

Just Laws for a Fallen World: Social Justice Laws

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

- [0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It's good to be with you to worship God together. If you would turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 22. And if you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to bring it over to you.
- We have copies that you can use while you are here. We're in Exodus chapter 22, verse 16, going all the way to chapter 23, verse 9 this morning.
- Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, we do not want to worship you as we imagine you to be.
- As we prefer you to be. Lord, we want to worship you as you have revealed yourself to be. And so again, we humble ourselves before your word.
- Reveal to us. Reveal yourself to us as the God of love. Reveal to us your terrifying justice.
- [1 : 14] And your scandalous mercy. Exalt the name of your son, Jesus, this morning.
- And capture our hearts anew. With wonder and worship before your throne. In Jesus' name we pray.
- Amen. Amen. If you would stand for the reading of God's word. I will read it out a lot for us.
- Exodus 22, starting verse 16. Going to Exodus 23, verse 9. If a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bright price for her and make her his wife.
- If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bright price for virgins. You shall not permit a sorceress to live.
- [2 : 18] Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death. Whoever sacrifices to any God other than the Lord alone shall be devoted to destruction. You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.
- You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry.
- And my wrath will burn. And I will kill you with the sword. And your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him.
- And you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. For that is his only covering.
- And it is his cloak for his body. In what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear. For I am compassionate.
- [3 : 23] You shall not revile God, nor curse the ruler of your people. 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. 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.

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. You shall not spread a false report.

You shall not join hands with the wicked man to be a malicious witness. 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.

Nor shall we be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit. If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it.

[4 : 27] You shall rescue it with him. You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. Keep far from a false charge and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.

And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. You shall not oppress a sojourner.

You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. Before justice became a buzzword over the last 20 years or so, God was already the God of justice.

And if you look at this passage, if you have the English Standard Version, which I read from, there's a heading that says, Laws About Social Justice. And this passage is about social justice.

What should justice in a society look like? But what also about mercy? Is there room in a just society for mercy and compassion?

[5 : 47] Justice punishes a person as he deserves. Mercy does not punish a person as he deserves. Justice penalizes.

Mercy pardons. So how should justice and mercy function together in a society? Can justice and compassion kiss each other, as it says in Psalm 85, verse 10?

This passage teaches us that as those who belong to the Lord, who is compassionate and just, we should treat our neighbors with compassion and justice. And I'm going to cover that in a few points, four points.

The first few verses of this section deal with sexual sins and expound on the seventh commandment, which prohibited adultery. And verses 16 to 17 deal with fornication.

Verse 18 with sorcery, with most likely a connection to cultic prostitution. And verse 19, it deals with bestiality. It says in verses 16 to 17, if a man seduces a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her, he shall give the bright price for her and make her his wife.

[6 : 59] If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money equal to the bright price for virgins. As I've said a few times in this part of Exodus, you can tell what a society values by looking at the law and looking at what it prohibits.

The Bible places a premium value on chastity and consistently denounces all kinds of sexual immorality, including in this case, fornication or premarital sex.

A man here has seduced a woman, a virgin, who is not betrothed and has lain with her. So this is a consensual relationship. And in our society nowadays, premarital sex is considered normal and expected, and all kinds of sexual relations are permitted so long as they are consensual.

But that is an appalling deviation from the scriptural standard. Because God designed sexual intimacy to be enjoyed within the covenant of marriage. It's not because God is a prude.

It's because God knows, understands, because he created it, how precious and powerful sex is. And like anything that is very precious and very powerful, it must be guarded and it must be enjoyed in its proper context.

[8 : 13] In Genesis 2.25, it said, Adam and Eve as husband and wife were both naked and not ashamed. After sinning and after the fall, now that innocence is gone and now people feel shame in their nakedness.

And it's only in the context of the covenant of marriage as they share conjugal relations with each other in the marital bed that they can recover that innocence, recover that unashamedness, in nakedness, where they are fully known and fully understood and yet not repulsed and invited in.

And that kind of precious and intimate mingling of body and soul should not be sold or given away cheaply. That's what these verses are meant to protect.

These verses protect women from playboys who want pleasure without responsibility, who want to have sex with no strings attached. I want to, this can apply to both brothers and sisters, but I want to especially exhort the sisters in the room, there are men who will sweet talk you and seduce you into having sex outside of the covenant of marriage only to use you for their selfish pleasure and throw you away.

So be wary. Be patient. Wait until you are within the protections God provides in marriage. These verses also serve as a warning and a deterrent to the would-be playboys.

[9 : 43] 1 Thessalonians 4, 3-6 commends us to abstain from sexual immorality, saying that committing sexual immorality, which includes fornication, is to transgress and wrong our brothers and sisters.

The word translated wrong, there is like a financial term, it means to defraud or cheat someone. When you have sex with someone who is not your wife or your husband, you are stealing something that does not belong to you.

So these verses require the playboy to pay it back. You think you can have a woman for nothing at all? Think again. It's going to cost you. You need to take responsibility for her by marrying her.

And even if you don't marry her because of her father's refusal to give her to you, you will still need to pay the full bright price or the betrothal present. A bright price back then was equivalent to several years' wages.

So this would cost him an arm and a leg. Bible scholar Tikva Framer-Kensky explains it this way, quote, A man cannot love her and leave her.

[10 : 52] By sleeping with her, he has assumed the obligation to marry her, and he must pay a normal bright price. He cannot obtain a girl cheaply by first sleeping with her, thus dishonoring her and lowering her bright price.

Virginity was highly prized back then and still is in many parts of the world today because sex is sacred and God intends it to be exclusively enjoyed between one man and one woman in the context of marriage.

And scarcity increases value. If you can be easily had, if others have already had you, then you don't look so precious and rare anymore.

So a woman of marriageable age who had lost her virginity this way could not demand the same level of betrothal gift that a virgin could command. This is why the man is required to pay the full bright price, even if he doesn't end up marrying her.

He has taken something from her. He has taken something from her family. This woman might never be able to get married and even if she does, she's not going to command the same high bright price for the sake of her family.

[12 : 00] And that's what this provision is here for. And we can see that this is not solely an individual decision, but a family decision in verse 17, which speaks of the father refusing to give his daughter to the man.

In those days, it was the father's responsibility to secure a good husband for his daughter. It was part of his protective duties as a father. So in this situation, it ultimately falls upon him to vet his potential son-in-law.

And if the father concludes that the man who has seduced his daughter is a worthless man and utterly refuses to give her to him, the man still has to pay the bride price, but he is released from the obligation to marry the daughter.

So the father has veto power because the father is wiser and more experienced than his daughter and because he has her best interest in mind. This is why we should not be dismissive of our parents' input when choosing a husband or wife.

We don't have an absolute obligation to obey our parents in these matters as grown adults, especially if our parents' assessment of a potential spouse is worldly and unbiblical.

[13 : 16] However, we should nonetheless honor and give weight to our parents' wisdom and experience and love. Verse 18 continues to address the issue of sexual immorality.

It says, you shall not permit a sorceress to live. Of course, man and woman can both engage in the sin of sorcery, but the fact that it singles out a sorceress here seems to just suggest that it's referring to cultic prostitution, so something committed to evolving sexual acts in a religious pagan setting.

2 Kings 9.22 and Nahum 3.4 both link the sin of sorcery with whorings, probably because they often happen together in Canaanite fertility religion, which included sorceresses and cultic prostitutes.

So, for example, in 2 Kings 9.22, it speaks of Jezebel's whorings and sorceries. So, God will not tolerate religious prostitution of any kind.

Religion is not to serve as a pretext for sexual immorality. All forms of sorcery, witchcraft, magic, and channeling seek to tell the future or discover some hidden knowledge apart from divinely appointed means.

[14 : 32] These practices are problematic because they are attempts to manipulate circumstances and situations for selfish ends rather than for God's glory. There's no humility.

There's no submission. There's rebellion apart from God. This is no different from turning to idols, turning to things other than God for provision and protection.

And so, in this way, verse 18 neatly captures the connection between spiritual whoring and physical whoring. In verse 19, we go on to bestiality, which is also forbidden.

Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death. Bestiality is a gross perversion of the natural order in creation. And it, too, was a feature of pagan Canaanite religion, which praises Baal, for example, in this poem called The Baal Cycle, dated in 15th century BC.

It praises the Canaanite god for making love with the heifer, lying with her 70 times. Bestiality debases human beings who are created in the image of God, and it, too, is connected to idolatry.

[15 : 37] And when we consider these connections between idolatry and sexual immorality, verse 20 no longer strikes us as a non-sequitur that it might initially have seemed to be. It says, Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord alone shall be devoted to destruction.

The meaning of the phrase devoted to destruction is unpacked in Deuteronomy 20, 10 to 18, where God delineates which cities, as the Israelites enter the promised land, are to be destroyed.

The cities that were far away from the promised land in Canaan were to be spared, according to God's instruction. But the cities that were within the promised land of Canaan were to be devoted to complete destruction.

And God's rationale is this, in Deuteronomy 20, 18, so that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods. And so you sin against the Lord your God.

The concern was that any surviving Canaanites, any remnant of Canaanite religion would seduce Israelites into idolatry and apostasy. And so, in this case, any Israelite who sacrifices to any god other than the Lord alone has essentially cut himself off from the gods' community and has made himself a foreign agent, a virus that is invading the body that must be eliminated.

[16:58] He has gone away from exclusive devotion to the Lord and allegiance to the Lord and is therefore a threat to the community. Then, after addressing how the Israelites should treat the people who are on the margins, how they should honor the Lord, they now turn to addressing how they should treat the people who are on the margins of society in verses 21 and 20:17.

Sojourners first, and then widows and orphans, and then the poor finally. And we're going to see this pattern repeatedly in this passage. First, it's going to command us to love God, and then it's going to command us to love our neighbors, because it's only when we love God with our whole heart that we can love our neighbors as God commands us to do.

So he says in verse 21, you shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. That verse is repeated almost word for word in chapter 23, verse 9, and the two verses unify and bracket this section on social justice together.

The word sojourner refers to a resident alien, a foreigner, an immigrant that is living in the land. Some of you guys are immigrants.

Some of you guys were immigrants once, like I was. The U.S. has historically been one of the most hospitable and open countries in the world for immigrants.

[18:18] According to the United Nations, the U.S. has the highest number of foreign-born residents living in it out of all the countries in the world, and it's actually not even close. It's off by tens of millions.

The people that I encountered here as an immigrant were by and large friendly and welcoming and helpful, but that is not the experience of all immigrants throughout the world.

Being displaced from your country and culture, away from people who look like you, away from people who speak your mother tongue is a difficult experience.

Immigrants are often misunderstood. They are viewed with suspicion, and because they don't have the same rights as citizens. Sometimes they are taken advantage of by bad actors.

For this reason, God singles them out and commands the Israelites to care for them. You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress them, for you were sojourners in Egypt.

[19:20] The phrase, you were sojourners, is plural, but the command, you shall not wrong a sojourner, is singular in Hebrew. God is singling out every single man and woman in Israel and every single one of us with this responsibility that we have toward our neighbors, and particularly toward the sojourner.

This is one of the distinguishing features of the book of the covenant. In this final section of the book of the covenant, that no other ancient law code contains provisions for care for sojourners and for immigrants.

And the preceding case laws dealt mostly with conditional statements, if this happens, do so and so, and mostly it was in the third person. But here, it transitions to going beyond the laws that govern the society, and it tells us about how God's appealing to people personally and directly using the second person and the first person pronouns to tell us how we ought to live.

But why does Bible take such an interest in sojourners and immigrants? Because God's appealing here to Israel's corporate experience in Egypt. Remember how you were oppressed in Egypt.

Remember what it felt like to be exploited and maltreated in Egypt. Don't ever treat anyone that way. No other ancient Near Eastern law, like I said, contains these kinds of provisions, but God's people, they should know better because they know what it's like to be sojourners in a foreign land.

[20 : 54] So God elicits their compassion by recalling their bitter experience in Egypt. God continues in verse 22, you shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.

A widow in those days would most likely not have any male relatives left. Her father and father-in-law would have passed on already by the time her husband has passed away. And so in a society led by men where men worked in the field and women worked in the home, a widow was vulnerable because she had no one to provide for her or to protect her.

She lacked provision and protection. It would have been very easy to mistreat, take advantage of such a widow or a fatherless child. A fatherless, likewise, is essentially an orphan because in those days and age, if you didn't have a father, you didn't have the same protection and provision that other children had.

And God tells the Israelites not to mistreat them and then he adds this threat in verses 23 to 24 to enforce the command. If you do mistreat them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry and my wrath will burn and I will kill you with the sword and your wives shall become widows and your children will become fatherless.

So God's promise that he will hear their cry echoes what we saw in Exodus 3, 7 when the Israelites were crying out to God because of their affliction and suffering in Egypt and he says that God saw their affliction and he heard their cry.

[22 : 31] God is not deaf to the cries of the afflicted. He is attentive even to the faintest groanings of the weak and the vulnerable and God will not sit idly by.

He says that if they mistreat the widows and orphans in their society, they will be ravaged by war and their men will perish by the sword so that their wives become widows and their children fatherless.

The punishment fits the crime. It will be done to them as they have done to others. And note how personal this threat is. My wrath will burn.

I will kill you with the sword. If it seems harsh to you, consider this. This verse is a helpful illustration of the fact that God's wrath and God's love are actually flip sides of the same coin.

It is God's fiery love for the widows and orphans that makes him burn with fiery wrath at those who oppress them. I remember when I was in fifth grade, still living in South Korea, there was a fatherless girl in my class.

[23 : 44] And she was the class, I mean, they had a term for it in Korean. She was the one that everyone bullied. I don't know if she was singled out because she was a fatherless child, but she was an easy target because the kids didn't really fear the repercussions of what might happen.

And this happened for day after day, week after week, month after month, and I think her mother, who must have heard countless times her daughter coming home and crying to her and complaining to her, I think snapped because I was sitting in the classroom and then the sliding door slams open and this woman storms into the classroom and starts screaming and starts naming names.

Where is this boy? Who is this person? Who are you to treat my daughter this way? And she had to be physically restrained by the teacher and escorted out of the classroom.

And I still remember the eerie silence afterward. That classroom was never that silent, but that day you could hear a pin drop. Only thing that you could hear in the classroom was the whimpering cries of the girl.

She was not crying because she was sad. She was not crying because she was upset or afraid.

[25 : 04] She was crying because she felt vindicated. She was crying because she felt protected. She was crying because she felt loved.

The wrath of the mom was an expression of her love for her only daughter. She was crying because she felt and she found a pin she was...

And for that reason, she was crying because she was crying. She will break out in wrath against you if you mistreat them. And then verse 25 turns to the treatment of the poor.

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a money lender to him and you shall not exact interest from him. It's not that lending money with interest is inherently wrong.

As we saw last week in Exodus 22, a thief who stole an ox had to pay fourfold. That's basically interest payment because an ox is a productive property that makes money while it's missing.

[26 : 41] It should have made money while it was missing. And so all that lost money had to be repaid. And so in a capital economy like ours, the money usually making money somewhere else.

And that's the idea behind interest and so on. However, if you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, he says here, then the Israelites are forbidden from exacting interest.

This is not the case of a rich investor who's taking out some other loan, another loan, so that he can make even more money and get even richer. This is a poor person who is destitute, who has no other way to live, so he is looking for a loan.

And God says when a poor person comes to you like that because they need bread on their table and roof over their heads, then do not take interest on the loan that you give them.

God is enjoining compassion. It is within the rights of the money lender to exact interest. But he's saying when it comes to the poor, have compassion on them. Be merciful to them.

[27 : 47] Some greedy money lender might actually take advantage of the situation and exploit the poor man and put some exorbitant interest on the loan. But God tells us to do the exact opposite. The man has little choice but to take the loan anyway.

Give it to him without interest. Since he's already having trouble making ends meet, you should not increase his burden by adding interest on top of it. Verses 26 to 27 get at the same idea.

If ever you take your neighbor's cloak and pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body. In what else shall he sleep?

And if he cries to me, again, same expression, I will hear, for I am compassionate. As we saw last week, the Bible teaches us to have a healthy respect for private property because it's an aspect of loving our neighbor.

Love manifests itself in the public square as justice, and you have to respect others' property. But the Bible does not treat property as an absolute value, as an inviolable thing that we must protect at all costs.

[28 : 54] It says here that if you have your poor neighbor's cloak as a pledge, even if your poor neighbor has not repaid the debt, you should return the cloak so that he does not have to sleep and freeze in the cold of night.

You are legally entitled to keep the cloak, but he says, have compassion. Go beyond that. Be merciful. Why?

Because God is compassionate, and he will take up the cause of the poor against the money lender. In his two treatises of government, John Locke captures this balance.

He says, As justice gives every man a title to the product of his honest industry, and the fair acquisitions of his ancestors descended to him, so charity gives every man a title to so much of another's plenty, as will keep him from extreme want, where he has no means to subsist otherwise.

So here is mercy tempering justice, mercy and justice functioning together. But as God's people, we go beyond even justice whenever possible, and ourselves personally show compassion to people who need it, because God is compassionate.

[30 : 10] In verses 28 to 31, we return to the idea of being devoted to or consecrated to the Lord. Once again, the pattern of loving God and then loving our neighbor. And then it says in verse 28, You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

We've seen this before. The word revile is the same word that was used earlier in Exodus 21, 17, when it says, Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death. It means to belittle someone, to make light of someone, to dishonor or slight someone.

And it's the opposite of honoring someone. And so God commands us to honor our parents, to honor the rulers in our society, and to honor ultimately God, because God's the one who puts these people in positions of authority.

And it's by obeying people in authority, or submitting to people in authority, that we learn to submit to God's authority. Those who have no respect for authority, I guarantee you, will have no respect for God's authority.

And those who have no respect for God's authority, will not obey his commands to be just and compassionate. Verses 29 to 30 also emphasize this idea of being set apart for the Lord, by giving our firstfruits and firstborns to him.

[31 : 25] It says, 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. 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. Old Testament law required God's people to bring the firstfruits of their harvest, of their vineyards to God as an offering, as a form of tribute, to acknowledge that all their produce, all their blessings come ultimately from God, and to acknowledge his authority over them.

In addition to that, God commanded them to give their firstborns to him. And so the firstborn of all livestock, the firstborn males of all livestock had to be sacrificed, but the firstborn sons had to be redeemed for a price.

And that's because of what God did during the Passover in delivering his people from Egypt. He killed the firstborn sons of Egypt in order to deliver Israelites out of Egypt because Pharaoh refused to let Israel go, whom God calls his firstborn son in Exodus 4.22.

So it's for that reason that Israelites are to be consecrated, and by consecrating their firstborn and giving him to God symbolically by paying the redemption price, they remember that they themselves are set apart for God, that they are not a common people, but they have been chosen, set apart to be a special possession of God.

[32 : 52] And that's why they are not to eat meat torn by beasts, animals torn by beasts. It's a way of distinguishing them from the pagan nations around them. So having once again addressed the idea of loving God and belonging to him, we turn in chapter 23 to stipulations dealing with love of neighbor again.

More specifically, verses 1 to 12 teach us to be just because the Lord is just. And justice, as I mentioned earlier, is to give a person what is his or her due.

Reward for the good doers and punishment for evil doers. It says in verses 1 to 3, You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked man to be a malicious witness.

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, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.

This is an expansion of the ninth commandment. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And we've talked, when we talked about that commandment, how important it was to have good, reliable witnesses in a day and age when the forensic science didn't really exist.

[34 : 05] There's no fingerprint. There are no photo video evidence, no DNA tests. You really had your witnesses to rely on. But false witnesses were an unfortunate reality then as they are now.

And there are a number of reasons why someone might bear false witness in the court of law. And verses 1 to 3 gives a sampling of them. Some people might give false testimony because they are a malicious witness. They have joined hands with the wicked man.

They have evil intention. They have partnered with an evildoer. They have a vendetta against someone. So they give false witness to get at them. Or maybe you're bearing false witness for a wicked man.

And maybe because that wicked man is your relative, your father or son or brother or friend. But God commands us not to join hands with such a man. We also must not side with the many, so lest to pervert justice.

Sometimes we bear false witness not out of malice, but out of the fear of man. In order to avoid repercussions for ourselves. In order to avoid being on the wrong side of popular opinion.

[35 : 09] We side with the many and with the spirit of the times. And then still others bear false witness because they are partial to a poor man in his lawsuit.

Isn't that an interesting way to put that? It's not saying partial against the poor man, which we see later. Partial to a poor man. Sometimes it's the most empathetic and compassionate people who run the risk of being partial to the poor.

And thereby being unjust. You might see a poor man in his rags and feel sorry for him. And that could dispose you to be partial to him in your judgment.

But the Bible specifically tells us not to do that. Because to do so is to pervert justice. A poor man might have less power than the rich man.

But his heart is every bit as sinful as the rich man's. His poor circumstances say nothing about whether or not he is guilty or innocent.

[36 : 19] And that determination must be made by an impartial judge. The same principle applies to other situations. Where someone might evoke our empathy. You can be empathetic.

You can be attentive and listen well to that person. But you must not be partial. You have to be impartial. Admittedly, the optics are not good.

Right? When there is a power imbalance in a poor situation. Because people in positions of power have abused power in the past. But we are not to judge by appearances. But judge with right judgment.

We have to love our neighbors even if they are rich and powerful. The converse is also true. We must love our neighbors even if they are poor and powerless.

Verse 6 to 8 serve as a counterbalance. Verses 1 to 3. It says, You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. Keep far from a false charge.

[37 : 25] And do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not acquit the wicked. And you shall take no bribe. For a bribe blinds the clear-sighted. And subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

Justice is due to the poor. Regardless of their socioeconomic status. They deserve justice. So we should take care not to trample on the rights of the poor.

Just because we can. Rich and powerful people can use their influence. As leverage to blackmail. And silence witnesses. They can pay victims. And coax them into signing non-disclosure agreements.

They can offer bribes and other gifts to the judge. In order to secure a ruling in their favor. They can employ their formidable PR team. To win over public opinion. And launch smear campaigns.

They can hire the best lawyers to bring false charges. But to give into their schemes. Would be to deprive the poor. Made in the image of God. Of their justice.

[38 : 27] Of what is due to them. So we ought to be vigilant. Carefully weigh the evidence. And the merits of each case. And we must fear God rather than man.

So that we can do what is right. Be courageous to do what is right. And bear true witness. Both verses 1 to 3. And verses 6 to 8. Deal with the courtroom. And sandwiched between them.

Are verses 4 to 5. Which goes even further. It brings our attention to that. It says. If you meet your enemy's ox. Or his donkey. Going astray. You shall bring it back to him.

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. So not only are we to love our rich.

And powerful neighbors. Not only are we to love our poor. And powerless neighbors. We must love our neighbors. Even when they are our enemies. Even when they hate us.

[39 : 28] When someone's donkey goes astray. We should bring it back to the owner. When someone's donkey lies down under its burden. And is stuck. You should help rescue it. Even if the owner is an enemy who personally hates you.

We are not to hate our enemies back. But to love our enemies. Again. We are now going beyond the scope of justice at this point. Justice does not demand that we help our enemy.

But mercy does. In Romans 5. 6-8. Paul uses three parallel participial phrases. To describe how sinful and unworthy we were.

Of God's affection and rescue. He says. While we were weak. While we were still sinners. While we were enemies. But after those statements.

Like a hammer driving a stake into the ground. With three powerful blows. He tells us. Three times. That even while we were still weak. Christ died for the ungodly.

[40 : 29] He says. Even while we were enemies of God. While we were still sinners. Christ died for us. While we were enemies of God. We were reconciled to God.

By the death of his son. Because we're justified. By the blood of Jesus. It's important to note here. That God did not replace. Justice with mercy. As C.S. Lewis writes.

In his essay. The humanitarian theory of punishment. Quote. Mercy detached from justice. Grows unmerciful. That is the important paradox.

As there are plants. Which will flourish. Only in mountain soil. So it appears. That mercy will flower. Only when it grows. In the crannies. Of the rock. Of justice. A society.

That forsakes justice. For the sake of mercy. Forsakes mercy itself. Because only in a system. Where there is a clear sense. Of right and wrong. And just deserts.

[41 : 25] Can mercy exist. Which is pardon. So no. God did not forget justice. Instead. He simultaneously. Satisfied the demands of justice.

And showed us mercy. By bearing the punishment. For our sins. In his son. Jesus Christ. By dying on the cross. For our sins. While we were still. His enemies.

Jesus graphically. Illustrated. Both the gravity. Of our sin. Our death. Deserving sin. And the graciousness. Of our sin.

Atoning savior. In James 2. 8. 13. After warning believers. Against showing partiality. To the rich. James writes. If you really fulfill. The royal law.

According to the scripture. You shall love your neighbor. As yourself. You are doing well. But if you show partiality. You are committing sin. And are convicted by the law. As transgressors. So speak.

[42 : 19] And so act. As those who are to be judged. Under the law of liberty. For judgment. Is without mercy. To one who has shown. No mercy. Mercy triumphs. Over judgment.

What does it mean. That mercy. Triumphs. Over judgment. If. As recipients. Of God's mercy. We forsake the sin. Of partiality. And show mercy. To the poor. Then.

The law of liberty. Will be judged. Under the law of liberty. And will be under the freedom. Of our spirit. Because God's just has. Justice has been satisfied. In Christ. And we have. Our responsibility. Of his mercy. But if we are not merciful.

Toward the poor. In our. To our poor fellow brothers. And sisters. We give evidence. Of the fact. That we ourselves. Have never received. The mercy of God. Our loving father. And we are thereby.

Condemned. Under the law. Rather than judged. Under the law of liberty. That's what it means. That mercy. Triumphs. Over judgment. It's the mercy. And compassion. Of God.

[43 : 14] That transforms us. To be merciful. And compassionate. Toward others. So let's remember. God's mercy. And as recipients. Of God's mercy. As those who have.

Been justified. Let's do what the Lord. Requires of us. In Micah. 6. 8. To act. Justly. And to love. Mercy. And to walk.

Humbly. With our God. Let's pray. Yes.

Father. Help us to. grow. Grow. Grow.

Grow. Grow. Grow. In our knowledge of you. In our understanding. Of your. Governance. Your rule. Your justice.

[44 : 15] And mercy. So that in all our dealings. With one another. We too may. Imitate you. That we might uphold justice.

And show mercy. And in doing so. Point. All those around us. To the cross of Jesus.

Where justice and mercy kissed. Thank you for. Your son Jesus. It's in his precious name.

We pray now. Amen.