

The Bottom Line: What God Requires of Us

Micah 6:8

June 6, 2021
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We begin a new summer series today entitled, *Bottom Lines of the Bible*. The Bible has lots of complexity and things that are hard to understand. Our series in Romans as one example. So much, that at times, we just want to say, *God, could you make it simple for us? You know, like the KISS principle—Keep It Simple, Stupid*. Well, this series is aimed at doing just that from keep-it-simple passages. Summary. Bottom line. Give it to me straight. Christianity for dummies, because let's be honest, we all qualify for that title at times.

Our first bottom line is a verse I learned in my childhood. Even in adulthood I bring it to mind as a simple guide for life and a guide for the kind of life that pleases God. There is a danger in it which I will get into later, so hang on.

We have not done much teaching from what is known as the minor prophets, these 12 smaller Old Testament books/prophecies. They are called minor because of their size, not their importance or depth.

Micah was written to Judah confronting the Jews of that day for their outward-only approach to God. They banked their relationship with God on their temple attendance and Levitical sacrifices. They thought they were good with God because they went through the motions of Old Testament worship. They checked the religious boxes. Micah calls them to task like Jesus did with the Pharisees centuries later when he said, *"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me"* (Matthew 15:8 ESV).

Check this out in chapter 6 of Micah. In verses 1-5 God says to Israel, *do you realize all that I have done for you?* He calls the mountains as witnesses for they were there when God brought Israel out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and defeated its enemies. God says, *how am I a weary burden to you?* Now comes the prophet's answer, speaking for the people.

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:6-7).

It's not easily noticed at first glance but there is an escalation of levels of sacrifice here. What shall I bring to God for worship? A year-old calf? Thousands of rams? Ten thousand rivers of oil? My firstborn? These end on a preposterous scale but that is the point. What does it take to please God? Sacrificial oil greater than the rivers of the world? Would that do it? Sacrificing my firstborn? Would that be enough? These are meant to set up the simplicity and sincerity of Micah 6:8.

Our approach to God often looks like this. We think, the more extraordinary the sacrifice, the happier God will be with me. How many people have promised God they would be a missionary if only God would: heal a loved one or provide a spouse or maybe just a girlfriend? *God, let's start there*. We think God's impressed with our attempts to manipulate him with our sacrifices. The reason is that we think he is like us. We are impressed with the outward show and spiritual posturing. Like Samuel who was impressed with the other sons

of Jesse, but God reminded him, "*Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Micah 6:8 is arguably the best and simplest answer to the mess we make of trying to impress God. It's so basic and straightforward we should wonder how we missed it all along.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Israel is confused. *What do you mean our religious ceremonies don't make you happy? What do you mean all our sacrifices aren't what you are looking for?*

The prophet reminds them, He has told you what is good and what is required. *Where?* Remember, we are in Micah, one of the later books of the Old Testament. God has already told Israel over and over what he requires. In the writings of Moses. The songs of David. The promises to the patriarchs. He has told you, over and over in Scripture.

What is good: Good to whom? Good to God. Good in God's eyes. Morally and spiritually good, spiritually wonderful and beautiful.

What the Lord requires: This is a statement of priority. What God deems most important. What is essential. Eugene Peterson translates this, "*But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women*" (Micah 6:8 MSG).

This begs a question, why should I care what God requires or wants? Of course, most of the world lives every day without any care about it at all. They often seem most interested in doing the opposite of what God requires. Romans 1 tells us why, because they fail to acknowledge God or give thanks to him in any way. The creation rejects its Creator. Humans rebel against God and experience the shattering consequences. We don't break the Ten Commandments; they break us.

Since God is Creator, Lord, and King of the cosmos, we are therefore in a relationship of obligation and necessity with him. It is his right to require and it is our duty to live submissive to that requirement.

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what is required: Three things. Each has a quality of character along with an action verb. *Do justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with your God.*

Surely the foundational requirement is the last one. "*Walk humbly with your God.*" This is the vertical requirement out of which the other two flow horizontally toward other people. Get the humble walk with God right and the doing justice, loving kindness will flow. But we will take them in the order they are listed.

Do Justice

I learned this verse in the KJV, so it's hard to not say, *do justly, love mercy.* Old, hard habit to break. "*Do justice.*" What is justice? Justice is an attribute of God rooted in his holiness and absolute glory.

- "*To do justly*" is to act with equity, fairness and deference to those who are in a weaker social position – the opposite of the violence, oppression, fraud, lying, and

injustice described in Micah 6:10-12. Thus "justice" is a comprehensive term for a way of life that finds its expression in the covenant of God." (Kaiser)¹

- *"In the Bible, justice means fulfilling mutual obligations in a manner consistent with God's moral law. Biblical justice creates the perfect human society."* (ESV Study Bible)²
- *"[Justice] insists on the rights of others."* (Allen)³

You may remember that the justice of God in Romans undergirds our own justification. God's absolute commitment to his own glorious holiness meant he must count our sins against us. Yet on the cross, Jesus completely paid the moral price our sins required. God's justice against sin was unleashed against Jesus instead of us. With God's justice satisfied by Christ, God is free to declare us innocent upholding his own status as God the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26). God's justice terrifies us in Romans 1 and assures us in Romans 3-11.

Have we heard a little about justice over this past year? Everyone is now interested in justice, demanding a just society, social justice is everywhere. This is of course, ironic as when our society does this, they are back on our turf. No more moral relativism, at least not with social justice. Moral outrage requires a moral standard. A transcendent "ought." A universal moral responsibility.

Can you deny there is a moral God and also hold up justice as a moral requirement? You can but not logically. Our secular society conveniently borrows Christian truths while denying the God of Christianity. Like the man standing on the branch while cutting that branch from the tree—he has nothing holding him up.

Friends, Justice is Bible language. It is a Christian word. Biblically understood, it is glorious and good. Don't let the world turn it into a bad word for you. Here in Micah, justice is a horizontal, personal deep concern for the needs and rights of others. This has been the hallmark of Christianity from the beginning. *"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world"* (James 1:27 ESV).

I think of that scene from *Ironman* where Miss Potts gives Tony Stark a gift of his original fusion reactor with this engraving, *"Proof that Tony Stark has a heart."* When we do horizontal justice and care deeply for the rights and needs of all people, especially the vulnerable and weak, it is proof that Christianity has a heart.

It's natural for people to stand up for their own rights. It is supernatural when we stand up for other people's rights, especially those who have nothing to offer us. That is what God did when he cared for us. He needs nothing. We have nothing to offer him. We are the Jew beaten up along the path. Yet, the gospel is proof that God has a heart. He is our faithful neighbor. The Good Samaritan who cares for us in our distress.

I was talking with some friends about this passage recently. One friend got passionate and said, *Micah 6:8 says, do justice. Do it! Don't just talk about it. I'm so sick of all the posturing and virtue signaling!* Why is he frustrated? Has there ever been a year of more people blustering about how important justice is and so little being actually done about it?

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Communicator's Commentary* (Word Books, 1992), 74.

² *ESV Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1315.

³ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 373.

I'm always amazed when the tax returns are made public of certain politicians who scream about justice and their return shows that in spite of the millions of dollars they magically earn, their charitable giving is like 1% or less. Apparently it's much easier to care about justice with other people's money.

Doing justice means much more than complaining about it on social media or marching about it or philosophizing on it. It means actually making a difference in other people's lives. We need more of that, amen? More doing, less posturing. What would DO justice look like in this coming year for you? Our church? I do believe this is the impulse behind much of our ministries in economically challenged parts of our community, the launching of the City Life Center, and many other initiatives. If you want to be part of any of those with personal involvement, go to the Welcome Desk for opportunities. What can we do to care about the rights and needs of others, especially the vulnerable? Doing justice is what pleases the Lord.

Love Kindness/Mercy/Hesed

This Hebrew word (*Hesed*) is common in the Old Testament and is difficult to translate into English. Typically, translations go with *Mercy. Kindness. Love. Steadfast love*. It is most commonly applied to God in how he relates to his people, with steadfast unchanging covenantal and unending kindness and mercy.

We all love mercy; we really do, particularly when are on the receiving end of it. But that is not what this means. It pleases God when we love mercy in that we are personally *giving* mercy. Giving undeserved kindness. If the kindness is deserved or earned, then it isn't kindness or mercy. That's a transaction. *You're nice to me, I'll be nice to you. You scratch my back, I scratch your back*. That's the world we live in.

We need both mercy and justice. Justice without mercy is a harsh society. It cries for justice while burning and looting. That's the cancel culture of today. Justice without kindness. Mercy without justice is a morally corrupt society. We are kind but immoral. Justice safeguards kindness. Kindness safeguards justice.

Christianity is rooted in God's undeserved non-transactional kindness to us. The overlap with justice is that kindness is especially powerful when it is applied to situations of human suffering or pain.

To that end I have a practical action step to share with you. Let me introduce you to Nate and Marcie Kloosterman and their great looking family. They are members of our church and a real encouragement to many of us. Their five-year-old son is the blond boy in front, Joseph.



The Nate and Marcie Kloosterman Family

A few years ago, Joseph was diagnosed with brain cancer, a heartbreaking diagnosis. Nate and Marcie have approached this in total faith and also pursued every medical option. Recently, the medical community told them there are no other options or treatments for Joseph. We know God can heal and we will continue to pray for that miracle. But we also must *love mercy* and our hearts are filled with mercy for the Kloostermans.

On behalf of the Lead Elders of Bethel Church, today I'm announcing the creation of a special fund within the benevolent ministry of our church. This fund is specifically for members of our church who have children who are in the medical category, "terminal." This fund will provide resources for the family to use as they deem best for their circumstances; perhaps a family experience similar to *Make a Wish* foundation, or medical bills, or whatever would comfort and bless them. Today, and for the entire month of June, all benevolent gifts to Bethel Church will go toward this fund to bless the Kloostermans and other future families. And as a special honor and legacy for little Joseph, we are naming this fund The Joseph Kloosterman Fund (or The Joseph Fund for short).

The Joseph Kloosterman Fund



Today is our normal monthly benevolent Sunday. We are going to take the benevolent offering now. To give to The Joseph Fund, you can do so on our online platform. Go to **bethelweb.org/give**. There is a drop down in the link for benevolence. You may also make a check out to Bethel Church and put in the memo, Benevolent Fund. Mail that to us or drop it in the boxes in the Commons. Thank you.

He has told you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires. Do justice. Love mercy.

Walk Humbly with Your God

"Walk" is shorthand for live your life. How? Humbly. Being humble is to regard myself and my life in light of who God is. To live humbly with God is to hold his opinion and pleasure as a first priority. Do you see the connection with this third requirement and the other two? God does justice. God loves mercy. God is essentially saying, *be like me*. God delights in

mercy. He loves justice. And he gives us the immense privilege through Jesus to walk or live our lives in relationship with him.

Friends, this is the highest and best life we can live. It is God-like. To delight in what he delights in. Our best life is precisely those moments we do justice, provide kindness, and live with a profound sense of being a child of the Most High God.

Bottom Line—Only the Gospel of Jesus Makes This Possible

John Newton calls this the most misunderstood passage in the Bible. So, don't miss this. You can do Micah 6:8 all day long and still be far from God. Without faith, all our attempts at justice and mercy merit nothing with God. I appreciate Alistair Begg's comment on why this passage is misunderstood,

"...because of how it is attempted without the gospel, because of how it may be proclaimed in place of the gospel, and because it needs to be understood that it is only possible by the gospel." (Begg)⁴

Micah itself holds this key. Just one chapter before it says, *"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days"* (Micah 5:2).

Who is that? That is the Messiah. That's Christmas. Bethlehem. Jesus. If doing Micah 6:8 is all we needed, there would be no need for a messianic birth in Bethlehem. In this way, Micah 6:8 not only shows us how to live as a Christian, but why we need Christ in the first place. Micah 6:8 doesn't save us, but it does condemn us, for who can fulfill these requirements perfectly? If you are not a Christian, let this bottom line of the Bible lead you to give up trying to do what God requires on your own. Trust in Jesus as your Savior. He perfectly lived Micah 6:8 and died for us and our sin.

If you are a Christian, how are we supposed to live? What pleases God? Faith in Jesus, doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God.

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⁴ Alistair Begg, "What God Requires," truthforlife.org, June 7, 2020, <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/what-god-requires/>.