

God's heart for justice

As human beings we are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). All human beings have equal value and should have equal respect. God loves all people and has a special concern for the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed, because they often experience suffering and injustice. His concern for the poor and oppressed, and his desire for justice are part of his character. This is shown throughout the Bible in his actions, laws and commands.

An example of God's heart for justice

The most significant example of God working for justice is the liberation of his people from oppression in Egypt, as part of his plan to bring them to the promised land. This involved physical liberation from slavery, political liberation from an oppressive regime and spiritual liberation so that they could worship God freely. The Exodus shows us God's compassion and his desire for justice and freedom. Compassion and justice are often found together in God's actions and commands: 'The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land.'" (Exodus 3:7-8) The Exodus was a foretaste of the Kingdom of God that Jesus would bring.

God's commands

God's commands and laws are a reflection of his character and a guide to how he wants us to live. There is a special concern for protecting those on the edge of society:

- In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded to walk in the way of God. This includes recognising that he 'defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing' (10:18).
- Isaiah speaks of true obedience to God: 'Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?' (Isaiah 58:6-7).
- Other key Old Testament passages which show God's desire for justice and mercy for his people are Leviticus 25, Amos 5:11-15 and Micah 6:8.

New Testament examples

Concern for the poor and justice are also found in the New Testament:

- Jesus shows this concern in his actions (see Jesus the advocate).
- Jesus teaches that the most important commandment is to love God and love your neighbour. Loving God with all our heart means being changed to become more like him and to have his heart. Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to show what this love looks like in practice (Luke 10:25-37).
- The Pharisees are told off for neglecting justice: 'Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone' (Luke 11:42).
- James teaches Christians to treat all people equally, in particular, not to insult the poor or ignore their needs (James 2:1-26).

Source: *ROOTS 1: Understanding advocacy*, Tearfund 2002, page 71