

Love-Driven Justice: *Part One*

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Love-Driven Justice* by Bishop Matt Whitehead
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Recovering a Biblical Vision of Justice

This is the first study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part two](#), [part three](#) and [part four](#).

Begin with prayer.

A simple scan through the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible will reveal the use of the word justice 130 times. The highest number of instances is found in the writings of Isaiah the prophet with 30 mentions of justice. His words can be difficult to read, but God's heart can be clearly discerned.

Isaiah 59:1-15 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. (2) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (3) For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things. (4) No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. (5) They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched. (6) Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. (7) Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts of violence mark their ways. (8) The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks along them will know peace. (9) So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. (10) Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead. (11) We all growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away. (12) For our

offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: (13) rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, inciting revolt and oppression, uttering lies our hearts have conceived. (14) So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. (15) Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

Isaiah uses many descriptive words to describe the people of Israel due to their lack of justice and righteousness. List some of them here:

Let's hear from Bishop Matt Whitehead:

Justice is a Bible Word.

Justice is a pervasive biblical theme that is often paired with righteousness. The Old Testament prophets cry out on behalf of a just and righteous God who demands justice and righteousness in His people. The Hebrew word for justice, *mishpat*, has in its root the concepts of fairness and equity for all, particularly the disadvantaged. So, when judges exercise justice, they don't take bribes or treat the rich better than they treat the poor. The Hebrew word for righteousness, *tzadeqah*, means living in a right relationship, treating everyone with fairness, generosity, and equity. In his book "Generous Justice," Tim Keller calls *tzadeqah* (righteousness) "primary justice." It is "behavior, that if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice (*mishpat*)

unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else."

Jesus' primary objective was not to establish a better society and thereby to accomplish deeper spirituality. He brought *heaven* to earth, thereby releasing deliverance, freedom, salvation, holiness, justice, and true righteousness. As His disciples, Jesus calls us to do the same. Our spiritual forefathers, John and Charles Wesley, proved that holiness contained the power that transformed 18th century England as converted people radically benefited the world around them.

Describe in your own words, what fairness and equity mean to you.

Why do you think justice is so important to God?

Is the idea that justice is a Bible word – and so near to the heart of God – new to you?

How does this definition change, enhance or clarify any thoughts you've had concerning holiness?

Biblical Justice vs. Social Justice

You might equate *biblical justice* with current *social justice* movements. Has that been your experience? Bishop Matt offers this comparison:

Christine Erickson, the director of the OneLess ministry for children at risk, [notes](#), “In contrast to social justice, which focuses on a temporal view of addressing injustices in society, biblical justice starts with the eternal in mind. It starts by seeing people as God sees them — recognizing that we are all created

in the image of God. And it is incumbent upon Christ-followers to pursue physical and spiritual freedom for the oppressed so others can also become what God created them to be. If we have experienced freedom, how can we not pursue freedom on behalf of others?”

Honestly consider for a moment the starting point of biblical justice as described by Christine Erickson – that it begins with the eternal in mind. Do people see others as equals? Why or why not? What is at work in biases we have against others?

Erickson continues that “it is incumbent upon Christ-followers to pursue physical and spiritual freedom for the oppressed...” Do most Christians tend to pursue righteousness for others or wait for them to come and ask? Why?

What might it take to become a people that pursue justice for those who simply cannot find their way to freedom for whatever reason(s), physical or spiritual?

Evangelism with Compassionate Action.

We’ll conclude this first part of four in this series with a look into various passages of Scripture. First, read this final segment from Bishop Matt, then read the Scriptures. For each one, write down any observations that jump out of the verse to you (key words, phrases, things that touch your heart) and then consider how they apply to our lives today.

Biblical, *Love-Driven Justice* is the conjoining of evangelism and compassionate action. They are not mutually exclusive. As God moves toward us in compassion and mercy, we are transformed by His love and then find ourselves driven toward those on the margins of society. Jesus got up-close-and-personal with the marginalized, and there He demonstrated His grace, love, and mercy. In His going, Jesus preached the good news to all. He surprised many with His inclusion of the outcast, equitable treatment of the lowest and least, welcoming strangers, and embracing the “unclean.” To love from a distance is not in keeping

with the character of Jesus. *Love-Driven Justice* is centered in Christlikeness and His clear example in the Scriptures. For us, His disciples, the implication is clear: we should mirror Christ’s method and message in our world today.

The Scriptures are full of references to God’s preference for the poor and God’s heart for justice and righteousness. There’s not enough space to list every reference but look at this sampling from God’s Word:

As to Foreigners:

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33–34)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to the Weak, Fatherless, Poor, Oppressed:

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. (Psalm 82:3)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Our Obligation to Fairness and Equitable Treatment of Others:

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:9)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Defending the Oppressed:

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

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Our Commitment to Be Merciful and Compassionate:

This is what the Lord Almighty said: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.” (Zechariah 7:9–10)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Our Call to Mirror God's Holiness, Righteousness and Justice:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?

As to Religion That Is Acceptable to the Father:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

Observations:

How can this be applied to our lives today? What is God asking of us?