

Social Justice and Scriptural Justice (Exodus 22:28-23:9)

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GOD IS A GOD OF JUSTICE AND HE CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO BE JUST

What is justice? Today we'll be in Ex 22 and as you turn there, listen to Acts 23.

- Paul is facing a Jewish justice system that was supposed to carry out the law of Exodus.
 - But corrupt political leaders made false charges against Paul and it was an unjust mistrial
- Acts 23: *'Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." And the high priest commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler...'*
- Paul's quoting from our text in Ex 22 as something directly applying to a NT Christian.
 - The OT law gave instructions for how to treat the accused, and it still applies in the NT.
 - It's not justice to physically beat or otherwise mistreat a suspect, or speak evil of a ruler.
 - Evil sinful leaders in government are not to be reviled or ridiculed by angry name-calling.
 - Beware conservative talk shows tempting you to speak evil of our rulers in CA or DC.

Paul confronted evil that men did, but was convicted as he spoke evil (white-washed wall).

- We can respectfully disagree, but God tells us not to disrespect as we disagree
 - o (I think applies to what we forward by email, SM).

In our world of instant judgment on blogs, or trial by Twitter, even Christians revile and rile up.

We can get frustrated like Paul, but need to remember what is written in God's law of love

Ex 22:28 *"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people [some translations have 'leader' and 'shall not dishonor'; lit. 'treat lightly'; Paul quoted as 'speak evil of']*.²⁹ *"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.*³⁰ *You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall be with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.*³¹ *"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. 23:1 "You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. ² You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, ³ nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit. ⁴ "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him. ⁶ "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. ⁷ Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked. ⁸ And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ⁹ "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*

Sojourners were ethnic minorities originally from another land

Key word: justice (v. 2, v. 6). NKJV heading of ch 23: 'justice for all'

- ESV heading for this section starting in ch 22: 'social justice.'
- This text applies God's justice to various social classes of people and social situations.
- The Bible speaks to social issues, social ills and social injustice.
- The God of justice cares for what's fair in social dealings more than any social movement

Justice is a buzz word today and it's a biblical word. There's baggage with the added word

- **social** (some think socialism or social gospel liberal)

So I will use a less loaded phrase **societal** justice (as I'll define it by **scriptural** justice).

Christians led societies against slavery, poverty, and for charity, equality of ethnicities.

Outline: 1. What scriptural societal justice is NOT
2. What it IS to do this justice in society

Justice and social justice are words that are political play-do (re-shaped and re-used).

- Abortion advocates, for example, refashion justice in the phrase ‘reproductive justice.’
- By that they mean a woman’s right to decide to kill an innocent life in the womb is ‘just.’
- And if you’re against that, you’re against justice, they insist, and twist what justice means
- But that’s a false charge, and that’s not scriptural or societal justice.
- God in Ex 23:6 says don’t pervert or twist justice.

Many pervert words like ‘healthcare’ or ‘freedom’ and falsely charge any opposition as unjust

⁷ *Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent...*

- So scriptural societal justice is not twisting words or falsely charging others as unjust.
- That’s systemic injustice, mass killing of innocent life in the womb by govt. systems.
- there’s a great disparity and majority killed of the poor and people of color in our land.
- That’s an oppression of minorities and suppression of their lives that v. 9 also forbids.
- And like v. 8, politicians accept bribes from a pro-abortion lobby and are blinded by that.
- Like the end of v. 8, they literally subvert the cause of what’s right and the right to life.
- Ex 21-22 says justice protects unborn life, it speaks true care of women and true freedom

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His true justice isn’t from man’s changing opinions, it’s from God’s unchanging Word.

- God’s justice isn’t about CRT or cancel culture or the crowds of political correctness.
- Worldly social justice focuses on skin color, sex, sexual preference or pronouns.
- To disagree with certain orientations is considered unjust prejudice nowadays.

God calls for a just society without discriminating, our govt. calls celebrating sin ‘justice.’

- If you don’t praise gay weddings and guys winning girls’ sports, they call you unjust?
- But biblical justice isn’t affirming wickedness, wokeness or whiteness as the bad guy
- Authentic justice is not about identity politics.

We can’t let culture define what justice is when they can’t even define what a woman is!

Voddie Baucham calls justice an Inigo Montoya word

- (you keep using it but it doesn’t mean what you think).

It’s 2 worldviews, he says: ‘the Critical Social Justice view—[from Critical Theory]...the world is divided between the oppressors and the oppressed (white, heterosexual males are generally viewed as “the oppressor”). The other is what I will refer to...as the biblical justice view...the current concept of social justice is incompatible with biblical Christianity.’¹

Let’s start with the starting point of oppressor/oppressed category at the foundation

Our world says the historically oppressed class can’t be oppressors. God’s Word says, v. 9: *You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*

- In the context, God is talking to Israelites who had been oppressed slaves 3 months ago.
- As evil and oppressive as American slavery of blacks was 159 years ago in America.
- No denial of that evil, but don’t forget Egypt threw babies in the Nile, just for being Jews.
- God hates injustice in slavery and segregation and sinful racism to sojourners/minorities.
- But His justice warns those who have been sinfully oppressed not to oppress others.

In v. 9, Jewish ethnicity and history didn’t define them as oppressed or excuse reverse racism.

- This was months after their liberation

To mistreat other ethnicities is unjust, no matter what mistreatment past groups did to yours

Does this speak to reparations for what ancestors did long ago?

- Think native American, African American suffering and others in past centuries.
- Israel's ancestors slave traded and committed genocide long before Egypt (Gen 34, 37).
- The men of Israel murdered the men of Shechem and left only their women and children.
- But there wasn't an inherent Jewish guilt in God's justice for that past generation's sins.
- The Exodus slaves were wronged by oppression but were to move forward in a right way.

Look at **22:21** "*You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*"

- God makes nations pay for sin (Egypt or us) but His law is for individuals and neighbors.
- Egyptians wronged Jews in the past, but Israel mustn't wrong back.
- Today there's a push for all taxpayers to pay reparations for the sins of some forefathers.
- But in Ex 22 it's the criminal who pays the individual he wronged.
- God's Law later says children aren't to pay or held be accountable for sins of fathers.²
- Biblical guilt is personal, not ancestral.

We lament our nation's sin but the gospel saves sinners not systems, individuals not institutions.

Restitution in Ex 22 is criminal-to-hurt individual, not reparations by all for distant history

Another r-word often associated with social justice today is redistribution of possessions.

- U.N. 2006 statement defined social justice as 'the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth.'
- Random House Dictionary social justice entry: 'fair treatment of all people in a society, including...equitable distribution of resources among members of a community.'³

Cambridge Dictionary adds 'the idea that...wealth and resources should benefit everyone...'⁴

On a popular level, Wikipedia 1st sentence: 'Social justice is justice in relation to a fair balance in the distribution of wealth...often includ[ing] taxation...to ensure distribution of wealth...'⁵

So social justice isn't only or mainly against discrimination, it's for distribution by taxes

Socialist justice is now re-branded 'economic justice' (take from you to give to poor).

- Disney's Robin Hood has a scene where Little John asks 'are we good guys or bad guys?'

What does the fox say? 'Never rob, we just sort of borrow a bit from those who can afford.'

- In the movie, the problem was unjust taxes, but in Marxism, unjust taxes is the solution.
- In communist countries some here grew up in, the govt. took people's possessions.

Oppressive overtaking or taking more of what you own is in the name of justice for the poor.

- But it never works as advertised, it sounds encouraging, but ends up enriching just a few.
- Some of you grew up in lands where govt owned all property,
 - o but biblical justice is based on private property that you own and work for.

God's law establishes personal ownership and property rights to be respected

22:5 '*in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best in his own field and in his own vineyard...*'

v. 11 mentions '*his neighbor's property. The owner...*' v. 14 mentions anything belonging to your neighbor.

- In ch 20 the 8th commandment is you shall not steal but the 10th is you shall not covet.
- Riches or anything your neighbor has you shall not covet being redistributed to you.
- It's unjust for govt. to steal and it's unbiblical for us to covet (and call it redistribution).
- The poor need help, v. 25 talks about giving them no-interest loans for basics, business.
- The rich were to offer work, Ex 23:11 tells Israel to leave extra for poor to work fields.
- That's a good thing for God's people to do but government people taking it aren't good.
- OT law is a work-for system, not welfare.

A State taking over charity and forcing sharing often helps politicians more than the poor.⁶

There's more we need to study about really helping the poor for our next message in Ex 23

When a nation totally takes over what should be individual's roles, it becomes totalitarian rule.

- The oppressor is defined as conservative Christians, colonizers, climate change deniers.
- The rights of animals or even the atmosphere become justice issues.

Our U.S. president said ‘We’ve put environmental justice at the center of what we do’ and injustice is ‘disproportionate impacts from climate change...pollution.’⁷

- Some of this is hard to understand and it proves Prov. 28:5: *‘Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.’*

That’s what scriptural societal justice is NOT, but now: What IS it to do this justice in society?

23:6 *You shall not pervert the justice due...* it mentions poor people in court but applies to all people in context.

Heb. word in Ex 23:6 is *mishpat*, justice, judgment, measure

- (idea of equal measures, weights). Jer 7:5 says *‘truly execute justice one with another...’*
- There’s true justice as scripture defines it.
- God doesn’t just desire things to be just, He requires us to do justly.
- Micah 6:8: *what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God...*

He has told you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires

Not just in the Law and the Prophets, Jesus rebuked those who tithed 10% but *‘neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness’* (Mt 23:23). What is it to do it?

An older dictionary⁸ says justice is ‘observance of the divine law; righteousness...moral right.’

MLK’s Letter from a Birmingham Jail said just law ‘squares with the moral law or law of God.’

That would include not unjustly judging by the color of skin instead of the content of character.

#1. Justice is about God and His character. We start where the passage starts in Ex 22, v. 28:

‘You shall not revile God...’ And right before that God said *‘I am compassionate’* (His character).

- God says in v. 27 He hears the cries of injustice and He is gracious.
- The God of justice and mercy calls His people to do justly and love mercy/kindness.
- It’s about God’s image in fellow human beings and about God’s Word, not man’s causes.
- His Word defines justice, not the world

John Perkins writes: ‘I was born on a Mississippi cotton plantation in 1930...As a civil rights activist, I was jailed and beaten nearly to death by police. They tortured me without mercy... I have known injustice. It would have been the easiest thing in the world for me to answer hate with hate. But God had another plan for my life, a redemptive plan. Jesus saved me...And it’s by that same grace that I have spent the last sixty years of my life...confronting injustice...[he tells younger] justice seekers: First, *start with God!* God is bigger than we can imagine. We have to align ourselves with his purpose, his will, his mission to let justice roll down [as the Bible says] and bring forgiveness and love to everyone on earth. The problem of injustice is a God-sized problem. If we don’t start with him first, whatever we’re seeking, it ain’t justice.’⁹

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God and His gospel has the answers, not the government.

- But we’re not to revile our leaders, v. 28 goes on to say, as God puts authorities in place.
- Paul said we’re to honor them, not speak evil (ex: the system is all rigged or all racist).
- To curse or call for the defunding of police authorities is the opposite of God’s justice.
- Rioters hijack ‘justice’ and crash it into burning buildings (starting in Minneapolis).
- The right starting point is asking how can I reflect God’s character in my social relations?
- How can I treat God’s image-bearer justly and kindly?

- v. 29-30 call God's people to put God first in giving Him the first-fruits of His provision.
- v. 31 is dietary law of unclean animals and in v. 30 a law to give firstborn animals back.
 - It's unjust to delay giving to the Lord from what He gives to you.
 - Our offerings look different, but giving the first and best portion to God honors Him.
 - When you get paid, a way to put God first is give a % to Him first, not later leftovers.
 - v. 29 ends with God first in our firstborn sons dedicated to Him.

#2. Don't spread or join in with false justice. 23:1 *"You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. ² You shall not fall in with the many to do evil ...*

- Some Christians literally join hands and hashtags for justice with wicked organizations.
- Don't just think of social justice, think of social media, sharing links that may not be true. In politics we see true justice overlooked and ads spreading malicious reports of the other
- Don't blindly follow the crowd, or go with the mob, like end of v. 2 *'siding with the many, so as to pervert justice...'*

This context is in court but it also applies to the court of public opinion

It's in pro sports, peer pressure in society, schools, secular workplaces, LGBTQ, BLM, etc.

Some of your jobs have DEI trainings (Diversity-Equity-Inclusion), also good sounding words.

- In v. 9 God wants inclusion of a diversity of sojourners with Israel to be treated equitably.

But religious inclusivity is a different matter, treating all right vs. saying all faiths are right

- Marriage equality isn't an area to have a diversity of views.
- Our society has no inclusion for our exclusive gospel.
- But in our world of fake news, we need to speak the good news, truth in love.

We need to pray for courage and conviction but also compassion for sinners

Which leads to #3. Love your enemies by fairness and kindness. ⁴ *"If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.*

- Do justly and love kindness by loving your enemies and treating them fairly.
- Remember the Good Samaritan who showed mercy to a down and out Jewish enemy.
- The guy was literally lying down hurt and a Samaritan (he hated) saw and rescued him.
- He didn't leave him, he lifted up and carried his burdens, brought him back on his donkey
- Jesus said that's loving neighbor, go and do likewise.

Do good to your enemies, Jesus said, help those who hate you

#4. Show no partiality or favoritism. ⁶ *"You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit [sadly the rich often receive partiality but notice v. 3 adds] nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.*

It's not just the rich who aren't to receive special favors, don't show favoritism to the poor.

- One class of people are not to get a legal leg up on others based on money, ethnicity, etc.
- Scriptural justice doesn't let someone win just because they're a woman or minority, etc.
- No favoritism just because he's black, no preferential treatment or prejudice by externals.
- This context is the right to a fair trial and fair treatment in general, by way of application.
- God is no respecter of persons and says *'Do not judge by appearances'* and *'regard no one according to the flesh.'*¹⁰

In statues of Lady Justice, she's blindfolded with the scales of justice, weighing not by sight.

Ex 23:8 says bribes blind, but in another sense, justice is to be blind to money you have or don't

Whether someone is small in the eyes of society or a great celebrity or immigrant, be impartial

God's Law says later in Dt 1:16 whether it's a fellow countryman or foreigner, '*judge righteously... You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone ...Lev. 19:15 You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be **partial to the poor or defer to the great**, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor...¹⁸...you shall **love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.***

- These aren't just court principles of jury duty, they're principles of Jesus for all of life.
- Loving your neighbor is the 2nd great commandment that sums up the law and our study.
- Do you love your enemies and help those who hate you?
- To you treat with kindness those you disagree with (and fairness as you speak of them)?
- If not, how can you do that soon? Are you partial to some people at church over others?
- Who do you judge by appearances or fleshly categories?

If you show favoritism or play favorites, pray for grace to change (grace=unmerited favor).

- Next time you're tempted to quick judgments from news media, social media, don't.
- If you speak evil or your rulers in government, stop yourself by scripture, like Paul did.
- Learn from Isa. 1:17 '*learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.*'

Advocate for her, do what's right for a single mom with fatherless kids, stop oppression if you can

Justice is something we have to seek and learn to do good, to do justly and to love mercy.

- But we all fall short of that, and in the end of Ex 23:7 God says '*I will not acquit the wicked.*'
 - o Another translation has '*I will not justify the guilty*' (HCSB).
 - o Ex 34:7 '*I will by no means clear the guilty...*'
- So this is a problem for us with wickedness in our hearts, we're all sinful and all guilty.
- How can God acquit and clear us as guilty sinners and justify us, that would be unjust?
- Jesus took the just punishment our sins deserve on the cross for our guilt.
- Rom 3:25 *He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus* (NIV84).
- Jesus is the ruler of all people as God but they cursed, reviled and spoke evil of Him.
- Spreading false reports about Him, their malicious witnesses perverted justice.
- Jesus suffered injustice and He can sympathize with any injustice you face.

This is #5. The gospel is the answer to injustice.

Judas joined hands with wicked men, and many went along with the mob ('crucify').

- The unjust trial had false charges and bribed leaders that were blind to what was right.
- Jesus was oppressed but He kept showing kindness to His enemies who hated Him.
- Like v. 7, they falsely accused and then killed the innocent and righteous One.
- They broke the law, as we all do, but Jesus fulfilled the law in the place of the guilty.
- He lived a righteous life in a poor village under an oppressive racist Roman ruling class.
- Whatever injustice or indignity you face, He faced worse and has forgiving grace.
- His first sermon proclaimed grace to the poor and downtrodden and disadvantaged, Lk 4
- He was executed by the wealthy but rose again so all who repent get riches of grace.
- He's coming again to bring perfect justice, and till then calls us to pursue justice

¹ Voddie Baucham, *Fault-Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*, p. 6.

² Deuteronomy 24:16.

³ Random-House Unabridged Dictionary 2024 edition at <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/social-justice>

⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-justice>

⁵ Access date 2/15/2024: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_justice

⁶ For more on this see Thomas Sowell, *Social Justice Fallacies*.

⁷ “We’ve put environmental justice at the center of what we do, addressing the disproportionate health, environmental, and economic impacts that have been borne primarily by communities of color — places too often left behind” – President Joe Biden, Earth Day 2022. The official White House statement continues: “For far too long, communities across our country have faced environmental injustices, bearing the brunt of toxic pollution, enduring underinvestment in infrastructure and critical services, and suffering disproportionate impacts from climate change.” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/>

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary, Unabridged* (definitive source of English etymology from late middle ages on).

⁹ Foreword to *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About Social Justice*, by Thaddeus Williams (Zondervan, 2020), xv.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:16 and John 7:24.