

I recently viewed an online course by Kristi McLelland called Jesus and Women.

In the course there was frequent mention of two Hebrew words, Mishpat and Tzedakah.

Mispat is most often translated as justice. Tzedakah is most often translated righteousness.

But as is the case with most Hebrew words the English translated word falls short of conveying the total original intent of the word.

To understand these words one needs to remove our Western glasses and don a pair of Middle Eastern glasses.

In our Western way of thinking we think Right or Wrong, Guilty or Innocent.

In the Middle Eastern way of thinking it is Honor or Shame, or we might substitute –Those worthy of honor and those who are not.

Honor comes from several sectors like:

- your family,
- your social relationships,
- your hospitality.

If you are lacking in any of these or others you would have less honor and more shame. Those with the highest amount of shame are the outcasts, sinners, and the poor.

**MISHPAT** Or "justice," serves a special function in the way God acts.

*Mishpat* deals with wrongdoing, but it is also concerned about equal rights for all – rich and poor, male and female, foreigner and native-born.

At its core, *mishpat* isn't so much a question of innocence and guilt as much as honor and shame.

To bring justice into the world, God exalts the humble by raising them to honor and out of their shame.

**TZEDAKAH** or righteousness when placed within the realm of relationships, prompts us to make things right through generosity.

In the first-century world, giving to the poor was seen as an act of righteousness. It was an act of reaching down to the shamed and raising them in Honor.

By not sharing generously, one violates the very justice (Mishpat) that God commands of us.

Mishpat and Tzedakah are not options in God's eyes.

But there is a fake tzedakah or righteousness, and that is to pretend to be righteous but internally be greedy and self-serving. Jesus accused some of the Pharisees of this kind of tzedakah. Simon the Pharisee comes immediately to mind.

Matthew 6:1-4 states:

*“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

*“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.*

*But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Giving our offerings at our services can be understood as an act of righteousness and truly it can be, if it is given with a whole heart and not of necessity or to be seen by others.

But that is not all of the righteous acts that we are to be involve with. We have a number of avenues within our congregation to practice tzedakah – the lifting up of people.

We have those in our community that need our help, our friendship and even our resources. If we have those resources and are willing to share them, we are practicing mishpat (justice) and tzedakah (righteousness).

May God Bless you as you practice mishpat and tzedakah