



Deuteronomy & The Beauty of Obedience

## Pursue Justice

*Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you. (Deut. 16:20)*

### Why Justice?

Justice is giving to each person that which is rightly theirs—giving them their due. Justice is a cardinal virtue, and in some ways, the foundation of all other virtues. But oddly, we tend to think about justice only when we experience injustice. God is a just God who expects us to act justly. Our world desperately needs a people who rightly define and model justice. \_\_\_\_\_.

### Provisions for Justice (Deut. 6:18-18:8)

- **Deut. 16:18-20. Follow justice:** Justice is the foundation of all other ethics, and without justice, the whole system crashes. **Partiality, bribes.** Treating people rightly must be non-discriminatory. We don't treat people better based on how they make us feel, what they can give us, or what we can get out of it. We treat people rightly because we are just people.
- **16:21-17:7. Asherah pole.** Idolatry \_\_\_\_\_, because justice is grounded in the character of the one true God. Without God, there can be no lasting justice. **Defect or flaw.** Honoring God keeps all other values in the right order. Values not grounded in the character of God will always veer off course. **Purge.** Idolatry was serious enough to warrant the death penalty, for it is the supreme act of injustice against God and others. But God provides safeguards to assure a just trial.
- **17:8-13. Levites.** The Levites were teachers of the Law, and, in many cases, judges of how to interpret it. **Contempt.** God's Word is to be honored. Contempt of God's Word breeds injustice. God honors those who \_\_\_\_\_ (Isa. 66:5).
- **17:14-20. King.** Kings were not above the law in Israel—a striking provision in a world of despots. Kings could not overtax people or act arrogantly. And they were to keep a copy of the Bible next to them to grow in justice.



*The floor of the idolatrous temple built by Jeroboam in Bethel—2 Kings 12:26-33. Worshipping the wrong gods led Israel to commit great injustice (dmy)*

#### Three Kinds of Justice

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) was one of the greatest thinkers in Christian history, compiling an extensive Christian system of justice that endures to this day. Aquinas identifies three species of justice:

1. **Distributive justice:** Justice from the group to the individual. For example, the government owes its people such things as due process, equal treatment, civil rights, etc.
2. **Legal justice:** Justice from the individual to the group. For example, each individual owes the government taxes, a degree of loyalty, obedience to fair laws, etc.
3. **Commutative justice:** Justice between individuals or organizations. For example, you owe love and respect to your spouse, payment to your credit card company, and enough respect not to throw garbage in your neighbor's yard.

\_\_\_\_\_ provision in a world of despots. Kings could not overtax people or act arrogantly. And they were to keep a copy of the Bible next to them to grow in justice.

- **18:1-8. Levites.** One out of every twelve Israelites was a minister. This was necessary because God wanted the Israelites to know His law intimately, and that requires many teachers. Israel was obligated to support the Levites financially, since the Levites were scattered throughout Israel as teachers and had no land inheritance. God's provision for Israel was good: teach the Word of God, and let justice prevail.

## Pursue Justice

- Recognize the importance of justice. If I act unjustly, I \_\_\_\_\_ somewhere in the universe that somebody has to pay. Justice is the balance that God wove into the fabric of the universe. Injustice is a disruption of that balance.
- Honor that which is holy. If I undermine holiness, I create injustice somewhere. Ex: Defining the unborn as a “mass of tissue” to justify abortion.
- Embrace biblical definitions of justice: Justice is about securing impartiality in rewarding good behavior and punishing bad (Rom. 13:1-7)—seasoned with grace.
- Be suspicious of pagan *definitions* of justice. Fake gods cannot create true justice. Ex: \_\_\_\_\_ in the twentieth century created some of the greatest injustices in history. Don’t fall for it again.
- Be suspicious of pagan *solutions* to injustice. Fake gods cannot solve real problems. Ex: \_\_\_\_\_ in America is a primary cause of massive injustice. If we fail to address it, injustice will grow.
- Don’t deny the reality of \_\_\_\_\_. Ex: the U.S. was set up by whites of European descent to serve whites of European descent—just as every other nation set up systems to serve their particular interests, too. But to pursue justice, we must constantly search for how to extend justice to outsiders as well, correcting past wrongs and refining current law to assure fairness.
- Don’t deny \_\_\_\_\_. People are culpable for their own actions. Ex: Bad choices lead to bad results that shouldn’t be blamed on the system.
- Pay special attention to those least likely to receive justice: the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. God has a heart for those at high risk of injustice, and we should, too.
- Model a just and loving community here in the church. Let’s show the world what God’s kingdom looks like!



*Some of NB’s elders in the summer of 2000 sitting at the gates of ancient Dan, where the elders of old sat in judgment. L to r, Bob Webb, Gerald Coggin, Tom Batey, Joe Mayes, Randall Matlock, Bill Sloan, and Don Daniel (dmy)*

### Five Approaches to Justice

**Libertarian:** Justice is about securing the freedom to live how I want. “I just want a government that leaves me alone.”

**Liberal:** Justice is about securing fairness for everyone. “Every American has the right to full healthcare, and we should redistribute wealth in order to achieve universal healthcare.”

**Utilitarian:** Justice is about securing happiness for the largest amount of people. “Since so many people enjoy marijuana, we should decriminalize it.”

**Critical Theory:** Justice is about securing power from other groups. “White people are inherently racist because the system was set up by whites. We must dismantle whiteness.”

**Biblical:** Justice is about securing impartiality in rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior—but seasoned with grace. “You need to pay your debt. Let me help you.”

*\*Adapted from Tim Keller, “A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory”*

*“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Mic. 6:8)*

*Answers: We are that people, perverts justice, tremble at His Word, create a debt, Marxism, hedonism, systemic injustice, personal responsibility*