

# Stay In Your Lane As A Creature

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we are going to turn to our Bibles now, and we're going to read together in the book of Exodus, chapter 22. If you don't have a Bible, they are scattered about the church at both sides, and at the front here and at the back.

So if you don't have one, do go and grab one, and you will be able to follow on and see what we're reading. John Gemmel, who is the director of the Cornhill Training Course, was with us last week, and we were looking at the book of Exodus, and he's here again this evening.

Welcome to John again, and we're looking forward to hearing what he has to say on this passage. We're going to read from Exodus 22 at verse 18, verse 18 to the end of the chapter.

You shall not permit a sorceress to live. Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death.

Whoever sacrifices to any god other than to the Lord alone shall be devoted to destruction. You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

[ 1 : 16 ] You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with a sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

If ever you see you take your neighbor's cloak and pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it's his cloak for his body.

And what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your oxen, with your sheep.

[ 2 : 24 ] Seven days it shall be with its mother. On the eighth day you shall give it to me. You shall be consecrated to me. Therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field.

You shall throw it to the dogs. Amen. May God bless to us his word. Let's pray and then we'll turn again to Exodus chapter 22.

Father God, please send your spirit to make these ancient words alive. That in this time we might behold your son afresh. Help these words not just to land and then be snatched away.

But may they penetrate deep. And continue to reverberate in us long after we leave this gathering. We pray these things before you, our Father. In the beautiful and powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. When I drove to London in 2017 to live, it was a terrifying experience. We left Edinburgh with a car bulging with all of our stuff on Friday morning.

[ 3 : 43 ] And the one thing I was petrified of was arriving in London at the time of rush hour. Despite my best efforts trying to organize our service station stops all the way down the country, it transpired that we turned onto the A13 at 5.15.

What followed was two hours of white knuckle, heart racing, stop-start driving. There was traffic everywhere.

Coming from every direction, all at once. For someone who had grown accustomed to driving around the village of Edinburgh, London traffic was alarming.

Absolutely mesmerizing. And so, petrified, I decided the best course of action was simply to stay in my lane and let the crazy frenzied automotive dance happen all around me.

Well, thankfully, after lots of teeth grinding and considerably sweatier than when we turned off, we turned into Tanner Street still alive with our rental car still in one piece.

[ 5 : 00 ] Staying in our lane had proven to be a very shrewd policy. So, therefore, I want to exhort you this evening to stay in your lane.

Not so much when it comes to driving, although I dare say in Glasgow in the madness we're witnessing, that may not be a bad policy. But I want to exhort you to stay in your lane when it comes to your position within the cosmic food chain.

To stay in your lane when it comes to the cosmic food chain. Tonight, I hope to show you from our passage in Exodus 22, the divine command for you to understand and operate within the parameters of being a supreme creature.

Nothing more, nothing less. Big message. Stay in your lane. Humans are supreme creatures. Nothing more, nothing less. Like last week, we're in this much overlooked section of Exodus, commonly called the Book of the Covenant.

[ 6 : 12 ] It stretches from Exodus 21, straight after the giving of the Ten Commandments, right up to the end of chapter 23, before we get the confirmation of the covenant in Exodus chapter 24.

And this section is really fleshing out how God's people are to fulfill their mandate to be a holy nation. In large part, God is giving his people through Moses an exposition of the Ten Commandments applied to the complexity of everyday life.

So far, it has been a carefully ordered section. We started with laws concerning slaves at the beginning of Exodus chapter 21, where we were last week.

There is then this section running almost to the end of chapter 21, clearing up gray areas of when murder is murder. Helping us differentiate what is premeditated murder, what is accidental death, what is manslaughter, and how you're to operate as a society with all those variations of what cannot be categorized merely as murder.

Then this gives way from the very end of chapter 21 to most of chapter 22, laws concerning restitution. How you make amends for the wrongs that have been committed, with the focus being on when stealing is stealing and what you're to do about it.

[ 7 : 45 ] This goes as far as in verses 16 and 17, prescribing the restitution a man must make if he engages in sex outside of marriage.

That he must make restitution by paying a full bride price, whether he marries her or not. And again, what is absolutely clear as we look in this section, is that God is under absolutely no illusions as to the spiritual nature of his people.

He knows what they're like. He knows they're sinful. If they were a perfect people deserving God's love, you wouldn't need laws about all of these things. They're not a people deserving of his love, but they're a people to whom God has graciously chosen to show his love to.

Chapter 22 continues. We get our passage starting in verse 18. And at first sight, it seems like any semblance of order has been dispensed with.

We have laws about sorcery, bestiality, idolatry, social justice, money lending, cloak borrowing, reverence, right worship, expedited offerings, and not eating lions, a lion's leftovers.

[ 9 : 12 ] It seems like Moses has resorted to a kind of messy drawer of jurisprudence. And he's just put everything that didn't fit anywhere else into this section together.

However, I want to show you that this section is in fact a coherent section. And this bundle of laws actually enables God's people to navigate the tricky line of living out their humanity properly.

These laws remind God's people of where they come in the pecking order of the universe. They exhort them to stay in their lane. Humans are supreme creatures, nothing more and nothing less.

And we need this today. Because the big question that the church was wrestling with in the first millennia of its existence was, who is God's?

All the debates about the nature of the Trinity, the person and work of the Lord Jesus, they were the big questions the church was needing to answer.

[ 10 : 19 ] And then as the first millennia gave way to the second millennia, the big question was, how are people saved? Over and against the established traditions, the reformers through studying the scriptures succinctly answered that the way people are saved was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

First millennia, who is God? Second millennia, how are we saved? And now entering the third millennia, the battleground has shifted again.

And the big question we're asking is, who are we? What is humanity? What does it mean to be human? Our questions that are being asked surround the doctrine of humanity and biblical

anthropology.

It is a subject around which there is so much confusion and confusion that Exodus chapter 22 helps us with.

Terry Pratchett, the author, put the conundrum into sharp focus when it came to what does it mean to be human? He described it as our opinion of ourselves oscillating between that of evolved apes or fallen angels.

[ 11 : 38 ] We don't know quite, humanity doesn't quite know where it comes. And I think Terry Pratchett puts his finger on it. We're unsure whether we're evolved apes or fallen angels.

And so humanity is in a quandary. Western society is in a quandary. What is a person? What is a human? Humans unsure whether they are just a chance product of matter plus time plus chance, refined by natural selection.

Humans as evolved apes. Or whether human exceptionalism is explained by the notion of being fallen angels somehow touched by the divine, distinct from creation and superior to it.

And we're not sure which one we are. We're not sure whether we're bottom up or top down. Our society confusingly wants to say both at the same time. We speak out of both sides of our mouths. We want to say both that we are born this way, but also if we don't like the way that we're born, we're free to change it. And we don't know where we come on that sliding scale.

[ 12 : 51 ] We want to find answers to who we are, both by the makeup of our DNA, but also from the makeup of our inner psychology. We don't know where we come on this oscillating, shifting balance.

We want to worship the science, but we also want to worship the self. We want to choose when we are evolved apes and when we are fallen angels, and we know we can't be both at the same time, so we oscillate between the two.

This constant oscillation is a fluctuation between hopeless calamity or crushing responsibility, and we can't cope with either. This uneasy vacillation will be greatly aided if we spend some time in Exodus 22, reminding us that humans are neither evolved apes nor fallen angels.

In fact, humans are supreme creatures, nothing more and nothing less. And thus it is incumbent upon us to stay in our lane.

Our verses, I think, have quite a neat structure. I think verses 18 to 20 at the beginning and verses 28 to 31 go together and explain humanity's relationship with non-humans, both other creatures, but also with our creator God.

[ 14 : 25 ] Then in the middle, verses 21 to 27, I think we get help explaining how humans are to relate to other humans. creation and creator, creation and creator, and in the middle, fellow humans.

And so let's begin with verses 18 to 20 and 28 to 31 under the heading, humans, neither elevation nor degradation. See that humans are not to elevate themselves to the place of the divine.

Verse 18, You shall not permit a sorceress to live. God's people must not tolerate any attempt or indulge any claim to utilize or manipulate supernatural power.

Sorcerers and sorceresses are not permitted to live as they are those that do not stay in their lane but elevate themselves and give the impression that humans are more than creatures.

which is a fatal mistake, trying to call down divine power from above. Not only that, but see verse 20, whoever sacrifices to any other than the Lord alone shall be devoted to destruction.

[ 15 : 45 ] Again, this is representative of coloring outside the lines. Rather than humans as those living in fear of their creator God, man instead usurps to the position of the creator and one thing that humans create for themselves is the gods to whom they will sacrifice.

Not living in obedience as creatures before their creator but elevating themselves to creators and forming their own gods. then drop down to verse 28.

You shall not revile God nor curse a ruler of your people. This word revile is the same word as in Exodus chapter 21 verse 17 where it is translated curse his father or mother.

This word means to speak flippantly or triflingly of someone or something. And it again suggests that humans are on very thin ice when they lightly esteem they flippantly talk about gods.

Where they don't esteem any weight to the one who is weighty and glorious and big and mighty. God's people are not to speak about God as though they were on the same level.

[ 17 : 12 ] There's no banter when it comes to the creator gods. Everything is to have weight and substance and purpose and is to be directed in a worshipful reverent direction.

Humans you see must stay in their lane and not live out the pretense of having ultimate authority. not trifling with the idea of having ideas well above our pay grade.

Not only that but humans are not to pretend that they can see everything and know everything. So not only is it not reviling God but it's also not speaking flippantly about the ruler that God has placed over his people.

not pretending they know better or to rule or to rebel against God's ordering of things. not only that but they're to worship expediently they're to worship God on the front foot ever since God rescued his people from Egypt that's in the near past of the people that Moses is talking to He claimed the firstborn and the firstfruits for himself they were his by divine right on account of his redemptive action on behalf of his people the firstborn of your sons you shall give to me you shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep you shall give the fullness from the fullness of your harvest and the outflow from your winepresses that's his right as the God who rescued them and the minute his people started to forget his action for them in the past they'd get behind on their payments and get sloppy on giving to God what was God's alone the minute they lost sight of who God was and what he had done for them worship became an option rather than a thankful duty the minute they lost sight of who God was they started to think that what was theirs was theirs and God says no remember who you are stay in your lane fulfill your duty don't get behind with the payments don't get sloppy in fulfilling your responsibilities worship God properly and wholeheartedly and as you do that it shows that your heart is orientated understanding understanding your place in the cosmic scheme of things

God is the holy creator and you are a supreme creature don't get that the wrong way up keep front footedly worshipping God keep remembering who God is keep understanding that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it and yet by his grace he wants the firstborn and the overflow of the fullness and you get to steward the rest the minute they lost sight of who God was they would start withholding and squirreling things away rather than giving to God what was his by rights when they started to forget that they were an enslaved people helpless under a cruel tyrant and God saved them they would treat worship as optional right at the beginning of the formation of Israel as a separate nation of God's people

[ 21 : 04 ] God wanted to be very clear of the stipulations contained in the first three commandments which I think are summed up and extrapolated out of these commandments at the beginning and the end concerning God's people's relationship with God's God's people were not to have any gods before him not to create their own or swerve out of their lane and start creating for themselves they were not to slip into DIY idolatry and form gods make images of him to bow down and worship and they certainly weren't to treat God's name and his character and his love and his actions towards them vainly with no esteem and with no gravity first set of these laws at the beginning and the end are to make sure that God is kept in the place that only

God deserves the creator the creator holy God who had been so kind to his people humans must stay in their lane as supreme creatures but never elevating themselves to the rank of the divine but see this section works the other way as well equally humans are not to slump down and denigrate themselves to the status of a beast that is succinctly stated in verse 19 whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death yes first and foremost this is obviously about bestiality and perhaps in our depraved fast moving morally relativist culture that is not as far removed as once it might have seemed the American social psychologist Jonathan Hines in one of his typically alarming surveys found that 67% of

American students were in favour of human animal marriages as long as it was clear neither party was being hurt through the arrangement isn't that insane however I think this law is also shorthand for so much more understand that you are distinct from the rest of the created order as image bearing creatures endowed with the very goodness of God you are part of creation but distinct from all other creatures a supreme creature endowed with responsibility and delegated authority to have dominion over the rest of creation now understand this isn't a mandate to exploit and pillage the earth but it is a responsibility to steward creation well and be involved in ordering it rightly under God's good design now probably behind this law there are some cultic practices engaged in by the surrounding nations whom God's people were going to live amongst and this law was to inoculate them against adopting any of those practices however there is no doubt that the arrangement of the material helps God's people understand their place in the good ordering of

God's good creation it should deeply worry us today when there is more public sadness shown about 50 pilot whales stranding themselves on the Isle of Lewis than there was about the fishing vessel carrying 600 souls that sank off Greece just a month before should worry us when whales get more air time and more tears shed over them than 600 human beings who were lost in the Mediterranean similarly if you drop down right to the bottom of our section verse 31 we have another exhortation to not scavenge the carrion left by other predatory animals understand that the supreme creatures looked after by a sovereign and caring God now you don't need to live like a hyena skulking around the periphery waiting for a chance to tuck in of what's left by other animals you are of a different order to a vulture

God your creator and redeemer can be trusted to provide sustain and care for you you are to be consecrated to him set apart for him trusting only in him worshipping only him different distinct and other from the rest of creation be consecrated to God not rising too high or sinking too low only then when we understand where we come where we have a right view of ourselves and therefore a right attitude towards everything else stay in your lane humans are supreme creatures nothing more and certainly nothing less see that in the middle verses 21 to 27 having orientated ourselves to understand the place of humanity we are now guided into how to relate to other humans the big message is we are to relate to other humans mercifully graciously and compassionately and as we do we so reflect the God whom we worship and so look with me at verses 21 to 27 humans neither oppression nor exploitation there are two particular scenarios that are placed in front of [ 27 : 06 ] Moses as here as in us now I don't think these are to be seen as exhaustive but illustrative verses 21 to 24 involve how Israel should treat sojourners treat outsiders from their community how they're to treat widows and the fatherless in short how you should treat those who have no one to protect them and the answer is that God's people are to treat them compassionately as fellow humans they are not to be oppressed or mistreated verse 21 you shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt you shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child if you do mistreat them and they cry out to me I will surely hear their cry and my wrath will burn and I will kill you with the sword and your wife shall become widows and your children fatherless

God's people are to treat those amongst them compassionately compassionately as fellow humans they are not to be oppressed or mistreated and the motivation for this is two fold firstly don't wrong or oppress the sojourner because that is to forget that you were sojourners in Egypt that would show that you are really Egyptian at heart rather than being yourselves as God's holy people redeemed and blessed to oppress and mistreat others would be to elevate yourselves above them and become one who tramples upon them in order to keep them down that would be definitively to move outside of your lane stay in your lane relate humbly and compassionately towards other people even if they're ethnically different to you like the sojourner but also see the motivation to not mistreat widows or the fatherless child you are not to mistreat them because if you do God himself will become your enemy if you do mistreat them and they cry up to me I will surely hear their cry and my wrath will burn and I will kill you with the sword and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless it's weighty isn't it but God cares passionately about those that don't seem to have anybody else to care about them the widow and the fatherless child in the same way God showed up for his people when they had no one to defend them in Egypt see that God will show up against his people if they fail to show the same care to those amongst them who have no one else to defend them see it is proportional it is in accordance with the lex tele onus that you get in chapter one the justice will be an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is that kind of deal if you mistreat the widow and the fatherless then know that those nearest you will become widowed and fatherless themselves which means that you'll die

God himself will ensure justice is done for those who nobody else will advocate for our God's ear is honed on the cry of the helpless and he himself stands behind and will guarantee justice for them care for the outsider and care for those who have no one else to care for them but see verse 25 the situation changes now the poorer are in view again it mitigates against people on the margins being oppressed when they have no other options it warns God's people that when they lend money it should be in the form of an interest-free loan not like a loan shark seeking to profit from the misfortune of others not only that but if a neighbor puts up his cloak insecurity that does not mean that you should let it stay in your wardrobe forever your help of him should be driven by compassion and therefore when the sun goes down you give his cloak back to him so he's not cold at night so

the misery of his situation is not compounded by you holding on to the security that he offered you when you lent him some money your help of him should be driven by compassion and humility and helpfulness not exploitation oppression and profiteering if you are to relate to God rightly to creation distinctly then it is also incumbent upon you to relate to your fellow supreme creatures compassionately you're to be caring and helpful you're to look out for them you're to go to the extra mile when it comes to helping them and in so doing you reflect what God is like God concludes the case study and if he cries to me I will hear because one of the things that God reveals about himself in this section is for I am compassionate for I am compassionate one of the quintessential characteristics about me your God is I am compassionate I show compassion to the poor the oppressed I turn and hear those who have no one else to turn to I am compassionate so within this what at first seems quite random list of laws unhelpfully titled in our Bibles laws about social justice I think there's a much bigger paradigm in view God is giving us laws to re-emphasize to us where we come within the created order to stay in our lane as supreme creatures without seeking to promote ourselves above our station or dehumanizing ourselves by dissolving foundational distinctions stay in your lane he's saying in

[ 34 : 02 ] Exodus 22 you are a supreme creature that's who you are nothing more nothing less remembering this helps us to relate to God rightly in a way that keeps us worshipping him on the front foot remembering this helps us relate to creation rightly not worshipping creation or idolizing creation but understanding the way the world is ordered and taking our responsibility under God to care for it to cultivate it and to protect it remembering this also helps us to relate to each other rightly remembering we are all supreme creatures under God means we look at others with compassion and care we don't look at others as competition or commodities to be used and abused stay in your lane you are a supreme creature nothing more and nothing less but here's the rub humans don't stay in their lane my little son Isaac is a very sweet boy however there is one thing he is not very good at and that is staying still you'll have seen this last Sunday if you were here he did about 500 laps of the church and I apologize if you were one of the helpless people whom he tripped up on his marathon this was exemplified to us during a recent holiday in

Butte he was sleeping in our room and about 3am in the morning Aileen woke me up panicked because Isaac was not in his bed we knew he hadn't gone far the door was still locked and there was literally nowhere for him to go but we checked all the cupboards we checked in the kitchen we looked under all the bags and under all the towels and after about 3 minutes of bemusement we eventually located him in the far right hand corner under our bed fast asleep from then on we have nicknamed him el chapo on account of his escapology antics but in this way Isaac is a microcosm of humanity you see we too have an innate aversion to staying in the place that we were put though these laws are clear it needs to be said that in many ways the horse had already bolted for humanity by the time we get to

Exodus chapter 22 you see not staying in our lane was the root cause of the fall back in Eden believing the lies of the snake our first parents made a power grab to elevate themselves to the status of God they listened to and believed the words of the snake when he said for God knows if you eat it eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God and so they took and they ate they sought a promotion and they swerved catastrophically out of their designated lane as supreme creatures nothing more nothing less catastrophic consequences of not staying in your lane and so later in the chapter after Adam and Eve have fled in nakedness and shame the gracious Lord calls out to them compassionately where are you this isn't a geographical question the omnipotent God knows exactly where they are but I think it is a question for them to ask where are you where have you sought to promote yourself to where are you in relation to me where are you in your relation to the rest of creation you see the fall was a power grab a power grab that meant our first parents didn't stay in their lane with catastrophic consequences not only that but Israel did not stay in their lane not long after Moses gave them these laws in Exodus chapter 22 to remind them where they came Moses is up a mountain and we find God's people cavorting before a golden calf worshipping and bowing down to it and the spiritual state of God's people go downhill from there throughout the whole

Old Testament first parents sought to promote themselves to God not long after Exodus chapter 22 in Exodus 34 God's people are worshipping creation and idols the very thing that God tells them not to do by the time we get to the writing prophets a little bit later in the Old Testament we realize that God's people are also failing to do the middle bits the haves are oppressing the have not those in

power with wealth are oppressing widows no one's looking after the fatherless the dogs with the big teeth are having the big dinners at the expense of everyone else not only that but by the time we get to Romans 1 we see that it's all completely unraveled Paul would write how creation has been elevated at the expense of the creator he says clearly right at the beginning how all of humanity claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things therefore

[ 39 : 59 ] God gave them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator the fundamental problem with humanity is that it refuses to stay in its way it won't stay where it's put and there's catastrophic confusion and catastrophic consequences of that usurpation you see despite these good laws given by a good God on the slopes of Sinai to his people humanity is fundamentally disordered and the ability to stay in our lane has been impossible for us sin has irrevocably broken our steering column meaning we are constantly veering from one lane into the other unsure who we are or where we are placed the good news however knowing the disordered nature of fallen humanity

God enacted an audacious mission to straighten what is crooked and to renew humanity after the image of its creator once again in the Lord Jesus Christ you see to undo the twist that happened at the fall the twist where Adam who was supposed to live in obedience to God and to lead his wife and have dominion over all of creation the fall that happened when creation in the form of the snake deceived the wife who led the husband to usurp God the only way for that twist to be undone would be for the creator to become a creature for that creature to live a perfect life of obedience to die a death for his bride the church and so reorder everything once again that there would be a reset and a reordering and a reemphasis of the place of humans in the grand scheme of things you see friends there is only one way actually to stay in your lane and so have life and this is to order your life around the

Lord Jesus letting him reorder everything about you and transforming you into a contented supreme creature who loves living in obedience to God who loves worshipping him on the front foot who loves seeing him for who he really is and never stopping giving thanks for all that he's done for us in the Lord Jesus it is actually only in Jesus we can do all the Exodus 22 commands of us thoroughly not only are we being reordered rightly but Jesus is the one empowering us to look at everyone else with humility as well as care and compassion he is the one who helps us spread his dominion across creation as we proclaim this good news in expectation of his new creation a place where there will be no disorder and where everyone and everything will perpetually stay in their lane worshipping God rightly forever and so I think if we keep Exodus 22 front and centre in our minds the profound truth that our

Lord Jesus became man to save us and reorder us that we will be a worshipful compassionate responsible people that are being renewed it will be so helpful to us in the confusion of the world around us so friends know who you are and who you are being transformed to be you're a supreme creature nothing more nothing less stay in your lane and Jesus will help you with that may this truth help us live rightly before our sovereign creator God compassionately towards everyone else and responsibly in our mandate over the rest of creation let's pray sovereign Lord all powerful God creator sustainer the one who is supremely worthy of all worship we are so sorry that often we have lived out of our disordered identity and overstepped sinfully thank you that you are compassionate and so out of love sent your son to undo what we have sinfully done father now as creatures redeemed by our loving creator help us live rightly and worshipfully before you help us live compassionately and graciously towards all others help us live responsibly and caringly towards your creation and we pray this in the name of your son our glorious savior who loved us so much that he didn't stay in his lane but came down to rescue us amen