

Thank you. As always, I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak with you in chapel. I consider it one of the greatest privileges that I have each semester to stand before you and share the Word of God. I have to start with a confession, though, today. It's not going to come as a surprise to any of you if you've had me before as a professor, but I was a weird child. I had some weird habits. In fact, a little while back, we moved and we were going through some old stuff, and I came across a set of rules that I had posted on my bedroom door when I was seven or eight years old, and I would like to share some of them with you, bad grammar and all. So these are Brian's rules posted on my door. Number one, knock if you want to come in. Rule number two, if Brian's not in the room, don't come in. Now, so far, so good. These are pretty simple to follow. They make sense. But then we're going to fast forward to rule number nine. If someone breaks the rules three times, they will never be able to enter my room again unless they sleep over.

And this is the point where the list gets really weird. Rule number 10, no babies allowed in the room unless they are nine months old or younger. I asked my wife if we could reinstate this rule in our house now. She said no. Rule number 14 to 17, no food in the room, no fighting in the room, no throwing toys, don't do farts in the room. My wife asked me if we could reinstate rule number 17 in the house now, and I said no. Rule number 18, if Brian says to do something when you're in the room, do it or get out. Rule 19, grandmas are allowed in the room at any time. Wasn't I a sweet boy? I was a sweet boy. Rules 20 to 26. If a person says, Stop, do it. No wrecking castles, no spanking, no erasing other people's work, no girls allowed, no kissing, don't be bossy. I find a lot of irony in rule number 26. You got to love it. Now, by the way, what happens if you break the rules? Well, don't worry. There's a rule for breaking the rules as well. Apparently, my room operated on a three-strike system.

Three strikes and you are out. And rule number 27 spells it out in great detail. If you help someone, I will take one strike away from you. And if you have no strikes, if you get a strike, I won't give you a strike. And don't come running up to me and say, Hey, Brian, I just helped someone take a strike. And if you do, you will get a strike to you.

For some reason, I struggled making friends as a young child. I don't know why. But lest you think all the rules stop there, I had one more rule for everyone. The most important rule of all, rule number 28. Have fun. These were the rules for my room. No joke. At one point in my life, I had this posted outside my door. If you wanted to enter my room, if you wanted to enter a covenant relationship, a friendship with me. These were the 28 rules that you were honor bound to follow. And honor them, you must. Otherwise, you would leave with a strike. And three strikes and you're out unless you're coming over for a sleepover, quite obviously. Now, I'm sure I never really forced anybody to follow those rules.

I might have tried on my brother. But you look at a list like this and you realize it would have been nearly impossible to follow all of those, nor would you really want to follow all of those and be friends with a kid like me. Because these rules are coming from an obsessive compulsive, weird little seven-year-old that desperately wanted to be the boss of everything, they're not rules that make sense. They're not rules that you want to follow.

Now, today, what we're going to do is we're going to study some of the laws, not of Brian, but some of the laws of the Book of Exodus. When you read the laws of Exodus, at times it might seem like you're reading a list of rules like my own. Rules to follow if you want to enter Yahweh's room. Yet these rules are not coming from the mind of a weird seven-year-old, but they stem from the very character of a benevolent, holy, merciful God. They are good laws. They are great laws. They help us not only to know how to love God, but they even help us to understand how to love one another.

And though we are under a different covenant and that we're no longer bound to the letter of the law as we were back then, the spirit of these laws is still certainly applicable for all of us today. They teach us something about relationships and about how to love one another.

If you have your Bibles, open up to Exodus 21. We're going to look at several laws written over 3,000 years ago that are still as inspired and as applicable as they were back then. Exodus 21, we're going to start in verse 33. "When a man opens a pit, or when a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make restoration. He shall give money to its

owner, and the dead beast shall be his."

Now, this law is going to set up the rest of the laws and the entire theme that we see this morning. Here's a scenario. A man opens up a pit or digs a new pit. There are a lot of reasons you might dig a pit back then. When I was a weird seven-year-old child, I would dig pits because I thought that if I dug deep enough, I would fall into the world of dinosaurs buried beneath the Earth's crust, and I could live there with a pet T-rex.

I was a severely disappointed child the deeper that I dug. In ancient Israel, you might open up a pit for a number of reasons, maybe to collect rainwater, to dig a well, to trap an animal. But for whatever reason, a man opens a pit, it's uncovered, and his neighbor's donkey or his ox or whatever it might be comes wandering over, falls in the pit, and dies. What happens then? And how does it apply to us? Well, the law assumes that the guy who dug the pit and left it uncovered, is mostly responsible for what happened. So he pays for the dead animal. But he does get to keep the dead animal, which might have been useful for meat or for clothing. The original owner of the animal doesn't get anything beyond the fair market price of his beast. He gets his sheep replaced or he gets a new ox or whatever it was that fell in there. But he doesn't get paid back double. He doesn't get a percentage on top of it because it's assumed that that man also has at least some responsibility for what took place. His animal was wandering on the field of another person.

But here's the bottom line. The text says, "The owner of the pit shall make restoration." That's the key right there of everything we're going to see today. That's the key. ESV translates it "restoration." King James version translates it, "The owner of the pit shall 'make it good.'" The Hebrew word used here translated restoration. Is *Shalam*. What does that sound like? *Shalom*. Yeah, like *Shalom*. It might be familiar to you. It is the same root as the word *Shalom*, which means peace or wholeness. It basically it means here that you're not just paying the guy back for his dead animal. You are making peace with him, restoring something that has been broken between the two of you because of what's happened. You are repairing a damaged relationship and making it whole. You're ensuring that there is, again, *Shalom* in the community of believers. That word *Shalom* or *Shalem* is used 18 times in the Scriptures that we're going to look at today. Eighteen times. Most often you're going to see it translated repay. You have to repay something that you did wrong. But that's what this passage is all about. That's what unites these laws together.

Making *Shalom* with your neighbor, making sure you take responsibility to restore the brokenness in your relationships with the people around you. If I could capture the entirety of this text in one sentence, it is this, Love your neighbor by taking personal responsibility to restore relationships. The passage we're looking at here in Exodus, it emphasizes the harmony of believers in a covenant community. But how does an ox falling into a pit, apply to us today? What is the spirit of that law? Because today, the closest thing to a farm animal that I own is my five-year-old. I don't have oxen. I don't have pits in my backyard. But here's what I do have. I have a grill, and my grill gets hot. And if I left my grill out on an unguarded or unwatched or uncovered while I was cooking up some hamburgers and my neighbor's kid comes wandering over and touches it and gets burned, guess what? I have some personal responsibility in what happened. I mean, yes, they let their dumb kid wander into my yard and touch my grill, but I was foolish enough to leave that grill open, unwatched and dangerous, which means I have to do to restore that relationship.

There is broken fellowship between me and my neighbor, and the responsibility is on me to go out and repair what has been damaged, to ensure *Shalom*. Let's look at another law, and you'll see this theme continue. Verse 35 and 36. "When one man's ox butts another so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and share its price. And the dead beast also they shall share. Or if it's known that the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past and its owner has not kept it in, he shall repay ox for ox, and the dead beast shall be his."

You know what you call two dumb oxen that are fighting with each other? Oxy morons. Sorry, I had to get at least one good dad joke in there at some point this morning. But here's the scenario you see. Two oxen are budding heads. And by the way, these laws are not just about oxen. That's just one creature that's used. These are paradigm examples. You could take out oxen, you could put in sheep,

you could put in any other animal. These laws are case laws designed to guide a judge in making a good decision. But two oxen are fighting, one ox dies. Well, how do you determine culpability when it's two animals fighting with each other? If you're walking your dog and I'm walking my dog and they're both leash, but then they start fighting when they meet on the road, one dog gets maimed, who pays for that hospital bill? It's hard enough to figure out who's right and wrong when two humans fight, never mind two animals. So the law is they just split it right down the middle. The ox that lives, they sell it and they split the profits. The dead ox, all that they share, too. They split that down the middle. Maybe they grill it up with some good ox burgers, have a little barbecue, but they make peace with each other. That's the goal, *shalom*. If our dogs are fighting and mine is killed, let's agree to split the price of whatever it costs for me to get a new dog. We both had a responsibility. So *Shalom* is what happens when we come together and make sure that we are both taking responsibility to repair that broken relationship.

Now, if one ox won and that ox had a reputation of picking ox fights on a regular basis, maybe if my dog was aggressive and usually tried to eat dogs on the neighborhood, There's more culpability on me, isn't there? I'm more responsible, which is why you see the owner has to pay back that new ox, that new dog or that new whatever. So these laws are actually quite simple. They show us how to love one another by restoring broken relationships with other people.

Well, we move from ox laws to laws about theft. But you're going to see the same theme in these next few verses as well. Look at verses one to four. "If a man steals an ox a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief is found breaking in and struck so that he dies, there shall be no blood guilt for him. But if the sun has risen on him, there shall be blood guilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double."

Now, in these four verses, there are a couple of if scenarios here. The last couple of verses dealt with issues where no one was purposely trying to harm somebody else. The guy didn't dig a pit in order to catch an ox. They weren't walking their pet oxen down the road in order to start an ox fight club or anything like that. They were just accidentally things that happened and broke a fellowship between two different people. But here we see a section where there is purposeful intent to harm another person or their property. In verse one, a guy steals an animal and he either kills it or he sells it. But there's definitely intent here. He's stealing in order to make a profit or to get some benefit for himself. And that's why the penalty is much more severe here. He steals an ox, he has to repay five oxen for one ox. If he steals a sheep, he's got to repay four sheep for one sheep. Now, the reason there's a difference there is probably because oxen were a lot more valuable than sheep were. An ox was a animal. So if you get an ox stolen, it's like a plumber getting his wrenches stolen or a carpenter getting his hammer and nails stolen. You're out of property, but you're also out of work. So the penalty is even more severe.

Now, compare all that to verse 4. Verse 4 says something a little bit different. Verse 1 dealt with a situation of theft where the guy sells or kills the animal. But what happens if the thief is caught red-handed with the animal still alive? Well, verse 4 tells us the thief pays that animal back, but then pays double on top of it. Which means, I think, that if he steals a sheep and he's caught, he not only has to give that sheep back, he's got to give another sheep to the person he stole a sheep from. And that's super significant because it illustrates something critical that we also see in this text, a simple principle that we call an "eye for an eye." Fair penalty for a crime. Let's say the one thief thief a \$1,000. If he's caught, not only does he have to cough up that \$1,000, but he also has to pay another \$1,000 to the guy that he stole it from. Now, what does that do? What that does is that puts the thief in the position of the person he stole from. The thief now knows what it feels like to lose \$1,000.

He stole \$1,000 from the guy. Now he knows what it feels like to have \$1,000 stolen from him, and that's going to help him to do that crime less often in the future. Notice nowhere in this text or anywhere in this book are you going to see the word jail or prison in application to these crimes. Because in the biblical perspective, prison is not the appropriate punishment. They had jails, but jails were merely for holding until a judge can determine if the person is innocent or guilty. But prison, a long term holding facility as a means of punishment or rehab, that concept is not found in biblical law.

Instead of prison, the thief has to pay back what he owes, and he has to pay it back to the person he owes it to. The person that's offended is the one that gets that compensation. The thief takes personal responsibility for his crime, and he's immediately forced to be a productive member of society again. Commentator Doug Stewart gives four reasons from the text that restitution is better than residency. Why is this better than a prison system that you often see in other legal text outside of this?

In other words, why is paying someone back better than sending them to prison? Well, Stuart says, "First, restitution compensates the victim more immediately and generously than if you were to just throw them or throw the thief in prison. Second, the biblical system requires the offender to deal directly with the person he offended, to face his victim and to own up to his crimes. Third, restitution permits a repentant offender to immediately continue a productive life. And finally, fourth, restitution instead of residency doesn't require society to have to provide housing, clothing, and food for the thief in prison."

It makes a lot of sense, in other words. I looked up some statistics on recidivism from the National Institute of Justice. Recidivism is the tendency of convicted criminals to reoffend. One study I found tracked 400,000 inmates released from prison. Within three years of release, two-thirds of them were re-arrested. Within five years of release, three-quarters of them were re-arrested. And more than half of those re-arrested were arrested within the first year of their release. Another article in the *LA Times*, years ago, estimated the cost of housing a single prisoner in California cost It costs a little over \$75,000 a year. That's an article almost 10 years ago. That's more than the cost of Harvard University tuition for a year. And is it working? Apparently not.

God's system here encourages just retribution or restoration of relationship within society, not just a holding place. You are made to enact *Shalom* with your friend or with your neighbor or with the person you've offended. You make restitution with them or you're removed from society. Now, verses 2 and 3 of Exodus 22 are sandwiched in between. If I can go back to that last slide there. Verses 2 and 3 deal with this specific threat, breaking and entering. The law is very simple here. If the thief comes in the night and the homeowner defends himself to the point of having to kill the thief, then there's no guilt upon the homeowner. He's not guilty of murder. That's what the expression means of no blood guilt for him. But if the thief comes during the daytime when the sun has risen and the homeowner kills the thief, then the homeowner is guilty of murder. Now, why is there a difference? Probably because they couldn't flick a light switch back then or pick up a phone and call the police.

It's much harder to judge the situation in the pitch black of night. The homeowner doesn't know if the thief is there to kill him or if the thief is there to steal a trinket off of his shelf. In the dark, they don't know if the thief has a weapon or not. So that homeowner has to use any means necessary to protect him and his family. But if it happens during the daytime, he could better judge the situation. You could more easily call for help. You could defend yourself with an appropriate amount of force. There's a little note in here that says, "The thief will surely make restitution. He will pay." That's very emphatic in the Hebrew text. Paying, he will pay. And if he's too poor to pay, then what he has to do is sell himself into an indentured service to pay off his debt. So one way or the other, you're going to have to pay.

Now, it's interesting to me when you compare laws like this to laws from our society. I'm originally from New Jersey, although I don't admit that in public too often. But New Jersey has a very strict self-defense law. If, for example, a burglar is breaking into my house at night, I would have to retreat to the furthest corner of my house before I could use any deadly force on him. Even if the guy comes in holding a gun, I couldn't shoot him as soon as he crosses my threshold, I would have to retreat as far as possible, and then I had to fire. In other ancient near Eastern laws, the penalties were much more severe than what you see up here. So some societies, the penalties are easier. Some societies, they are much more severe. For instance, under the Hittite law, the penalty for stealing was you had to pay back 15 times what you stole. And at one point in the Hittite laws, it was 30 times. Middle Assyrian laws required the thief to be flogged up to 100 times, have his hair torn out, and be the king's slave for a month, and repay whatever it was that he stole. But if you think all that's bad, the code of Hammurabi, which is a law code that dates back a few centuries, even earlier than Exodus, says, "If a man committed robbery and has been caught, that man shall be put to death."

You see the difference between the Bible's laws and the laws of the world? Hammurabi prescribes the death penalty for robbers. But the Bible, though, has laws here that even protects the thief himself. Why? Because people are always more important than property. It's better to let your stuff go than to kill the guy that's stealing your stuff from you. God values human life above human property.

Now look at the next two verses and you'll see something similar but different. Verses 5 and 6. Jump over there. "If a man causes a field or a vineyard to be grazed over or lets his beast loose, then it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best in his own field in his own vineyard. If a fire breaks out and catches in thorns so the stacked grain or the standing grain or the field is consumed, he who started the fire shall make full restitution."

Now, these two verses are related, not just because they deal with the same thing, but even related in vocabulary. Negligence that results in property damage. That's what these verses deal with. In fact, they're even related in that vocabulary. The word grazed over in Hebrew in verse 5 is *ba'ar*. It's the same Hebrew word for start of a fire in verse 6. So both of these verses deal with what do you do when negligence causes *ba'ar* to your field or your property? Grazing a field or blazing a field, the law is the same. In verse 5, a guy is not watching where his cattle are eating. They end up accidentally eating another man's field. And if that's the case, you just go and pay back the man for his damaged property, but you pay from the best of what you have. It wasn't intentional, but you still have to make amends. You don't have to repay double like with the thief. But here's what that looks like. If I have a teenage son and I brought him to work with me one day and he accidentally grazes through the staff refrigerator in the Divinity department and eats everyone's lunch, I owe my coworkers lunch. And according to this verse, I owe them a good lunch. Maybe I'll take him out to Chick-fil-A or something like that.

Verse 6, a guy starts a fire. Maybe he's trying to do a controlled burn. Maybe he's roasting up some matzah smores, but the fire gets out of control. It burns part of another person's field. Same deal. He makes restitution. He must ensure *Shalom* between the members of the covenant community. Negligence is a crime that had to be repaid. "Whoops" doesn't mean you get out of having to pay. You must take personal responsibility, even if it results from your negligence or from an accident.

Now, students, I want to encourage you to allow yourself to be matured by that concept. You need to own your negligence and you need to own your accidents. When you hand in a paper late because you misread the syllabus or even because you just simply forgot, even if you didn't do it on purpose, you need to take responsibility. It's not your professor's fault, and your professor is under no obligation to mitigate the consequences of your negligence. When you show up late to work, to your job because you accidentally overslept, take responsibility. It's not your roommate's fault. It's not your alarm's fault. It's your fault. Own it. Restore *Shalom* between you and your boss by manning up and taking responsibility.

You see, the concept of these verses is quite simple and easy to grasp. We love our neighbors by taking personal responsibility in what we're doing. And that's the theme that you see over and over again in all of these verses throughout all these passages. We don't have time to get through every one of them today, but I want to jump ahead just to that statement I made in the beginning again. Hopefully you've seen how simple and practical some of these laws are. They deal with everyday stuff. My stuff is stolen or my stuff was borrowed and not returned in the same condition. My stuff fell into a pit that you dug. They're not complicated laws written in legal jargon that only a lawyer can understand. They're also a lot more rational than the 28 rules that I posted on my door as a seven-year-old. This is simple, basic stuff related to human interaction. And here's the question it answers. How do I love my neighbor? How do I love my neighbor? The answer to that question is you love your neighbor by taking personal responsibility to restore relationships. We make every effort to enjoy a community of *Shalom* with one another. Whether that's *Shalom* here in the university, back in your dorm, whether that's *Shalom* in your classroom, whether that's *Shalom* in your house, whether that's *Shalom* at your work.

Do you know why we're called to reconcile with one another and be at peace? The apostle Paul says

that "through Christ, God reconciled us to himself and gave us a ministry of reconciliation." Which means that we must keep in mind that all this that we talked about today, the desire to have *Shalom* with one another, all of that is possible only through the gospel of Jesus Christ. You were once enemies of God. You were out of *Shalom* with God because of your sin. But once you accepted the gospel and placed your faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, you go from a broken relationship with him to being made whole, being at peace with God. Paul says in Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace," we have *Shalom*, "with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It's because of that peace, that gospel of peace, that we can reconcile with one another.

If you know that you've got a broken relationship with someone in your family, at your work, in your dorm, I want to urge you, based on the text of Scripture today, to take the initiative, be a Christian, and apply the gospel by reconciling. That might mean you've got to make some restitution, or maybe it means you've got to let go and leave justice to God. *Shalom* is more important than money, and *Shalom* is what God has called us to. Your neighbor or your father or your mother or your brother or sister, your professor, your roommate, your RA, they might be somewhat at fault. But as far as you are able, make restitution for your part of that broken relationship.

What I'd like to do is I'd like to end with a few verses of scripture, and I'd like to read those together. These are New Testament passages that summarize a lot of what you're seeing here in the Book of Exodus. We started our chapel today by standing and praying. I'd like to close our chapel by standing and reading. Will you stand with me? I'm going to put three verses on the screen here. If you truly desire to relate to each other with love and peace in a way that a covenant community should. Will you read these out loud with me?

Romans 14:19 "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Romans 12:18 "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Shalom.