



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 21:28 - 22:15

Topic

God gives guidelines for His recently redeemed people to live safely together as neighbors

Title

“Mister Redeemer’s Neighborhood”

Have you ever had a bad neighbor?

He probably wasn't as bad as Florida landscaper Mitchell Igelko.

When he wasn't hired by his neighbor to mow the lawn, something in the man snapped. He decided if *he* couldn't mow the lawn, no one would. So he sprayed toxic chemicals on the property that caused the grass to die.

From there, he went on a rampage, showering numerous houses with eggs, nails, and flammable liquids, which caused a boat to catch fire.

Video surveillance cameras caught Igelko in the act, and he was sentenced to five years' probation.

You might assume that Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar was a bad neighbor - but not for the reason you might think. While putting together his private zoo, Escobar imported a single male hippopotamus and three females.

After Escobar's death in 1993, many of his pets were shipped off to other parts of the world, but the Colombian government sort of forgot about the hippos. *National Geographic* counted at least 70 in 2013. Rural Colombians are dealing with the 4000 pound ear-wiggling inbred maniacs coming up to their villages in increasing numbers, all thanks to their long dead neighbor.

Even if you're not a fan of *Seinfeld*, if I say, "Hello, Newman," you know I'm referring to Jerry's despicable neighbor. TV guide included him in their 2013 list of the "60 Nastiest Villains of All Time." In 2016, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked him #16 of their "40 Greatest TV Villains of All Time."

In the good neighbor category we'd expect to find Mr. Rogers. After all, it was always "A beautiful day in the neighborhood."

Here is a bit of controversy: Although we all remember Fred singing, "It's a beautiful day in *the* neighborhood," if you search for it on YouTube, he sings "**this** neighborhood." Weird.

We're thinking about good and bad neighbors because our next verses in Exodus set forth the guidelines that can make it a beautiful day for neighbors. Specifically, they deal with avoiding *personal injuries*, and with respecting *personal property*.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 You Love Your Neighbor As Yourself By Keeping Him Safe From Personal Injury, and #2 You Love Your Neighbor As Yourself By Keeping Safe His Personal Property.

#1 You Love Your Neighbor As Yourself
By Keeping Him Safe From Personal Injury

(21:28-32)

I still remember some of the safety tips promoted by Fire Marshall Bill:

- Like when he demonstrated the danger of throwing a live grenade into a fireplace during the office Christmas party.
- Or like when he demonstrated the danger of *Stop, Drop, and Roll* if the floor is covered with thumbtacks.

“Safety is no accident.” We say that to each other around campus - especially when one of the staff is not practicing safety.

Since the Israelites were to live in community with one another, personal injury was going to be an issue. God addresses a few cases, and gives His judgment on them.

These obviously are not exhaustive; but they are typical.

Exo 21:28 "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox *shall be* acquitted.

I think you know this, but I am afraid of all animals - large or small. I'm afraid of my own pets. They could turn at any time.

The internet has only deepened and confirmed my fears as I watch over-and-over again that lady who gets attacked by a house cat and slips all over the icy sidewalk between her front door and her mailbox.

Who knew oxen could kill? They could, and they did. When they did, they were put to death. The owner wasn't held accountable, but neither could he profit by selling the meat.

Exo 21:29 But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death.

If the ox was a menace, a disaster waiting to happen, then it was a different story. That was negligence. It carried the death penalty for its owner.

Way back when, we had Siberian Huskies. I don't recommend it; not if you want to have a yard. They weren't aggressive, but the Rottweilers living in one of the yards we walked by were. One night while Pam and I were walking two of the Huskies, the Rott's broke through the rickety fence. There was only one thing to do: I ran off with our dogs while Pam fended-off the Rottweilers.

That's a funny story - but only because no one was hurt. There are too many dog attacks as a result of the owner's negligence that result in severe injury or death.

Exo 21:30 If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him.

He was not a murderer. He hadn't trained the ox to be a killer. He wasn't involved in underground, backyard ox-goring competition. "The first rule of ox-club is you don't talk about ox-club."

Instead of the death penalty, his life could be ransomed. The victim's family apparently could demand a monetary settlement instead of the death penalty.

Exo 21:31 Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.

The sanctity of the precious lives of children was thus upheld. They were no less valued than adults.

Exo 21:32 If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

The fact that the ox was killed for goring a slave is significant. It tells us that the slave had the same sacred worth as a free person. A slave wasn't property; he or she was a person made in the image of God.

We commonly say that "thirty shekels of silver" was the price of a slave. That's kind of true. Here's what I mean: Slaves in Israel were not bought and sold. We saw in our last study that, for a variety of reasons, they put themselves into slavery, but had to be released after a maximum of six years of serving.

Thirty shekels wasn't the 'going rate' for purchasing slaves. No, the thirty shekels was compensation for the loss of the slave's labor, which might have been intended to pay off a debt that he owed.

We also tend to think that thirty shekels wasn't very much money. True, it converts to only about \$60.00; but we need to put that into perspective. For example, the prophet Jeremiah bought a field from his cousin for seventeen shekels (Jeremiah 32:9).

In the Book of Judges, a priest is hired at wages of ten shekels per year (17:10). Thirty shekels, then, was his three years wages.

Of course, the most famous use of thirty shekels in the Bible is the price Judas was paid to betray Jesus. The point isn't that Jesus was 'sold' as a slave. The thirty shekels paid Judas were the fulfillment of a couple of marvelous prophecies in the Old Testament book of Zechariah.

Back to Exodus: These were guidelines, helping the elders and the judges to apply God's Law to every specific case. Love demands I keep my neighbor safe.

You're undoubtedly familiar with the phrase, "Ambulance Chaser." It's a lawyer who specializes in bringing cases seeking damages for personal injury.

Lawyers are near the bottom on lists of Most Trusted Professions, ahead of only Business Executives and Lobbyists.

Pastors fall in the middle. The most trusted profession by far: Nurses.

Israel had no Ox Chasers. When a situation arose between neighbors involving personal injury, it was resolved according to the Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments; which can further be summarized by loving God with all your heart, mind, and soul; and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus was once asked, “What is the greatest commandment in the Law?” He answered, saying,
Mat 22:37 ... 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

Mat 22:38 This is the first and great commandment.

Mat 22:39 And the second is like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

“Loving your neighbor as yourself” is the foundation for these judgements about personal injury, and personal property. Keep love in your heart and you will strive to avoid causing personal injury to your neighbor. Love your neighbor as yourself and you’ll know what to do if you cause a problem for him.

Rather than attempt a list of ways I can love my neighbor as myself, I came across this quote that puts it into perspective rather boldly:

[The] commandment to love our neighbor as we love ourselves... seems to demand that I tear the skin off my body and wrap it around another person so that I feel that I am that other person; and all the longings that I have for my own safety and health and success and happiness I now feel for that other person as though he were me... If this is what it means, then something unbelievably powerful and earthshaking and reconstructing and overturning and upending will have to happen in our souls. Something supernatural. Something well beyond what self-preserving, self-enhancing, self-exalting, self-esteeming, self-advancing human beings... can do on their own.

The “something” that must happen is that I get saved and have God the Holy Spirit take-up residence in me. With His indwelling and His enabling, I can feel for that other person as though he, or she, were me.

#2 You Love Your Neighbor As Yourself By Keeping Safe His Personal Property

(21:33 - 22:15)

Speaking of *Seinfeld*... In one episode, Jerry sees his dry cleaner wearing his coat that he had left with them. Later he spots the dry cleaner’s wife wearing his mothers fur coat.

I recently acquired a replacement shirt from my dry cleaner. They lost one of mine, so I picked-out a shirt from their rack of unclaimed clothes. Turns out, the shirt I chose is quite expensive. Whenever I wear it, I wonder if its owner is going to see it and confront me.

Do you ever wonder what happens to your car when you give up the key for valet parking?

If you have a Tesla, you’ll know what happens. A Tesla keeps track of the car's energy usage. One owner saw a dramatic spike on the dashboard after it was valet parked.

"It was all the way up to the 900 level," the owner said. "I've never had a spike like that."

For five to six miles, the car recorded that someone floored it, likely topping speeds of more than 90 miles an hour.

"It was clear that they were driving the car hard," he said. "Driving it like you stole it; it's exactly what they did." Busted!

Concern for your neighbor's personal property is next discussed in Exodus.

Exo 21:33 "And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it,
Exo 21:34 the owner of the pit shall make *it* good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead *animal* shall be his.

The "pit" was normally a well. It needed a protective wall around it so it wasn't a hazard. Don't skimp on the wall; or leave it undone. There was too much danger.

How many times have we seen a child fall into an abandoned well or mine shaft? Too many times.

Exo 21:35 "If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide.

I'm not sure I get ox-math, but each individual ends up with the equivalent of a whole ox in meat and in money.

Exo 21:36 Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.

In the case of the aggressive ox, the innocent party is paid the value of his gored ox, and he keeps it for its meat and hide.

Exo 22:1 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

That seems a pretty effective deterrent to stealing. You had to restore 5-fold or 4-fold. If you couldn't, you'd serve six years as a slave.

Exo 22:2 If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, *there shall be* no guilt for his bloodshed.

As we will see in verse three, the attempted theft in verse two occurs at night. The homeowner had the right to protect himself using lethal force against the nocturnal intruder.

Exo 22:3 If the sun has risen on him, *there shall be* guilt for his bloodshed...

If the thief broke-in during the day, things were different. "Guilt for [the thief's] bloodshed" means the person being robbed was held accountable for taking the thief's life.

In one case, you're sleeping; it's dark; you're startled by the intruder and don't know his intentions. Lethal force is understandable and acceptable.

If it's daytime, and you can see you are not in mortal danger - you can't just kill people. Plus in the light of day you could identify the thief, leading to his capture.

Law Enforcement has a Use of Force Continuum. It's a standard that provides them with guidelines as to how much force may be used against a resisting subject in a given situation.

Cops can't randomly draw their sidearm and shoot people. Sure, it makes their job a whole lot more dangerous, but they must only use as much force as is necessary.

I saw a video the other day of an Arizona purse-snatcher being shot at by a by-stander. As much as the guy was a dirtbag, I don't think shooting him fits the crime. Human life is of greater value than a purse.

One commentator put it this way: "God holds sacred even the life of a thief who is breaking into a house. If he breaks in at night and is slain, the slayer is not charged. But if his crime is in the daytime, when the owner could call for help or even recognize the intruder and accuse him later, then the slayer is guilty of homicide."

Exo 22:3 If the sun has risen on him, *there shall be* guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

The "he" in the last half of the verse is the thief. He must pay-up or serve as a slave.

Exo 22:4 If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.

God thought restitution was a good thing to demand. BTW: Our courts often do order restitution - although it can be difficult to enforce.

Exo 22:5 "If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.

Exo 22:6 "If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

Your neighbor's grazing land was important for his livelihood. You must work to keep your animals off of it; and to be sure you don't accidentally kindle a fire.

A do-it-yourself bedbug extermination attempt gone wrong left a Cincinnati home in flames and displaced 10 people.

The fire broke out in a multifamily home, which had five units. Three people suffered smoke inhalation. The blaze caused \$250,000 damage.

It was the second recent such incident in Cincinnati.

The blaze began when a woman on the first floor tried to kill bedbugs with alcohol that ignited near an open flame, either a candle or burning incense.

Call Hedges Pest Control. Leave it to the professionals.

Exo 22:7 "If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double.

Exo 22:8 If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges *to see* whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods.

There were no banks, or mini-storage facilities. Personal property was sometimes given to a neighbor for protection. The one who received someone's valuables (goods, clothing, or animals) for safekeeping was responsible for them. If personal valuables were lost and no thief was found, the one who kept the goods had to prove before the judges that he did not steal them or he had to make restitution by paying double.

I'd like to make an observation. In verse eight, many Bible versions have the word "judges." It's the Hebrew word *elohim*, which I've mentioned a few times as a description of God and other beings that inhabit the supernatural realm. In some Bible versions, scholars interpret it as also referring to human judges. That's not accurate.

Elohim does not refer to humans unless they are deceased and in the supernatural.

One of the better recent translations of the Bible, the ESV, translates the word in this verse, "God." It's correct in doing so.

Moses was emphasizing that these judgments were being made before God. Besides, when Moses at the urging of his father-in-law, Jethro, first chose men to help him judge, they are not called *elohim*. They are called elders (Exodus 18).

In the question of Yandu to Rocket regarding something Baby Groot was saying, "Is this conversation important?"

It is - in order to remain consistent with the use of *elohim* throughout the Old Testament.

Exo 22:9 "For any kind of trespass, *whether it concerns* an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, *or* for any kind of lost thing which *another* claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; *and* whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.

Again, "judges" should be translated God. The translators who prefer "judges" are interpreting what they believe is being said. It might sound strange to us, to say that the parties came "before God," but it shouldn't. An Israelite might appear before Moses, or the elders; but he was to understand that he was really appearing before God.

By the way, according to Deuteronomy 17:12, "the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed... the judge, **that man shall die.**"

Exo 22:10 If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing *it*,

Exo 22:11 then an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept *that*, and he shall not make *it* good.

Exo 22:12 But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it.

Exo 22:13 If it is torn to pieces *by a beast*, *then* he shall bring it as evidence, *and* he shall not make good what was torn.

Taking care of someone's animals was tricky. These verses list some of the things that might happen to them, and whether the neighbor was required to make restitution or not.

Exo 22:14 "And if a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not *being* with it, he shall surely make *it* good.

Exo 22:15 If its owner *was* with it, he shall not make *it* good; if it *was* hired, it came for its hire.

This is one reason I don't like to borrow things. If I break it, I've bought it - for its owner. And I always seem to break it.

These are not the comprehensive property laws of Israel. They were representative guidelines to give the Israelites understanding on how to approach property issues.

Want to get along with others? Love God; love your neighbor.

It's simple - until you try to do it. Then you find it is impossible.

But wait: We've been told that what is impossible for man is possible for God.

If you are a believer, something supernatural has occurred in your life. God the Holy Spirit has taken residence in you.

"Love your neighbor as yourself" has nothing to do with your natural disposition or personality:

- You're not at a disadvantage to love this way if you're a hermit-like curmudgeon.
- You're not at an advantage if you're a syrupy-sweet glass-half-full kind of person.

Loving your neighbor as yourself is totally supernatural.

But so are you and I - because God resides in us.

It may sound like a cop-out, but rather than tell you how to love your neighbor as yourself, **I'm only going to remind you that you can.**

If you start thinking of specific activities... That's putting the cart before the horse. If you list it out, then you're setting yourself up for failure:

- Either you will fail to accomplish your list, feel defeated, and grow even less loving; or,
- You'll think you've succeeded and grow into a legalist - which might be worse than failing in the long run.

Having begun in the Spirit, you cannot make advances by your own efforts.

Everyday is a beautiful day in the neighborhood for loving God, and for loving your neighbor, all in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.