

Unbiased Actions

General Topic: God: The Source of Justice

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Lesson Text: Exodus 23:1 - 12

Background Scripture: Exodus 22 and 23

(Exo 23:1) Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

(Exo 23:2) Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment:(Exo 23:3) Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause.(Exo 23:4) If thou

meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.(Exo 23:5) If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden,

and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.(Exo 23:6) Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.(Exo 23:7) Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.(Exo 23:8) And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and

perverteth the words of the righteous.(Exo 23:9) Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.(Exo 23:10) And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:(Exo 23:11) But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. (Exo 23:12) Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger; may be refreshed.

Lesson Objectives:

Lying, bribery, and disobedience have no place in God's economy. Believer's must learn to embody and embrace His thinking and methodology. In this week's lesson we will look at a specific command that He fleshed out for His people to understand to treat one another with mercy (compassion) and grace.

Questions to Ponder:

1. One of the more recent hot topics involved the Ahmaud Arbery case. Discuss the difficulty this case may have been for the one black male juror.
2. "Everyone loves justice at another man's expense." What does it mean, especially in the face of blatant injustice in this country?

3. How can Christian's support cause's they believe in?
4. How can Christian's support causes that we believe in but don't jive with our spiritual/godly principles?

Teaching Tools:

Word puzzles may be developed from the following site: www.puzzlemaker.com. Also, www.dtlk.com has several visual aids that may be beneficial, as well as www.kidssundayschool.com which provide other helps for teaching.

Bible Journaling may be an interesting way to involve older teens in self-expression of the lessons they are taught. Visit www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps to find ways to use this valuable tool to learn and reinforce Scripture.

Movie Clips are a wonderful teaching tool to further explain or create topics of discussion for a variety of age groups; www.wingclips.com provides clips divided by movie title, category, scripture, or theme. Clips may be accessed on any electronic device.

The Lesson:

The gist of this week's message is regarding judicial laws that God set in place for Israel after crossing over the Red Sea and leaving their Egyptian captors. Since they were a fairly 're-newed' nation, it was important they learn how to manage and function with one another, in order to create a peaceful and civilized environment. One might think that laws of this nature unnecessary for godly people but God established them so they would *remain* a godly people and reflect His nature during their interaction, especially difficult interactions, with each other.

Sometimes, as with children, you have to further explain and provide examples, so they understand the rules and will perhaps 'think before they leap.' The commandments discussed in this week's lesson focus on Law eight and nine of the Ten Commandments, which read "Thou shalt not steal and Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." The purpose of the notes on these laws do not nullify the initial commandments; however, they express the intent of the law, so that

citizens could maintain positive interpersonal communication and ensure that all are treated justly.

What is justice? An anonymous writer stated that “Everyone loves justice at another man’s expense.” It is a term that is loosely thrown around in society that has become meaningless. We often discover that justice belongs to the person with the most money, power, or political influence. As I looked at the varying definitions in the American Heritage Dictionary, I found things like conformity to moral rightness in action or attitude; the upholding of what is just; fair treatment and/or reward. There was a laundry list of the world’s definition of justice.

God has requirements, that if followed to His letter, would result in a of perfection and harmony. Of course, that can only happen when all men have surrendered and submitted their lives to His Son. However, in the meantime, believers can set the pace for harmonious living when we strictly adhere to God’s Word. Because we are forgiven; we have more than enough grace. It is for this reason that we should want to live a life that demonstrates our gratefulness for not receiving what we actually deserve (mercy).

God’s laws supersede all of the laws of this country. His goal is to teach us how to get along. Each believer would do well to remember that Christ is in charge of our lives. He came to die for the sin of the world, but He also served as the example of how to live. In watching Him, we can learn valuable principles that can be used to help us as we encounter others and begin to create meaningful relationships.

The first law in this text that begs our attention is related to the commandment against bearing false witness, in other words, lying. First of all, it tells us not to create slanderous stories about another individual. It says to me that we should avoid gossip, no matter how juicy the story may be. In the court of law, lying brings a perjury charge. We should resist the urge to destroy one’s character with fabrications that could prove detrimental. If we have an issue with someone, we should avoid bringing others into the fray, as well. In our anger we have the tendency to recruit for others to join our team so that we can hate an individual collectively. This verse clearly indicates that we should not develop and/or join groups that seek to distribute injustice.

The 2nd verse cautions us against joining crowds who participate in malicious behavior. We should avoid membership in groups that practice wrong-doing. It could be gang membership or simply a group of girlfriends. If their behavior includes destroying lives either with a gun or a tongue, we are to disassociate

ourselves from them. By the same token, we should speak our own opinion when asked and not allow the flow of the majority to muddle our decision-making skills. We must be willing to take the risk of being ridiculed and stand alone, rather than be persuaded by majority opinions that are slanted and prejudiced.

We are also cautioned against taking the side of the poor man simply because he is poor. He or she must be given the full measure of the discipline their actions without regard to their economic circumstances. The same is true for those who are wealthy. Money, position, and power should be considered null and void in the issue of treating all people fairly. Justice must serve as the prevailing factor and decision-maker. The law should be the same for everyone. Christ teaches that it rains on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). When He died, He died for the world; not for a specific group of people. If He had only come to the Jews, the rest of us would not have an opportunity to be saved. Christ came that we might have abundant life, which does not mean material wealth, but a life that is full of the power of the Holy Spirit; a life that can be lived for Him without inhibition.

This text takes a sharp *left* to discuss how we treat our enemies and his goods. While the text talks about oxen it makes the point of doing the right thing as it regards one’s enemies. First it teaches that we should protect the things of our enemies as though it were ours. I think about children, the most precious gift that any of us possesses. If I saw my enemy’s children in trouble, I should seek to do everything I could to assist them in their plight. Surely, I wouldn’t leave them with a flat tire on the side of the road because they were my enemy’s child(ren). Christ was revolutionary in His teaching about dealing with enemies. Rather than hate them for the evil they dish, He taught the following during the Sermon on the Mount:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:44-48).

I know! Love my enemies! Bless them who curse me! Do good to them that hate me and pray for them, too! It

sounds like He requires too much, but if we can't attain racial harmony on earth, it will not be tolerated in heaven; therefore, if you planning on going, you get the rest...

God made a point to look out for the poor man always; however, this text teaches that if he commits a crime, his punishment should not be lessened due to his inability to pay. However, they should not be charged with offenses they did not commit. If you look at our current judicial system, you see how far the world falls from coming close to treating all people justly, especially the poor. Often times, poor people lose legal battles because they cannot hire the high-priced lawyers. Their lack should not keep them from being treated fairly. Such is the rule of emergency rooms as they are bound, by law, to treat all who access their facilities without consideration of their ability to pay. The poor and uninsured should have the same access to emergency medical treatment and other needed health care, as the rest of the population.

The Bible then teaches that we should stay away from lies and deceit. We should work to stay on the side of right. We cannot side with our friends and family when they are wrong. While it is difficult, we should carefully evaluate a situation to ascertain the truth before taking a stance. Failure to do so may result in the pardon of someone who is actually guilty. God promises that the guilty party will receive what is due him. Paul teaches in Galatians that God is not mocked; we will reap what we sow.

A bribe is the exchange of money for one to perform illegal acts or to conceal the truth. In this respect, a gift (vs 8) is a bribe. Bribery can be used in any setting where power is necessary to wield a position. People have used money, sex, and power to their advantage for countless generations. It has been used in the court of law, in political circles, among families, in places of employment, and yes, even in the church, to extend or withhold certain services and rights. We see it in the world constantly and consistently. Anything that can be brought has been exchanged thru the years. The wealthy have an unfair advantage, while the poor often continue in their suffering. The Bible says that bribes can cause blindness-force one to look the other way or it can cause one to lie. If one does not accept bribes, they can judge according to their convictions ***based on the truth.***

God then warns about oppression of the stranger. In this case of the lesson, the stranger was one who was not Jewish. In our case today, the stranger might be someone of a different nationality, ethnicity, race, age, and/or color. We are to treat them with kindness and respect. While the religious leaders in the Jewish sects continued to think themselves better than the Greeks and other

heathen nations, Christ continued to preach to those outside of His ethnic and religious circle. One such case was the woman at the well who was Samaritan. They were half-breeds and considered outcasts among the Jews. This single encounter allowed Jesus to stay with them for two days. I can only imagine the amount of evangelistic work that took place during that time. The Jews were God's chosen nation, but they were selected to deliver the Word to the rest of the world; it was part of His divine plan.

After the issue of how to treat strangers, God gave Moses the edict to give the land rest for one year, after toiling on it for six. The seventh year would allow the land to replenish itself. They were also to do the same for their servants, animals, and olive yards, so they could rest. Everybody and everything deserved rest. During the year of rest, the seventh year, the poor and beasts of the field (animals) could be fed and filled from whatever the land yielded. In this way, every part of the community was benefitted.

God expects His children to behave as He would; these laws help us to understand His expectations. It may appear difficult to abide by His commands; however, His Word is not to cause us grief, but to encourage our hearts toward obedience.

Be Salt! Be Light! Be Blessed!