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A PEOPLE SET APART

The laws set out in the Old Testament were God's way of showing people how to live differently – set apart from the oppression they had experienced in Egypt. Although many of the laws now seem odd and outdated, many were designed to address injustice and inequality and are just as radical now as they were then.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN NOW, FOR US TO LIVE LIVES THAT ARE SET APART FROM THE INJUSTICE OF THE WORLD?



YOU WILL NEED:

Bibles, pens, copies of the law grid (a printable version is provided on page 3), news stories that mention Christians



GET STARTED: Law sorting

LET'S LOOK AT THE OLD TESTAMENT LAWS.

Give everyone in the group a cut-up copy of the 'Law sorting' grid (to be found at the end of this document). Can they work out which of the laws are really found in the Bible and which are red herrings?

(Give people time to read and think about the laws.)

In fact, all of these laws are found in the Old Testament! They form part of the Mosaic law – the laws given to Moses to pass on to the Israelites after they escaped from slavery in Egypt.

Ask if anyone can name any other laws that they know are found in the early part of the Old Testament.

We often remember the laws in the Old Testament that now sound a little crazy. Because of that we can tend towards dismissing this part of the Bible, thinking that these laws are irrelevant for us today. But when we understand the point behind them and why it was important for God to give people such laws, we can discover a radical thread running through them that might be just as relevant for us today as it was thousands of years ago.

The laws were given to ensure that the Israelites reflected the character of God in their whole lives, not just in their rituals of worship. They were commands on how to reflect God's love for all people – for example through the way we welcome strangers, the way we look after the vulnerable, and the way that we use our money.

ACTIVITY: **Christians set apart?**

Find recent news articles that feature Christians. Let the group look at them and discuss them.

What is it about being a Christian that means these people are in the news? What are Christians usually in the news for? What do you think Christians should be known for? How should Christians be 'set apart'?



READ:

Ask different people to look up these verses and read the law to the group. Can they explain the law and its purpose?

- Exodus 21:2, Exodus 22:25-26, Deuteronomy 15:7, Deuteronomy 10:17-19, Deuteronomy 14:28-29, Leviticus 25:1-13

What is the common theme in all these laws?

They are designed to avoid extremes of wealth and poverty within the community, to prevent exploitation of people by others, to protect visitors and the vulnerable. These laws were all designed to make sure the Israelites didn't maintain any of the injustices that

they themselves had faced in Egypt. God wanted to use the Israelites to transform society, setting them on a path from exploitation to a community without injustice. In Deuteronomy 15 we see that, if the laws are kept, no one need live in poverty.

DISCUSS:

- The laws repeatedly mention widows, orphans and aliens: those who were most vulnerable to living in poverty or being discriminated against. Who are the widows, orphans and aliens of our world today?
- The laws aimed to stop extreme inequalities of wealth by creating systems, such as the jubilee, that would rebalance any injustice. The Israelites were called upon not to participate in the systems and structures that made people poor. What systems of our society should we choose to avoid as Christians?
- Deuteronomy shows us a right relationship between the rich and poor: farmers leave their surplus crops for the poor, rather than accumulate excess. Can you think of a modern equivalent? Today, the State collects taxes – money over and above that which we spend on our immediate needs – and uses this money to pay for services that benefit everybody – in effect redistributing it to those most in need.

PLEDGE:

Think of the way that you want to be set apart as a Christian, and try living this out for a week. Come back next week, ready to talk about how it went.

Find out more about the Christian Aid campaign for tax justice and take the latest action at christianaidcollective.org/take-action

PRAY:

Pray that we are part of God's continuing plan for the restoration of society, from a society of injustice and exploitation to one of justice and love. Pray for our leaders as they enact and develop laws, that they are laws that fight discrimination and poverty and do not fuel them.

If it works for your group, you could also continue the prayer-plait idea from the first session – so that by the end of the series everyone has prayer bookmarks throughout their Bible, or prayer reminders around their wrists.

1. You shall not see your neighbour's donkey or ox fallen on the road and ignore it; you shall help to lift it up.

4. Buzzards shall not be eaten, they are an abomination.

2. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, orphan and the widow.

5. Do not let your animals breed with a different kind, or sow your field with two different kinds of seeds.

3. You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers.

6. You may not tattoo any marks upon you.

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In order to save ink, this resource will print without the background colour.

More sessions from *The Justice Thread* series, and other resources, are available from christianaidcollective.org