



29 Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. (Ex 22:29)

God implants lasting reminders of that first Passover in Egypt after which God required the first born of each household to be dedicated to the Lord. This is not simply to be understood to mean only children, but first fruits of all increase in crops, wages, etc. Of course the means of granting these to the Lord differ. A first-born son was to be dedicated to God, but the first-fruits of harvest and of cattle were to be publicly sacrificed as a public testimony of the goodness of god in granting harvest. Verse 30 following that above reads: *“Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me.”* (Ex 22:30) The eighth day is significant in its relationship to the day of circumcision of sons. It is quite applicable to our Sacrament of Baptism of babies in the Reformation Anglican tradition.

This chapter continues to reveal civil and statutory laws that were to be observed by the Children of Israel. God's approach and intention of regulating civil conduct and behavior flies in the face of all who constantly harp upon a Constitutionally non-existent mandate of ‘separation of church and state.’ Even were the US Constitution to contain such an article, it would not be legitimate under the Higher Law of God. Please read the First Amendment (of Bill of Rights) of the US Constitution and tell me which part precludes the free prayer of little children in schools, of posting of the Ten Commandments, or of public prayers at school, or governmental, events, etc:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

God makes very little distinction between His Moral Law, and the ordinances and laws of implementation thereof. Civil law is also moral. All governments incorporate parts of the Moral Law in their own laws and statutes. *“Thou shalt not kill;” “Thou shalt not steal;” “Thou shalt not bear false witness;”* and, until recently, *“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”* Is this not legislating morality that the moderns deny?

In Chapter 22, we find three major categories of offenses, each of which could be attributed to the disobedience of one of the Ten Commandments:

- 1) Theft;
- 2) Fornication;
- 3) Usury.

THEFT

Though the sins and penalties under this heading cover theft explicitly, it also makes application to careless neglect that also takes from the rightful owner property, crops or livelihood. Let us examine select verses under this heading: "*¹If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.*" (Ex 22:1) Not only were thieves to be punished for their crimes, but pay restitution as well. "*If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.*" (Ex 22:2) God recognizes the sanctity of home and private property. If a burglar breaks in at night and you kill him, you are free from penalty. But if the sun has risen, then there will be a penalty for the shedding of his blood since you could recognize the man and require compensation in kind. The following verses continue to express the sanctity of private property as opposed to a socialistic system of property in common. If a man's animal eats in the field of another, the owner will compensate, and if a fire is started and gets out of control, the one who started the fire will pay restitution to the one who suffers loss. "*If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.*" (Ex 22:6) Verses 7-15 continue a defense of private property from trespass. I hope you will read these verses for further enlightenment.

FORNICATION

We might discover a surprising connection here between adultery and idolatry that we discussed earlier. Please note the odd context of the first three verses: *¹⁶And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife. ¹⁷If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins. ¹⁸Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.* (Ex 22:16-18) The first three verses are obviously describing a form of fornication in promiscuity; however, why the sudden change to a seemingly altogether other subject: "*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live?*" Are these two possibly related? Yes, they are. The first discussion of promiscuity is carnal and physical, but the reference to witches is of the same tenor, but spiritual. See what Leviticus says regarding the matter: "*20.6 And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.*" This is spiritual adultery, or idolatry. Here is an unmentionable sin (at least it was thus only a few years ago): "*Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death.*" (Ex 22:19) It may surprise some of us to know that a bill was introduced in the US Senate in 1982, sponsored by Sen. Ted Kennedy, to legalize bestiality in the nation's capital (District of Columbia). The bill felled of passage, but do not be surprised if that perversion does not find respectability along with its similar perversions of homosexuality and lesbianism in the coming months or years.

Interestingly, in this polemic against unlawful sexual sins of fornication, we again find reference to idolatry – sister to the first. "*He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.*" (Ex 22:20) Just as a strong and loving husband is jealous of his bride, so is Christ jealous of His Bride, the Church. He will brook no whoring after other gods: "*Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.*" (Ex 20:5) Those widows who have no earthly husband have a Father in Heaven that will avenge their persecutions on any who dare lay a hand of malice upon them: "*Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.*" (Ex 22:22-24)

USURY

God makes provision for honest entrepreneurship, but abuse of privileges of financial transactions is a violation of the Morals, as well as civil, law. *"If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious."* (Ex 22:25-27) Please not that, just as with widows and orphans, God lends a special ear to the oppressed of His people.

Here is an interesting turn on a particular term, 'gods.' *"Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people."* (Ex 22:28) Though the term is, in the Hebrew, Elohyim, as it appears also in the first verse of Genesis; its application is quite different. The term here is plural, meaning judges. The Elohyim of Genesis 1:1 is plural intensive (meaning a plural/singular, or Trinity in One). In the days of the Wilderness Journey and after in the days of the judges, the judges of the people, ecclesiastically appointed, stood under the moral imperative of God to render justice. We are to honor the secular arms insofar as it does not overlap the spiritual arm.

"Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me." (Ex 22:29-30) Yes, these were the two introductory verses for today's devotion. The first of every profit and gain; and the first of every endeavor is the Lord's. Read what Adam Clarke says about these verses: *"The rejoicings at our harvest-home are distorted remains of that gratitude which our ancestors, with all the primitive inhabitants of the earth, expressed to God with appropriate signs and ceremonies. Is it not possible to restore, in some goodly form, a custom so pure, so edifying, and so becoming? There is a laudable custom, observed by some pious people, of dedicating a new house to God by prayer, etc., which cannot be too highly commended."*

"And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs." (Ex 22:31) With such soiled hands and hearts, how can we be holy unto God? Once more rings loudly the bell of LOVE. Love is the key and it is best summed up by the words of Octavius Winslow that a friend, the Rev. Geordie Menzies-Grierson sent to me from Newcastle, England this morning: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you."* (Jeremiah 31:3) *"The law of love is the law of God's moral government of His people. By this, and by this alone, He rules them. All that is disciplinary in His conduct is resolvable into love. It is by kindness, "loving-kindness," yes, "marvelous loving-kindness," that He wins back their truant hearts, and binds them closer to Himself. "I am the Lord, who exercise loving-kindness." Oh, to imitate Him in this particular!- to be like God in His kindness to the children of men. Then would there be less sitting in the judgment-seat; less readiness to cast the first stone; less harshness and censoriousness in our conduct and spirit towards others; and more of that self-judging, self-condemning, and self-abasement, before the holy, heart-searching, all-seeing Lord God, without which we may be awfully deceived."*