

A Biblical Definition of Justice (with Scripture)

We frequently hear phrases such as “social justice” or “economic justice” or “criminal justice” but when was the last time you heard someone assert a need for Biblical justice? God’s Word to us, in the Bible, contains repeated commands to “do justice.” Those who seek to “be the light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed” are embodying the Biblical imperative to “do justice.”

At Colonial, we seek to “do justice” not from a worldly understanding of justice but rather, as God understands it. And that understanding begins with the *imago dei*, i.e., the knowledge that **all people** are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Because He made **all of us** in His image, every human life is sacred and every human being has God-given dignity. Every person has a worth bestowed upon them by God. Next, God himself is the definition of justice (Isaiah 30:18). All of God’s ways are perfect and just (Deuteronomy 32:4). The fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God provides us with an understanding of what is right, just, and equitable – every good path (Proverbs 2:5, 9).

Therefore, because all people are created in the image of God, and because God is a God of justice, Biblical justice happens when God’s standards for fairness and equity are met, as most clearly seen in three specific ways:

T *Treatment of disadvantaged people:* widows, orphans, the poor and oppressed, and the foreigners living in the land

- Luke 4:18-19
- Matthew 25:34-36
- Ex. 22:21, 23:9, Lev. 19:34, Dt. 10:19, 1:29 (the treatment of foreigners in the land)
- Proverbs 31:8-9
- Lev. 19:9-10 (leave the leftovers from gleaning in your field for the poor and alien)

I *Integrity in business dealings:* ethics in the marketplace; not cheating or stealing from the poor, orphans, widows and immigrants, the “quartet of the vulnerable.”

- Lev. 19:36, Deut. 25:13-16, Amos 8:4-6 (use honest standards when measuring weights, lengths, or quantity)
- Hosea 5:10, Proverbs 23:10-11, Deut. 19:14 (moving boundary lines to steal property)

E *Equity* (fairness and impartiality) in all spheres of society:* giving people what they are due, whether punishment, protection, or care.

- Isaiah 11:4 *With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.*

- 2 Samuel 8:15 *And David reigned over all of Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people.*
- Lev. 19:15 *Do not pervert justice: do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.*
- Deut. 1:17 (same idea as Lev. 19:15)
- James 2:4 (warnings against showing favoritism to the wealthy)
- Proverbs 24:23 (to show partiality in judging is not good...)
- Luke 19:1-8 (Zacchaeus wants to pay back all that he cheated people out of, with massive interest)
- Exodus 22:4-14 (rules for making restitution if you cause someone harm, whether intentional or not)

*Note: We use the term equity in the Biblical sense, which means all people should be given the same level of respect and consideration in the basic spheres of life, e.g., courts of law, education, health care, job opportunities, housing opportunities, police practices. We seek to address the disadvantages many of our brothers and sisters face due to the after-effects of policies put in place in previous generations (e.g. red-lining, the GI Bill not being available to soldiers of color following WWII, segregated schools, etc.), and we seek ways to restore that which was lost, stolen, or destroyed, as far as it is in our power to do so. What we do NOT mean by equity is the notion that all people should receive the same wage for different levels of work or that people should not be held accountable for poor decisions which have adversely affected their lives.

One of the teachings from Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) is that if we neglect the hard work of doing justice – if we neglect the hungry, the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned, the oppressed and disadvantaged of every kind – then we are failing to live justly and righteously. Colonial's mission to be the light of Christ – to generously love our neighbors as ourselves – puts us on the path of Biblical justice.

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