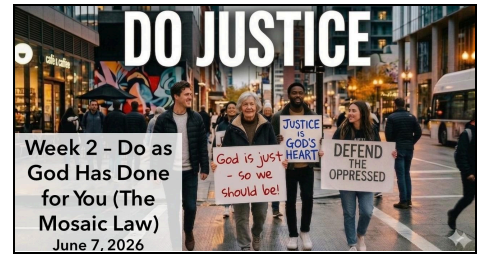


Do Justice (Week 2) - Do as God Has Done for You (The Mosaic Law)  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**



1. We began our tour of biblical justice with "The Torah" (Mosaic Law) on Sunday. But that begs a question - why should Christians care what it says...aren't we kinda over the Old Testament? Well, small "yes," and big "no": there are parts of the O.T., like the ceremonial and sacrificial laws, that are no longer applicable, but the moral code and ethical principles of the O.T. are in fact the same as those in the N.T. Moreover, as both Jewish and Christian O.T. scholars point out, the "law" is really more like "guidance" or "direction." These laws were meant to shape the conscience and practice of God's people. They were the starting line, not the finish line; that is, God's people would learn to go in the same direction as these laws but go far beyond them in benevolence, mercy, and generosity.
2. Over and over in The Torah (e.g., Ex. 22.21 and 23.9; Lev. 19.34), you hear that The Exodus - God's rescue of an oppressed Israel from an abusive superpower, Egypt - is the bedrock underneath the O.T.'s moral instruction. Whereas Jesus' "golden rule" is to do to others as you would have them do to you, in the Mosaic Law it's also about doing for others what the God of justice has done for you.
3. So if we are to "do justice," this requires us to remember how God has intervened on our behalf in the past and helped us cross seemingly-insurmountable hurdles, and then try to do the same for others now. Churches and nations would be no different: who have we been, what difficulties have we navigated...now, how we help others do the same?
4. One of the more significant African-American theologians of the last 70 years is James H. Cone (of Union Seminary in New York City). He wrote, "The Bible is the story of God's liberation of an oppressed people. To know God is to know what God is doing on behalf of the weak and helpless. You cannot know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...without knowing God as the champion of justice." So for those in the Judeo-Christian tradition, justice is theological; it is based on God's own character. In light of that, Thomas Mann, an American O.T. scholar, has also concluded that "to pervert justice is to worship a false god and commit idolatry."
5. The Old Testament law in the books of Moses is quite distinctive from other Ancient Near Eastern moral or law codes of the time. First, other law code - such in Egypt and Babylon - had a tiered justice system: there was a system for the elites, another for commoners, and a third for slaves. But not so in The Torah: because God is impartial (see [Deut. 10.17](#)), justice should be too. There should not be preferential treatment shown to the rich, powerful, ruling class, etc. So in a way the Mosaic law is trying to check or redirect a universal human tendency toward bias and favoritism.
6. So to "do justice" is to pay attention to our own tendencies to want or give preferential treatment, or to isolate ourselves within relationships with those who are like us or on our same social/educational/economic tier. For a church, it would mean being more than friendly and practicing radical hospitality and inclusion to those who have little to no social standing - the unhoused, those who struggle to maintain steady employment, the disabled, and so on. It would also mean showing no favoritism to the church's biggest givers and/or longest tenured members.

7. But because the Mosaic Law is also a window into how a country might try to structure itself God's way, how might a nation "do justice" in an unbiased, impartial way? Here are a few of what could be many examples: a) its criminal justice would ensure equally-capable legal representation for rich and poor and its sentencing wouldn't be noticeably influenced by race or socioeconomic class; b) its tax codes wouldn't disadvantage labor (those who work for a living) over and against capital (those who invest for a living); and c) the quality of healthcare, education, and available food would not be determined by your zip code.

8. The O.T. law is distinctive from its contemporaries in regard to justice in at least one more major way - the most vulnerable and disadvantaged are prioritized, resourced, and cared for in a unique way. British O.T. scholar Christopher J. H. Wright summarizes what you'll find the Mosaic Law this way: 1) the O.T. doesn't lecture the poor or even try to identify the cause of poverty, but instead focuses on telling everyone what their collective responsibility toward the poor, foreigner, etc. is, and 2) some in the community who have more than enough were asked to act against their own economic self-interest in small, specific ways for the sake of those have less.

9. Dr. Wright continues his synopsis on the Torah's guidance about the vulnerable and poor as follows: 3) If Israel would have followed the Law, there would have been no poverty. Thus, the presence of the poor, under-resources, and marginalized foreigners was a moral failure on a national scale, and 4) Giving to the needy is not only a sacred duty to God but it also is the defining point for any claim to have kept God's law...the law is kept only if the poor are care for...love for the disadvantaged is the practical proof of our genuine love for God and neighbor.

10. So what did we learn about biblical justice in the Mosaic Law? 1) God actively acts against injustice and seeks to topple it, while simultaneously seeking to rescue those subjected to it. 2) As God has done for you, yours, and your people, do for others. 3) Keep a wary eye out for favoritism and preferentialism in all its forms and on any scale. And 4) live like prioritizing, resourcing, and caring for the most vulnerable and marginalized is our sacred, and that without it no person, group, or nation can speak of great (as O.T. scholar Thomas Mann put it).

### **A Prayer for the Week**

Adapted from the late Desmond Tutu (Anglican archbishop of South Africa)

Almighty God, goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, and life is stronger than death. Victory is already ours through You who love us.

Because You love justice, look with compassion on all who suffer from the cruelty of oppression, the sting of poverty, and the indignity of being marginalized. Awaken the conscience of the world; begin with me. Give me the courage to speak for the voiceless, to share my bread with the hungry, and to build a world where every person is honored as a reflection of Your holy image, and no one more or less important than another. In Christ's name, amen.

## Justice in the Mosaic Law this Week

1. Probably the best thing you could this week is read some of the moral and social law in The Torah, given that - you know - we as Christians aren't known for spending a lot of time there. As you read these passages, remember that they are guidelines or a direction, and are spent to shape our moral conscience so that we respond to situations or needs that the O.T. Law never anticipated:

[Exodus 22.21-27](#)

[Exodus 23.1-9](#)

[Leviticus 19.9-37](#)

[Deuteronomy 15.1-18](#)

[Deuteronomy 16.18-20](#)

[Deuteronomy 24.10-21](#)

If it helps, here are some questions to ask as you read these texts (as provided by Christopher J. H. Wright, from his book on Old Testament ethics):

- What kind of situation or behavior is this text trying to promote or prevent?
- Who is the law aiming to protect?
- Who would benefit from this law, and why?
- What misuse of power is the text addressing? How is it channeling or redirecting power and influence?
- What rights and/or responsibilities are inherent in the text?
- What vision for society does the text have?
- What moral values is the text trying to shape within God's people that can be used in other situations?
- What sanctions or penalties are in the text? What blessings?

2. Read a little Jonathan Sacks (former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom) on justice in the Mosaic Law:

[Tzedek: Justice and Compassion](#) and [The Parameters of Justice](#)

3. Try this 40 min. podcast from The Bible Project on what the Mosaic Law is and isn't...we might not agree with it 100% but it's a good place to start: [The Reason the Old Testament Laws Exist • The Law Ep. 1](#)