

Whatever Happened to JUSTICE?

The word justice appears 134 times in the Bible. But it has disappeared from the vocabularies of most Christians.

Most people who died during the civil rights movement were black. However, many whites also chose to cross the color boundary to make a difference in our nation. One of these was William Moore, an atheistic postal worker from Baltimore, who was saved and transformed during the early days of the civil rights movement.

Moore desired to take a letter to the governor of Mississippi, urging him to end intolerance based on race. Inspired by a verse in Amos 5:24, he began a one-man march to see “‘justice roll down like waters’” (NASB).

Moore got as far as Attalla, Alabama. He wrote to his pastor: “Southerners quite hospitable and having a pleasant walk. Feeling quite secure by now. But if anything ever happens, I feel like I wonder if anybody would ever know.”

Moore’s last statement proved to be prophetic. A few days later, two shots rang out from a rifle, and Moore lay dead. He was martyred April 23, 1963.

Moore pushed a cart on his sojourn. Attached to the cart was a poster with a picture of Christ. Letters above the picture read “Wanted.” Below the picture was a caption: “Jesus Christ, wanted for sedition, criminal anarchy, vagrancy and conspiring to overthrow the established government.” People said Moore was killed not because he was pro-black but because he was blaspheming God.

I am convinced that this man had managed to avoid being infected with all the systemic spiritual diseases of his generation. He clearly had heard a prophetic call from God to be a voice and to make a difference.

Moore embraced a concept of “kingdom justice.” The suffering of black believers became his suffering because they were children of God.

For them, he gave his life. Just as Jesus became poor so that we might become rich, Moore laid down his life so that others might live as God intended. The Jesus revolution does not use guns to further its cause, but in a world full of violence it must stand strong in the face of violent opposition.

To this day the murder of William Moore remains unexplained—as well as unavenged. Perhaps, just as the blood of Cain’s brother Abel called out from the ground, Moore’s blood cries out for justice. It cries out for individuals to make a difference. It implores us to move out—to where we are uncomfortable.

As I meditated on Moore’s life, I was challenged by his example. Moore gave his life for justice. I asked myself: “Am I willing to do the same? What am I willing to die for?”

The Bible has a lot to say about justice, but the true concept of justice is often obscured by the translation of the Bible we read. The words “judgment” and “justice” can be used interchangeably in some passages of the Bible. However, these words are not similar in our modern English language.

When I read the word judgment I picture God dressed in black

with a big stick, but justice evokes the image of a kind advocate rescuing me from an unfair punishment.

In our culture, most Americans view justice as an absolute right. Justice is something we are taught to demand.

But the Bible is asserting much more. It shows us that God wants us to exercise kingdom justice. We should desire not only to receive our personal rights but also to create an environment in which kingdom justice reigns supreme.

Kingdom justice extends beyond the court system. Wherever we have authority or influence, God evaluates our attitudes and actions toward people.

His justice, unlike ours, is not always punitive. In fact, He tempers His justice with mercy “because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!” (James 2:13, NIV). Because all of us need mercy, we should follow God’s example and be willing to intervene on behalf of needy people in the world today.

I encourage the body of Christ to drop its sectarian agendas and develop an agenda for kingdom justice. I suggest we begin by addressing three of the major social ills in the world today.

The HIV-AIDS pandemic. This is no longer a gay-male problem. It is an international problem that can be lessened by American dollars and medicine. Even being able to delay death until people can receive the gospel would be a victory.

Abortion on demand. To date, our efforts to stop abortion have been unsuccessful because not all Christians of all ethnicities have embraced our responsibility to end this problem.

Civil rights. The most recent census data show that Hispanics have recently surpassed blacks as the largest ethnic group. Do we as Christians want minorities in America to continue to live as a permanent underclass—receiving fewer educational opportunities and lower-paying jobs than the majority of the population?

All three of these social ills should be addressed by Christians as areas in which social justice is pursued from a biblical basis.

God has a social agenda for America. Unfortunately, most of us have a tendency to zero in on our favorite social causes.

One segment of the body is very concerned with abortion; another desires to minister to the gay community; another sees civil rights as the most urgent need in America today.

Our diverse passions have caused division in the body of Christ because we have been guilty of demonizing people whose focus differs from ours. We have inadvertently violated the principle of corporate agreement.

Even though more of us than ever before are praying for our nation, we are not seeing the full cultural impact of our intercession. But I believe the church will see a massive spiritual awakening when we embrace God's kingdom justice agenda.

The Bible tells us to “‘defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed’” (Ps. 82:3). It also says that “to do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice” (Prov. 21:3).

God is saying here: “All of your religious activity, if you are not careful, will become an external legalistic expression that does not carry the heart or the weight of what I am really about. And if I had to choose between your being religious and your being righteous, then I would choose righteousness.”

The biblical concept of justice is so ingrained in the heart of God that it was woven into the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. One of the tribes was named Dan, which means justice. God desired to use Dan as a prophetic picture of what justice should be.

Unfortunately, this tribe did not live out its intended legacy. For example, one of the most famous Danites was Samson. Anointed by God, Samson used his supernatural strength for his own self-centered purposes.

America is in some ways just like the tribe of Dan—dangerously close to veering away from our calling. We have been appointed by God to be a place where religious freedom and justice ring. To fulfill His mandate we must be willing to fight for everything God has ordained.

The word justice appears 134 times in the NIV Bible. Recently I discovered 30 references to it in the book of Isaiah alone.

The most poignant passage is found in Isaiah 42:3-4: “‘A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out. In faithfulness He will bring forth justice; He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth.’”

This passage clearly shows Jesus’ commitment to justice.

What can you and I do about justice in America? We can decide to act on the position of priority that justice occupies in God’s Word.

We need corporate unity, but remember also that one obedient person can make a difference.

If we will commit to (1) praying for God’s justice agenda; (2) registering to vote—and then voting according to this agenda at every opportunity; and (3) becoming involved in our nation’s political parties, then we will start to see, as Amos prophesied, “‘justice roll down like waters’” in our land.

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