

Exodus 21  
Psalm 1  
Matthew 5:17-48

“The Book of the Covenant I: Murder and Slavery”

May 14, 2017

Read Exodus 20:22-21:32

Exodus 20-23 is the “Book of the Covenant” (which Moses will read in Exodus 24).  
The Book of the Covenant is God’s basic direction to Israel  
to show them how they are to live as his people.

The Book of the Covenant in Exodus 21-23 consists of particular rulings  
that are now written down in order to guide the judges of Israel  
in establishing righteousness and justice in the land.

No one would have read this as a “statute book”  
containing the precise verdict that every judge must enforce.  
After all, the statutes in the Book of the Law are woven together  
with the story of Israel coming to Sinai.

The Law – the Torah – combines the narrative of salvation (the gospel)  
together with God’s commandments and precepts.

So a wise judge will understand the principles of the Law in the context of the gospel,  
so that he can apply them appropriately to the cases that come before him.

Indeed, that’s why Psalm 1 speaks of the blessed man meditating on God’s law day and night.  
If you want to know how to live this way – how to walk in this way –  
then it is not a matter of woodenly applying this,  
but of allowing the principles – the *equity* – of the law sink into you.

Sing Psalm 1  
Read Matthew 5:17-48

Scoffers and atheists say that the Mosaic Law is barbaric.  
They would say that any book that justifies slavery cannot be a guide for moral conduct today.

My neighbor has friends asking him this question.  
He came to me this week, “How do I answer them?”  
In order to answer them, you *need to know your Bible*.

Part of the problem is that when people say “slavery”  
the only “slavery” they know is the slavery that existed in the United States  
(and more often than not, they only know the Hollywood version of that!).

So we need to see that American slavery bore *very little* resemblance  
to the sort of slavery that God permitted to Israel.  
As we’ll see today, the American south rejected almost *everything* in Exodus 21.

But before we jump into Exodus 21,  
we first need to understand *how should the Christian read the Law?*

And that's why we read from Matthew 5  
Matthew 5 – the Sermon on the Mount – shows us that Jesus is not a new Moses.  
Moses simply *received* the Law, and said  
“Thus says the LORD.”  
Jesus sits on the mountain, saying repeatedly,  
“I say to you!”  
Jesus is not simply a new Moses who receives the Law on the mountain.  
Jesus is the God who reveals the Law from the Mountain.

And as we saw last time,  
the Book of the Covenant begins with the Law of the Altar (at the end of chapter 20).

The statutes in the book of the covenant  
begin with a statute about how to *worship* God properly.

**Introduction: The Law and the Altar (20:22-26)**

*<sup>22</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. <sup>23</sup> You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. <sup>24</sup> An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. <sup>25</sup> If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it. <sup>26</sup> And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.’*

One commentator has pointed out that

“One reason why we Christians argue so much about which hymn to sing,  
which liturgy to follow, which way to worship  
is that the commandments teach us to believe  
that bad liturgy eventually leads to bad ethics.

You begin by singing some sappy, sentimental hymn,  
then you pray some pointless prayer,  
and the next thing you know you have murdered your best friend.”

— Stanley Hauerwas, *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life.*

The reason why bad liturgy leads to bad ethics  
is because liturgy is the first part of ethics.

We are called to love the Lord our God with all our heart.

How we worship him is at the heart of how we love him.

Will we worship him in the way that *he says*?

Or will we worship him according to our own preferences?

But this opening discussion of worship at the end of Ex 20

is essential for understanding how to interpret the Law.

Notice v26 – “And you shall not go up by steps to my altar,  
that your nakedness be not exposed on it.”

Here in Exodus 20 God forbids steps for the altar.

Later, when Solomon builds the temple, there will be steps up to the altar.  
How can Solomon do this – when God had forbidden it?!

By that time, the priests were wearing undergarments –  
the “holy underwear” you might say! –  
so that the *reason* for the statute in Exodus 20 no longer exists.

So *even within the Old Testament itself* a statute might become outdated.

This should help us see how to interpret the statutes of the Law.

These are not “timeless” laws that were given for everyone everywhere.

We have seen in our study of the Ten Commandments on Sunday evening  
that the Ten Commandments are an embodiment of God’s moral law  
addressed to the particularities of Israel’s situation in the OT.

And as we saw last week,

the Ten Commandments are worded in very general ways  
so that they apply to every people and every time –  
but we also saw that they need to be understood *in Christ* –  
through the redemption that he wrought in history at the cross.

Our Confession of Faith has a helpful way of thinking about the Mosaic Law.

We distinguish between three different aspects of the Mosaic Law:

First, there is the *moral law* (God’s eternal standard) –  
which is expressed in the Ten Commandments –

Second, there are the *ceremonial laws* (the laws that focus on the ceremonies  
sacrifices, distinctions between clean and unclean, and so forth);  
these ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament  
(For instance, Jesus himself declared all foods clean).

And third, there are the *judicial laws*. WCF 19.4 puts it this way:

“To them also [to Israel], as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws,  
which expired together with the State of that people;  
not obliging any other now,  
further than the general equity thereof may require.”

In other words, we recognize that the judicial laws of the OT were designed for Israel  
in their particular historical context.

And the laws regarding murder and slavery in Exodus 21  
are primarily judicial laws.

The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20-23) is particularly addressed to Israel  
for a particular time and place and people.

If we try to apply them directly to modern society,  
we will completely miss the point.

On the other hand, we cannot simply reject them as irrelevant.

After all, this is what *God* said for *his people* to do.

As we heard in Matthew 5, Jesus is very clear that we should not ignore and reject his Law!

He did not come to abolish the law and the prophets.

He came to fulfill them.

The Westminster Confession urges us to think about the *equity* of these laws.

Equity is an important legal concept for all of us.

There are two bad ways of approaching law.

First, you can take the “nearest applicable statute” approach,

where you are facing a situation,

and so you ask, “what is the bible verse that most nearly applies”

and then you simply do what that bible verse says.

What’s so bad about that?

Well, it will probably work most of the time –

at least, when you are facing ordinary situations.

But the problem is that it pays no attention to the question

of how to apply the Word of God to this situation.

It simply says, “Here’s the nearest applicable statute – go do it.”

Second, you can go the opposite direction and use the “spirit” of the Law

to run roughshod over the letter of the Law.

For instance, “God says you should love your neighbor,

so if your neighbor wants you to sleep with him or her,

go for it!”

Conservatives tend to focus on the nearest applicable statute.

Liberals tend to focus on the “spirit” of the Law.

This is why we need *equity*!

Equity has to do with doing what is right – doing what is fair.

And particularly, equity has to do with doing what is right and fair

in a context where enforcing the “nearest applicable statute”

would result in injustice and unfairness.

I want us to start with the Murder and Manslaughter laws –

because they will help us understand something of the world that Moses addresses.

## 1. Murder and Manslaughter (21:12-32)

### a. Distinguishing between Murder and Manslaughter (v12-14)

<sup>12</sup> “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. <sup>13</sup> But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. <sup>14</sup> But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.

In chapter 21, verses 12-14, God distinguishes between murder and manslaughter.

The sixth commandment is “You shall not murder.”

Verse 12 says that whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

Does that mean that everyone who kills someone else is guilty of murder?

How do you distinguish between murder and manslaughter.

Verse 13 says that if it was an accident –

or more to the point, if it was not premeditated –

then it is not murder.

Modern U.S. law makes exactly the same distinction.

We make these distinctions because we recognize that while it is always bad when you kill someone, it is worse when you did it on purpose.

So the underlying principle – the ‘equity’ of this law – is that it is important to distinguish between murder and manslaughter – and that *intent* is essential to calling it *murder*.  
“if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning...”

There is another aspect of this that is equally important.

Notice what happens to the one who is guilty of manslaughter.

“I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee.”

Later in the book of Numbers, we will hear about the cities of refuge which God established as places for the manslayer to flee.

If you accidentally killed someone, you could flee to one of those cities, and you would live there until the death of the high priest.

(the death of the high priest was symbolic of your death).

The point of this law is that it is *always* a bad thing when you kill someone.

Even if it was an accident, the fact remains: *you killed someone*.

There should be *some* penalty.

And God makes it clear that the community (through its judges) should decide the question of intent.

A man may *claim* that he did not intend to kill his neighbor

but if you determine that in fact *he did* do it willfully,

“you shall take him from my altar” – there is no “sanctuary” that can protect the guilty.

The altar is only designed to protect the innocent.

#### **b. Capital Offenses (v15-17)**

<sup>15</sup> “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

<sup>16</sup> “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.

<sup>17</sup> “Whoever curses<sup>[g]</sup> his father or his mother shall be put to death.

Verses 15-17 then give three examples of capital offenses – offenses that (in Israel of old) should result in the death penalty.

Two of them have to do with parents:

whoever strikes his father or mother – and whoever curses (or dishonors) his father or mother.

You can see here the root of what Jesus will say in Matthew 5.

The command “you shall not murder” is not just about the physical act of killing someone.

It also applies to your *words*.

And particularly, think about what you are doing when you strike your parent:

the point of “striking” is to do serious bodily harm,

so when you strike your parent you are trying to do serious bodily harm to the one who brought you into the world.

When you strike your father or your mother,

you are saying that you don’t want this person to live;

but if they never lived, then neither would you.

So when you strike or curse your parent, you are, in effect, saying, “I wish I had never been born.”  
And so God says, “Okay, fine, you may have your wish!”

But we should be careful to understand the *motive* of the striking!  
For instance, I am aware of an example of *proper* striking!  
A young man discovered that his father had been cheating on his mother for a number of years.  
When he confronted his father, the father denied it (against incontrovertible evidence!).  
So the young man struck his father in the face, repeatedly,  
and finally beat his father into a confession.

In extraordinary circumstances, you may need to take extraordinary action.

The other example here is kidnapping.

<sup>16</sup> “*Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.*”

Notice how this law is designed to strictly limit slavery.

The slaver – the kidnapper – shall be put to death – of course!  
because he has stolen a life.

But also the one who *buys* a kidnapped slave – “anyone found in possession of him” –  
shall be put to death.

In other words, if you don’t know how this person *became* a slave – you don’t want to buy him!  
Because if you purchase an kidnapped man as a slave,  
then you will pay for it with your life!!

You cannot plead ignorance here!

You cannot say, “But I didn’t know!”

After all, we are talking about a person’s *life* here!

All you would have to do is *ask him*: “Were you kidnapped?”

Imagine what would have happened if this had been the practice in America!

The slave ship shows up at the port.

The slaver says, “we have slaves for sale” –  
but no one will buy them,

because they can’t tell whether they were properly obtained!

The Atlantic slave trade would have been over before it began!

(Or, at least, the slave trade would have required careful documentation  
in order to prove that no slaves were kidnapped).

But we’ll come back to slavery shortly.

### c. “An Eye for an Eye” – How to Make Distinctions (v18-25)

Verses 18-25 provide us with examples of how to make distinctions in various cases.

So, for instance, in verses 18-19:

<sup>18</sup> “*When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die*”

*but takes to his bed, <sup>19</sup> then if the man rises again and walks outdoors with his staff, he who struck him shall be clear; only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall have him thoroughly healed.*

If you seriously hurt someone,  
then you should be responsible not only for the medical costs,  
but also for providing for his family (the loss of his time).  
You should pay for whatever economic loss he suffers *because of you*.

<sup>20</sup> *“When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. <sup>21</sup> But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.*

Verses 22-25 deal with the pregnant woman:

<sup>22</sup> *“When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. <sup>23</sup> But if there is harm,<sup>[h]</sup> then you shall pay life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*

You can see here that the unborn child is treated as a full human person.

If you strike a pregnant woman so that her child dies,  
then you will pay with your life.

How much more, then, would a willful attack against the unborn child be considered murder!

But notice two more things in verses 22-25:

First, notice *how* the system works:

when there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined –

“as the woman’s husband shall impose on him”

which at first sounds a little ridiculous – letting the husband impose the fine! –

but then he shall pay “as the judges determine.”

In other words, the husband proposes the penalty in the city gate:

“he should be fined X”

And then the elders in the gate – the judges –

determine the final amount:

“No, Simeon, we think X is rather exorbitant –

we will determine that Z makes more sense here.”

The judicial system of Israel is designed to protect all parties.

Second, verses 23-25 contains the famous line “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

Some have interpreted this to mean that if you gouge out someone’s eye,

the penalty would be for *your* eye to be gouged out.

That is not at all what it means.

What it means is that the penalty should be proportionate to the crime.

Over the next few weeks, we will see this over and over again.

The punishments in the OT were designed to fit the crime.

And if you want to see how that works, just keep reading!

**d. How to Apply This to the Ox (v26-32)**

<sup>26</sup> “When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. <sup>27</sup> If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

(Again, we’ll come back to the slave in just a moment...)

For now, let’s look at the ox:

<sup>28</sup> “When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. <sup>29</sup> But if the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not kept it in, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. <sup>30</sup> If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him. <sup>31</sup> If it gores a man’s son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule. <sup>32</sup> If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels<sup>[i]</sup> of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

If we were to take “an eye for an eye” literally,  
then if your ox gored someone, then you should be gored by his ox!  
“A gore for a gore”!

What does the Law do instead?

The Law translates the goring into a “ransom” – a monetary penalty –  
according to the following set of principles:

If this was the first time that an ox gored someone,  
then it is simple:  
the ox shall be stoned – and its flesh *not* eaten.  
(The owner should not benefit in any way from the death of his neighbor!)  
The only liability to the owner is the loss of his ox.

But if the ox had a history of goring, and the owner was *negligent*,  
then the owner should be put to death *with the ox!*  
(In modern terms, if you *know* that you have a dangerous dog,  
and you don’t properly restrain your dog –  
then you are liable for your dog’s actions!)

But there’s a caveat.  
Yes, you deserve death – because your negligence resulted in the death of another.  
But it is permissible to pay a monetary penalty in place of being put to death.

The redemption price in the case of a slave is 30 shekels of silver.  
Thirty shekels of silver is around 12 ounces –  
which at the time was about six months wages for a laborer.

The idea here is that the master has lost the services of his slave,  
so he should be reimbursed for that lost labor.  
The punishment fits the crime.

But that brings us to the question:

## 2. What Do We Do with Slave Laws? (21:1-11, 20-21, 26-27, 32)

We have seen throughout the book of Exodus so far  
an emphasis on how God has delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt.

There is a school of thought – called Liberation Theology –  
that uses the Exodus to argue that the Exodus is a pattern for social justice –  
liberation for the oppressed.

But if God’s purpose in the Exodus was simply “freeing slaves” –  
then Exodus 21 makes no sense.

If slavery was the problem, then why did God allow slavery to continue?

But remember what we saw from the start:

the point of the Exodus was *not* to set Israel *free*.

The point of the Exodus was so that Israel would no longer *serve* Pharaoh –  
so that Israel would now *serve* Yahweh.

We’ve already seen that Yahweh forbids manstealing – kidnapping.

And anyone who holds a kidnapped person as a slave shall also be put to death.

So what exactly did slavery mean in the OT?

In Deuteronomy there will be regulations regarding foreign slaves,

but for now we will focus on the rules in Exodus 21,

which have to do with domestic slavery.

### a. The Slave and His Family – Understanding Slavery and Freedom (v1-6)

21 “Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. <sup>2</sup> When you buy a Hebrew slave,<sup>[e]</sup> he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.

“When you buy a Hebrew slave...”

There could be a number of reasons why you might become a slave.

For instance, if you are a poor man, and your only ox gores someone to death,  
you would owe at least 30 shekels of silver.

What do you do if you don’t have 30 shekels of silver?

Well, you could be executed!

Uh, what if I don’t want to be executed?!

Well, someone might be willing to pay the ransom for you.

In which case, you would become his slave for the next six years.

Or, you might have a fifteen year old son –

and you could say, “Son, if you work for our neighbors for the next six years,  
you could save my life – and preserve the family farm –

so that when you grow up, you can have the family farm!

Slavery often resulted from economic troubles.

You are deep in debt and the only way out is for someone else to pay your debt –  
and so the only way for you to repay that debt is through your labor  
(or through the labor of your children).

Verse 2 makes it clear that the slave should only serve for a specified term of six years.

The idea is that over six years, the slave has worked off his debt – his purchase price –  
and so he should not have to pay anything to obtain his freedom.

You can see the sabbath principle clearly at work here.

Six days shall you labor and do all your work, but on the seventh you shall rest.  
In the same way, six years shall you labor and repay your master,  
but in the seventh you shall go forth free.

Why does God allow slavery in the OT?

What was the alternative?

No, really?

Challenge your scoffing friend with that question!

What was the alternative to slavery in the ancient world?

The alternative is to let poor people die.

Slavery was the social welfare system of the ancient world.

Those of you who have stood in lines at social welfare agencies  
will appreciate the parallel!

But ancient slavery was *better* than 20<sup>th</sup> century social welfare!

Social welfare in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was designed to keep poor people poor.

(It would not be wrong to rephrase that: “to keep black people poor” –

The mortgage interest deduction is the largest federal housing subsidy  
in the federal budget –

and for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, blacks were prohibited from benefiting from it.

Instead, federal housing subsidies for the poor were designed to provide rentals –

and by definition, rent is paid to your *landlord* –

so *landlords* are the ones who are the ultimate beneficiaries there).

Ancient slavery was *better* than that –

because at the end of six years,

the slave goes free

(and Dt 15 says that his master should give him a generous parting gift –

so that he has a chance to get back on his own feet again!).

Think about that – in the seventh year, all your debts are wiped out,

and your master gives you a gift to help you get going again.

(There was also a provision that every *fiftieth* year the land would revert to the original owner.

So once in every generation, your family would get their land back.)

I'm sorry, but I have never seen an economic system  
that is more carefully crafted to protect the poor  
and make sure that a temporary crisis does not utterly destroy a family.  
I'm not suggesting that we go back to an ancient slave economy!  
But those who say that this is somehow oppressive and unjust  
simply demonstrate that they have not understood how the Mosaic Law was designed.

Verses 3-6 then deal with the question of slave marriages:

<sup>3</sup> *If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.* <sup>4</sup> *If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone.* <sup>5</sup> *But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'* <sup>6</sup> *then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.*

If you were married before you became a slave,  
then your wife and your children are *simply that* – your wife and your children!  
But if your master gives you a wife – then your wife and children belong to your master.  
(It is worth pointing out that Dt 15 also makes it clear that the *female slave*  
also goes out after six years – so she only belongs to her master for a short time).  
But on the other hand, if you have a good situation –  
if you have a good master and no real prospects for yourself in life –  
then you might decide that slavery is a good deal.

And verse 5 provides a procedure for how to deal with that situation.  
The slave must plainly say (to the *judges* – the elders of the city).  
“I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free.”  
And in that case, the master shall bring him to God  
(this could mean either, to the sanctuary – the Tabernacle –  
or it could mean, to the elders – those who judge according to God's rules).  
and he shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

The key principle here is that no one should be held to life-long service without his consent.  
Incidentally, this passage prompted the State of Pennsylvania – and other northern states –  
to pass similar laws in the 1800s.  
If a southerner brought a slave into the state of Pennsylvania,  
the slave could not be taken *out* of the state,  
until the slave had a private interview with the county clerk,  
in which the clerk asked the slave, *do you want to return to slavery?*  
I have read the transcript of the interview between the county clerk of Washington County, Pa,  
and one of R.J. Breckinridge's slaves.  
He asked her (without RJ present) whether she wanted to return.  
She said that all her family and friends were back in Kentucky,  
and while she appreciated her time in Pennsylvania,  
she was looking forward to returning to slavery in Kentucky.

But here's the problem:

Kentucky did *not* follow this principle.

*American* slavery did not follow these rules!

In America, African slaves were life-long slaves.

They were *never* given the opportunity to choose for themselves!

Further, African slaves were *not permitted to marry*.

It's not just that their wives and children remained slaves.

Southern states did not recognize slave marriages as valid marriages *at all*.

**b. “When a Man Sells His Daughter” – the Concubine (v7-11)**

<sup>7</sup> “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. <sup>8</sup> If she does not please her master, who has designated her<sup>[f]</sup> for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. <sup>9</sup> If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter. <sup>10</sup> If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. <sup>11</sup> And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out for nothing, without payment of money.

Verses 7-11 then deal with female slaves.

Not all female slaves go out in the seventh year,

because some female slaves are purchased for the purpose of marriage.

Now, I realize that that sounds barbaric,

but in the ancient world, pretty much all marriages were economic transactions.

In the book of Genesis, Rebekah agrees to marry Isaac sight unseen,

after Abraham's servant gives lavish presents to her family.

In contrast, because Jacob has no such lavish presents,

he has to work for seven years to pay the bride price for Rachel (and again for Leah!).

So, again, when we find ourselves in an awkward spot financially –

and we are deep in debt,

your neighbor says, “Hey, tell you what,

if you give me your daughter, I'll call it even.”

She is normally called a concubine –

but Exodus 21 does not that term because the Israelite concubine is given a higher status than the concubine in other ancient cultures.

She is called a “slave” because she is not free.

She is *bound* to this arrangement.

In contrast, Rebekah had the freedom to refuse Isaac:

They asked her, “Will you go with this man?”

But once the daughter is sold as a slave,

she is not free.

But in contrast to concubinage in the surrounding culture,

the rest of the passage is devoted to laying out the protections for her:

First, verse 8, if she has been designated for her master,

but she does not please him,

then he must allow her be redeemed.

(What if no one redeems her? Verse 11 – she goes out for nothing – she is free).  
Second, verse 9, if she has been designated for his son,  
then he must treat her as a daughter – *not* as a slave.

Again, it is true that she is unfree –  
but the LORD protects her by his Law,  
because she is so vulnerable.  
And third, verse 10, if – in either case – he takes another wife to himself,  
he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, or her marital rights.

The point here is that the concubine is a real wife.  
If you mistreat her, then she may go out free.

And given what you would have spent to obtain your slaves,  
it would be foolish for you to treat them poorly!

And that brings us to our final point about the slave economy –  
which will hopefully also help us think about how to connect all this to our own situation.

**c. “The Slave Is His Money” – the Slave Economy (v20-21, 26-27, 32)**

<sup>20</sup> “When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. <sup>21</sup> But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

So let’s go back to those three passages about the slave that we skipped earlier.

First, in verses 20-21,  
we hear that when a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod  
and the slave dies under his hand,  
he shall be avenged.  
In other words, the master shall be punished according to the law of murder.

The ESV of v21 is confusing:

“if the slave survives a day or two” –  
makes it sound like the slave *dies* a day or two later.  
The verb means to “stand up” or to “endure” –  
so it is probably better to translate it  
“if he gets up after a day or two” –  
since there is no penalty whatsoever.

The principle here is that the *master* has lost a couple of days of his slave’s labor –  
so if the master continues to beat his servants like this,  
he will not only harm them, but he will also impoverish himself.  
Because “the slave is his money.”

The slave is his money.

We don’t talk like this anymore.

Or do we?

How many companies have adopted the slogan:

“Our greatest asset is our employees”?

That's just the modern way of saying, "the slave is his money."

When you work for a company,  
that company *owns* your labor.  
If you come up with a brilliant idea on company time,  
odds are, your company owns your idea!

And at the very least, you may have signed a noncompetition contract  
that bars you from doing business in the same area as your company!

That's just the modern way of saying "The slave is his money."  
Of course, the modern employee has more rights.  
If you want to leave your employer and find a different job,  
it is certainly easier today than it was back then.  
But as verses 26-27 point out,  
even in the ancient world,  
if your master mistreated you,  
you would be set free:

<sup>26</sup> "When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free because of his eye. <sup>27</sup> If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

Here you can see how the "eye for an eye" principle works in practice.  
The punishment should fit the crime.  
If you seriously mistreat your slave,  
then you forfeit your rights over that slave's labor.

I hope that by now you have seen that biblical law  
does not validate the American slave system.  
African slaves were frequently kidnapped.  
African slaves were not allowed to marry.  
African slaves were not given the opportunity  
to decide whether they wanted to continue in slavery.  
African slaves were not freed when their masters mistreated them.

And here's the kicker:  
the whole point of Exodus 21 is that the slave is fundamentally your brother –  
your fellow-Israelite.  
In the 19<sup>th</sup> century *only* Africans *could be* slaves.  
It was not *possible* for a white man to be a slave.  
In 19<sup>th</sup> century America, it was *illegal* to sell your son or your daughter into slavery.  
Unless you were black.  
We'll see next week that in chapter 22, verse 21, the LORD says,  
"You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him,  
for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

You shall not come up with laws that discriminate against the sojourner –

the weak, the helpless.

Exodus 21 makes it clear that if you are going to have a slave economy,  
then the *same rules* need to be applied to everyone.

Your slave might someday become your master!

So you should treat your slaves as you would want to be treated in return.

Scripture does not require any particular economic system.

But in whatever economic system you have,

the principles of Exodus 21 will apply:

the relationship between the “boss” and the “laborers”

needs to be set up in such a way

that oppressive bosses will be penalized.

After all, notice that there are *no* laws that penalize the slave!

Most slave societies have all sorts of restrictions against slaves.

But the Law of God recognizes that masters already have the advantage.

Therefore the laws regarding slaves need to protect the slaves.

(After all, Israel had just come out of slavery in Egypt.

*Don't* make the same mistake that Pharaoh did!!)

<sup>32</sup> *If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels<sup>[1]</sup> of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.*

And of course, I would be remiss if I did not point out that the Lord of Glory himself  
was betrayed for the redemption price of a slave.

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.