

Isaiah 1:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Analysis

True religion manifests in justice ('mishpat'), relief of the oppressed, and advocacy for the vulnerable—orphan and widow. The imperatives 'learn to do well' and 'seek judgment' reveal that righteousness is cultivated, not instinctive, requiring deliberate pursuit of God's moral order. This social ethic flows from covenant love (hesed) and anticipates Jesus' summary of the law as love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Reformed theology affirms good works as the fruit, not root, of justification.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern kings were judged by their protection of society's powerless. Isaiah holds Judah's leaders to this standard, indicting their failure to administer covenant justice that reflects God's character.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does advocating for the marginalized demonstrate authentic faith today?
2. In what practical ways can we 'seek judgment' and 'relieve the oppressed' in our contexts?

Interlinear Text

שְׁפָט וְצַדְקָה בְּלִמְדָה וְאֶשְׁר וְצַדְקָה וְמִשְׁפָט וְדָרְשָׁה וְהַיְטָבָה לִמְדָה וְלִמְדָה

Learn to do well seek judgment relieve the oppressed judge

H3925 H3190 H1875 H4941 H833 H2541 H8199

אֶלְמָתָה: רְבָוָת וְזַדְבָּת הַיְתָרָה:

the fatherless plead for the widow

H3490 H7378 H490

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 22:3 (Judgment): Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Micah 6:8 (Parallel theme): He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Isaiah 1:23 (Judgment): Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Proverbs 31:9 (Judgment): Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Zechariah 8:16 (Judgment): These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates:

Daniel 4:27 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.

Zephaniah 2:3 (Judgment): Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger.

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