

# TOM'S OXEN

By Darrell Farkas

Tom stands at the front of the church hall, preparing to address the boy's club with a unique message. Inwardly, he was wondering how well they would understand, but felt they needed to be given the opportunity to hear it. He felt a burden to deliver this message to the boys at the Friday evening pizza party.

After prayer, Tom begins, "I want to look at a biblical proverb. We are told the following in the first chapter of Proverbs:"

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. Proverbs 1:6

"Proverbs are concise, power-packed messages put in a short form. That means they require serious thought to extract the foundations behind them. The way something is said, tells of a foundation upon which it rests if such were true.

Now turn with me to the following in Proverbs 14:4:"

Where no oxen *are*, the crib *is* clean: but much increase *is* by the strength of the ox. Proverbs 14:4

"This proverb is based in an 'agrarian' framework. Agrarian being a farm-based form of living.

This proverb covers a lot of 'social, political thought' which most of you would be bored to death with, but when you understand how that impacts you, your family and your moral responsibility, I'm sure you will see why we need to look at it, despite the lack of action involved.

Looking at this proverb, we need to see how important an ox is in an agrarian lifestyle. They are the engines in the tractors. Without the oxen, a family would produce only a fraction of the food from their land. They may produce enough to eat themselves, but not enough to sell at the local farmer's market. The farmer's produce is what feeds the towns 'watch' repairman. The watch repairman doesn't need oxen for himself, his livelihood doesn't use them, but if it weren't for his oxen-owning farmer neighbor, he wouldn't have produce to buy at his local farmer's market. The oxen are the means to the farmer's prosperity and livelihood.

To bring this into focus in our society, consider the rural housing. I like to call the following illustrations, 'Anti-Oxen Laws'. The watchmaker likes the rural look of the farms and white field-fences; the pretty red painted barns and clean stalls. He likes them so much he actually gets angry when he sees a pile of ox manure in a stall as he drives by. He fumes within himself saying, 'that is why I'm having to deal with flies this summer'. He resolves to force his neighbor to get rid of his ox, horse, goats, whatever doesn't leave this watchmaker's picture perfect dream of Utopia at peace. He approaches the home-owner's association to force his desires on his neighbor. This farmer's livelihood, his prosperity, depends on his livestock.

Now if this neighbor succeeds in his attack on the farmer, he will effectively bring him into a scabble for survival. He will have destroyed his ability to prosper,

his ‘much increase’ in the passage. This brings us to the consideration of how we can observe Jesus’ words of, ‘And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. - Luke 6:31’. ‘Anti-oxen laws’ impose upon the prosperity and livelihood of our neighbor.”

Addressing a young man sitting up front, “Alex, your family lives next to Paul’s” he looks at Paul in the back.

“Let’s say we have a creek flowing from Alex’s property to Paul’s. Paul’s dad has been trying to raise fish in a pond on the creek. Those fish will be part of Paul’s families ‘prosperity’ and provision for food. Now Alex, your dad’s oxen have been coming down and mucking up the creek that flows into Paul’s dad’s pond, thus killing his fish. This creates a flash-point of contention between your families. In the world, Paul’s dad might go to court to force the removal of the oxen. As Christians, what would be in line with proper treatment of one’s neighbor?”

Paul pipes up with, “My dad could talk with Alex’s to see if he could divert water to troughs for the oxen to drink from, thus reducing the need for them to wallow in the stream.”

Alex slyly retorts, “Is your dad volunteering to help build these troughs?”

All the youth laugh at the jovial rivalry.

Tom smiles and continues, “As you can see, if we work together, solutions to problems can be found. We don’t have the right to destroy our neighbor’s ability to prosper and provide for his family, but neither do we have the right to live so self-focused in our pursuits, that we bring harm to our neighbor. A pile of ox manure may harm the watchmaker’s Utopian fantasy, but that doesn’t infer a moral right for him have his neighbor’s oxen taken away, destroying his livelihood.

In society, we have imbibed the ‘socialist’ idea of the community deciding what the neighbor should look like in

disregard to his need for survival and livelihood. It is from this foundation the ‘anti-oxen laws’ spring forth. As Christians, we need to examine treatment of our neighbors based upon biblical precepts. Unless we read our Bibles, we cannot have the proper foundation to evaluate and make proper decisions in our lives. When we lack biblical understanding, we form decisions from the influences society imposes on us in schools, movies, music, news-stories and our friends and peers.

Who would have thought a simple proverb on oxen could carry so much meaning?

When we consider Proverbs 1:6, we realize we need to think thru to see the ‘interpretation’, i.e. to understand the underlying points that help lay a godly framework for life.”

Tom bows his head, to lead the youth in prayer, before they dismiss to enjoy the pizza.

Available at

[www.basedintheword.org](http://www.basedintheword.org)

as “Tom’s Oxen”



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