

Exodus 23:1–9

The Just God's Society Should Be Careful to Witness, Neighbor, and Judge Justly

Friday, September 16, 2022 ▫ Read Exodus 23:1–9

Questions from the Scripture text: What shall they not do with what (v1)? What are they not to put with whom? To do what? Whom shall they not follow to do what (v2)? What shall they not turn aside after whom to do in what situation? To whom shall they not show what in v3? What sort of animal are they encountering in the situation in v4? What has happened with it? What are they to do with it? Whose donkey is in the situation in v5? What has happened to it? How would one want to act (i.e. according to his flesh)? But what must he do instead? What shall they not do to what in v6? Of whom? What sort of matter is in question in v7? What instruction does God give them about such a matter? Why? What shall they not take (v8)? Why, what two things does a bribe do to what two types of people? What shall they not do to whom in v9? Why, what do they know? How do they know it?

How must God's society resist the temptation to treat others unjustly? Exodus 23:1–9 looks forward to the evening sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In these nine verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **in situations where there is extra pressure to act unjustly, God's people must be all the more resolved and consistent to act justly.**

God's people must act justly as witnesses, v1–3.

The Israelite has not composed the report in v1, but he is tempted to support it. God describes this as putting his hand with the wicked. This does not change, even if everyone else is doing it. For if many have turned aside (v2b) so that they make a crowd (v2a), the Israelite must still refuse to do so. Better to side with God in the truth than all other men in a lie! Whose side is God on? The right one. And that doesn't necessarily mean the poor man (v3). God is no Critical Theorist! Rather, knowing that the compassion that He has commanded toward the poor could be twisted, God now specifically forbids partiality toward him.

God's people must act justly as neighbors, v4–5.

As the question in Luke 10:27–29 reminds us, being a neighbor isn't necessarily easy. In fact, as Jesus's answer (cf. Luk 10:30–36), sometimes the neighbor is from among the "enemy" (v4) "who hates you" (v5). So, the Lord takes the situation in which we're most tempted not to love our neighbor as ourselves and uses the Hebrew doubling of the verb, in both verses, to press upon us our absolute obligation to love him.

Think about it: you see an ox or donkey going astray, or a donkey who has given out under its load. You notice that it belongs to an enemy, or someone who hates you. Are you not tempted in your flesh to laugh to yourself and consider it "justice" that this has happened to his animal? But you mustn't! You must act with the same care as if the animal was your own. Return the straying animal and help the struggling animal. God demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were His enemies Christ died for us!

God's people must act justly as judges, v6–9.

Again, now in the case of judges, the Lord takes up several of the most tempting situations in which to take shortcuts to judgment. v6 treats the flipside of v3. A judge may be tempted to thrust aside the justice of the poor just as much as he might be tempted to favor the poor or the stranger (v9). The wealthy have more power to punish us or reward us (v8), but we must not allow that to blind us or change our words.

Another tempting situation is when there's doubt about guilt in a capital crime (v7). The judge might worry that the defendant might be guilty, and what if he is letting him off the hook? God's answer in v7 is that no one ever gets let off the hook. The wicked man, though the case be unproven on earth, will have to stand before God, Who will not justify him.

What are some situations in which you are tempted to be unjust? Whom do you know that acts as an enemy toward you or hates you? How does recognizing this help you prepare to obey the Lord in this?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You that You have shown us marvelous, redeeming kindness without compromising Your justice the smallest bit. Grant that we would be like You in both love and justice, especially in situations where we are tempted to be unjust. For, we ask it in Your own precious Name, Lord Jesus, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP51B "From My Sins, O Hide Your Face" or TPH174 "The Ten Commandments"

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Exodus 23 versus 1 through 9. These are God's words. You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute. So as to turn aside, after many to prefer justice, You shall not show partiality to a poor man and his dispute.

If you meet your enemy's ox, or is donkey going astray, it's a surely, bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you will refrain from helping it, you shall shortly help him with it. You shall not pervert.

The judgment of your poor in His dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter. Do not kill the innocent and the righteous for I will not justify the wicked and you shall take no bribe for a bribe. Blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. Also, you shall not oppress a stranger for, you know, the heart of a stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

So far the reading of God's inspired and inherent word. So throughout these nine verses that we'll hear preach Lord willing on the Lord's day afternoon evening. We see that the society of the Lord, the society of the redeemed must be one in which everyone whether a witness or a neighbor or a judge is careful to act justly as careful to act justly.

And so the first three verses treat situation in which your neighbor, sorry you're a witness in a court setting. This would probably be in the city gates, but still in the trial.

Setting and then versus four and five with your neighbor and particularly your enemy. It was a class of neighbor and then in verses 6 through 9 as a judge. So, first being careful to act justly when you are a witness and trial and this can be formal in a court case or informal in investigation or conversation.

And the first example of being a of careful to be a righteous witness is being careful, not to affirm things that you don't know to be true. So, he says, you shall not circulate a false report to, this is not a case in which you're making up the false report.

But in which by not challenging it, or even by a knot of the head or repetition or some of the ask you, is that true? You might know it's not and you struck your shoulders, whatever it is. You're adding the weight of of your testimony or your non-denial even to the to the strength or the effectiveness of the false report.

You're allowing the false report to have more life by not denying it or by making it seem like you're affirming. It. And you need to know that those who are unrighteous in their witness are actively circulating, false reports. And they are able to get more traction. When others are idle and do not challenge that which they know to be false, or allow it to seem as if they affirm that, which they don't know to be true.

This is a very significant responsibility to think about what narrative, what version of what happened. You are allowing to continue or even encouraging to continue. This becomes even more difficult when the unrighteous witness from first. One has gotten a whole bunch of people either to shrunk their shoulders or not their heads or whatever.

Or now there's an entire crowd of people who seem to be on one side of things. And yet, we know that even if, every man is a liar, God is true. And that the number of people saying something does not actually increase The likelihood that it is true. In fact, in a society where people are sinful, the number of people saying something or affirming, something can actually be increased precisely because it's false.

And so we're not to decide the truthfulness of something based upon the number of people who are saying it and certainly we don't want to become part of the crowd. That makes it more difficult for the next person to discern the truth of it. So he says, you shall not follow a crowd to do evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute.

So as to turn aside, after many to prefer justice and so the picture in the second half of verse 2 is one in, which there's a question that you seem to have been undecided and yet more and more people are coming down on one side of the issue. And eventually, after enough of turned to that side of the issue, you turn to that side too.

Saying, don't make decisions that way and certainly don't decide on your actions. Don't take actions that way The third place where we are tempted to come down on the wrong side of an issue. When we either know what the right with the true state of things is, or we don't know, but we're tempted to come down on a side.

Anyway, is out of pity for the poor. And we should put pity there in Fear quotes because someone who's poor is under temptation to bring about a change in his circumstances through sin. Just one of the things that the Bible teaches us to pray, when we ask the Lord, that we might not have poverty.

And the one of the reasons that the scripture gives us for asking for that is so that we wouldn't be tempted to steal. Well, the poor are also tempted to lie. Tempted to try to use the justice system to change their circumstances. Driving down here. We passed about, you know, at least several hundred billboards for I named Alexander Sundara.

Who's you know, the kind of lawyer who helps you file a lawsuit that it's easier to just make go away by settling with you and people can see legal proceedings as a way of quickly changing their circumstances, but it doesn't help. Someone It's not actually pitying him to take up his side in a case where you don't know that.

He's telling the truth where he might be lying. If you reinforce him the lie, you might be able to get him some material things from whomever, he's trying to squeeze them out of, but you're hardening him in giving false testimony before God, which is a great danger to his soul.

You are being like the devil who is the father of lying and he was glad to see the destruction of the soul of the poor. And so the temptation to show partiality to. The poor comes from what we would call misplaced, sympathy or misplaced, pity. It doesn't actually love the soul of the man.

It loves feeling generous towards the man or feeling like you're a white knight to defend the cause of the poor man. And we've seen before how critical theory taking the side of someone just because they're not in power just because they seem to be disadvantaged that. It really is satanic, and it's origin, and its nature.

So, all of those are places where We are taught to be aware of how our testimony, whether in public thought and discourse or whether in a formal trial, may end up being false and just be careful about the sort of testimony that we give. So that's acting justly as a witness and there's acting justly as a neighbor and he takes the hardest case.

Love your neighbor as yourself, you know, for those who love us and are friendly towards us, much more easy. And yet the Lord Jesus sets an example for us in the Sermon of the Mount of thinking especially about how we treat our enemies. That an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, is how the court should operate in.

Inflicting penalties and sentences but for us as private persons where to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us to do good to those who persecute us. And this is the neighbor that we are to love as ourselves. So you remember in Luke 10 when Jesus affirmed that the second great commandment.

Just love your neighbor as yourself. And the guy says yeah, but who is my neighbor and what comes out of the actors, what we now call the parable of the Good Samaritan. And this Samaritan when he sees the Jew, he probably sees a guy who under other circumstances would ignore him at best and probably abuse him verbally or otherwise.

But what he sees is a man who has been beaten and left for dead and he acts and as a neighbor towards him even though he's an enemy. And so we have something similar here. Jesus doesn't teach that for the first time in Luke 10 in his humanity. Here he is, and his divinity, by his spirit, teaching us the same thing.

It's your enemies ox or donkey that you see going astray. And we all know what our flesh is tempted to do when we see that straight on docks Only that straight, ox or donkey. And we notice that it happens to be our neighbors ox or donkey. What's the flesh tempted to do?

Haha serves him, right? Hope you never gets it back. What he tells us here not just to not feel like that in their hearts or that that's a wrong feeling but that we are supposed to stop what we are doing and lose the time and lose the, the effort and opportunity for whatever else.

It was that we were going to do and actually help our enemy get her his ox, or donkey back. And then in verse 5, it's even another step because you see the donkey line under its burden. What does that mean? That means your foolish enemy. Who hates you Notice.

It's the donkey of one who hates you. You have foolish guy who hates you. He's always doing everything wrong. He's not even kind enough to his animals. Look at that. He overloaded the thing, he deserves it and that donkey deserves it for belonging to him. And you know, when when his donkey has exhausted itself and his injured or maybe dies of a heart attack from trying to get up or whatever it is and I'll serve him, right?

We know that our flesh is tempted to think that to think that way or to feel that way. I mean, it's not incorrect necessarily analyze the situation that way, but what does loving your neighbor properly do? What does justice and a society where God has redeemed? His enemies for that is what we are to him.

In our sin caught demonstrating, his love for us and that all we were still sinners Christ died for us. That Jesus shows his love by dying for his enemies. What does a society of a God who has redeemed us by loving us? Even when wears and how are we supposed to act?

Well he says you you look and you see the foolishness of that one who hates you and you go and you help the beast with its burden which actually might mean. You take some of the burden on yourself or your own donkey and you make sure that it's able to get to where it's going.

And you can imagine how shocking this would be to someone who didn't live in a society that was operated under these laws. And I think it's probably fair to say that Israelite society. Never fully or healthy or robustly functioned under such principles. It would have to be a Christian Society in which there was real spiritual life in the church was doing well, that you would find people acting this way.

And certainly not all people but it would be a reminder and a display of what kind of God. These people have who act like this even with their enemies. And so, there's a great incentive for us to act. Justly not just as witnesses but especially as neighbors and especially towards those neighbors, who are enemies towards those neighbors.

Who ate us that the character of our God and particularly, the way he has displayed, that character in redemption would come out in the lives and the conduct of those whom, he has redeemed that we would be children of our Father in heaven who makes His good son to shine on the just and the unjust to make this good rain to fall upon and refresh and give life four and two, the just and the unjust.

Well, the third place that this brief passage reminds us that we should be careful to act. Justly is if we end up in a place of of judgment authority and we are going to render verdict or we are going to render sentence or participate in that perhaps as a jury of sorts or as a, as a judge or as a magistrate.

So, you shall not pervert. The judgment of your poor and his dispute. Notice also the bride in verse 8, you know who can't bribe, you ordinarily. Can't probably up or person. There's a temptation when someone has money or someone has influence to be more willing, or to find it easier to find in his favor.

So that you don't defend him or that you even encourage a fellow feeling towards you in him. And the poor men can't do any of those things for you. The reason to be just towards him may be found to some extent in sympathy. But you remember verse 3 that it doesn't actually help him unless you are rendering a righteous and correct verdict.

But the primary reason is because God is the one who is the chief judge and all of us who have authority on earth, have an authority that is under him. In the second place. Verse 7 reminds us that we are not act merely on suspicions that we are to keep ourselves.

Far from a false matter. We may be tempted to think. Oh, this guy really could be guilty even though I don't have in controvertible proof of it. And if I let him go, what's gonna happen? What's he gonna do? And yet we're allowing ourselves to determine the case out of fear, rather than from evidence.

And so he says, do not kill the innocent and the righteous. This is in particular in a capital case. It says, one of the places in Scripture where the principle of innocent until proven guilty comes from, and the reason we are able to do that is because we know that God knows who is guilty and that God will bring about ultimate justice.

We cannot bring about ultimate justice, even if we were to, but in the process of trying to often those who are actually innocent will end up condemned because of the fear and the one who's rendering judgment. And So we must remember that God will not justify the wicked. The wicked will get the punishment that is coming to them.

And therefore, their needs to be that high bar of being Sure, beyond reasonable doubt, especially in capital cases, Of course, will not take must not take gifts at all. From someone who's case is under our consideration in verse 8, this

Shows that almost all of contemporary American politics as wicked people, taking all sorts of gifts, from those who for whom they will end up passing legislation. And then verse 9 similar to verse 6. But in this case, it's the stranger who does not have standing or influence. And here our minds, the people of Israel that they too were strangers.

And so Be careful not to oppress the stranger. Whether you're in the place of judgment or whether you're taking advantage of their weakness and society, the weakness of their position to influence judgment against them or to take advantage of them in some way. But you see how there's not just a list of rules for executing justice.

The particular examples that he gives for all three situations as a witness as a neighbor, or as a judge show, not just procedure or proper outcome. But by, by the particular cases that are selected, God shows that there ought to be a carefulness for justice and awareness of the situations in which we would most likely be unjust.

And so resolving ahead of time thinking through ahead of time. So that we will act justly before God and justly unto men and resist. The temptations that arise from our flesh to twist or pervert. Justice. What's ask the Lord to help us. And that Our Father in heaven. We thank you that you have not only been righteous and just towards us even to the extent of loving us when we were still sinners and your enemies that you have also set before us the value of Reflecting your justice in.

However, we act Lord help us to be very careful about the truth. Help us to be loving, even towards our enemies and to be freed. And by the fact that vengeance belongs to you and help us, we pray when we are in positions where we are making decisions that will effect others, that we would remember that you ruled over rule all things and some help us to make our decisions right?

Justly and not out of fear trusting that you will get everything right? Even when we are unable because of our finitude or finiteness to get everything, right? So

help us Lord to trust you and to reflect your character and how we speak. And how we act, we ask all these things in Jesus name, Amen.