

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Laws Against Lawlessness

*Learn to do well; seek justice,
relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless,
plead for the widow.*¹ — Isaiah 1:17

Where is the God of justice?” asked the prophet Malachi.² Not that the prophet didn’t know. Oppression and injustice deny God. He Whose very holy Name³ is Justice is most evident when we live it among ourselves. Accordingly, God commands us — the human race — to stand up for Him on the Earth where He’s put us to establish laws and fight for Him against injustice.

This is a negative Commandment, a prohibition.⁴ God hates injustice; so should all of us. Man is Divinely obligated to act against it, as a matter of Universal law.⁵

How do we oppose injustice? By setting up a system of laws, police and courts against it, and by refusing to passively accept it as a fixture of social life. Anarchy is not the path of justice; people must live by civic laws.⁶

Note that Moses established Israel’s system of courts, police and judges before the people ever even got to Sinai.⁷

Let justice rise up as the waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. — *Amos 5:24*⁸

Man has no right to leave all judgment up to Heaven. “The Judge of all the world”⁹ judges each man and woman individually, but “no man is an island, entire of itself.”¹⁰ God created Israel as a unique instrument to promote “charity and judgment” in the world,¹¹ but the Torah doesn’t just speak about Jews to Jews. Rather, “all men are responsible for one another.”¹²

Human beings are social beings. Everyone belongs to someone, to some society, nation-state or culture. So God also judges people collectively, in our respective nations and our generations.¹³

If there is no justice, there is no peace. — *R. Bachya ben Asher*¹⁴

Injustice is a negation of religion.¹⁵ Because the problem is a social one, this Third Universal Commandment addresses people both as individuals and on the collective level. God requires each of us to pursue justice in his everyday relations with other creatures, to act in a just and upright manner personally.¹⁶

The Hebrew Revolution’s most basic, general Rule of conduct is the Golden Rule: “what is hateful to you, do not do unto another.”¹⁷ To fail to act when the time comes to act, to take a decent public stand against injustice, is both hateful and a crime in the Noahide law. In fact, it carries a possible capital penalty.¹⁸ Because the God of justice also commands men to pursue justice collectively, as social beings — as responsible members of society.¹⁹

Mystics associate this Commandment with the dark brown or deepest red of the rainbow — that is, with the initial band of color, the foundation. In other words, it’s seen as the point of departure or the underpinning for the other colors and Commandments. In a sense, this is the reality underlying the whole structure.²⁰

Oppression and injustice deny God. Law and order is fundamental to the stability that makes civilization possible.

Laws must be just. Order must not be oppressive. At a minimum, every nation is Divinely obligated to establish effective systems and institutions to justly enforce the terms of the Universal Commandments.²¹ They must render decisions founded upon the