

Just Laws for a Fallen World: Personal Injury Laws

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. If you have your Bibles with you, please turn in them to Exodus chapter 21. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand and we'll have someone grab one cup and bring it over to you that you can use.

Exodus 21, we're going to be in verses 12 to 32. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Heavenly Father, we honor you this morning by inclining and submitting ourselves to your Word.

Address us now. Speak to us. Impress upon us the inestimable value of human life that you speak of here in this passage.

And renew in us a sense of wonder at the precious life of your Son, Jesus, who gave us life that we might live.

Give us understanding as we go through this complex passage. Help me to speak clearly. Give us all focus and understanding.

[1 : 29] In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's Word from Exodus 21, verses 12 to 32. Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.

Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

Whoever steals a man and sells him and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death.

Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.

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, 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. When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.

[2 : 47] But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money. 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.

But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

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. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

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. 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.

If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him. If it gores a man's son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to the same rule.

[4 : 12] If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master 30 shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned. This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated.

In case you're visiting for the first time, just so you know, I didn't look through the Bible and then decided, this is the passage I want to preach on today. We've been going through a book called Exodus.

We've been going through it from the beginning to the end. We believe that every passage of Scripture is inspired by God, and so we don't skip passages, and we believe this one too has something to teach us. So last week we began this series, kind of a mini-series in this section of the

book called The Book of the Covenant, which details some of the laws, the practical laws, fleshing out the Ten Commandments that were covered in Exodus 20.

So we covered labor laws last week. We talked about slavery in ancient Israel times, and this week we're talking about personal injury laws with focus on capital crimes. And as I mentioned last week, because these rules and regulations are historically and culturally situated for Jews living in the 15th century BC in ancient Near East, and under a theocratic government, under the Old Covenant, we can't lift these laws out of context and apply them directly to our 21st century U.S. context. Because Jesus, as the new Israel, fulfilled the entire law, we now need to interpret and apply every passage of Scripture through the lens of Christ in light of how Christ has fulfilled it in the New Covenant.

[5 : 45] So the principle of justice that we can still learn from this is this, that we must safeguard human life, which has inestimable value, and trust in Jesus who died so that we might live.

So that's what we're going to talk about today. So we'll talk first about crimes punishable by death, and then assault and battery, and then involuntary manslaughter. Let's first look at crimes punishable by death.

If you look at verses 12 to 17, you might notice that the phrase, shall be put to death, is repeated again and again at the end of each case law. Whoever does so and so shall be put to death.

So that tells us that this section is dealing with capital crimes. You can tell what a society values by looking at what it prohibits. What does it enforce?

What does it punish? You can tell what it cherishes and protects by looking at its laws. And so these laws here reveal what the Bible deems fundamental to a just society in a fallen world.

[6 : 47] While all the sins mentioned in verses 12 to 17 are bad enough to warrant a death penalty, they're organized in a descending order of importance with the worst crime being listed first.

So the order is murder, then assaulting one's parents, and then stealing and selling a person, and then fourth, cursing one's parents. So let's look at these in turn.

First, verse 12 prohibits murder. It says, Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. This is now unpacking the sixth commandment, which was you shall not murder.

And violation of the sixth commandment is here enforced with capital punishment. And then verses 13 to 14 address the issue of intent behind the killing.

It says, 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. But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar that he may die.

[7 : 47] Here's a wise distinction between accidental killing and intentional killing. Bible provides some specific examples of this in Numbers 35 and also in Deuteronomy 19.

It says in Deuteronomy 19.5 that when someone is cutting down a tree in a forest with an axe, and then the axe, the head of the axe, the sharp part of the axe flies off the handle and injures someone or kills someone, that that would be considered accidental killing.

And the person is not responsible for the death of his neighbor in that case. So these kinds of accidental homicides are what's in view here in verse 13. So in our modern day, accidental discharge of firearms could fall into this category in certain situations.

And notice it says that God let him fall into his hand, meaning it was from a strictly human perspective, a chance event. Though, as this verse tells us, all such chance events still happen under God's sovereign control.

That's why it says God let him fall into his hand. Since it was out of the man's hands completely, a person who accidentally struck someone dead is to flee to a place that will be appointed.

[9 : 02] This is an anticipation of cities of refuge that will be established later on in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19. And under Israel's justice system, there's no active police force.

If there is a murder, it was the responsibility of the kinsman redeemer or the avenger of blood, the nearest kin of the deceased person, to avenge the death of his relative, to enforce that penalty. But because the Bible wants to prevent kind of this cycle of revenge killings, in the event of an accidental homicide like this, there's a city of refuge set aside to where these people who have accidentally killed someone could flee.

So that they have immunity there and are protected from the wrath of the avenger of blood.

However, there is no city of refuge for a murderer. It says in verse 14, But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar that he may die.

The word willfully communicates intent. And this is not an accidental killing, it's an intentional killing. And the word cunning conveys deliberation.

[10:12] Our modern laws distinguish between intent and premeditation. For example, when someone kills a person in the heat of anger without planning, having planned to kill before, they distinguish that.

So they call that voluntary manslaughter, but it's not murder because there was no premeditation. Now, the Bible does not make those kind of distinctions.

The Bible takes murder more seriously, and it takes manslaughter more seriously. And so it doesn't distinguish between intent and premeditation. Whether you had two years to premeditate and to plan a killing, or whether you had a split second to plan a killing in your heat of anger, if you intended to do it, the Bible considers it murder and enforces it that way.

And that's because giving and taking away life is God's prerogative. And a murderer takes someone else's life into his own hand, presuming to arrogate this divine prerogative.

For such a person there is no refuge. Verse 14 speaks of taking the murderer from the altar that he may die. That's an allusion to the ancient practice of where a fugitive can run and take hold of the horns of the altar as a way of basically confessing their sins and pleading guilty.

[11:38] And they're pleading guilty and saying, Have mercy on me. I'm going to hold on to the horns of the altar. Now, you find examples of this in 1 Kings chapters 1 and 2. After a failed coup, Adonijah and Joab are both afraid of how the newly appointed King Solomon is going to punish them.

And so they flee to the tent of the Lord and take hold of the horns of the altar, not at the same time. And what's fascinating is that Solomon promises Adonijah, who was the first one to hold on to the altar, that he's not going to punish him.

He's not going to kill him for his treason. However, in the next chapter, when Joab does the exact same thing, Solomon says, Take him down and kill him. So what's going on?

So why does the altar work for one person but not the other? And here's the reason that Solomon gives. He says, Do as he has said. Strike Joab down and bury him. And thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause.

The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head because without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself.

[12:50] Abner, son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Amasad, son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah. So if you know the story, Joab had killed in peace times and avenged the death of his loved ones during peace time by killing these two commanders of their respective armies.

And so that was innocent blood that was shed that was still on Joab's hands. And it's because he was a murderer that he could not take refuge at the horn of the altar. He's taken away from the altar to be killed.

So this distinction between accidental homicide and deliberate homicide teach us a very important truth about God. Namely that God cares not only about what we do, but about why we do them. God judges us not only by our actions, but also by the intentions of the heart. For example, stealing is objectively wrong.

It is sinful to steal. But there is a difference between a selfish, malicious thief who steals to enrich himself at the expense of others and a thief who steals out of desperation to feed his kids.

[14:04] God sees. He sees into the human heart. There's an objective dimension to sin and a subjective dimension to sin. And God, who alone sees the inner workings of the human heart, will take everything into account and judge with perfect justice.

Having delineated the general law concerning murder, verses 15 to 17 list off a few more crimes that warrant the death penalty in Israel.

Both verses 15 and 17 deal with the way children treat their parents. So they're unpacking the fifth commandment, which is honor your father and your mother. Verse 15 says, Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death.

And verse 17 says, Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death. The word curse here doesn't mean formally to invoke a curse down upon your parents.

It also does not mean to utter obscenities or expletives at one's parents. It's a general word here that's translated curse that means to make light of someone.

[15:10] It's actually the exact antonym of the word to honor in the fifth commandment, to honor your parents, to consider your parents weighty, to give weight to them, to honor them.

But this word, to curse, translated curse here is to make light of someone, to slight someone, to belittle someone, to dishonor someone.

And so it certainly includes uttering obscenities and expletives, but it's not limited to that. It's more comprehensive than that. So striking one's parents is more severe than simply dishonoring them because you're not only damaging their reputation and feelings, but also damaging them physically. However, both the striking of the fist and the lashing of the tongue warrant the death penalty. For some of us, that probably seems like overkill.

And as I mentioned before, that you can tell what a society cherishes by what it enforces and punishes. And these verses reveal just how much emphasis the Bible places on proper relationship between parents and children.

[16:20] If you want to hear a little more about that, you can go back and listen to my sermon on the fifth commandment from Exodus 20. But I'll summarize briefly why it's so important in the Bible. It's because the children are the future of our society.

And because healthy parent-children relations are essential for the health and growth of children, it's not an overstatement to say that parent-child relations are foundational to a functioning society. And so if that parent-child relationship is subverted, it's destructive for society as a whole. So to prevent this, Scripture has severe punishment to deter people from this kind of sin, to stop this contagion of rebellion and contempt toward fathers and mothers from spreading throughout the society of Israel.

And not only that, because parents are the first authority figures that children interface with, the way they treat their parents have implications for how they relate to authority figures throughout society. And that connection is illustrated by the fact that throughout the Bible, not only the literal biological mothers and fathers, but also other leader figures like judges and priests and prophets are referred to as fathers and mothers.

[17:36] And so this includes even the authority of God. God reveals Himself to us as a heavenly Father. God reveals His Father. And because of that, earthly parents are patterned after our Heavenly Father.

So similar to how God creates man in His own image, He says in Genesis 1.27 and Genesis 5.3 that Adam fathered a son in his own image.

So parents are literally copying and imitating what God did in creating people. And so parents image God in their begetting and rearing of children.

And because parents are instituted by God, appointed by God to exercise authority over their children, when they dishonor their parents, and that has implications.

It affects the way they perceive the authority of God. It affects the way they perceive the fatherhood of God. That connection is seen clearly in Exodus 22.28.

[18:37] If you skip forward a little bit to verse 28 in chapter 22, it says, You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. That word translated revile there is actually the exact same Hebrew word that was translated curse in verse 17 of chapter 21.

Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death. So if you slight your parents, if you dishonor your parents, if you slight God, dishonor God, if you slight your ruler, a leader of your people, the three people, the categories of people, God, the society's rulers, and your parents are all objects of the same command because they represent different levels of authority over the home, over society, and over the entire visible and invisible world.

This demonstrates the interconnectedness of these commands and why God places such a premium on the honoring of one's parents. The erosion of one authority erodes all other authorities. Now, interposed between the two stipulations concerning parents is verse 16, which prohibits man stealing. It says, Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him shall be put to death.

The Bible never prescribes the death penalty for stealing property because people are more important than property.

[19:59] However, it does prescribe the death penalty for man stealing because a man is not supposed to be property regardless of the complexion of their color or gender or age or socioeconomic status.

And so, as I mentioned last week in my sermon on slavery and labor laws in ancient Israel, this verse alone, if rightly understood and applied in our context, would have dealt a singular death blow to the transatlantic slave trade and to slavery and modern-day slavery in general because all that was sourced through man stealing, kidnapping, and then selling a man.

And so, it's a powerful verse that has huge implications for society. So, those are all capital crimes. Now, let's look at verses 18 to 27, which turn to assault and battery.

Now, these laws offer details for how to govern cases of violence that do not lead to death. It says in verses 18 to 19, when men quarrel and one strikes the other with the stone or with his fist and the man does not die but takes to his bed, 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. So, these men are in the, are tossed, they're in the midst of a quarrel when one strikes the other. And, it's not, it's not strictly speaking, you know, accidental, right?

[21 : 37] Because it's in, they're fighting, there's hostile intent. So, this is an intentional one. But, the strike does not end in death. It, it, it ends in a serious injury that causes the man to be bedridden and need to rest and recover.

In a case like this, the man who struck him shall be clear, meaning, he's clear of the guilt of murder because he did not kill him. However, it says in, it says in the following verses, only he shall pay for the loss of his time and shall have him thoroughly healed.

In other words, the man who struck him is financially responsible for the injured man's loss of time, all the money that he would have earned if he hadn't been injured by doing his normal work. And also, he is responsible for the man's healing, for his medical expenses, all the money that takes, it comes out of the offender's pocket.

Now, keep this case in mind as we look at verses 20 to 21, which deals with another case of battery, but this time, it's an altercation between a master and his slave.

It says, when a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod, and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be avenged. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be avenged, for the slave is his money.

[22 : 54] Explain what this means. Verse 21 is structurally parallel to verses 18 and 19 and follows the same logical order. So, first, if the slave that was struck dies under his hand, he shall be avenged.

The word avenged doesn't necessarily mean to kill, but in this context, it does refer to the death penalty because if you look at Jeremiah 50, 15, it explains exactly what this word avenged means, and it means to do to her as she has done.

So, it's to render proportional punishment, reciprocal punishment. And so, if he kills the slave, then he shall be avenged, meaning he is subject to the death penalty, even though it's his slave.

Now, but if he survives, the slave survives a day or two, he's not to be avenged, for the slave is his money. Now, if you come to Scripture with suspicion, seeking confirmation, that sounds really wrong, right?

The slave is his money. What does that mean? So, like, if this, does that mean that the master can treat his slave however he wants? Maybe can he kill him? Well, obviously not, because if he kills him, he'll be subject to death penalty.

[24 : 04] Well, then can he beat him as much as he wants? Of course not, because as we see in the later verses, verse 26, 27, if the master maims the slave, he has to let the slave go free. If he destroys his eye or knocks out his tooth, he has to let the slave go free.

So, it's not saying that the slave is his money, meaning he can do to him whatever he wants. That's not what this is saying. Rather, the verse is parallel to verses 18 and 19 that we saw dealing with the injury of the man that was bedridden.

So, if the slave is bedridden, if the slave is injured and is bedridden, who is responsible for his medical expenses? It's the master. The slave has no money to his account.

If the slave is bedridden and the slave, all the labor that the slaver does makes money for the master, who is losing money during the time that the slave is bedridden?

It's the master. So, all the money that the slave needs for his recuperation, for his medical expenses, and for the loss of time that the Bible guarantees for an injured party, it all comes out of the master's pocket.

[25 : 11] That's what it means when it says that the slave is his money. And so, even though he is to be avenged, if he kills the slave, if he is injured, the master is already punished through the loss of time and through the medical expenses that come through the slave.

And so, he is not to be avenged on top of that is what this verse is saying. Does that make more sense? Yeah. So far, in terms of personal injury laws, we've covered intentional killing and accidental killing, as well as intentional assault and battery.

now we cover collateral damage. When injury is inflicted incidentally on a person that was not the intended target. It says in verse 22, 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.

This is a fascinating case because, on the one hand, the battery is not exactly accidental. The men were, you know, tussling in public.

Surely they understand that people nearby are at risk, that they pose a threat to people around them. So it's not accidental, but it's also not intentional because they weren't trying to hit the pregnant woman.

[26 : 30] They were trying to hit each other. And so, it's very similar, I think, to the case of a goring ox that we'll see later on. It's probably an injury inflicted on someone by negligence.

So, the interpretation of this verse is highly debated because there are some problematic translations that has produced some incorrect interpretations. So, to give an example, the Revised Standard Version, RSV, translates verses 22 to 23 this way.

It says, When men strive together and hurt a woman with child so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according to the woman's husband, shall lay upon him, and he shall pay as the judges determine.

If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, so on. So, according to this translation, the tussling men have caused a woman's miscarriage, and yet, it is nevertheless possible that no harm is done.

So, that's how they're interpreting this passage. So, if they interpret it that way, then the harm must refer only to the harm that comes upon the woman. So, it doesn't matter what happens to the baby, that's not harm, as long as nothing happens to the woman, but if something happens to the woman, you know, then you pay life for life.

[27 : 54] So, some people who are looking for justification in Scripture to not consider the baby in the womb a human use this passage that way. But, this is a bad translation and an even worse interpretation of these verses.

And, here are the reasons. The Hebrew expression in verse 22 is literally so that her children come out, exactly the way the ESV translates it. It does not say so that there is a miscarriage as the RSV has it.

That's an over translation. When the Hebrew word for come out is used to refer to children in the womb in other contexts of the Bible, it always refers to live births and not to a stillbirth.

So, in Genesis 25, in Genesis 38, when Jacob and Esau are born and when Zerah is born, it simply says that they came out. Moreover, there is a specific Hebrew word that means miscarriage.

And, there is a specific Hebrew word that means stillborn. And, neither of these words are used in this verse. the word that is used here is simply that they came out.

[29 : 03] And so, verse 22 is not referring to a miscarriage but to a premature birth, which is exactly what reputable translations like the CSB and NIV render it.

So then, when two men who are fighting with each other unwittingly strike a pregnant woman so that she gives birth prematurely to her baby, if both the mother and the baby are healthy and there is no harm, then the punishment for the man who hit her is merely a fine for causing the distress and the scare of the premature labor that he induced.

And, the woman's husband who is the head of the household and is responsible for the care of his wife will impose a fine and then that fine will be deliberated on by the judges and they will ultimately give a verdict to determine how much the man should pay.

But, if there is harm and since the object of the harm is not specified, I would assume here that it involves both the child and the mom, if there is harm to either, it says, you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This is the famous legal principle called *lex talionis* which is translated law of retaliation. This principle is articulated in this way to be memorable for rhetorical purposes, life for life, eye for eye, but it's not intended to be applied, enforced literally.

[30 : 33] It's making the point that the punishment should be commensurate with the crime. The punishment should be proportional to the crime, not that the punishment should be identical to the crime.

Do you understand the difference? So, for example, in, to give you some examples, in November 2021, a man who smuggled and sold copies of the Netflix series *Squid Game* was sentenced to death by firing squad in North Korea.

A student who purchased the drive with the show downloaded on and received a life sentence, six other students who just watched the video were sentenced to five years of hard labor.

Now, the punishment was excessive and not proportional to the crime. this is not life for life, but life for 1 or worse.

Or consider this example from 1983 when a British judge sentenced a man to 12 months in prison, eight of which were suspended. So this man only served four months in prison for assaulting and raping a six-year-old girl, which was considered too lenient at the time and it caused widespread outrage leading to some legal changes.

[31 : 53] That's not life for life. That's tooth for life. Or worse, both of those are unjust. We know that *lex talionis* was not meant to be applied literally from the following verses.

Look at verses 26 to 27. 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. If he knocks out the tooth of his slave, male or female, he shall let the slave go free because of his tooth.

So immediately after articulating the principle of eye for eye and tooth for tooth, here are very clear specific examples of when literally an eye is destroyed and a tooth is knocked out and the punishment is not that you poke out his eye and knock out his tooth.

No. You let the slave go free. The idea is proportional justice, proportional punishment, not identical punishment. The slave is compensated by his freedom and the master is punished by the loss of his slave's labor.

And this is unprecedented actually because if you search other ancient Near Eastern legal collections and there's quite a few of them, you find no law addressing abusive behavior by masters.

[33 : 08] There are laws that provide some protection for slaves from other people, but there are no protections for slaves from their own masters in other ancient Near Eastern laws. Only here in Scripture do you find that.

And as that example shows, the eye-for-eye principle in Scripture was not intended to be applied literally. We find another confirmation of that in verses 18 to 19. Remember when the man was struck and injured and he was bedridden?

What's the punishment? Strike the other guy, make him bedridden? No. It was to pay for the loss of time and to pay for his medical expenses. Proportional punishment. This is in contrast to other ancient law codes that apparently enforced this kind of justice literally.

So for example, the Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian legal text, which is often compared to the Book of the Covenant, says this, If a son strike his father, his hands shall be hewn off.

If a man put out the eye of another, his eyes shall be put out. If a man knocks out the teeth of his equal, his teeth shall be knocked out. The wording is so specific that it gives the impression that this was literally enforced, which I think is quite, what's the word?

[34 : 25] It's severe, barbaric. Furthermore, the Code of Hammurabi did not offer equal protection to people of inferior social status, like slaves, as the Bible does.

For example, in the Code of Hammurabi, if a property-owning citizen puts out the eye of another property-owning citizen, his eye is literally put out. But if he puts out the eye of a lower-class free person who does not own property, a poor person, well, then he only needs to pay one gold miner. Okay? And if he puts out the eye of someone else's slave, well, then he only needs to pay half of the slave's value, which must not have been much because the same Code stipulates that the man whose ox kills a slave only needs to pay one-third of a miner, and the ox doesn't even get killed. So the proportional punishment was only guaranteed to upper-class citizens in these other ancient Near Eastern laws, and they enforced the eye for eye principle with great literally.

And that's in stark contrast to the Book of Exodus and the Book of the Covenant, where the principle of proportional punishment is applied wisely and consistently to masters and slaves alike. [35 : 37] So, so far, we've looked at personal injury laws governing crimes committed by humans. Now we turn to cases of involuntary manslaughter. This is not like what a normal sermon is like, so just so you guys know, it's kind of dense because of the nature of the passage, but you guys have been very patient, and you're listening really, really well.

So it says in verse 28, 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.

An ox that gores a human to death is without exception killed. But that's not only for the sake of preventing similar incidents in the future, yet it's also for the sake of justice, because Genesis 9.5 says that any beast that kills a man, that God will require a reckoning for that lifeblood.

So it doesn't matter how ignorant the beast is, because it took the life, it dared to take the life of a human being created in the image of God. Its own life, therefore, is forfeited.

Once again, this sets Exodus apart from other ancient Eastern law codes, because there is an exact parallel where an ox gores someone to death, and the ox is never killed in those other texts.

[36 : 57] The sanctity of life, the Bible places supreme value on the sanctity of human life. And according to this text, not only is the ox to be stoned, after it's dead, its flesh shall not be eaten.

Why? Because it would be inappropriate to have a feast thanks to an ox that gores someone to death. The flesh of the dead ox is considered unclean, unfit for human consumption.

So this also serves to punish the owner of the ox. Though it was an accident, though it was not him that killed someone, it was his ox, the owner himself is not guilty of murder, and yet he is still punished in some sense because he loses the valuable labor of a farm animal, and he does not get to feast on it.

It's not fit for consumption. However, it says in verse 29, 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.

So this is again a case of negligent homicide. The owner himself did not kill, but by his criminal negligence, he has allowed his ox to kill another person.

[38 : 15] There may not have been any malicious intent, but there was irresponsible negligence.

So there was a known significant risk related to this ox and he did nothing to prevent the goring.

And that's why he is liable for the death because if it weren't for his negligence, the person would still be alive. So you might be wondering how all of this applies to us since none of us own any oxen, but maybe some of you did.

I think some of you actually did. Yes, Laura did own an oxen in the past. Yes. Well, even if you don't have oxen, many of us own pets, right, which are also very expensive.

They're not as valuable as work animals, but we own pets. And they too can be dangerous. Only two weeks ago, a family's Siberian husky killed their four-day-old baby girl in Arkansas.

A few months ago in Memphis, Tennessee, two pit bulls attacked their owners, killing a two-year-old girl and a five-month-old boy and hospitalizing their mother. If you have a dog that is known to bite, you should have your dog leashed at all times when you're in the presence of other people.

[39 : 31] Not only that, cars that we drive are very much like the oxen of the ancient world. They're expensive, they're dangerous, and you need it to work in a lot of cases.

At least you get to work. And there are examples of negligence related to that as well. Drunk driving, texting while driving, speeding, reckless driving.

This is convicting for me as well. We should value human life so much more than our convenience and our time and our desire to appear responsive to people who have texted us or our desire to appear punctual to an appointment that we're going to.

We should value human life so much more than that we don't do this kind of thing. That's negligent homicide. Here's another example. If you are aware that you are carrying a deadly and highly transmissible disease, you should take care not to infect other people with it, especially the most vulnerable members of our society.

Obviously, we need to be wise and careful in applying this principle and I'm not trying to comment necessarily on COVID because we need to acknowledge that people's assessment of risks differ.

[40 : 56] It varies. However, we need to use our discernment and we need to be considerate toward others. All of this ultimately boils down to loving our neighbors as ourselves. when it comes

to negligent homicide, the book of the covenant did not strictly enforce the death penalty because while negligence is bad, it's still not the same as murder and intentional killing.

And so that's why there's a provision for a ransom in verses 30 to 32. If a ransom is imposed on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is imposed on him.

If it gores a man's son or daughter, he shall be dealt with according to this same rule. If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master 30 shekels of silver and the ox shall be stoned.

Since in verse 22, the judges determine the amount of the fine in consultation with the victim's family, I assume that the same applies in this context. After considering the circumstances of the negligent homicide, the family of the victim and the dolly appointed judges may choose instead of enforcing the death penalty to impose a ransom.

The ransom price was decided on a case-by-case basis except in the case of a slave, there was a fixed ransom price, 30 shekels of silver, which is interestingly enough the price that the chief priest paid Judas is scary in Matthew 26, 16 for the selling out of Jesus to send him to his death on the cross.

[42 : 29] Imposing a ransom was a form of leniency. It was a show of mercy in cases of involuntary manslaughter. But the Bible explicitly forbids such leniency and ransom in cases of intentional killing, of murder.

It says in Numbers 35, 31 to 34, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death. No atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.

The only acceptable atonement for murder is the death of the murderer because God has decreed in Genesis 9, 6, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.

For God made man in his own image. That's where the value of a human life comes from, that we are made in the image of God. We represent God.

So the value of the man's life, of a human's life, is so inestimably high that there is no possible money amount that you can pay to atone for him except for the life of another.

[43 : 42] So imagine what it's like to be on death row in ancient Israel for murder. You've been sentenced to death for a crime for which there can be no ransom.

Doesn't matter how rich you are. You cannot get out. With the crushing certainty of doom weighing on you ever heavier and drawing nearer, imagine that desperation.

Because that's where we have all been. We've all in fact been in those exact shoes. Because Romans 6.23 says the wages of sin is death.

We've all sinned against an infinitely worthy God by rebelling against him and living for ourselves. And the just punishment for that is death. It's the only just punishment.

And we cannot possibly afford a ransom to escape our death. Psalm 49 says, Truly no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice that he should live on forever and never see the pit.

[44 : 49] Only thing costly enough for a person's life is life. Another human life only fitting punishment for us is death and eternal damnation.

But knowing that full well God the Father loved us and sent his only son, the son of God and the son of man to be the substitute for us to take our place to die on the cross for our sins and in our place the innocent one the righteous one dying freely giving his life on the cross so that we who are convicts on death row can be atoned for and go free.

Only death can atone for our sins and only the death of the perfect sinless son of God can atone for all of our sins and that's what Jesus did.

And Jesus willingly and gladly paid that price so that people who have no hope of freedom no hope of atonement can live can have eternal life.

So let's safeguard human life because it's valuable and let's trust in Jesus who has died to give us life. Let's pray together.

[46 : 08] Father, when we see just how precious human life is from this passage, we more rightly understand and appreciate the true price you paid, the preciousness of the life of your son Jesus Christ and why that price was necessary.

Father, thank you for being willing to pay the unspeakable price out of your love for us. And Jesus, thank you for your loving sacrifice on our behalf.

Help us to now live our lives knowing the worth and value of our own lives purchased by the precious blood of the Son of God.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.