly.

They were treated like they weren't even human. They were treated so badly on the slave ships that a good portion of them died before they got even over to the to America or to the other lands that were buying them. And then once they were purchased, they were often treated like they were just chattel, like they were just animals or worse.

Now, that kind of slavery is objectionable to Christians and would have been objectionable to the Old Testament, too. Because kidnapping was punishable by death and Atlantic slavery. That is African slavery that was brought slaves brought across the Atlantic to here.

That involved as its very first step, kidnapping. And under the law of Moses, those slaves

would have been put to death for kidnapping. Furthermore, if the slaves were purchased over here, the law of Moses would have required that they be treated as human beings.

That they be treated as Christians should treat them like brothers. Now, we would still object to slavery, even under better conditions in our day, because we have come to points where we have we're influenced more by the Enlightenment and the idea of humanism than we are by biblical ideas. And we simply think that human freedom, human liberty is something that is a something that we should never impinge upon.

But we're pretty inconsistent about that because many people work at jobs that are a little better than slavery and much less secure. You see, slavery in the Bible was not like Atlantic slavery, the slaves were not kidnapped. Sometimes they were prisoners of war, but the war was not conducted in order to get slaves.

The wars were conducted about other issues. Once one nation conquered another nation, they often took slaves of those survivors. Rather than killing them all.

And these slaves then got to live. But many people were slaves by their own choice. Many people were slaves because of their economic circumstances.

Just like today, there are people who do not seem to be able to pay their bills. They go into debt and they can never repay their debts. And in this country, they maybe file for bankruptcy or they may end up homeless.

Even in biblical times, someone who is insolvent and could not pay his debts would sell himself into slavery. That would happen frequently so that a man was a slave because he found it necessary and desirable to be a slave. Why? Because if he had a nice master, his master would buy his housing, his clothing, his medical, his food, everything would be covered.

He had security. All he had to do is serve his master. And there are people who do that now.

They serve their employers. Like slaves, in some cases. Of course, not really like slaves.

I mean, your employers, they can't beat you. They can't sexually assault you. They can't kill you, as some masters did their slaves in biblical times.

But that kind of behavior was not permitted. I mean, beating, yes. Beating was permitted.

Disciplinary action, just like with a son. A slave could be disciplined physically if he is rebellious. But he could not be... That was a crime, you see.

It was a crime for the slave to rebel against his master. And just like criminals would be beaten, so would slaves be beaten or rebellious sons were beaten. That seems strange

to us.

But a beating, properly conducted, is only a disciplinary action. It's not a permanently damaging action. And many people in our society don't even want to spank their children.

They even think it's wrong to spank children. Which shows again how far we've drifted from a sensible biblical worldview. You know, infliction of pain is something God himself does to correct people.

And Jesus said, whom I love, I rebuke and I chasten. And the Lord scourges, that means whips, every son in whom he delights. It says in Hebrews chapter 12.

This is very different from our way of thinking. But, you know, whenever we find that our way of thinking is different than God's way of thinking, there's two possibilities. Either we're wrong or God's wrong.

No, come to think of it, there's only one possibility. Because God's never wrong. So if we don't agree with God about something, then we should.

Now, I'm not saying that we should go back to slavery, because the kind of slavery that was practiced in this country was immoral. It was something the law itself would have condemned and would have executed the slave traders as criminals. But in a society where people were able to sell themselves into slavery, that was a security situation, a financially secure situation.

The reason that most slaves were slaves was because they couldn't take care of themselves economically and their master could take care of them and they felt more secure having somebody else take care of them. It's a very un-American way of thinking because we Americans are very independent. We don't want anyone to take our rights away.

And I'm just like any American in this respect. I don't want that. On the other hand, there are people, and many of them, in the modern world as well as the ancient world, who would gladly give up their freedoms for their security.

Our whole country is moving more in that direction with this whole idea of health care. Give up my freedom to make choices about my health care. Give up my freedom to spend money as I believe God wants me to spend it.

Let the government take more and more of it so that they'll give me security so I know that if I get sick, someone else will take care of me. If I get hungry, somebody else will feed me. If I need, if I'm out of a job, the government will give me welfare.

You see, it's just the same mentality. The idea is if I can't take care of myself, or even if I

can but don't want to, if I don't mind giving up my freedoms to have somebody else take care of everything for me, then that's the same mentality as drove many people into slavery. The difference here is that in that day, a person could sell himself into slavery and be secure for the rest of his life financially.

In our day, we can't. There are no slaves, and therefore, he has to go out and get a job. But there's many people who have jobs, even double and triple jobs, and still are losing their houses.

They're still not sure where they're going to live. They're still insecure. We aren't them, so we're not really aware of that.

And we would never be in—none of us are in a position where we'd even be tempted to sell ourselves into slavery if that was an option. But there are many people who are homeless right now, who in a society where it was taken for granted that if you're really in trouble, you could sell yourself as a slave. They would do it.

And we even see in the laws we just read there's—that a Hebrew slave was to be offered his freedom after six years. In the seventh year, he was supposed to be released if he wanted to go. But it was suggested maybe he wouldn't want to go.

He might want to stay a slave. And, of course, one of the conditions that are mentioned is that if he, as a slave during those six years, if his master has given him another slave woman to be his wife, and he has children and so forth, he may have become attached to his family and want to stay there, even if he doesn't much like being a slave, in which case his family is kind of an anchor to hold him into the household, and that might feel like he's kind of under duress to stay. But there's also the other option, says he might say, I love my master.

I want to stay a slave. And even as bad as slavery was in this country and as evil as it was, when the emancipation was declared, there were some slaves that were not eager to leave the plantation because they had Christian masters. They—the slaves had become like part of the family.

They didn't—and, you know, they were secure. They were happy. They were treated well.

I realize that many slaves were not treated well, and they were probably very happy to be released, but not all the slaves found being emancipated really what they really wanted. We assume, perhaps, that if somebody owns another person, they will buy—they will abuse them. And that's because so much, you know, of human nature is that way.

But the law of God and the Spirit of Christ in the New Testament created a new kind of people, or at least was supposed to create a new kind of condition for slaves, in that

slaves would—although they were slaves and slavery was not abolished, nor necessarily should it have been. They—they were to be treated fairly, like human beings. You see, the laws of slavery in Israel were much more humane and much more honoring of slaves' rights than the laws of similar nations—of other nations around Israel at the time.

All nations had slaves. In fact, all nations had slaves up until the—up until the 1800s. For almost 6,000 years, slavery was something that all societies saw as either useful or, you know, good or right or just something that, you know, an oppression that some people were able to impose on another.

It was abolished here in the 19th century, and we're glad that it was, except now there's going to be people—see, here's the thing. What should have been done here probably is that immoral slavery should have been outlawed. You know, kidnapping Africans and bringing them over here against their will, that should have been outlawed.

There should have been prosecution of those who did those kinds of crimes. But it shouldn't necessarily have been illegal for a person, if he wished, to sell himself into slavery, because then you wouldn't have to have the whole society brought into slavery to the government. If someone was worried about their health care or worried about their security, they could sell themselves as an individual into slavery if they wanted to.

The rest of the people could remain free if they wanted to. But, see, right now the option of selling yourself into slavery isn't available except to the government. You can sell yourself into slavery to the government, but then everyone has to go, whether they want to or not.

So the government has to put everyone into slavery. It would actually be more just if voluntary slavery was still an option, as it was in the Bible, because there are people who want to be slaves today. They don't want to call it slaves.

They don't want to call themselves slaves, but they want the conditions that slavery provided for people, security provided by somebody else. And they don't mind giving up freedom for it. But there are plenty of people who still like freedom and people who aren't interested in having somebody else to take care of them.

And so it's unjust to force them into a slave condition with the government. But in a society where it's all or nothing, then either there's going to be people who cannot be taken care of because they can't take care of themselves, or there are going to be people who can, but are forced to become slaves to the government anyway. And they don't want to be.

So actually, to have the option of a moral kind of slavery was not an evil thing. In fact, it was it's probably better than what modern people are opting for in this country. We know that Paul spoke to slaves.

I'd just like to give you some end masters, give you an example of Paul's teaching on this subject in Ephesians. Ephesians six, beginning with verse five, Paul said, servants, he means slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling and sincerity of heart as to Christ, not with eye service as men please, but as servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart with goodwill, doing service as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he's a slave or free. And you masters do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own master also is in heaven and there is no partiality with him.

So masters are told to treat their slaves kindly in Colossians chapter three. We have similar instructions. I'd like you to look at these because.

They tell us exactly what the New Testament mentality would be about slavery, not to abolish it necessarily as an option. It should never be anything that someone's forced into by being kidnapped, obviously, because kidnapping is punishable by death in the law. But in Colossians three, verse 22, the servants obey in all things your masters, according to the flesh, not with eye service as men please, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God and whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ.

But he who does wrong will be repaid for the wrong which he has done. And there is no partiality. Chapter four, verse one masters give your servants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

So slaves are told to be obedient. Christian slaves are told to be obedient to their masters and Christian masters are told to be just and fair to their slaves. In First Corinthians, chapter seven, verse 20, First Corinthians, 7:20, says, Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called, were you called while a slave says, did you get saved as a slave? As many of the Christians in the Roman Empire were slaves.

Do not be concerned about it, but if you can be made free, rather use it. So it's good to be free. If you can be, if you can't be, just consider that God has put you in that circumstance and be content there.

He says, for he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freed man. Likewise, he who is called while free is Christ's slave. Now, what he says, we're all slaves anyway.

The thing that we object to about slavery is that it takes away a man's freedom to do whatever he wants to do, and he has to do what someone else wants him to do. But in a sense, all of us give up that freedom when we become Christians. We all give up our rights.

We all come to a place where we are doing someone else's will, God's will. We've been bought with a price. And if God's will is for us to be a servant of somebody else, then that's the will of God.

If he wants us to be free, then that's the will of God, too. But even a free man isn't totally free. A free man usually has to still work, and often he has to work for an employer.

And he might even have to work several jobs, in which case he might have fewer hours free from work than a slave had and less security. Because he might lose his home anyway, and he might not be able to pay his medical. So slavery, we have the wrong impression of slavery because we have a particular paradigm of slavery, and I want to kind of practice here.

Any slavery that means you go and kidnap people from their homes and sell them as property is immoral. It was not something that was permitted, except for prisoners of war. And that's a different story.

You could kill them or take them home as slaves. You didn't want to leave them in their original state because, well, they could rebel against you again. They could rise up.

This is a conquered territory. You want them to be under, at least under tribute, which would make them sort of a slave to you as a whole society. In any case, there were a number of ways in which people could become slaves, but none of them were the ways that people became slaves in this country.

And therefore, slavery in this country was immoral. But not all slavery is immoral or else Paul would have abolished it. Some people say, well, Paul would have abolished it, but it was too entrenched in society.

He didn't feel like it could become abolished in a single generation. But they're forgetting that the slave masters would have, the Christian ones, would have to do whatever Paul said. Paul could easily say to all the slave masters in the church, release your slaves.

Slavery is inconsistent with being a Christian. But he didn't. And they would have done it.

He could have abolished slavery in the Christian community with a single command, just like he abolished idolatry in Corinth or any other pagan town with a single command. He said, you know, the Corinthians and the Greeks in general practice temple prostitution and fornication and idolatry. And Paul came and said, that's unacceptable for Christians.

And they stopped. And if Paul had said, and slavery is unacceptable for Christians, then the slave masters would have had to release their slaves. Although it would have been an economic hardship, of course, because much of the work of the empire was being done by slaves.

In any case, we see that there is this teaching that a Hebrew slave, now this was different for a non-Hebrew slave. If you had a pagan slave, it was different. But if you had a Hebrew slave, a brother, he would serve you for only six years.

And then in the seventh year, he was offered his freedom if he wanted it. If he didn't want it, if he wanted to stay a slave, that was going to be for life. He didn't keep getting seven-year increments.

If he at the end of the first six years, if he didn't want to be released, he could make a decision for life to stay a slave. And then his ear would be pierced. And he'd wear an earring that would show that he was a voluntary slave, a bond slave, as they called him.

Now, the apostles referred to themselves as bond slaves of Christ. That's the term they used in the opening of their epistles. Paul, a bond slave of God and a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

Bond slave. Peter called himself a bond slave. James called himself a bond slave.

A bond slave is a slave who's a slave because he wants to be one. Remember, Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room in John 15, he said, I don't call you any more servants, but friends. Well, he might call them friends.

They called themselves bond slaves. They were voluntary slaves for life. So you might say, well, why didn't why did he have to make a life decision at the end of six years? Why couldn't he come up for reconsideration another six years later and so forth? Well, this was for the security of both the master and the servant.

After six years serving, a slave would know whether his master was good to him or not, whether he's someone he could live with and work for the rest of his life or not. And if not, he could go free. But if he wanted to stay at that time, then he would know that the master couldn't just kick him out.

It was a life commitment. He's going to be secure for life and the master is going to know that he's not going to replace the slave. He can invest in him.

He can train him. You know, he can make him a foreman. He can give him responsibilities and know that the guy's not going to walk away in a few years.

The slave becomes part of the household, just like a wife or a son. It's for life. So after six years of being a slave, a slave really decided, does he want to become part of the family, part of the household? Of course, he'd still be in there in the role of a slave, but still he'd be there permanently like any member of the household was.

Now, there's also female slaves. And verse 7 says, if a man sells his daughter to be a maid servant or female slave, she shall not go out as the men's servants do. In other

words, after six years, she doesn't go out.

And the reason for that is strange as it may seem to us, it was usually assumed that a female slave was being purchased to be a wife to her master or a concubine. Now, this seems strange to us. We'll talk more about polygamy and some of the things that come up later in the law.

But suffice it to say that polygamy was not condemned at this point in time. And again, for the same reason, we think of polygamy as an absolute intolerable arrangement for the woman. But in those days, a woman didn't have much of a way to support herself unless she had a husband.

And most women wanted to have babies. Most women found that their real fulfillment in life came not from being a wife, but from being a mother. And in a society where there are often far more women than men, women could either share a man with other women or not marry at all.

But most women would rather in that society be married and have children, even if they had a husband who had another wife or two children, too, because they would at least have their own family rather than none. You see, if they didn't get married at all, then their father, they'd live with their father until he died. And then they then what would they do? Then they themselves might be too old to attract a husband.

So marriage was much more a necessity for women in that society just to survive than it is in modern society. Any modern woman in the Western world would much rather remain single on her own than to share a husband with another woman. It's unthinkable, but not in that society and not even in all societies today.

In Muslim societies, they still have polygamy. And in many tribal societies, is it a good thing? No, it's not a good thing. But it's not necessarily an injustice because it was it provided for women at a time when men were often in short supply.

Now, why would they be in short supply? Because of war. Men were killed off in large numbers on the battlefield, leaving widows and daughters behind and a short supply of men. So those women could either become the charge of the government to pay for or they could marry and share some of the few men that were left.

We read about this arrangement in Isaiah chapter four. Actually, at the end of chapter three and into chapter four, it talks about war and judgment coming on the nation. And it says in chapter Isaiah 325, your men shall fall by the sword and you're mighty in the war.

And then it says in verse one of chapter four, and in that day, seven women shall take hold of one man saying, we will eat our own food and wear our own apparel. Only let us be called by your name and take away our reproach. That is the reproach of being a

widow and having no husband.

Seven women sharing one man because why the men are being slain by the sword in large numbers. So you've got a whole bunch of single women and not very many available men. So, I mean, that reflects an attitude we can't relate to because we're Westerners.

But it's very foolish for us to judge all societies by our modern enlightened ideas, which enlightened just means the ideas we have. Whatever ideas we have, we call them enlightened, even if they weren't. And in some cases, they're not that enlightened, as we can see from our enlightened society.

They can't see any reason not to marry same sex couples. I mean, it's obvious that we are not a very enlightened society, but we have great confidence in our superior understanding of things. I don't believe that a woman had to marry into a polygamous situation, although sometimes daughters did have to marry whoever their father made them marry.

But certainly a widow, for example, would not have to remarry if she didn't want to. But they sometimes wanted to. Not that anyone prefers polygamy.

It's just that some would prefer polygamy to widowhood or singleness or childlessness. And so the option of polygamy was always considered to be open and under the law. Now, in the New Testament, we don't find a direct statement forbidding polygamy.

But we do see in the New Testament some things that would seem to say that it's not the right thing. Now, I think the reason it's not directly forbidden is because there were polygamous marriages in the early church. That is, there were polygamous marriages where they got saved.

Pagans who were polygamous who got saved and came into the church. In modern times, missionaries have encountered this situation in places like Africa and other tribal places that were evangelized. They find a chief or a village where the men have multiple wives and the men get saved.

Customarily, many missionary societies have made it their policy to say, OK, when a man who has multiple wives gets saved, he has to divorce all of his wives except for the first one he married because they consider his polygamy to be adultery. The Bible obviously does not equate polygamy with adultery, since the same law that forbids adultery does not forbid polygamy. Why isn't it adultery? Because the man entered into covenant relationships with each of these women.

As long as he doesn't violate those covenants, then he's not committing adultery. Because they did not assume in the covenants they made in marriage that there would be monogamy. There was no promise of monogamy, so there's no violation of

monogamy when men would take additional wives.

That is just understood in that society. Obviously be different here, because when people make marriage vows, they promise to forsake all others and cleave only to their spouse. And so any anything like polygamy in our society, when there's been those kind of marriage vows would be cheating.

That would be adultery today. But only because that's what's understood in the marriage vows. It wasn't understood in their marriage vows that they were having a monogamous relationship, necessarily.

But the New Testament does, in a sense, drive polygamy out of the Christian community, not by forcing the polygamist who got saved to give up some of their wives, but rather by essentially keeping new polygamous marriages from being formed. For example, elders had to be the husbands of one wife. Now, that suggests that if Paul said that an elder had to be the husband of one wife in First Timothy, Chapter three, and also in Titus, Chapter one, that the elder could not be a polygamist.

Why? I believe that if you look at the qualifications for elders, that everything in the list of qualifications is simply that he has to be the kind of Christian that all Christian men should be. Not all Christians are what they should be. Many Christians have substandard performance in their Christian life, and they're not necessarily thrown out of the church unless they're involved in unrepentant sin.

But an elder is supposed to be one who is not living a substandard life, but an elder is supposed to be chosen from among those men who are living a consistent life the way that all Christians should. Why? Because they have the examples. And therefore, although there apparently were polygamists in the church, none of them were allowed to be elders because their marriage would not be an example to the church of what the church really teaches and believes in.

Likewise, when Jesus was asked about divorce, he said, Have you not heard how it was from the beginning when God made them male and female and made the two one flesh? He said, If God joined them together, let not man put it asunder. Notice Paul said, I mean, Jesus said, You want to know what to think about marriage? Look at the way God made it in the Garden of Eden. It's interesting that most people entered into polygamous marriages.

Men were motivated by the desire to have a lot of children because you can have a lot more children if you have a lot more wives than one. But although God gave Adam and Eve the instructions to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and therefore having a lot of children was desirable, yet God only gave Adam one wife, which is interesting because that limited the number of children he could have at a time. And his task was to fill the earth with children.

It seems like there was some overriding concern, even more important than filling the earth with children rapidly, that made God create a monogamous marriage rather than a polygamous family. And that's because monogamy is God's model. And Jesus pointed out that the way God made it the first is the way that Christians should view marriage.

Christians should be monogamous and should not approve of polygamy. But when you find that someone who's already got a polygamous marriage gets converted, I believe it's wrong to tell them to divorce some of their wives. Polygamy is not specifically forbidden in scripture, but divorce is.

And therefore, I think the missionaries made the mistake by telling these men to divorce all their wives except one. Divorce is not right. That made them covenant breakers.

And it left some of their children fatherless and so forth. It's a bad, bad call. The early church had to deal with that very thing.

They didn't make the polygamous marriages break up, but they wouldn't let a man in a marriage like that be an elder because that would set an example of something they didn't want to set as a norm. And of course, polygamy never really seemed to be practiced after the first century or so in the church because the church upheld a different standard. And the different standards that the bride and the bridegroom have a relationship like Christ in the church.

There's only one Christ and he has only one church. And therefore, there's only one bride. And that's what marriage is supposed to be an example of.

Now, it says. If a man sells his daughter in slavery, she does not. She can't go out after six years because she is coming in really as a wife or concubine and more likely if she does not please her master who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed.

That her family can buy her out of slavery. And that would be the end of that marriage or that concubine. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people since he has dealt deceitfully with her.

That is, he it was understood that she was being bought to be betrothed to him. That's what says her master who has betrothed her to himself by buying a female slave. He was betrothing her to be a wife or a concubine.

And if he decided after he got it, she wasn't going to be someone he wanted to have as a wife and concubine. He had to let her family buy her back. He couldn't sell her off somewhere else because he's treated her wrong.

He's treated deceitfully. He took her in on the on the assumption she'd be his wife and now she's not going to be. So he can't he can't sell her to another country.

He has to sell her back to her family. And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall not be he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. So if a slave girl becomes the wife of the master's son, then she becomes like a daughter rather than like a slave to her master.

And if he takes another wife, apparently, if the the son takes another wife or the master, if he has taken this one, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing or her marriage rights. And all Hebrew scholars seem to believe that marriage rights refers to sexual rights. So, you know, he has to treat her the same and not diminish anything about her marital status if he takes an additional wife after her.

And if he does not do these things, these three things for her, then she shall go out free without paying money. So there was apparently this as a grounds of divorce, non-support. If a man would not sleep with his wife, if if he would not feed her, do not support her, then she had grounds for divorce.

She could go out free, although she had been his wife. And she didn't have to pay any money, even though she had been purchased originally with money as a slave because he has wronged her. She gets her freedom.

Now, pagan society didn't give slaves that kind of rights. Women were just property and the man could do whatever he wanted. But here are the woman's own feelings, her own rights, even though she's a slave are considered true.

She has to put up with the idea of being maybe a concubine to her master or or one of more than one of several wives. That would be unacceptable to any modern woman. But those things were what a girl grew up understanding in that society, just like in a Muslim society today.

The girl grows up knowing she may have her husband have four wives. You grow up thinking that way. You'd think differently about marriage.

Just you don't expect to have an intimate, friendly, loving relationship with your husband. You expect to be a baby maker. That's what they expected, I'm sure.

But a man, even if it was a slave wife, if he didn't treat her justly, she could go for free, leave without money. And so this is a very what we'd have to say a very kindly law compared to other laws about slaves in other societies. Well, we've run out of time for this class.

Let's take a break and we'll pick it up at verse 12 when we come back.