

Exodus 21:20-21 Explained - *Briefly*

And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.

Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.

Have you ever had someone ask you to explain this - knowing full well their intention is to try to discredit the Bible or make the Laws of God look foolish? This comes from the natural man receiving not the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to him. The reality is that the Laws of God are totally perfect and totally reliable from generation to generation and must be implemented into any society if that society wants to receive the blessings of God and live in peace, freedom and free from the plagues of crime.

The "slavery" addressed in this passage is NOT the way most people think of "slavery." Most people think of "slavery" as what took place in the 1700-1800s on American soil. The truth is, that was not "slavery" that was man-stealing. Man-stealing is also addressed in Exodus 21, in verse 16, but does not usually enter the conversation when people want to to discredit the Laws of God:

And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.

Those practicing "slavery" from the 1700s-1800s - the way American history has told us it took place - should have been prohibited from such things if they were following Exodus 21. The death penalty would have applied to the man doing the original man-stealing AND the man who took power over the stolen man.

Biblical "slavery" when properly used - is as perfect today as it was during the day of Moses and should be observed today. Biblical "slavery" occurred under 3 circumstances:

1) Spoils of war. Used as a means of punishment against those who mistreated Israel and God gave to them with victory in battle.

2) Punishment for crime. A man who could not pay damages for his crimes was "sentenced" to "slavery" as a means to pay for his crimes. This is much like the way things are still done today - except with God's Perfect Law - the one who was damaged

by the criminal is the one who receives the restitution - not the "state."

How ironic is this? A man gets his house broken into and incurs damage and loss. The "police" manage to find the perpetrator. They put the perpetrator in "jail" and require the man who was robbed and damaged initially to pay for the "punishment" of the perpetrator. The man who was robbed and damaged suffers loss from the original crime - but suffers further loss by having to pay again to "punish" the perpetrator. And that's a better system than what God established? That system does not deter the crime of stealing - but in many ways - actually perpetuates it.

3) A man could sell himself into "slavery" to pay his own debts or simply to secure a better way of life than what he had on his own.

In all instances, those who had power over the "slaves" were never allowed to abuse the "slaves." Matthew Henry does a fine job in explaining that "slaves" were actually treated with kindness and mercy under the Law given to Moses.

*"Their government being purely a Theocracy, that which in other states is to be settled by human prudence was directed among them by a divine appointment, so that the constitution of their government was peculiarly adapted to make them happy. These laws are called judgments, because they are framed in infinite wisdom and equity, and because their magistrates were to give judgment according to the people. In the doubtful cases that had hitherto occurred, Moses had particularly enquired of God for them, as appeared, ch. 18:15 ; but now God gave him statutes in general by which to determine particular cases, which likewise he must apply to other like cases that might happen, which, falling under the same reason, fell under the same rule. He begins with the laws concerning servants, **commanding mercy and moderation towards them.** The Israelites had lately been servants themselves; and now that they had become, not only their own masters, but masters of servants too, lest they should abuse their servants, as they themselves had been abused and ruled with rigour by the Egyptian task-masters, **provision was made by these laws for the mild and gentle usage of servants.** Note, If those who have had power over us have been injurious to us this will not in the least excuse us if we be in like manner injurious to those who are under our power, but will rather aggravate our crime, because, in that case, we may the more easily put our souls into their soul's stead. Here is,*

I. A law concerning men-servants, sold, either by themselves or their parents, through poverty, or by the judges, for their crimes; even those of the latter sort (if Hebrews) were to continue in slavery but seven years at the most, in which time it was taken for

granted that they would sufficiently have smarted for their folly or offence. At the seven years' end the servant should either go out free (v. 2, v. 3), or his servitude should thenceforward be his choice, v. 5, v. 6. If he had a wife given him by his master, and children, he might either leave them and go out free himself, or, if he had such a kindness for them that he would rather tarry with them in bondage than go out at liberty without them, he was to have his ear bored through to the doorpost and serve till the death of his master, or the year of jubilee.

1. By this law God taught, (1.) The Hebrew servants generosity, and a noble love of liberty, for they were the Lord's freemen; a mark of disgrace must be put upon him who refused liberty when he might have it, though he refused it upon considerations otherwise laudable enough. Thus Christians, being bought with a price, and called unto liberty, must not be the servants of men, nor of the lusts of men, 1 Co. 7:23. There is a free and princely spirit that much helps to uphold a Christian, Ps. 51:12. He likewise taught,

(2.) The Hebrew masters not to trample upon their poor servants, knowing, not only that they had been by birth upon a level with them, but that, in a few years, they would be so again. Thus Christian masters must look with respect on believing servants, Phlm. 16"

Is it possible that a "slave," particularly one who has become a "slave" due to his criminal behavior commits another crime while under the judgement for his original crime? Absolutely. In the U.S., what "further punishment" will he receive if he is already in "prison?" Do cops ever beat inmates into submission? Sure they do! Do they put them in isolation for punishment? Do they allow other inmates to beat on them? Do they deprive them of certain privileges? Sure they do. But in America, the same ones who would assail the Laws of God concerning the punishment of crime - would applaud jailers who abuse prisoners.

How about those taken as "prisoners/slaves" under acts of war? People who rail against the Laws of God from Exodus 21 revel in the "torture techniques" employed by the U.S. military - remember "water-boarding?" That's just one they admitted to.

The reality is that according to the Laws of God, those that had the power over "slaves" were not allowed to do anything they wanted to do to them. They were commanded to treat them with kindness. If correction ever became necessary with one of their "slaves" - they were under the strict understanding that the punishment was not to be excessive. If punishment or correction led to the direct death of the "slave" - the one

who killed the "slave" would receive the death penalty himself.

Assuredly, this admonishment led to the careful employment of correction with the "slave" so as not to be excessive.

For an even more thorough discussion, I would refer to Ted Weiland's excellent work on Bible Law vs. the U.S. Constitution, Part 22.

<https://www.bibleversusconstitution.org/BlvcOnline/biblelaw-constitutionalism-pt22.html>