

## BCC Position on Justice

In Scripture, the idea of “justice” (mishpat in Hebrew) requires not only refraining from evil, but also, restoring to goodness or shalom.

For instance, God tells Ezekiel that justice (also translated as righteousness) includes both avoiding sin such as robbery and oppression and—in addition—proactively providing necessities like food and clothing to those in need (Ezekiel 18:16).

Similarly, Job knows he is responsible not only to avoid sins like falsehood, deceit, and adultery (Job 31:5,9), but he also must proactively provide for the poor, the widow, and the fatherless (Job 31:16-17). Failing in any of these obligations would make him unjust (Job 31:3) and would fall short of the biblical idea of mishpat.

Job even goes as far as saying if he has ignored those who were asking for justice, he should have his arm broken as retribution (Job 31:13, 22). Again, it is not enough to avoid evil. Faithful, righteous, and just people are depicted as proactively elevating those who are downcast or afflicted.

While it is true that mishpat carries a range of meanings in Scripture, all of the meanings still fall under the broader heading of “setting right,” or, more specifically, “setting right what has gone wrong.” The idea is always to come into alignment with righteousness and, therefore, create full goodness (shalom).

For instance:

Mishpat conveys the need for “aligning with what is right” by sometimes being translated simply as “rules.”

Exodus 24:3

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the **rules (mishpat)**. And all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

Other times, mishpat is translated as “judgment” because holding the perpetrators of evil accountable for their actions is always essential in order to “set right.” For example, when victims of a crime cry out for “justice” they are pleading for the offenders to receive an appropriate penalty for their actions. Letting offenders escape from any penalty whatsoever is certainly unjust.

God, who abounds in compassion, and is unwilling to deny justice to any victim of any crime, promises such **judgment (mishpat)** of offenders.

Isaiah 34:5

For my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens;  
behold, it descends for **judgment (mishpat)** upon Edom,  
upon the people I have devoted to destruction.

But the idea of mishpat is broader than just moral obligations and judgment for not following them. It expands to all areas of how the world ought to be ordered.

It can refer to a person's role in society:

1 Kings 4:28

They also brought barley and straw for the horses and swift steeds to the place where it should be, each **according to his charge (mishpat)**.

Or the location of a building.

Jeremiah 30:18

“Thus says the LORD:  
Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob  
and have compassion on his dwellings;  
the city shall be rebuilt on its mound,  
and the palace shall stand on **its rightful place (mishpat)**.

And frequently, as was already referenced in both Ezekiel and Job, mishpat is often closely tied with alleviating the plight of the poor or oppressed.

Psalms 146:7

(God) who executes **justice (mishpat)** for the oppressed,  
who gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets the prisoners free;

Psalms 140:12

I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted,  
and will execute **justice (mishpat)** for the needy.

In fact, mishpat (justice) will, by definition, always be essential in order to alleviate the plight of the poor and oppressed because there always exists a cause for their suffering that needs to be set right. The cause for their affliction could be personal (emotional/mental), relational, spiritual, institutional, physical, legal, societal, or some combination of the seven. However, undeniably, at least one wrong has occurred because, otherwise, no affliction would have ever existed. And it is the work of justice to set that wrong back right.

Thankfully, Scripture looks forward to the day when God will comprehensively enact such justice across the world. As we would expect, God's comprehensive justice will include both judgment of sin and also creating a world of complete shalom.

For instance, when Micah is "filled with the Spirit of the Lord with **justice (mishpat)** and might," (Micah 3:8) he declares there will come a day when God will both judge Israel and usher in unparalleled peace and harmony. Israel will be appropriately "plowed as a field" in God's judgment for her sin (Micah 3:12), but also, God will establish on His mountain a place of peace where there is no war or need for weapons, a place of abundant food and provision for each person, a place of no fear, and a place where the afflicted, lame, and outcasts are made into a strong nation (Micah 4:3-7).<sup>1</sup>

Notice, both the total ending of evil and the providing an overflow of goodness are how God will institute His complete mishpat (justice)--He will finally and completely set right all that has gone wrong.

Therefore, when God commands His followers to do justice (Isaiah 1:17, Micah 6:8, Luke 11:42), we understand how comprehensive the task is. Not until all fear, hunger, war, affliction, and even disease are eliminated will the work of justice be completed.

Further, we must be relentless in our efforts. As Job admitted he would have sinned if he ignored the cause of those who called out for justice (Job 31:13), we will also sin if we ignore those in our world who express their need for justice.

While church history is filled with examples of Christians both succeeding and failing in our responsibility, we must always continue to improve, listen to those who claim to be victims of injustice, and sacrificially work toward the future justice which God will eventually bring to the earth.

The elders and pastoral staff at BCC are willing and available to meet with anyone who would like to have further dialogue on any of the statements made above. Furthermore, we are committed to walking alongside all who desire to explore and follow Jesus and what that may look like in our lives.

### **Scripture References**

Ex. 24:3; Deut. 27:19; Job 31:3, 5, 9, 13, 16-17, 22; Ps. 140:12, 146:7; Prov. 24:11-12, 31:8-9; Isa. 1:17, 34:5, 58:6-10; Ez. 18:16; Micah 6:8; Matt. 25:34-40; Luke 11:42; James 1:27

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<sup>1</sup> For how God can levy fair judgment for every offense and simultaneously create a type of heaven on earth for the offenders, while remaining perfectly just Himself, read: Truth Matters at: <https://www.bridges.church/vision-statement/>