

## Message #42

## Exodus 22:1-15

When the Apostle Paul wrote one of his letters to the Corinthians, he wrote to a people who were proud of who they were and they were proud of all they had. They were from all appearances very affluent and successful. So one of the things that Paul had to do was to remind them of the truth that they certainly were not successful spiritually speaking.

When he decided to address their wealth, he said to them, “what do you have that you did not receive?” (I Corinthians 4:7). In other words, what he told them is everything you have has been given to you by God, and you should purpose to be right in a relationship with this great God.

It is absolutely true that everything we have has been given to us by God and God monitors what we have, how we use what we have and what happens to what we have. In fact, His Word has specific laws and judgments that are aimed at protecting what we have.

Now Paul would say in regard to this O.T. Law that “the law is good if one uses it lawfully, realizing that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious...” (I Timothy 1:8ff).

So in a society there are certain lawless, ungodly people who don't care about the property God has given to someone. They don't care about who you are or what you have. There are some who would actually take what you have. So God came up with a series of personal property laws that were designed to protect the property rights of His people.

**THE O.T. LAW OF GOD DEMANDS THAT CERTAIN PROPERTY RIGHTS AND JUDGMENTS BE MADE AGAINST THOSE WHO VIOLATE THOSE RIGHTS.**

Now back at the time when these laws were given, many of these matters involved animals. Israel did not own tractors or trucks, they used animals. So animals were critical to the life and survival of the nation, which was mostly an agricultural nation.

Now there are nine different potential situations that God presents here regarding a person's property:

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #1 – God's judgment concerning the stealing of someone's animals. 22:1**

The scenario presented here is that a person steals an ox or sheep and slaughters it and sells it.

What is described here is the intentional theft of an animal. A person steals an animal and then intentionally butchers it and sells it.

Now we don't know why he stole the animal, but most likely it is because criminal types are usually poor because they are too lazy and irresponsible and they don't want to work for a living.

Criminal types don't want to work for something; they want to steal something from those who have worked for it.

There is a form of this taking place in our country right now. People who don't work want to take things from people who do work. They want what they have, but they don't want to work to get it. God's society does not support sloth. God's society does not support someone who refuses to work.

In God's society you were not given government handouts if you refused to work. So since criminal types are too lazy to work themselves, they are always looking to make a fast buck by stealing something someone else has. **Stealing is never justifiable.**

Now oxen were work animals and would be a little more difficult to steal, but a sheep would be a little easier to steal. God said the penalty is that a thief must pay restitution for each animal he stole. If he stole an ox, he must pay back five oxen for the one he stole, which is a 400% steep fine. If he stole a sheep, he must pay back four sheep for the one he stole, which is a 300% steep fine. This certainly was a detriment to stealing. The sociologists, who claim that punishment does not deter crime, don't know what they are talking about because God's Word says it does.

Obviously we may learn from this that one crime is slightly less serious than another crime. Stealing an ox was a little more serious than stealing a sheep, but both were crimes that demanded restitution be made.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #2** – God's judgment concerning a thief who is caught breaking and entering someone's house with the intent to steal. **22:2-4**

**The Law of God permits people to use lethal force if someone breaks into their house at night with the intent to steal something.** When I took the concealed weapon course, the instructor said if someone comes into your house at night and takes your TV and you wake up and see him with it, you should get out of your house and let him have it. At the break I said to the guy, that isn't going to happen in my house. If someone comes into my house at night he will get shot even if he was there just to take a coffee cup. **God's Word and God's Law supports the use of deadly force in protecting your property especially if someone breaks into your house at night.**

Notice what **verse 2** says, if a thief is caught while breaking into a residence and is killed, the owner of the residence is not liable; it is justifiable homicide. This person should not even have to appear in court.

But according to **verse 3**, if he went in during the day and is spotted, you cannot just kill him.

Obviously if this happens in the day time, you can see who it is and what he is doing and you can track him down.

So you cannot just kill him if you see him walking off with a sheep. But you can force him to make restitution for what he has taken and if he doesn't have anything, he can be sold as a slave and would probably be required to serve six years as a slave for his crime (Ex. 21:2-4). Most thieves do not have anything with which they can make restitution. They don't have bank accounts or retirement funds; most live off welfare and mooch off society.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #3** – God's judgment concerning the damage of free grazing animal. **22:5**

If a man owned an animal, he was responsible for it. Now most land boundaries were marked by stones, not by fences. I used to bear hunt a spot on the Idaho/Montana border way up in the mountains. They marked the state off by a pile of stones. That is how it worked in Israel.

No intelligent farmer or rancher would just allow his animal to wander over to other people's land and let them just graze and eat someone else's crops. Any responsible owner of animals knows you must protect your animals from doing destructive things to your neighbors. At night you need to see that the animals are fenced in.

Now if your sheep, goats, cows, horses, donkeys or oxen were just turned out to free graze and it went to someone else's property and ate from another man's field, the owner of the animal was responsible to make restitution by giving the best of his own field and vineyard. This could include things harvested and not harvested.

A goat would not just eat the fruit of the vine; it might eat the whole vine, so the vine would need to be replaced.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #4** – God's judgment concerning the destruction of property against someone who started a fire. **22:6**

This is timely data especially in view of the fires that are burning in Texas. A wildfire raced through north Texas and destroyed at least 100 homes and thousands of people had to be evacuated from 1300 homes. At least one person is dead. One person is dead. Authorities are not sure who or what started the fire. There are crazy pyromaniacs who love to start fires and watch things burn.

I doubt that was much of a threat when this law was given. But there were dry seasons and if you burned and started a fire and that fire got out of control, you were responsible to make restitution.

If someone were responsible for starting a fire, according to God, he had to make complete restitution for the damage. Let us say a person were burning brush or doing some hot shoe farrier work and the fire got out of control and it destroyed someone else's harvested grain or grain standing in the field, the one who started the fire and let it get out of control is liable.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #5** – God’s judgment concerning the loss of something while someone else was taking care of it. **22:7-8**

Now God says suppose you gave something to someone for safekeeping and a thief broke in and stole what you gave to someone to keep. If the thief was caught, then the thief was responsible to pay back double.

But let us suppose the thief was not caught. Then the person who was responsible for safekeeping was to be examined by judges to determine whether or not he was responsible for the loss.

Now we will learn from **verse 11** that one thing the person had to do was to appear before God and take an oath that he had not been involved in a plot to steal.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #6** – God’s judgment concerning the loss of anything because of a breach of trust. **22:9**

In any breach of trust incident in which some property is lost, whether ox, donkey, sheep, clothing or any lost thing, both parties were to appear before the judges and the one guilty was required to pay back double.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #7** – God’s judgment concerning the loss of an animal that someone else was watching. **22:10-13**

If an owner of an animal lent his animal out to help someone else or if he asked his neighbor to take care of his animal while he was away and it died or was hurt or wandered away and got lost, not due to any intentional or known malice, the owner needs to accept it and not demand restitution.

According to **verse 11**, there must be an appearance before God and an oath taken before God by the owner and the one who borrowed the animal. If it were proven that he was innocent, then there is no liability. There would need to be no restitution.

However, if the animal were stolen, then restitution needed to be made (**22:12**). Now we may assume on this point that if a thief were discovered who stole the animal, the thief had to make restitution. However, if no thief was found, then it is possible that the person who borrowed or was lent the animal was involved in it and he needed to make restitution.

If a predator killed the borrowed animal, then no restitution needed to be made (**22:13**). Pieces of the animal needed to be recovered as evidence because it is easy to determine whether or not an animal was killed by a predator.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #8** – God’s judgment concerning the loss of an animal that was leased or borrowed with the owner not present. **22:14**

If a man borrows anything from an owner and the owner is not present while using what he borrowed and something happens to what he borrowed, he is responsible to make it right and make restitution.

**PERSONAL PROPERTY SITUATION #9** – God’s judgment concerning the loss of an animal that was being used with the owner present . **22:15**

If a man borrowed something or paid a rental fee for something from an owner and the owner was present when the person was using what he borrowed or rented and something happened to it, the borrower was not responsible or liable.

The point here is that we need to respect each other and respect each other’s property.

It is clear that a good society of people is built on the basis of responsibility, honesty, integrity and respect. We need to be responsible people who care for each other and treat each other with respect. We need to take care of what we have and see to it that we do not infringe on what others have.