

Exod 04-02-22b

Let's continue our study now in Exodus chapter 23. Let's continue our study now in Exodus chapter 23. Well, this section, as you've already seen, is dealing with truth and justice.

This is the tenth of our twelve divisions or twelve categories here. And once again, having looked at reverence and dedication in the previous three verses, and remembering that there were no chapter and verse divisions in the original text, the original law would be read pretty much of a piece, we look for elements of structure. And once again, having looked at the affliction of the poor who are the ones below in the eighth division there, 21-27, verses of chapter 22.

Then looking back to God in 28-31, which is looking up now, we're once again looking to the side, and specifically we're looking to those who are in some way disadvantaged, those who are susceptible, those who are vulnerable to abuse. Do not circulate a false report. What happens when you hear a rumor? This happened recently with one of the presidential candidates.

A rumor got started that there was some kind of marital infidelity. Well, you can't always control whether or not you hear a false report, and you can't always determine whether a report is true or not. But if you know that a report is false, this scripture says, do not circulate a false report.

Don't pass it along. If you don't know if it's false or not, what's the best policy? Don't circulate it. If it may be false, you wouldn't want to be guilty of circulating a false report.

So if you don't know if it's false or not, then leave off. Do not put in your hand, or do not join your hand, might be a good translation, with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. Do not bear a false report.

Do not circulate a false report. Do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious or an evil witness. Now, this ties in with verses like Deuteronomy 19, 16.

If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly. If the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother.

Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity.

Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. So, a malicious or evil witness is to be tested. And in this case, you would get the idea that the penalty for perjury in our court system is not strong enough.

If someone perjures himself against someone who is on trial for murder, let's say, and tries to get the person convicted and it turns out that it is a false witness, he should receive the

murderer's sentence. It should be done to him as he tried to get done to the defendant. That is the biblical principle.

Now, we don't often find ourselves in court bearing witness and so on. What is the principle here for us? What does James say about the tongue? The man who can bridle his tongue has brought his whole body into subjection. The hardest thing to do is control what we say.

And in particular, what we say about other people. So, thinking about that principle of first fruits, thinking about living in a way that is pleasing before God, a good area to work on for all of us is in the area of what we say about others. Because, suppose we see someone that we don't like or we are mad at or we think is really wrong, and so we use our tongue as a weapon against them.

Maybe we don't know for sure the truth of the allegation or the gossip that we have heard, but it fits with what we like to think about that person. And by spreading this gossip, by telling this tale, by communicating this episode to some third party, we are going to reduce their credibility. We are going to hurt their reputation.

We are going to make people wary of them. We are going to do them damage. Well, the principle in God's word says, if we do this, this penalty in God's economy falls on us.

To gossip, to malign, to judge someone else reassigns their penalty to us. That's the biblical principle. So, do not circulate, do not bear a false report.

Do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. Psalm 35:11, malicious witnesses rise up. What happened to the Lord Jesus? There were malicious witnesses who joined hands with evil men to bear witness against the Lord Jesus.

And some of what they said was true. He said, destroy the temple, and in three days He would raise it up. And they retold that.

But it was malicious. It was evil. It was given with the intent of convicting Him with a sentence of death.

His words were twisted. His words were taken out of context and used against Him. Do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

By retelling a tale, by communicating foibles or follies or errors or the mistakes of people, we join with sinners. We make ourselves one of them. How many times we've gone back to Psalm 11? Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, does not stand in the way of sinners, does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

If you notice, those three descriptions all entail fellowship with people who are not walking in the light. Sinners, scoffers, ungodly ones. And we fellowship, we join and become one of them if we're not careful with our tongue.

You shall not follow the masses in doing evil. Now this is the Hebrew word *rav*, R-A-V, *ravim* actually, it's in the plural. And this is sometimes used to mean many and other times it is used to mean mighty.

I think that here it is probably intended to be the mighty. Instead it doesn't have a word for crowd here as in your New King James. Because you have a contrast that follows in verse 3. Do not follow the *ravim*, the ones that have a lot.

The ones that are characterized by much, the mighty. Do not follow the mighty to do evil. Do not testify in a dispute to turn aside after many to pervert.

Notice justice is in italics there. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute either. Don't go after the one that's got a lot.

Don't go and follow with the one that has nothing. Don't let that be a factor. Just because someone is well off, just because someone is not well off.

Well, once again, this is in sort of a courtroom setting or a judicial dispute setting. But we know that this is representative of spiritual truth that goes beyond those confines. When's the last time any one of us was a witness in a court trial? I suspect if it has ever happened, it hasn't been lately.

So what would this mean to us? Don't partner with, don't follow after the ones who are well healed. The ones who have a lot. The ones who are mighty.

The ones who are influential to do evil. Whether they are mighty, whether they are many, or whether they are lowly. These are the three extremes that we have.

Don't follow the mighty. Don't turn aside after the many. Do not show partiality to the few, the poor.

What is this saying? Some people, some of us at different times, find this to be a compelling reason to throw in or to adopt a position. Well, my boss likes this, so I'm going to like it too. My friend, you find this probably most easily illustrated in school, where I used to muse on this even as a junior high and high school age teenager.

You know, it is an accident, so to speak, of chronology that I was born in 1957 and I started kind of paying attention to the world around me and listening to the music that was on the radio in the late 60s and in the early 70s. At that time, the music that was playing was of a certain kind. And within that smorgasbord of stuff that you could get on the radio, there was some of it that I liked.

There were people who would only listen to those rock stations, KELI and KMOD and KAKC were the three big stations in Tulsa that broadcast rock music out into our little rural community. Everybody in my high school listened to one or another or all of those three stations. So they

liked the Eagles and they liked the Doobie Brothers and they liked the music that was playing at the time.

Well, what if we had all been born 30 years earlier? What if we were listening to the radio in the 1940s instead of the 1970s? We would have done what the teenagers of that age did. We would have liked Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller and Artie Shaw and Harry James and the Ink Spots and the groups that were big at that time. And it just happens that... And I say, well, let me play you some big band music to my classmates.

Let me play you some of those swing and big band songs. Oh, they hated it. It was just terrible.

Couldn't stand it. Wanted to hear something with a beat. Well, it's throwing in with the many.

This is what the many like and so I'm going to like it too because it's not cool to like something that's outside what is accepted and what is the majority. I think reality TV is some kind of a perverse manifestation of evil on my TV set. I think gay TV.

We have gay TV all over the place now. You can't even watch the news without getting commercials. I just can't hardly turn the TV on anymore.

And it is wildly popular. Reality TV is wildly popular. I think it stinks.

I think it's unimaginative. I think it's artificial. I think it's contrived.

I think it's exploitative. I think it doesn't raise you. It doesn't do what art does.

Movies and teleplays and things that work in the way literature is supposed to to create a metaphor for higher things. There's none of that. It's just exploitative.

It's window peeping. It's peeping Tomism. Put cameras in and watch people as though they're not knowing that they're being watched.

You might as well just go to your neighbor's house and peek through the shades and see what you can see. It's just the very same thing. It's voyeurism, in my opinion.

Well, I think the reason people put up with this is that that's what is being dished up. It is going with the masses. Here, the example is testifying in a dispute to turn aside after many.

Well, everybody else gave that testimony, so I'm going to say the same thing. Everybody else said that Uriah is the one who didn't close the gate and the ox got out and gored this child to death. So, yeah, I'll just go with everybody else.

There is a sheep mentality that is good, and that's looking to the shepherd. There is a sheep mentality that is bad, and that's looking at your fellow sheep and just being down to the flock. And wherever the flock goes, that's where I go.

That's what is in view in the center of these three pieces. We've seen throughout the law that

he's constantly changing perspectives. Sometimes he's looking up at God.

Sometimes he's looking down at servants or at the oppressed and the afflicted. Other times he's looking at peers and those who are sort of on the same level. Here, the ones who are high and mighty, don't use that as a basis.

Don't use majority as a basis. Don't use underdogism as a basis. Don't say, oh, the poor person, let's help them.

I saw a lady interviewed who is working with the oppressed and so on, and it has kind of twisted her thinking. She's just so close to the oppressed that she can't be objective. People who don't understand what has been pejoratively called trickle-down economics, people who don't understand tax breaks for the rich, they're always throwing rocks at some aspects and some proposals in government that say help the rich, help the top 10% in the economy, and they act like that's a bad thing.

Well, they just put it out there as an assumption. Well, everybody knows that tax breaks for the rich are terrible. Everybody knows that making it easier for the top 10% of the economy and those who make a lot is bad and reducing their taxes.

We ought to increase their taxes and benefit those who are down below. Well, this is faulty thinking, and it is in accord with verse 3 here, showing partiality to the poor man. You don't show partiality to the rich.

What you do is, what makes the economy go? I will tell you both from taking classes in economics and from my own personal observation, you know what makes the economy go? Rich people. Rich people make the economy go. Rich people invest.

Rich people start companies. Rich people hire the rest of us to do jobs. If you cut the legs out from under your upper class and your rich people, you know what happens? People that own stocks in companies no longer get dividends.

People who are looking for a job no longer find them, and the economy begins to sink because it's like having a car and the rich people are the gas in the tank. You can say, you know, we really need to concentrate on the upholstery, and I see my dashboard is cracking here, and these knobs, the chrome is coming off the knobs here, and my turn signal is not working quite right. Well, all of it is pointless and useless if you don't have a car that goes.

If you have a car that goes, then the rest of it is worthwhile. So you do not use this as a basis. How does this translate into real terms? If you're not going to show partiality to the poor, you're not going to show partiality to the mighty, and you're not going to show partiality because everybody else says so, what is your basis? What do you use as a standard of measure? The answer, of course, is self-evident.

It is the word of God. We choose what we choose. We support what we support because it's

right, because it is God's choice, it's God's way.

Verse 4, If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. This says do not decide what you're going to do based on how well you like your neighbor.

It doesn't say your friendly neighbor's ox or donkey going astray. This is your enemy. Suppose someone really has it in for you.

Suppose somebody in your workplace or in your school or in your social periphery is really doing you in a dirty way, and yet you go out in the parking lot and they've got a flat, or their car won't start, they need a jump. Do you say, well, I'll teach them a lesson, I'm going to drive off and leave them in the lurch here. I see it's clouding up, starting to rain, serves them right.

Let's see if they can, they're so high and mighty, let's see if they can change their tire. What does this say? It is right to help someone who is in need. The help comes not based on who and what they are, help, love is expressed based on who and what we are.

Is it the right thing to do? Is it right to help someone who is in distress? Is it right to help someone who has a need? The help is not based on their worthiness. Heaven help us if God's grace toward us was based on our worthiness. It's not.

If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, your first instinct is to set yourself up as judge and jury. This goes back to the definition of judging. Here's a way I can inflict a penalty on this person who I think is wrong.

I will deny them what I would normally give. So, avoid judging, practice the golden rule. Verse 6, you shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute.

It doesn't say which way to pervert it, does it? It doesn't say pervert it in his favor because you feel sorry for him. It doesn't say pervert it against him because he's poor and he can't help it. The issue here is he's poor.

Well, ignore the fact that he's poor. Don't pervert the system just because he's poor. We should have a justice system that functions regardless of the means that are available to the plaintiff or the defendant.

That is not the case, but that's the way it should be. It shouldn't matter if you're poor. It shouldn't matter if you're rich.

Judgment should not be perverted. Keep yourself far from a false matter. Do not kill the innocent.

Do not kill the righteous. If you do not keep yourself far from a false matter, guess what? You're killing the innocent and you're killing the righteous. This is cause and effect.

It's a false matter. Stay away from it. Don't be a part of it.

People jump on board in suits, class action suits. People jump on board in taking advantage of a store. They hear that somebody went and bought a dress at Walmart and wore it all night and then returned it and got a refund.

They say, well, I'm going to do the same thing. They join in this false matter. You are costing somebody somewhere.

If you think about it, you think, oh, boy, I've got a good deal. It didn't hurt anything. I didn't break any laws.

I didn't steal anything. Yes, you did. It's a false matter.

You're taking advantage. And people don't realize, I mean, just in that example, if enough people do that to Walmart, what's going to happen? It's going to cost them money, which means they can't afford to hire as many people. Somebody's going to lose a job.

Prices are going to go up. People who make false insurance claims raises everybody's rates. People who nickel and dime their medical insurance to death, when they don't need to, raises everybody's rates.

You cost other people when you engage in a false matter. Keep yourself far from a false matter. It is linked here with killing the innocent and the righteous.

God says, I will not justify the wicked. You know what that means? You can claim 1 John 1.9 until you're blue in the face. And if you are not keeping far from a false matter, you are not justified.

You are not cleansed. You are not forgiven. There are conditions on forgiveness.

If you do not forgive your brother, you yourself are not forgiven. If you do not cleanse yourself, if you do not depart from false ways, if you continue to walk in darkness instead of walking in the light, 1 John 1.9 and confessing your sins is meaningless. You will not be forgiven.

You will not be cleansed. This is the Word of God. We are accountable.

We are responsible for keeping ourselves from false matters. God says, I will not justify the wicked. Take no bribe.

A bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. This seems so obvious. We say, oh, I would never take a bribe.

Well, what about people that you see on these television shows who go to islands and run around digging up worms and swimming around in squid guts and all the other wild things that they do? Is this something they would normally do? No. Why are they doing it? Somebody made it worth their while, quote unquote. I only see the commercials, thank the Lord.

But I see this program. I guess there is a woman who got engaged to a large guy who is being really obnoxious to her family. It's like my big fat fiance or I don't know the name of it.

But the idea is if she can get her family to go along and get all the way up to the wedding, then she gets a million dollars. So she's putting her family, the little commercial is showing her mother crying and her father stomping around and all of this grief and woe in the family. She's got to try to hold this all together and hold this deception together long enough to qualify for a million dollars.

Well, we say I would never do that. But we do in small ways in our own life. We say if I can just get this far, then everything will be okay.

If I can just hold this together this long, then I'll get this benefit. If I can do whatever is necessary, this isn't quite on the up and up, it's not quite right, but if I just kind of wink and wince and go by, it'll be okay. Do not pervert.

Do not twist. Do not pervert justice that is due to your needy brother in his dispute, the poor in his dispute. Keep far from a false matter.

Take no bribe. A bribe blinds the discerning. We are kings and queens of rationalizing.

We can say, well, this is okay because. There's an extenuating circumstance. I'm a special case.

And so this little benefit, I know technically maybe it's not quite right, but it's okay for me because. That's taking a bribe. You're perverting what is right and what is wrong because there is some personal benefit that attaches to seeing it in a certain way.

God says, don't pervert justice for the rich. Don't pervert it for the poor. Don't pervert it for the many.

And don't pervert it for yourself. Don't blind yourself to the truth with rationalization. That's taking a bribe.

Whatever benefit you're gaining by not doing the right thing, that's your bribe. He says, don't take a bribe. Then once again, he reminds him of something we saw a little earlier.

You shall not oppress a stranger for you know the heart of a stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt. We saw this in 2221. Do not wrong a stranger.

Do not oppress him for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Leviticus 19.33. When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. What is the idea here? Remember from whence we came.

Sometimes we get upset with people. Even in the Christian world, we get upset with people because they don't understand the Bible the way we do. They have a different view, a different theology perhaps.

Maybe a radically different theology. And we tend to not cut them much slack. We tend to give them short shrift.

Well, they are not in the perhaps. We like to think that we have learned some of the Word of God and we know some things that are true. And we look at other people who have not arrived at that understanding for whatever reason.

And we say, boy, you really are missing this. You are concentrating on the wrong thing. You are focusing on the wrong thing.

Well, they are spiritually impoverished. They are spiritually a stranger to the things that we have learned and come to know. But we used to be unknowledgeable.

We used to be a stranger to many of the things that we have learned over time. And how would it have been, how motivated would we be to learn and to grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior if the people who had learned and grown looked down on us and treated us with contempt, despised us, shooed us away and said, you are just ignorant. Come back when you know something.

The Bible says, remember you yourself started out somewhere and have made progress through phases. Remember that other people have the potential. And we look at someone and say, there is no potential.

That person is not learning and growing. They are just hopeless. Well, regardless, if there ever is any hope, you don't want them to look at us and say, well, that's one direction I'm sure not going.

Look at those intolerant, looking down the nose people. Of the available options to me, that's one way I'm sure not going to go. I don't want to become a cold, frigid air of a person like these people are.

We should be encouraging. The elder should help the younger. The strong should bear with the weak.

These are all injunctions of Scripture. Do not oppress the stranger. People can be a stranger to truth.

They can be a stranger to the Word of God. They can be a stranger to correct thinking. They can be a stranger to a lot of things.

Well, anything that you want to name. We used to be there in some way, shape or form. We weren't born with perspicacity and becoming what did Jesus say to the Pharisees? You see yourself as guides to the blind and pinnacles of paragons of virtue and all of that.

Nobody starts out that way. We need to be tolerant. We also need to be observant.

There is a time to separate. There is a time to eschew the company of people who are on the wrong track and who are actively enemies of the cross, enemies of the truth. I'm not saying that you look kindly on that, but if someone is just a stranger, if they're just mumbling around lost, the Bible says don't pick on them.

Now, beginning in verse 10 here through 19, this is the 11th of our 12 sections. This we call Sabbaths and Feasts. The first nine verses of this chapter, truth and justice.

Do not pervert. How many times did you see the word do not twist, do not pervert, do not change what is right on some false basis, whether it's numeric or economic or whatever. Truth is truth.

It's right because it's right. It's not right because the consequences are good. It's not right because people like it or don't like it.

Right is right because it's right. Now we're moving into Sabbaths and Feasts. Truth and justice is for people.

Sabbaths and Feasts is getting back to an upward view, looking back up toward God. Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove.

Six days you shall do your work. This is an imperative. He who does not work does not eat.

It is on the table of commands. When it says, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, the very next phrase says, six days thou shalt work. Now, who's the audience? Is this men, women and children in Israel? It is not.

If you haven't noticed in the last chapter and a half, who is being addressed in the law? We can leave out children, right? We can leave out servants. We can also leave out women. There's been no injunction whatsoever to women.

This is all addressed to men. It is patriarchal. It is all about the men.

Why is this only addressed to men, do you think? Remember the great stress on authority and on structure that permeates these pages? God has delegated authority to the man, to the father, to the husband. He is the one who gets the word and it is his responsibility to be the head of his household or the head of his clan or even the head of his tribe. This is why it says, six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce.

Who is it that does the sowing? Who is it that God told in the garden to earn bread by the sweat of the brow? It is the man. That's why injunctions regarding servants, because the man is the master of the servants. That's why there is injunctions about the daughters who are given or taken in marriage, because it's the man who brokers those transactions.

So, when it says, six days you shall do your work, who is the you? It is the same throughout Scripture. It is the man. The man is to communicate these truths to his family.

He is to communicate it to his wife. That is unchanged in the New Testament. You have the Apostle Paul talking about good order in the church.

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. If she has a question, let her ask her husband at home. Now, this doesn't mean that nobody can express an opinion or ask a question in our church service on the break or in conversation or whatever.

But when you think about their worship life in Israel and in the early days of the church, it was a sort of one-way communication from the communicator to the congregation. And there wasn't a lot of time. They didn't have the luxury that we have to come back week by week by week.

The apostles might only be in town for a short time, maybe a few days, maybe a few weeks, sometimes up to a year, even two years in one place. But there was an urgency of communication and it had to repose, the information had to be deposited with the men, faithful men who could teach others also. That was the urgency.

What is the principle though? It doesn't mean, and I encourage ladies in our congregation or in our extended periphery to ask questions. It's great. But the husband is the first place to look for answers because you support him as the spiritual head of the house.

You encourage him to stay ahead of you. It enhances your fellowship. It enhances your relationship.

It enhances your prayer life together. And that is just the way God set it up. So, six days you shall do your work.

This is the men. The men are to work for six days. On the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

Now, why only the son of your female servant? How about the son of your male servant? These are representative. These are token samples here, aren't they? Your ox and your donkey. This is also your sheep and your goat and all of your other livestock.

That your animals may rest and all of those in your household from the greatest to the very least. You could have just as easily said to the son of the woman who grinds behind the mill, Everyone should be refreshed. The purpose of rest is restoration, refreshment.

In all that I have said to you, verse 13, be circumspect. Be on your guard is another way to translate this. Do not mention the name of other gods.

Do not let it be heard from your mouth. They're not even worth mentioning. All of your behavior, all of your obedience reflects on the Lord God.

We started out this morning talking about our weaknesses and God as our strength and our ever-present help in time of trouble. It is His glory that our lives should reflect. When we are true to the truth, when we are diligent to observe the truth and use it as the standard regardless of who is involved, be they great, be they small, be they many, be they few, when we observe His truth in our lives, His glory is reflected.

And it may put us in a position of weakness. It may seem to disadvantage us. It may seem to endanger us even, whether socially or in some other way.

We think, well, if I really stick with the truth here, I'm going to rock the boat. I'm going to make waves. I'm going to cause a problem.

Well, that's a weakness. We say, I don't want to put myself in a position of weakness by coming out here for the truth. I don't want to... All of us have had situations where maybe everybody is taking advantage of some loophole or some fortunate aberration where something happens, but you look at it and say, you know, that's really not right.

But by standing out and saying, I'm not going to go down that road, all the others are saying, hey, you're going to mess up our good deal. A lady who blew the whistle on some of the bad trading on Wall Street was going on for years, and they interviewed her and they said, well, why didn't someone speak up sooner? She said, well, it was just a good deal for everybody and nobody wanted to mess it up. Nobody wanted to be the one to blow the whistle and be the black sheep that screwed it up for everybody else.

That puts us in a position of vulnerability and weakness and a target of attack. But God says, I am your refuge. I am your strength.

Do what is right. I will be with you. Be circumspect.

Don't mention the name of other gods because the name of our god is written on us. And to the extent that we reflect his glory, to that extent we fulfill our purpose. It's a challenge, but we armor our thinking, we bolster and support our thinking by going to the word of God.

What do we know is true? What do we know is right? It isn't the nature of the people. It isn't the number of the people that's involved. What is true? What is right? That's what we stick with.