

## 32. Justice

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## I. Justice in Action

Topics encompassed by the theme of justice together form a very large proportion of what the Bible says about how to relate to other people. It is essential that we incorporate the Bible's teaching on these topics into our own lives. In doing so, we must be mindful that acting justly involves not only doing what is right ourselves; it also involves ensuring that others are treated fairly – notably the needy.

### Do What Is Just and Right

#### Act justly

No, the LORD has told us what is good. *What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.* MICAH 6:8 GNT

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must pursue justice alone so that you may live and inherit the land the LORD your God is giving you.* DEUTERONOMY 16:20

#### In acting justly, do what is right

[GOD:] *Learn to do what is right! Promote justice!* ISAIAH 1:17A

*To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.* PROVERBS 21:3 ISV

#### Maintain justice

This is what the LORD says: *Preserve justice, and do what is right. My salvation is about to come. My righteousness is about to be revealed.* ISAIAH 56:1 GW

#### Do not show favoritism

*You must not deal unjustly in judgment: you must neither show partiality to the poor nor honor the rich.* LEVITICUS 19:15A

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, I solemnly charge you to carry out these commands without prejudice or favoritism of any kind.* 1 TIMOTHY 5:21

#### Do not use flattery

[DAVID:] *People lie to one another; they flatter and deceive. <sup>3</sup>May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that boasts!* PSALMS 12:2–3

#### Do not plot evil schemes

*Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another.* ZECHARIAH 8:17A  
*Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.* PROVERBS 12:20

### Dishonest Gain

Note that because much of what can be described as “dishonest gain” involves deceitfulness, a good portion of this section is also relevant to the previous section, *Deceitfulness*.

#### Do not steal . . .

*You shall not steal.* EXODUS 20:15

#### . . . and do not defraud

*You shall not cheat your neighbor ...* LEVITICUS 19:13A NKJV

#### Do not take excessive interest or extort money

[EZEKIEL, SPEAKING OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON:] *He keeps his hand from doing wrong. He does not take too much interest or profit when he lends money. He obeys my laws and lives by my rules. He will not die for his father's sin; he will surely live. <sup>18</sup>But his father took other people's money unfairly and robbed his brother and did what was wrong among his people. So he will die for his own sin.* EZEKIEL 18:17–18 NCV™

#### Do not accept bribes

*Be careful that no one entices you with riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside.* JOB 36:18

## Truthfulness

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### Speak the truth

*These are the things you must do: Speak the truth, each of you, to one another.* ZECARIAH 8:16A

### Be honest

If you are a thief, quit stealing. *Be honest* and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need. EPHESIANS 4:28 CEV

### Be sincere

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world with pure motives and godly sincerity, without earthly wisdom but with God's grace—and especially towards you. 2 CORINTHIANS 1:12B ISV

### Have integrity

[GOD, TO SOLOMON:] *You must serve me with integrity and sincerity, just as your father David did.* Do everything I commanded and obey my rules and regulations. 1 KINGS 9:4

## Deceitfulness

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### Do not deceive

*Never steal, lie, or deceive your neighbor.* LEVITICUS 19:11B GW

### Do not lie . . .

[PAUL, TO THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS:] *Do not lie to one another* since you have put off the old man with its practices <sup>10</sup>and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it. COLOSSIANS 3:9–10

### . . . and so do not give false testimony

*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.* EXODUS 20:16

## Justice and the Needy (I): Instructions

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### Do not mistreat the needy

*Don't oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and poor people.* ZECARIAH 7:10A GW

### Treat foreigners the same as your native-born

*The foreigner who resides with you must be to you like a native citizen among you; so you must love him as yourself, because you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.* LEVITICUS 19:34A

Note that foreigners were seen as being vulnerable and needy.

### Defend the cause of the needy

*Defend the weak and the orphans; defend the rights of the poor and suffering. <sup>4</sup>Save the weak and helpless; free them from the power of the wicked.* PSALMS 82:3–4 NCV™

*“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; defend the rights of all those who have nothing. <sup>9</sup>Speak up and judge fairly, and defend the rights of the poor and needy.”* PROVERBS 31:8–9 NCV™

### Provide the needy with food and clothing . . .

John answered them, *“The person who has two tunics must share with the person who has none, and the person who has food must do likewise.”* LUKE 3:11

Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means Dorcas). *She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity. . . .* <sup>39</sup>So Peter got up and went with them, and when he arrived they brought him to the upper room. *All the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him the tunics and other clothing Dorcas used to make while she was with them.* ACTS 9:36, 39

### . . . Even sell your possessions so as to give to the poor

[JESUS:] *Sell your possessions and give to the poor.* LUKE 12:33A

*They [believers] made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods and to distribute the proceeds to anyone who was in need.* ACTS 2:45 ISV

## Justice and the Needy (II): Insights

### Defending and providing for the needy are part of true religion

[GOD, REFERRING TO KING JOSIAH:] *He always did right— he gave justice to the poor and was honest.* <sup>16</sup>*That's what it means to truly know me.*

JEREMIAH 22:15B–16A CEV

*Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world.* JAMES 1:27

### Providing for the needy brings oneself blessing

*The one who is gracious to the poor lends to the LORD, and the LORD will repay him for his good deed.* PROVERBS 19:17

[JESUS:] *Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive.* LUKE 6:38

Quite possibly Jesus has giving to the poor primarily in view. This teaching is at least inclusive of it.

### God will punish those who ignore the needy

“Then he [Jesus Christ] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!’ <sup>42</sup>*For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.* <sup>43</sup>*I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’* <sup>44</sup>Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?’ <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, ‘I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.’ <sup>46</sup>*And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*” MATTHEW 25:41–46

Remember the persecuted

## II. Being True

In order to do what is right in our relationships with others, we must be true – both faithful and truthful. It is important to remember that faithfulness and truth – with the trust that they generate – are absolutely essential for our relationships with others to work, for so many aspects of our relationships are dependent on them. Accordingly we must avoid deceitfulness and associated dishonest practices. Bear in mind that deceitfulness is arguably the prime characteristic of Satan and evil.

### Faithfulness

#### Be faithful

*Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness. Tie them round your neck; write them on your heart.* <sup>4</sup>*If you do this, both God and people will be pleased with you.* PROVERBS 3:3–4 GNT

#### Be trustworthy

In the same way, women must be respected by others. They must not speak evil of others. They must be self-controlled and trustworthy in everything. 1 TIMOTHY 3:11 NCV™

#### Stand by others

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *You are the ones who have always stood by me in my trials.* LUKE 22:28 ISV

So Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her god. Follow your sister-in-law back home!” <sup>16</sup>*But Ruth replied, “Stop urging me to abandon you! For wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will become my people, and your God will become my God.* <sup>17</sup>*Wherever you die, I will die – and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I do not keep my promise! Only death will be able to separate me from you!”* RUTH 1:15–17

Ruth’s promise to stand by her bereaved mother-in-law is a superlative expression of loyalty and commitment.