

Civics: A Christian Worldview.
Justice or Legalism? (20-25 minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY

Prep

- Put students in pairs/groups.
- Print this page and a copy of Page 2 for each student.

Instructions

1. This activity helps students distinguish between justice (fairness, protection of the innocent, proportional punishment) and legalism (blind enforcement of rules regardless of fairness, intent, or moral rightness). Students must evaluate each real-life style scenario and decide whether it reflects JUSTICE or LEGALISM.
2. Hand out Page 2 to students.
3. Read the instructions aloud with the students. (Get a volunteer if possible!)
4. Give students 10 minutes to complete the scenarios. (Running short on time? Do fewer of them!)
5. When individual students finish, they can discuss in pairs/groups.
6. Discuss as a class. (Take turns calling on different pairs/groups!)

Answer Key to Scenarios

1. LEGALISM
2. JUSTICE
3. LEGALISM
4. JUSTICE
5. LEGALISM
6. LEGALISM
7. JUSTICE
8. LEGALISM
9. LEGALISM
10. JUSTICE

Wrap-Up Questions

- Why is blindly following laws sometimes dangerous?
- What role do juries play in protecting justice?
- Why should intent and circumstances matter when judging cases?
- What qualities should judges and jurors have to promote justice?
- The Bible says in Romans 13:3, “For rulers are not a **terror** to good works, but to the **evil**” (meaning *harm*). What does this verse have to do with the cases we looked at today?

Civics: A Christian Worldview. Justice or Legalism?

Individually, read each scenario and write JUSTICE or LEGALISM. Be prepared to explain your reasoning! After you're finish individually, get with your team/group and discuss them your answers together.

1. A high school enforces a “zero tolerance” weapons policy and suspends a 12-year-old student for bringing a small camping utensil knife in his backpack after he forgot it from a family camping trip. _____
2. A North Carolina judge dismisses charges against a father who exceeded the speed limit while rushing his unconscious child to the emergency room. _____
3. In 1850, under the federal Fugitive Slave Act, a U. S. commissioner orders a runaway slave returned to his owner, even though the slave clearly escaped severe abuse. The commissioner states he must enforce the law as written. _____
4. A federal court overturns a wrongful conviction after DNA evidence proves a man did not commit the crime, even though he has already served 15 years in prison. _____
5. A city government passes an ordinance fining homeowners \$500 per day if their grass exceeds 10 inches in height, and fines a hospitalized elderly man who could not maintain his lawn while recovering from surgery. _____
6. In 1942, under Executive Order 9066, government officials force Japanese-American citizens into internment camps, even though there is no evidence they committed any crimes. _____
7. A judge gives probation instead of jail to a teenager who stole food because his family had no money and he showed genuine remorse. _____
8. A public school automatically suspends a student for five days for accidentally leaving a plastic toy soldier in his desk, because the rule bans all “weapon replicas.” _____
9. A Pennsylvania woman with a legal concealed carry permit, accidentally drove into New Jersey—where her permit was not valid. She told an officer she had the gun and was arrested. _____
10. A jury refuses to convict a defendant under a law criminalizing peaceful public criticism of government officials. _____

