

Exodus 20:18-26, 21
November 2, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Why are laws important? [They provide a norm of conduct; without laws our society would not be able to function effectively.]

Q: Who makes the laws in our country? [The legislative branch of our government made up of the Senate and House of Representatives]

Our government makes laws that are supposed to benefit its citizens. Through most of our lives we have mostly been unaware of the laws being enacted by our government. And there have been so many that the Wall Street Journal tried to answer the question, “How many federal laws do we have on the books?” and they couldn’t even begin to get a solid count. They went to the Library of Congress and discovered that public laws are published by subjects, and it would take three lifetimes just to read through them and count them! In the category of Criminal Offenses, it is estimated that there are at least 3,000 laws covering criminal offenses.

I had to laugh because we have this tendency to judge the Pharisees in the Bible for being so legalistic. Yet they became the spiritual leaders of their day because had a mastery of the many laws in their books and how to apply them. The laws had great importance to them for the same reasons we expressed at the beginning of class today. We are all looking for structure that helps us interact in healthy ways as a society.

Transition: This is what God had in mind as well. After He delivered the Ten Commandments, He decided to drill down some of these commandments with more specific ordinances, which we will begin to learn today and over the next couple of weeks. What we need to appreciate over the next several weeks is that God created laws for His children to follow that reflected His values.

I realize that some of these laws will feel like they don’t apply to us, but I don’t want us to get stuck there. I want to invite you to identify God’s VALUES behind the ordinances He presents to the Israelites. Because God is immutable, His values haven’t changed. So as we go through these laws, evaluate whether your values align with God’s values. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Ex 20:18-26]

Observations/Process Qs-

Exodus 20

V.18:

- When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance

V.19:

- and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”

V.20:

- Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

V.21:

- The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

V.22:

- Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven:’

V.23:

- Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.

V.24:

- “‘Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.

V.25:

- If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.

V.26:

- And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.”
- Commentary (Toussaint): Reference to a single altar indicates that God intended that worship should be centralized in one place. The altar was to be unadorned by craftsmanship; it was to be **of earth** (i.e., of natural stones; cf. Deut. 27:5–7), and without steps so the priests would not be indecently **exposed**. Altars with elaborate craftsmanship and elevated platforms with staircases were common in the worship of false deities.

Observations/Process Questions:

- According to v.20, what was one of the values of having the Ten Commandments in place? [He is testing His children to see if they have fear of Him. If they do, then following these commands will keep them from sin.]
- Which of the Ten Commandments does God feel a need to emphasize with the Israelites? [v.23 – Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver and gold.]
- Q: What other instructions does God give to the Israelites? [v. 24-26: Make an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and cattle.]
- Observation: God gave instructions to the Israelites about corporate worship because worship was to be an integral part of their lives.
- Q: Do you think Christians today place high value on corporate worship as God does? Is corporate worship an integral part of our lives? How many professing Christians do you know who rationalize why they opt out of corporate worship?

Exodus 21 [Read Ex 21:1-11]

V.1:

- “These are the laws you are to set before them:

V.2:

- “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. [Wiersbe: The Jews were allowed to buy and sell servants, but they were forbidden to treat them as slaves. Sometimes people had to sell themselves into service because of their poverty (Lev. 25:39; Deut. 15:12), but their service was limited to only six years. Then they had to be freed.]

V.3:

- If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him.

V.4:

- If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.

V.5:

- “But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’

V.6:

- then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

V.7:

- “If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do.

V.8:

- If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her.

V.9:

- If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter.

V.10:

- If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. [Cabal: Polygamy, like many other sins including divorce, is an expression of the hardness of people’s hearts and is contrary to God’s will (Mt 19:8). God’s ideal from the beginning was for one man to marry one woman, and for the couple to remain in an exclusive sexual relationship for as long as both partners were alive. Biblical evidence for this is found in the fact that God created woman as a uniquely suitable helper for one man—Adam (Gn 2:18–24).]

V.11:

- If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

Observations/Process Questions:

- Who is God protecting in these verses? [Servants, daughters]
- What values are expressed in these laws? [v.1-6: fairness – servants and their wives and children could not be separated if the servant declared his love for them. Masters were not to take advantage of the Jews who sold themselves as servants to help their families.]
- Q: Do we place high value on being fair with other people? Probably the closest scenarios we have are employment situations. When you are hired for a job, you are a “servant” to your boss. Perhaps you are the boss. Is fairness given high value?

[Read Ex 21:12-17]

V.12:

- “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.

V.13:

- However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate.

V.14:

- But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.

V.15:

- “Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death.

V.16:

- “Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.

V.17:

- “Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

Observations/Process Questions:

- Who is God protecting in these verses? [Parents, kidnap and murder victims]
- Which crimes did God determine was punishable by death? [Intentionally striking a man and killing him; attacking your parents – whether they die or not; kidnapping; verbal abuse of your parents]
- Q: Do we place high value on being fair with other people?
- What values are expressed in these laws? [Respect for human life, especially your parents; Grace for unintentional killing – your intent matters to God]

[Read Ex 21:18-27]

V.18:

- “If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and he does not die but is confined to bed,

V.19:

- the one who struck the blow will not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with his staff; however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and see that he is completely healed.

V.20:

- “If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished,

V.21:

- but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property.

V.22:

- “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows.

V.23:

- But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life,

V.24:

- eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, [Wiersbe: These regulations were given to assure fairness in compensating people for injuries. “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (v. 24) is not a “law of the jungle” but an expression of fair payment for injuries received, so that the judges would not demand more or less than what was right.]

V.25:

- burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

V.26:

- “If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye.

V.27:

- And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.

Observations/Process Questions:

- Who is God protecting in these verses? [Slaves, pregnant women, manservants and maidservants]
- What values are expressed in these laws? [Respect for human life, especially those who are injured; v.19 – Time; Legal and social rights for the underprivileged; Fairness – offender must compensate the injured party]
- Observation: We have similar laws in place with attorneys who make a living strictly doing malpractice cases.

[Read Ex 21:28-36]

V.28:

- “If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible.

V.29:

- If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death.

V.30:

- However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.

V.31:

- This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter.

V.32:

- If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.

V.33:

- “If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it,

V.34:

- the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his.

V.35:

- “If a man’s bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally.

V.36:

- However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and the dead animal will be his.

Observations/Process Questions:

- Who is God protecting in these verses? [People gored by animals, including children and slaves]
- What events did God determine was punishable by death? [Animals known for goring people and not being controlled by the owner]
- Q: Who or what was put to death in these cases? [Both the owner and the animal]
- What values are expressed in these laws? [Responsibility – owners are accountable for doing everything possible to protect others from their animals that had a reputation of goring others]

LOOK:

We have processed the values that God expressed implicitly in His laws to the Israelites. Let’s ask the Lord to reveal in our own hearts if our value system is not aligned with His. If He does reveal a discrepancy, then let’s thank the Holy Spirit for showing us where we’ve missed the mark and adjust our values accordingly.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Ex 21)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

I. Caring for Servants (21:1–11)

The Jews were allowed to buy and sell servants, but they were forbidden to treat them as slaves. Sometimes people had to sell themselves into service because of their poverty (Lev. 25:39; Deut. 15:12), but their service was limited to only six years. Then they had to be freed. If a servant wanted to remain with the master, the servant was marked in the ear and would remain in the household for life. See Deut. 15:17, Ps. 40:6. The Law gave special protection to female servants to make sure their masters did not abuse them and deprive them of their rights.

II. Compensating Personal Injuries (21:12–36)

These regulations were given to assure fairness in compensating people for injuries. “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” (v. 24) is not a “law of the jungle” but an expression of fair payment for injuries received, so that the judges would not demand more or less than what was right. It is the basis for law today, although it is not always justly applied. Our Lord’s words in Matt. 5:38–42 have to do with private revenge rather than public disobedience to the Law. There were several capital crimes in Israel, among them: murder (vv. 12–15), kidnapping (v. 16), cursing one’s parents (v. 17), causing the death of a pregnant woman and/or her fetus (vv. 22–23), trafficking in demonism (22:18), and practicing bestiality (22:19). The basis for capital punishment is God’s covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1–6) and the fact that man is created in the image of God. It is God who gives life and only He has the right to take it away or authorize it to be taken (Rom. 13).

God makes a distinction between deliberate murder and accidental death or manslaughter (vv. 12–13). The cities of refuge were provided for the protection of the person who accidentally killed someone (Num. 35:6ff). There were no police in that day, and a slain person’s family would feel obligated to avenge the death of their loved one. Therefore it was necessary to protect the innocent until the case could be investigated by the elders.

Note that God held the owner of an animal responsible for what it did to others (vv. 28–36), if that owner knew already that the animal was dangerous. The law made sure that nobody could take advantage of such situations and profit from them.

Verses 22–23 are basic to the pro-life position on abortion, for they indicate that the aborting of a fetus was equivalent to the murdering of the child. The guilty party was punished as a murderer (“life for life”) if the mother or the unborn child, or both, died. See also Ps. 139:13–16.

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). *Acts*. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Vol. 1, pp. 140–142). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

1. The people's response (20:18–21)

20:18–21. The response of **the people** gathered before **the mountain** was one of **fear** and awe (cf. 19:16). Recognizing the mighty power and majesty of God, they wanted to hear of Him *through Moses*—not directly lest God destroy them. **Moses** assured them that the purpose of this display of God’s power and holiness was **to test** their reaction to Him. **Fear of Him** would help

curb their disobedience. Tragically Israel soon lost this fear of Him (Ex. 32)—a frequent theme in her history.

3. THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT (20:22–24:11)

God applied and elaborated on the Decalogue in its civil and religious implications for the nation. This section is called “the Book of the Covenant,” based on that phrase in 24:7.

a. *Statutes concerning worship (20:22–26)*

20:22–26. God gave the nation regulations about their worship of the true God and the building of **an altar**. He had come **from heaven** to Mount Sinai (19:20) to give the Ten Commandments. Now (20:22–23:19) He elaborated on many of those 10. The command to worship God alone, not other deities (20:23), and the caution against making carved or molten idols **of silver or ... gold**, re-emphasizes the first and second commandments (vv. 3–4).

On **an altar** the people were to offer **burnt offerings and fellowship offerings**, which would result in His **name** being **honored** and their lives being blessed. Reference to a single altar indicates that God intended that worship should be centralized in one place. The altar was to be unadorned by craftsmanship; it was to be **of earth** (i.e., of natural stones; cf. Deut. 27:5–7), and without steps so the priests would not be indecently **exposed**. Altars with elaborate craftsmanship and elevated platforms with staircases were common in the worship of false deities.

b. *Statutes concerning the care of servants (21:1–11)*

21:1–6. The subject of verses 1–11 is regulations governing the rights of male (vv. 1–6) and female (vv. 7–11) **Hebrew** slaves. Among the Israelites a person could sell himself and his wife into slavery due to poverty or debt (Lev. 25:39; Deut. 15:12; 2 Kings 4:1; Neh. 5:5), but the servitude was to be limited to **six years** (Ex. 21:2). Thus it was indentured service. Further, a **master** was obligated to provide for his **servant** on his release (Deut. 15:13–14). If a male **servant** wanted to remain in permanent servitude his request was to be validated by **the judges** and then one of his ears was to be pierced **with an awl**, to symbolize willing service (Ps. 40:6). A female servant could do the same (Deut. 15:17).

21:7–11. Female slaves were treated differently. Many times female slaves were concubines or secondary wives (cf. Gen. 16:3; 22:24; 30:3, 9; 36:12; Jud. 8:31; 9:18). Some Hebrew fathers thought it more advantageous for their daughters to become concubines of well-to-do neighbors than to become the wives of men in their own social class. If a **daughter** who became a **servant** was not pleasing to her master she was to **be redeemed** by a near kinsman (cf. Lev. 25:47–54) but never sold **to foreigners** (Ex. 21:8); she could also redeem herself. If she married her master’s **son** she was to be given family status (v. 9). If the master married someone else he was required to provide his servant with three essentials: **food, clothing**, and shelter (**marital rights** probably means living quarters, not sexual privilege).

c. *Statutes of capital offense (21:12–17)*

21:12–17. These verses enumerate four crimes that required the death penalty: premeditated murder (vv. 12, 14; cf. the sixth commandment in 20:13 and Gen. 9:6); physical violence against

parents (Ex. 21:15); kidnapping (v. 16; cf. Deut. 24:7); and verbal abuse of parents (Ex. 21:17; cf. the fifth commandment in 20:12 and note Lev. 20:9). Allowance was made for unintentional, accidental deaths (Ex. 21:13). A “guilty” person could escape to one of the six cities of refuge after Israel was in the land (Num. 35:6–34; Deut. 19:1–13; Josh. 20). Because of the importance of the home its sanctity was guarded, parents protected, and children controlled; disrespectfulness was to be dealt with in the same way as murder.

d. Statutes concerning physical injury (21:18–27)

Regulations concerning several civil deviations are given that were not severe enough to merit the death penalty.

21:18–19. In a physical **quarrel** the injured party, whether or not the injury was premeditated, was to be given compensation for his **loss of work time** (while he was walking **around outside with his staff**) and for medical expenses.

21:20–21. Slaves were not to be treated cruelly by their masters, though they were considered **property**. If a master beat his **slave ... and the slave** died, the master was to **be punished** (but probably not by death). However, **if the slave** soon recovered, no punishment was to be exacted (for apparently homicide was not intended); the loss of a slave’s work was his master’s loss.

21:22–25. **If ... a pregnant woman** delivered her child prematurely as a result of a blow, but both were otherwise uninjured, the guilty party was to pay compensation determined by **the woman’s husband and the court**. However, **if there was injury** to the expectant mother or her child, then the assailant was to be penalized in proportion to the nature of severity of the injury. While unintentional life-taking was usually not a capital offense (cf. vv. 12–13), here it clearly was. Also the unborn fetus is viewed in this passage as just as much a human being as its mother; the abortion of a fetus was considered murder. A person’s physical loss by **injury** was to be punished by a similar loss to the offender (vv. 24–25), the law of retaliation (cf. Lev. 24:19–20; Deut. 19:21). This law was designed to *restrict* the exacting of punishment to what was equitable.

21:26–27. The law of retaliation, however, did not apply to a master who injured his **servant**. Any permanent maiming of a slave would result in his being legally freed (the master **must let the servant go free**).

e. Statutes concerning culpable neglect (21:28–36)

21:28–36. Here statutes were given for cases involving injury through negligence. First, God gave regulations concerning injuries inflicted by animals (vv. 28–32). **If a bull** gored someone **to death**, the animal was to be killed. However, if the animal had a **habit** of violently attacking people **and the owner** did nothing to prevent it and someone was killed, **the owner** (as well as **the bull**) was to **be put to death**. He could avoid the death penalty if he could come up with financial compensation **demanded** by the dead person’s relatives. If a **slave** was killed by a **bull**, the animal’s owner had to remunerate the slave **owner** by paying **30 shekels of silver** (cf. Matt. 26:14–15), apparently the price of **the slave**.

Second, in the event of animal loss due to someone’s negligence (e.g., in not covering a **pit**—perhaps used to collect rainwater—to prevent an animal falling in), the guilty party was required to render full compensation for the loss of the **animal** (Ex. 21:33–34). This regulation was important because animals were important property of the Israelites.

Third, **if a bull** killed someone else's **bull**, the loss was to be shared **equally** between the owners by selling **the live** bull and splitting the money (v. 35). **However, if** a man knowingly neglected to pen his goring **bull**, he **must** then **pay** for the **dead** bull.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 118 – 121). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

20:24 In this verse the Lord asks Israel to make a sacrificial altar of earth, but the instructions of 27:1, 6–8 refer to bronze and wood. These passages need not be seen as contradictory. The transportable altar made of bronze and wood was box-shaped and hollow. Possibly a layer of earth was placed in the bottom before sacrifices were offered on it. The surface on which the sacrifice was laid would have been earthen, not bronze or wood. The earth could have been easily removed to lighten the altar for transporting to another location.

20:24 The narrative of events after Israel came out of Egypt is filled with instructions about burnt offerings and sacrifices, yet in Jr 7:21–22 God appears to deny giving Israel such commands during that period (see Am 5:25). The contradiction is more rhetorical than substantive. In Jr 7, God contrasts wholehearted obedience to the Lord (Jr 7:23) with the mere performance of outward ritual (Jr 7:22). God did not want Israel to put observable activity ahead of inner devotion to Him.

This same literary device of expressing a complex concept in abbreviated fashion is found in Hs 6:6, a passage that suggests that God does not desire sacrifices (cp. Am 5:21–22). God commanded sacrifices, but wanted them to come from people who could back up their commitment to God with a life of merciful concern for others.

20:26 Ascending the altar on steps would expose the sacrificial area to the underside of the priest's clothing, and possibly to his private parts. This was considered an affront to the Lord.

21:2, 7 Some have suggested that these verses contradict the command in Lv 25:42, which forbids selling Israelites as slaves. However, the rules set forth in Lv 25 do not prohibit Israelites from becoming slaves. Instead, they regulate situations in which Israelites had to sell themselves to other Israelites in order to pay debts. Israelites who became slaves had to be given rights and privileges normally associated only with hired workers

21:7–11 Was a female who became a slave always a slave, or was she to be set free after six years? The instruction of Dt 15:12 appears to provide a different guideline for the treatment of a female slave. Jewish commentators and others have suggested, however, that the regulations reflect different situations. If a slave woman was used as a sexual partner she was not to be set free, but must be given a lifetime of proper care. If she served in any other capacity, she was to be emancipated after six years.

21:10 Polygamy, like many other sins including divorce, is an expression of the hardness of people's hearts and is contrary to God's will (Mt 19:8). God's ideal from the beginning was for one man to marry one woman, and for the couple to remain in an exclusive sexual relationship for as long as both partners were alive. Biblical evidence for this is found in the fact that God created woman as a uniquely suitable helper for one man—Adam (Gn 2:18–24). When the pair

disobeyed God, they could no longer implement many aspects of God's plan for human life. Because of sin conflict, oppression and death became part of the human landscape. People's sinful nature often leads to sexual misconduct. As in the case of Lamech, the first recorded polygamist (Gn 4:19), men will be inclined to take multiple sexual partners for themselves.

The law presented here and in other laws in the Torah is not meant to condone polygamy. It is not an expression of God's ideal, but a concession to humanity's hardheartedness. The law recognizes the male's sexual inclinations, but seeks to limit the injury to women that could result; all wives must be given adequate food, clothing, and intimacy. Far from approving of polygamy, the law of Moses discourages it by placing high demands on anyone who chooses this option, and it preserves the essential rights of polygamy's potential victims.

21:20–21, 26 The Bible does not condone slavery any more than it condones polygamy or divorce. Instead, it establishes humane limits for an existing, evil system. Slavery had long been a feature of human society. The Israelites were always to remember that they themselves had been the victims of this practice for an extended time (Gn 37:28, 36; Ex 1:8–14) as slaves in Egypt (Dt 5:15; 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22). Accordingly, Israelite slave owners were to treat their slaves in a fair and charitable manner. They were to be given a day of rest every week (Ex 20:10) and, as beings created in God's image, were expected to attend religious festivals (Dt 12:12, 18; 16:11). Israelites who were slaves were to be treated with special benevolence, and to be released after six years (Ex 21:2; Dt 15:12) or in the Year of the Jubilee (Lv 25:40–41), whichever came first. Female slaves who became wives to their owners or owner's sons were to be treated with all the respect and rights of a regular wife (Ex 21:8–11). When an Israelite's term of slavery had ended, he was to be given a gift (Dt 15:13–14). If slaves were physically abused by their owners, they were to be granted immediate freedom (Ex 21:26–27) and, unlike animals, the killing of a slave constituted a crime (v. 20).

Through these measures the law of Moses made it clear that slaves were to be treated as persons with God-given rights and standing before God. Furthermore, slavery for Israelites was to be a temporary state, not a lifetime condition. The law of Moses laid the groundwork for the eventual demise of one of the most demeaning institutions in human society.

21:23–25 Does the Bible teach that people should retaliate, or that they should “turn the other cheek” (Mt 5:38–39; Lk 6:27–29)? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasted a popular interpretation of the law of Moses with His own teachings. In doing this He was not saying that OT law was wrong, only that his adversaries' way of applying it to situations was wrong; by emphasizing the letter of the law they had missed its true intent.

The “eye for eye, tooth for tooth” passage did not require people to pay someone back for a wrong done to them. Its purpose was to establish limits for retaliation. The most one could do in response to knocking out a tooth was to knock out the other person's tooth; a person could not be killed for injuring someone's eye. As Jesus pointed out, a person who was wronged by another could choose not to retaliate for what had been done to him. Often such a response would be the best way to deal with the problem. In every case, it should be the first option considered.

21:29 For a discussion of capital punishment, see note on 20:13.

21:29–30 This passage indicates that the person responsible for the death of another might be able to ransom his life; Nm 35:31, on the other hand, suggests that the death penalty could not be commuted. Biblical commentators have long noted that these two passages complement, rather than contradict, each other. The passage teaches that a person whose negligence caused someone

else's death would have to be punished, but their life might be spared. The passage in Numbers directs that anyone who has willfully taken someone else's life must be executed.

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