

# Voices: Justice is a constant gut check

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.*

*You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudice. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.*

*[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.*

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Injustice in the society is not a new phenomenon. The Bible has a lot to say about justice, often linking the twin traits of righteousness and justice.

Righteousness is being upright in your vertical, one-on-one relationship with God, while justice is dealing with other human beings in a loving, fair, considerate and equitable manner.

These two themes were reflected in our Lord's answer to the lawyer who tested him by asking what the greatest commandment in the law was.

Our Lord quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind"—and said this was the greatest and the first commandment.

He added a second commandment is like the first, quoting from Leviticus 19:18—“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Our Lord then concluded, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

What our Lord called the first and greatest commandment is a definition of righteousness, while what he called the second to the greatest commandment leads to justice. James would refer to the second of these commandments as “the royal law” (James 2:8).

## **Injustice in the 8th century**

Injustice seems to rear its ugly head more in times of prosperity. More affluent societies have the tendency to accept injustice—oppression—more readily as a way of life.

In the divided kingdom of Israel, King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam II of Israel in the 8th century B.C., led the two kingdoms into a prosperous era. As it often happens, the prosperity functioned to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots and to bring about the oppression of the have-nots by the haves.

God used the 8th century prophets to condemn the injustice in no uncertain terms. God’s prophets always spoke for the oppressed, giving a voice to the voiceless, never to sanction the oppressor’s acts or statements.

### **Amos**

Amos called out the oppressors of Israel for oppressing the poor and crushing the needy (Amos 4:1); “afflicting the just and taking bribes” (Amos 5:12); “diverting the poor from justice at the gate” (Amos 5:12); for “making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that [they] may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of

sandals—even sell the bad wheat” (Amos 8:5-6).

The haves were dubiously finding ways to cheat the poor when they were buying items from them, as well as when they were selling anything to them. Amos, therefore would cry out, “But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

## **Isaiah**

Isaiah pointed out that the plunder of the poor was in the houses of the oppressors who were crushing God’s people and “grinding the faces of the poor” (Isaiah 3:14-15). Isaiah also blamed the oppressors for justifying the wicked for a bribe and taking away justice from the righteous man (Isaiah 5:23).

## **Micah**

Micah pronounced woe on the evildoers devising iniquity on their beds and acting out the plans in broad daylight, “because it is in the power of their hand” (Micah 2:1).

The evildoers would “covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them” (Micah 2:2), thus demonstrating they did not know justice, hated what was good and loved what was evil (Micah 3:1-2).

Micah would go on to give us what often is referred to as “the golden rule of the Old Testament,” saying God clearly had shown the people what was good: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Micah’s declaration indeed would be partly restated in “the golden rule” of our Lord: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

# Injustice in conflict with the gospel

In our Lord's parable of the unjust judge, the unjust judge had no fear of God and no regard for man (Luke 18:1-8). It is people like the unjust judge who thrive on injustice. It is a contradiction in terms to embrace injustice on one hand and to claim to be a proclaimer or an adherent of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the other.

Injustice can manifest itself in meting out unequal justice or withholding or delaying due justice. The class, race or affiliation of the person never should be the determining factor in considering justice.

The late Congressman John Lewis challenged all of us: "If something is not right, not just, say something, do something."

If you cannot say something to condemn wrongdoing, at least do not rationalize it, let alone say something in approval of the act or statement.

It is not that hard to detect injustice, but you are faced with an unavoidable, gut-check question in each situation: Will you condemn it, turn a blind eye to it, rationalize it, approve of it or engage in it?

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