

## The Laws of Justice and Mercy

### Aim for Change:

1. REMEMBER that God expects believers to care for others
2. ASPIRE to be impartial in showing justice and mercy
3. PRACTICE helping those who are in need

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### Background:

- The Book of the Covenant (The Covenant Code of Exodus – 20:22-23:33) expands on the Decalogue (Ten Commandments)
- Voluntary agreement to follow and obey God that caused Israel to suffer when they disobeyed the covenant laws
- God's anger was kindled when His people engage in injustice and don't show mercy to others
- God's character is infused with justice and mercy, which is revealed through His Covenant Code

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### The People, Places, and Times:

- Perjury – lying under oath; false witness; a lying tongue God hates (Proverbs 6:17, 19), which carries serious penalty
- Witnesses (Disciples of Christ) must tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth (Proverbs 12:17; John 1:17, 8:32)
- Most ancient laws are not just a list of dos and don'ts, but examples of wise standards of justice
  - Aids in devising a just verdict based on situation

*Do you believe that your tongue is like a two-edge sword? Hebrews 4:12*

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### Focal Verses:

#### 1. *Five Judicial Imperatives (Exodus 23:1-3)*

- a. Adds emphasis and additional details to the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) commandment (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Deuteronomy 19:15-21)
- b. Lying is forbidden in two (2) legal situations:
  - i. False accusation/report
  - ii. Acting as a witness in a trial
- c. Also includes telling the truth in the wrong manner (gossip, exaggerations, fabrications)
- d. Majority rules does not exclude the Christian from doing what is right even against the majority as it may cause you to lie and pervert justice
- e. The OT encourages to show mercy and justice to the poor, but it always reiterates don't do it just because they are poor
  - i. Rich or poor are all equal in the eyes of God

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### 2. *Two Case Studies (Exodus 23:4-6)*

- a. Shows how to win converts by showing mercy even to your enemies (testimony)
  - i. Parable of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:25-37
- b. Common misunderstanding in the OT to hate their enemies, “eye for an eye” (Exodus 21:24) is actually a matter of upholding straight justice verses revenge or hatred
  - i. Vengeance far exceeds the original incident
  - ii. Jesus’ clarification was a misinterpretation of oral tradition and not a matter of actual law (Matthew 5:38-39)
- c. Scriptures reveal similar situations we experience today, just worded differently according to the times (Luke 6:27-38)
  - i. (v. 5) similar to helping someone with a flat tire
- d. Compassion and kindness are explicit commands from Jesus that will demonstrate justice and mercy to show towards our enemies
- e. Two (2) types of poor:
  - i. Poor – basic term (Exodus 23:3)
  - ii. Poor – extremely needy person, in danger of oppression and abuse, someone who is destitute or indigent (Exodus 23:6)
- f. God’s people are called to a higher standard, regardless of our earthly positions

***Have you had the opportunity to help your neighbor and neglected to follow God’s instructions?***

### 3. *Five More Judicial Imperatives (Exodus 23:7-9)*

- a. Justice should not be denied because of one’s status, whether rich or poor
- b. Bribes – gift, present for a corrupt official with the intent of gaining favor (Deuteronomy 16:19; Proverbs 17:23)
  - i. continues to this day (common with judges and other officials)
  - ii. Some countries, bribes are part of routine order of business
  - iii. Bribes blind justice by favoring the one who pays the highest bidder
- c. No one should be judged based on ethnicity or nationality
- d. To God, being kind to a stranger is significant (Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19)
- e. The greater truth is that justice is the embodiment of God’s holiness within His people
- f. He’s personally involved with the lives of His people, judging individual cases, and He hears the cries of the oppressed (Exodus 22:22-24; Judges 2:18; Nehemiah 9:27)

***Have you ever been bribed? Have you ever thought about bribing someone else?***

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### 4. *The Sabbath Year (Exodus 23:10-12)*

- a. Allows the ground to lie fallow (unsown) for a year so its nutrients aren't continuously depleted
- b. Allows the land and animals to rest, showing them respect (God's creation)
- c. Sabbath year proceeds are similar to the Sabbath day – just provisions of rest for all
- d. The poor are entitled to the entire harvest every seven years (laborer's)
  - i. Provides economic boost to gain capital and get back on their feet
- e. Ancient Rome gave daily rations which were barely enough to remain above starvation and that's only if you lived in the city
  - i. Outside the city, you had to fend for yourself
- f. Three nuance meanings for rest
  - i. Hebrew *shabat* – cease from labor
  - ii. Hebrew *nuakh* – settle down and enjoy a quiet repose (state of rest, sleep, or tranquility)
  - iii. Hebrew *nafash* – allowed to take a breather; a pause to catch your breath and see the rejuvenation in your soul and not just your body
- g. God is the ultimate provider, so we must reorient ourselves towards Him

*What would a Sabbath Year look like among God's people today?*

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### **Application for Activation:**

- God's holy character and standards haven't changed
- He still doesn't tolerate injustice amongst His people
- We are His children, which makes us: (Deuteronomy 10:15; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:2, 2:9;)
  - a chosen generation
  - a royal priesthood
  - a holy nation
  - a peculiar people
- The challenges for believers today are to correct injustices when they are found and to act justly so temptation doesn't give into sin