

2018 Spring Bible Study – Act Justly

Week 6 - Treatment of the Stranger, Caring for Poor

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Introduction

In the passage below, Moses describes what it means to be obedient to God. We hear God’s call for us to surrender our willful resistance God and to follow God by seeking justice for those who are vulnerable and oppressed. This is what it means to serve the Lord. We are chosen by God to fulfill God’s purposes by reflecting the love and justice of God. This is how God’s promises to our spiritual ancestors are fulfilled. Following God in seeking justice is not about having the right opinion or doctrine. It is about faithfulness.

Reading the Word - Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Read this passage with your group. (Each person can take a verse.)

12 So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. 14 Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, 15 yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. 16 Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. 17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, 18 who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. 19 You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 20 You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. 21 He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. 22 Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

Responding to the Word

1. In his book, *Just Politics*, Ron Sider writes,

“Justice and love are virtual synonyms in this passage. There is no suggestion that loving the sojourner is a benevolent, voluntary act different from a legal demand to do justice to the fatherless.” (page 87, Brazos Press, 2012)

How does this passage call us followers of Christ to practice the justice and love of God?

2. The fourth article of the Belhar Confession states,

that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged

How is God’s special care for those who are vulnerable and oppressed described in this passage?

3. One of the lines in the carol, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”, reads
*And in despair I bowed my head, “There is no peace on earth”, I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.*

What does this passage say to us about despair when seeking justice seems futile?

Application

In her book, *The Next Worship*, Rev. Sandra Van Opstal writes about a continuum of justice engagement marked by three postures. The first posture is “Hospitality”, which says, “I welcome you”. It is the posture we hold in circumstances where we have more power or resources to offer someone else, but don’t necessarily receive anything in return.

The second posture she describes is “Solidarity”, which says, “I stand with you,” to others in life’s most joyful and painful experiences. In this situation, power is beginning to shift through surrender or sacrifice of what might be best for you for what might be best for someone else.

The third posture is “Mutuality”. This posture says, “I need you”. It should be the goal of all justice work. In the posture of “Mutuality”, broken systems are repaired, and no longer is there dependence on others to meet basic needs. In this posture, both parties choose to rely upon each other for support as needed, but the gift that each party brings to the table are recognized.

As you think about this text, and this continuum of postures, what are some ways that God might be calling you to practice hospitality, solidarity, and mutuality in relationship with others? How might this call influence how you vote? How you advocate for others? And how you received others?

A Closing Prayer

God of heaven and earth,

In your word we read that you do not play favorites; that with you, there are no transactions or brownie points that can get us in right standing with you or a better place in your heart. Everything we have comes to us through you, and through our relationship with your son, Jesus Christ.

But we do see your priorities, your longing that the weak and vulnerable, the lonely and the outsider, those suffering and in pain would receive comfort and peace, justice and mercy, grace and hope and love.

And we recognize that being chosen by you means being called to demonstrate your goodness, your holiness, and your justice towards a world that needs you desperately. Make us willing servants who follow Christ in surrendering our privileges in order that others might have the rights due them as your image-bearers.

We pray this in the powerful name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.