

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Do Justice, Love Mercy

Exploring God's concept
of justice in today's world

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Preface

There used to be a show on NBC called *To Catch a Predator*. Dateline NBC, local law enforcement, and an organization called Perverted Justice, worked together to bring this program to life. The show featured a series of sting operations aimed at Internet predators trolling for young children. Adult decoys, posing as young teens, would enter online chat rooms and lure predators into dialogue—which I could never repeat in a book like this—and then an eventual meeting at “their house.”

The predator would arrive at the house—frequently bring booze, drugs, and other things which I could never mention in a book like this. They let themselves in and followed the voice of the “teen” they expected to...uh...“interact” with. The decoy would tell them to wait in the kitchen while he or she changed into other clothes. “I’ll be right down,” called the decoy.

The impatient predator would move towards the door out of the kitchen to the staircase leading up to their prey’s bedroom—not knowing the last phrase they uttered was the signal. Just before the arrived at the doorway someone unexpected popped up.

Chris Hansen—host of Dateline.

“Where are you going?” Chris asked. The predator, at a complete loss, stammered. Awkwardness radiated off the television screen. This was especially the case in the episode where the predator has already disrobed himself. “Why don’t you put your clothes back on and have a seat over there,” suggested Chris. The bewildered predator wandered to a kitchen stool and took a seat. Any confidence the attacker may have had evaporated leaving behind a trembling coward consumed with shame.

Chris Hansen, in even tones, would then ask the obvious question, “What are you doing here? Sometimes the predator would confess and break down—more often they would try and weasel out of reality.

“I was just coming to make sure they were OK,” lies the perp looking down at their fidgeting hands. The weak lie is only augmented by mass quantity of alcohol the predator brought with them. The awkwardness ratchets up a few notches as the host of the show makes his next move.

“That’s not what you said,” says Chris, extracting a transcript of the sick online conversation the man—usually in his 40s—had with someone they thought wasn’t even old enough to drive yet. Chris then reads a few choice selections while the abuser shakes, weeps, and eventually waves off the camera and makes a break for the door.

Game on.

A S.W.A.T. team lurks outside awaiting the arrival of the criminal. One of the team members, usually lurking in the shrubs, is dressed in full camouflage. As the bewildered pervert staggers his way out of the house—still reeling from the shock of having his worst secret brought to light in national television—the man in the shrubbery leaps out and slams him down on the cold pavement.

Cuffs, rights, and jail.

What an awesome job to confront the face of evil, call it out, and then give it a clothesline, dropkick, or punch in the face. To bind it and haul it away to its everlasting shame. And the audience cheers. Yes! Justice has been served—right? Even if it’s a little bit “perverted?”

And really, who cares?

Justice doesn’t have to be nice. Justice doesn’t have anything to do with being nice. The only warm fuzziest that should be experienced are the ones belonging to the television audience reveling in another waste of humanity being dumped into a darkened cell—am I right?

But what if there’s more to justice than eliminating degenerates?

What if there’s more to this concept of justice in Scripture than courts and punishment?

What if our society’s concept of justice is as perverted as the criminals it catches?

God’s idea of justice is so much bigger than crime and punishment. In this book I hope to show you from scripture, and experience, that justice is not only a prevalent theme within the pages of God’s Word—but also a source of good news for everyone.



*Dealing with the idea that we all
have a sense of right and wrong*

Chapter One

A Sense of Justice

Imagine yourself making the weekly pilgrimage to the grocery store. Upon loading your cart with the usual staples such as cheese, bread, flour, and chocolate, you wheel yourself in line—patiently waiting for the cashier to check out the small army waiting ahead of you. As your mind begins to wander from boredom you are snapped back into reality by the sound of a slap and the scream of a child.

From what you can deduce, the little girl in line ahead of you has asked for a package of gum one too many times for the frazzled mother to handle. Instead of instructing her to put the gum back, the lady backhanded her daughter, sending her crashing down onto the linoleum floor—blood trickling from her mouth.

How do you feel?

Unless you are a sociopath, my guess is you feel a combination of outrage, fear, and pity that may drive you to share your own special form of communication with the rage-a-holic mother that just violently abused her daughter in a public place. Hopefully security reaches her before you, or any of the other horrified patrons do.

But why do we feel this way?

When someone hurts an innocent, or takes your seat when you were up getting seconds, or cuts in line, or gives an award to someone you know didn't deserve it, or shoots up a mall, or crashes a plane into a building—something inside our soul lurches and screams “That’s wrong!”

Where does that come from? Certainly social norms and culture play important roles, but even peeling the layers of rules, which support principles, we discover basic convictions about the world that most people groups share



ADVENTIST VOICES PAST AND PRESENT

- We wish here to appeal to the sense of justice and honor of our people.
~ James White, *An Earnest Appeal*, Page 22
 - The duties of justice between man and the spirit of universal brotherhood, are manifest dictates of the human constitution; and when man violates these principles, he so far forth ceases to be human and approaches the character of spirits and beasts of prey ~ Uriah Smith, ARSH, July 22, 1858
Mutual Forbearance
 - While there are many who do justice in different ways in and around our church, doing justice has been something of a blind spot in much of our theology, despite being an essential focus of the Bible itself and having a much larger place in the practice of early Adventists. ~ Nathan Brown¹
-

in common—including concepts of right and wrong.² When a basic conviction about how the world works is violated we react with anger or sadness.

A striking example comes from Seattle during Superbowl XLIX when, after a miraculous comeback, the Seahawks made one of the NFL's most notoriously awful calls in sports history. After a storybook season, they were now at the one-yard line, with three downs left—scoring a touchdown would seal them as back-to-back Superbowl champions.

Instead of handing the ball off, at least a couple times, to their superstar running back Marshawn Lynch, a safe, and almost guaranteed, play—they opted to throw. The pass was intercepted, the opposing team won, and all of WA, and football fans all over the world, were left in shock.

That's not the way that was supposed to happen. The storybook season had a band ending—just like novels that leave you hanging, or those movies that run out of steam and just randomly end without tying up the loose ends.

Some people see these types of events and use them as fuel for arguments against the existence of God. Known as **theodicy**, the question of God's justice, people wonder how a good God could allow such awful events to take place. It's not a new issue, even King David the Psalmist had questions concerning God's justice:

How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?

Is the enemy to revile your name forever?³

¹ <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2014/12/06/ear-nathan-brown-focuses-justice>

² Stassen, Glen Harold, and David P. Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

³ Psalm 74v10



INSPIRED THOUGHTS

- Those who in harmony with God, and through faith in him, receive strength to resist wrong, and stand in defense of the right, will always have severe conflicts, and will frequently have to stand almost alone. But precious victories will be theirs while they make God their dependence. His grace will be their strength. Their moral sense will be keen, clear, and sensitive. Their moral powers will be equal to withstand wrong influences - EGW, RH, July, 29 1873
- The Bible should be the child's first textbook...from the beautiful lessons of His Word they are to gain knowledge of His character. Through the inculcation of its principles, they are to learn to do justice and judgment - EGW, Counsels to Teachers and Students, 108, 109
- With sanctified judgment our brethren in responsibility must discern between good and evil, and be faithful to their God-given trust. - EGW, RH, October 26th, 1905

How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?⁴

O Lord, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?⁵

Maybe you have prayed similar prayers.

However, the question has arisen with some—if there is no good God then how is it possible to identify evil? When we say something is wrong we are appealing to an unnamed good somewhere—where does that come from and what is it? If anything, our recognition of evil may be an evidence for God and the idea of justice.

In *The Reason for God*, Timothy Keller comments on C.S. Lewis' realization that his ability to identify evil actually points to a good God. He writes”

Lewis recognized that modern objections to God are based on a sense of fair play and justice. People, we believe, ought not to suffer, be excluded, die or hunger or oppression. But, the evolutionary mechanism of natural selection depends on death,

⁴ Psalm 82v2

⁵ Psalm 94v3



RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst. ~ Aristotle
 - Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable...every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals. ~ Martin Luther King Jr.
-

destruction, and violence of the string against the week—these things are all perfectly natural ...

The nonbeliever in God doesn't have a good basis for being outraged at injustice... If you are sure that this natural world is unjust and filled with evil, you are assuming the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which to make your judgment.⁶

Furthermore our recoil against injustice is something infused inside our souls from the moment evil entered the world.

Back in Genesis 3, when humanity stepped outside of God's plan, and tried to become gods on their own (see 3v1-7) a curse entered the world that severed the relationship between man and God, man and humanity, and man with nature. Instead of God simply declaring the state of affairs to be the new normal—He planted something within the heart of humans everywhere.

Speaking to the now cursed serpent, God declares:

I will put *enmity* between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."⁷

That little word refers to our not being okay with things not being okay. While death is a fact of life, occurring everyday in a myriad of ways, for countless millennia, we remain uncomfortable and unconverted to its presence. We expect something else—and that something else is God's promise to "make all things new" (Rev. 21v5).

⁶ Keller, Timothy J. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*. New York: Dutton, 2008.
⁷ Genesis 3v15



OTHER VOICES

- My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. ~ CS Lewis
- I hope to leave my children a sense of empathy and pity and a will to right social wrongs ~ Anita Roddick
- Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it.” ~ Augustine of Hippo

The act of restoring the world is how the Bible defines “justice.” The Greek word is *dikaisune* and it translates to “righteousness”, or what is right and good. The word is used mostly frequently to refer to our right standing with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3v21-22). It is also occasionally used in reference to providing for the needy (2 Corinthians 9v9-10) and practicing good deeds/fair treatment of others (1 John 3v10). You might summarize the New Testament’s usage as referring to God restoring His relationship with man, and man’s relationship with mankind.

The Hebrew word is *tzedek* which translates as “justice;” but they way it is used links it closely with charity for those in need and even equated with elevating the oppressed. For example, God tells His people:

You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.⁸

Evil creates a lopsided distribution of power—God’s people are to look out for those who become trampled underfoot by those who abuse their advantages.

Unfortunately, God’s people sometimes forget this role and we need some reminding. The prophet Jeremiah spoke against God’s people at a time where they had become “senseless” and insensitive to the needs of those around them: ...they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of evil; they

⁸Deuteronomy 16v19-20

judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy.⁹

We are called to elevate humanity wherever we can.

Closely linked with justice is the word “peace” which in Greek is “erene” and in Hebrew is “shalom.” The prophet Isaiah wrote:

And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.¹⁰

While most of us tend to limit our definition of peace as “silence” (as in “peace and quiet,” or “forever hold your peace”) or “death” (“rest in peace”) the word is much more than silence and death. After all when we refer to Jesus as the “Prince of Peace” it would be weird if it meant the Prince of Silence and horrifying if it meant Prince of Death. No, what shalom refers to is everything being in its proper place—which us hasn’t been since sin entered the world. Christ’s mission, and subsequently our mission if we follow Him, is restoring a world in pieces—or “missing peaces.”

Perhaps our calling, and our goal when it comes to the subject of justice, is most succinctly articulated by another prophet named Micah

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?¹¹

May we all strive to fulfill these words.

9 Jeremiah 5v28

10 Isaiah 32:17

11 Micah 6:8



A Sense of Justice

Personal

1. Share a time when you personally experience a sense of injustice? What did you do with that feeling?
2. How have you typically responded to the evils of the world (i.e. natural disasters, wars, tragedies, etc)?
3. How do you feel about making an argument for the existence of God by using the presence of evil?
4. In discussing the concept of “sin” with people unfamiliar with the term, how might a discussion of “shalom” (peace) create more dialogue? How can we frame injustice as a disturbing of the peace?
5. Where and when did you receive your ideas of justice and injustice?

Scriptural

1. Explore 1 Corinthians 13v1-10.
 - a. In this letter Paul states that it is his third time speaking to this wayward church—and he has witnesses. What does this say about how we should approach justice in terms of confronting evil?
 - b. How do you think prayer affects someone’s sense of justice? (see v. 7)



BIBLE STUDY

- c. What do you think Paul means about God not being “weak” but “strong” in dealing with the Corinthian church? (vs. 1-4).

2. Look at Matthew 23v23 and Luke 11v42.
 - a. How is it possible for someone to practice religion and neglect justice?

 - b. Compare these verses with Amos 5v18-24. How are they different? How are they similar?

 - c. What are a few lessons from Israel’s history that challenge our modern expressions of faith?

3. Ellen White makes the following statement, “Strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service.”¹² Compare this statement with Jesus’ experience of being tempted, and His response, in Matthew 4v10; and His teaching in Matthew 6v24.
 - a. Do you feel Ellen’s statement fits with Jesus’?

 - b. How does service increase our capacity to sense right from wrong?

 - c. How can someone know if they are serving the right “master?”

¹²The Acts of the Apostles, 105



Practical

1. List three ways, which you are practicing justice right now:

a.

b.

c.

2. List three ways in which people can dull their sense of justice:

a.

b.

c.



3. List three ways how people can increase their sense of justice:

a.

b.

c.

4. Write a biblical definition of justice in your own words: