

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for January 17: Wrestling with injustice

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Injustice remains one of humankind's terrible maladies. Injustice happens not only in courts of law but in everyday life as people are denied fairness. God demands all people be treated fairly. God is displeased when any person is denied fairness in the marketplace, school, family, civil or criminal system, workplace or society at large. Prophets sounded God's displeasure with unfair treatment (Isaiah 1:10-17; Amos 5:7-27).

The presence of injustice (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17)

Qoheleth feels distress as he observes wickedness (unfair and uncaring practices) where people should expect fairness and care. The places of judgment related to more than the court system; they included the structures of society that were expected to produce fairness but were leading to oppression.

Problematically, the Teacher found this same wickedness operated in the places of righteousness as well as the larger society. The religious sector that was expected to follow the ways of God produced injustice, violence, lawlessness and oppression. The Teacher recognized the wrongness of this condition.

The Teacher contemplated the oppression and injustice that reigned in both society and in the religious structures. He exclaimed to himself God's displeasure at injustice and oppression (v. 17). God's teaching on justice included provision for all. God taught that his people who possessed the

means of production should share with those who did not. God's people were to leave grain standing and grapes unharvested so the poor could reap them (Leviticus 19:9). To deny any person "enough" is disobedience to God (Ephesians 4:28).

God judges both the secular society and the religious structures that produce injustice and oppression. Any person falling short of God's expectation of justice stands under God's judgment. A time exists for every activity; God expects these activities to include justice.

How should Christians relate to evidences of injustice, unfairness and lack of care for the poor in your community?

The power of injustice (Ecclesiastes 4:1)

All forms of injustice have incredible power to produce sorrow, destruction and devastation. The Teacher shows his continuing problem with injustice, saying "again," meaning he is returning to this subject. He observed the many expressions of injustice. Too often Christians fail to understand the events of oppression and their catastrophic results.

The Teacher observed the "tears" (sufferings) of the oppressed. Many times this suffering rises from their lack of hope for change. The Teacher's sorrow springs from the fact that these oppressed people have no one to "comfort" them. Comfort refers to one who can console or bring relief. The word is used of the Messiah in Isaiah 40:1. The comforter will remove the injustice and achieve fairness for all. The Teacher was stricken that the oppressed had no hope for they had no comforter.

History repeatedly has demonstrated the suffering that follows injustice and oppression and the lack of hope for change. Much human suffering has eventuated from injustice.

The protest of injustice (Ecclesiastes 8:2-9)

The Teacher turned to possible ways to overthrow injustice and oppression. These words bring up the question of civil disobedience. Is it permissible for Christians to disobey laws they recognize as injustice and unfair? The Teacher's answer seems to be that we should obey the law and realize disobedience will result in punishment.

The advice seems to be, try to work within the system to achieve justice. Remaining in proper relationship with the king increases chances of achieving change. Even the most challenging of situations (man's troubles are heavy) are not always relieved by rebellion. The Teacher gives the principle that the king will answer ultimately to God.

New Testament teachings indicate Christians might rebel against injustice but should they do so, they should be ready to accept the consequences (Romans 13:1-7). The Teacher may well be giving something of this same type of advice.

In seeking to change the patterns of injustice, Christians do well to follow the Teacher's advice. Christians should consistently seek to live uprightly and follow proper conduct as they seek change. They should demonstrate patience in seeking to change injustice but be willing to take risks in order to help the suffering. The king will stand before the judgment of God, but this fact should not turn believers from seeking justice for all.

The prospect of justice (Ecclesiastes 8:10-13)

Where hope remains despair lessens. Evil oppressors will fail and the oppressed can hope for a better future. The teacher may have been speaking from his observations at the funerals of the wicked. These people were praised even in the temple (the holy place). They were praised in the holy place and went out to continue their oppression. Regardless of this human praise, the wicked face lives of futility and meaninglessness.

The Teacher declared that part of the reason for oppression and injustice

was the fact that sentences for evil acts were not carried out or were delayed. This failure to hand out justice led to people being inclined toward evil practices (heart of people filled with desire for crime).

The Teacher indicated that those who practice evil would not escape punishment. Evil people would not lengthen their days. The teaching is that reverent, God-fearing people will do well (v. 12). Because the wicked are not trusting God and serving him, they will not experience God's blessings.

God expects his people to practice justice and fairness to all. To claim piety and practice oppression is sin.