

Biblical Reflection

by Pax Tan

"You Gotta Do It, Do It ..."

What is Justice?

The word Justice (Righteousness) or Just (Righteous) occurs more than 1300 times in the Bible. It is usually associated with *"doing what is just or right"*. It has to do with judgment, of the judiciary, functions of the government, of law and regulations. Therefore, justice has to do with our rights and duties in a lawful society where there are norms and rules that governs us. So, where there is conformity to the norms, then it is just and justice prevails, whereas actions that are not in conformity to the norms or rules are unjust or injustice has occurred.

God and Justice

Justice is a very important word in the Bible. It is more than a concept. The people of the Old Testament knew that justice has to do with God. The writers of the Bible conveyed the message that God is Just and Righteous and that he sets the standards and rules by which all human behaviour are to be measured and judged. (Deut 32:4; Neh 9:13, 14, 33; Dan 4:37; Isa 30:18; Jer 9:24)

God is Just, it is his very nature, he cannot pervert justice, yet he serves justice and calls us to work with him in carrying out justice. (Job 8:3, 9:19, 40:8; Isa 42:1, 3; Amos 5:24; Mic 6:8; Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42; Heb 11:33) Since God has revealed the laws and norms of interaction in society, he thus defines what is just and what constitutes justice for our living together.

Doing Justice in Society

Justice then is doing what is just and right as revealed by God in the Scriptures. It calls for obedience that must be translated into works and action unto others. It is interpersonal and with your neighbour. You cannot have justice in a vacuum, it is relational. To live justly, you need to do just things, to think justly, to look for the just norms to measure against, lest unjust norms become the default. Laws of the land can be passed by the legislatives, but it may not conform to God's law and norm.

For example, laws that incarcerate persons indefinitely without due



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process would be unjust when measured against the legal justice system in the Old Testament where judges and rules of evidence were called for, to provide a hearing so that legal justice may be carried out.

Social Justice

As with individuals in society, the Bible also spells out laws for a just community to function. Judges are to be fair, show no partiality and accept no bribes (Deut 16:18-20). Even the king is subject to the laws (Deut 17:18-20). Spiritual disciplines like fasting, prayer are not only personal, but must be translated into actions of being fair and caring to others. *“Is this not the kind fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”* (Isa 58:6, 7).

“This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” (Jer 22:3). So structures of a social system are to be set up so that the needs of the poor, oppressed and marginalized can be looked into and maintained in accordance with the justice and righteousness of God. It is both an individual and a community's responsibility to carry out the justice.

Maintaining Justice

The call to do justice and to do what is right is as clear as daylight, but the dark clouds of unjust acts and the storms of injustice are prevalent and present; frightening and threatening. To speak up and to stand up against injustice is never easy, especially when the prevailing environment does not conform to acts of justice and impartiality. To be honest in business practices is just, so when dishonesty is tolerated or done then it is unjust. Impartial courts are just, but when judgments are prejudiced and selective, it is unjust. Where corruption is practised and treated as a norm, injustice reigns. Discrimination, racism, selective prosecution and oppression of the poor and weak are also unjust. And such are circumstances in which many of us live in. Yet, the will and words of God are written for us to execute in love and righteousness.

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Reprove the ruthless. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” (Isa 1:17)

The above verbs in the injunction of Yahweh to the Israelites who were manifesting injustices like oppression of the poor, insecurity, violence, homicide, greed, discrimination of foreigners, corrupt governments, bribery, graft, corrupt judges, ineffective and incompetent enforcement, immorality, kleptocracy and abandoned religious leaders; can give us some encouragement and pointers to persevere in our actions to do and maintain justice.

Learn to do right — acquire knowledge and skill, from others, study cases. Cooperate, with others who are doing it.

Seek justice — desire to pursue, do your homework, be prepared for the long haul, to achieve the objective, be ready to sought help, even beg, to petition, and pray hard.

Defend the oppressed — to protect, safeguard, provide resources — legal, custodial, residential, authorities, NGOs, ready to resist attack.

Reprove (Rebuke) the Oppressor — there is room to fight back morally, legally; call the person out, show who is in the wrong or unjust.

Take up... — be open to cases, and situations to help and intervene, a spirit of walking the extra mile, to listen to the cries and needs

Plead... — can appeal to emotions, use of social media, look for avenues to proclaim, present and argue the case

Words and Deeds

You are not alone, be on God's side, He is a God of justice. There are others who share our convictions, and will do and march with us as we with them. Doing Justice and Working Righteousness is a very spiritual thing.

“But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will be proved holy by his righteous acts.” (Isa 5:16). ■