

The Biblical Concept of Justice as it Relates to the Vulnerable

What do you think of when you think
of justice?

Background: Social Justice and the Church

- ▮ “In the twentieth century the American church divided between the liberal mainline that stressed social justice and the fundamentalist churches that emphasized personal salvation.” -Tim Keller, *Generous Justice*
- ▮ Consequently, sometimes discussions of social justice raise concerns among conservatives that one is of the “Social Gospel” movement and that doctrine does not matter.

It is Not an Either/Or Issue

- ▮ The reality is that there is absolutely no conflict between orthodox Christianity and a robust dedication to pursuing social justice issues.
- ▮ In fact, there is a growing consensus that respect for orthodox doctrine should strengthen one's dedication to social justice, not detract from it.

“To do Justice...”

- ▮ “He has shown you... what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8
- ▮ Justice (mishpat) is used over 200 times in the Old Testament and helps guide our understanding of the term.

Mishpat

- ▮ Lev 24:22 warns Israel to “have the same mishpat [rule of law] for the foreigner as the native.”
- ▮ This concept of justice in Hebrew is broader than just punishing people who do wrong. It is also affirmative, in that it means to give people their rights.
- ▮ Time and time again, ‘mishpat’ describes taking up the care and cause of what some scholars have termed the quartet of the vulnerable.

Quartet of the Vulnerable

- ▮ “This is what the LORD says: Administer true justice (mishpat); show mercy and compassion to one another. Do do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the immigrant, or the poor.” Zechariah 7:10-11
- ▮ Ps 146:7-9, 68:4-5, Deut. 10:17-19, 24:17-21, Jer. 7:5-7, 22:3, Isa. 10:1-4, 58:6-10

Why these four?

- ▮ “In pre-modern, agrarian societies, these four groups had no social power. They lived at subsistence level and were only days from starvation if there was any famine, invasion, or even minor social unrest.”
- ▮ “Today, this quartet would be expanded to include refugees, migrant workers, the homeless, many single parents and elderly people.” -Tim Keller

If this is justice, how does that help us understand the biblical concept of injustice?

Injustice

- “The mishpat, or justness, of a society..., is evaluated by how it treats these groups. Any neglect shown to the needs of the members of this quartet is not called merely a lack of mercy or charity, but a violation of justice, or mishpat.... That is what it means to ‘do justice.’”
-Generous Justice

Why should we be concerned about the vulnerable?

- Because God is concerned about them.
 - “He executes justice [mishpat] for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, he lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves those who live justly. The LORD watches over the immigrant and sustains the fatherless and the widow...” Ps 146:7-9
 - “The LORD ... defends the cause [mishpat] of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the immigrant, giving him food and clothing.” Deut. 10: 17-18

Justice is Right Relationships

- ▮ Tzadeqah can be translated as “being just” or “being righteous,” and it refers to a life of right relationships.
- ▮ “Biblical righteousness is inevitably ‘social,’ because it is about relationships.”
Tim Keller

Tzadeqah

- ▮ Tzadeqah is often used in conjunction with the word mishpat.
- ▮ The two words roughly correspond to what some have called primary justice (tzadeqah) and rectifying justice (mishpat).
- ▮ Primary justice is behavior that if it was prevalent in the world would render rectifying justice virtually unnecessary because everyone would be living in a right relationship with everyone else.

A right relationship with God should result in right relationships with others.

- ▮ “I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him.... I put on righteousness [tzadeqah] as my clothing; justice [mishat] was my robe.” Job 29:12-17
- ▮ If I have denied justice [mishpat] to my employees.... If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eye of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing with the fatherless.... These also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God.” Job 31:13-28

Tzadeqah and Mishpat

- ▮ “When the two words ... are tied together, as they are over three dozen times, the English expression that best conveys the meaning is ‘social justice.’”
-Generous Justice
- ▮ As such, Ps 33:5 could be translated as follows:
 - “The Lord loves social justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.”

A Community of Justice

- ▮ Deut. 15 sets out several legal procedures that if the people fully obeyed, God says “there should be no poor among you.” Deut. 15:4-5.
- ▮ These rules included mandatory debt forgiveness every seven years, gleaning laws that prevented landowners from keeping all the grain they harvested to allow for the poor to gather, laws of tithing (one third of which was to be given to the poor, immigrant, widow, and orphan); and a Year of Jubilee (redistribution of land every 50 years to restore equality in possessions). Lev. 19:9, Deut. 14:29.

Question:

Do you think the Christians' call to seek justice (mishpat and tzadeqah) for the vulnerable is exclusively a private admonition to charity or is it a corporate responsibility?

Do you think the biblical concept of justice should influence the types of legal structures and policies we pursue as Christians?

**Application: How should the
Biblical concept of justice inform
U.S. immigration policy**

What the Bible says about Immigration Policy

- ▮ “You are to have the same mishpat [rule of law] for the foreigner and the native-born.” Lev. 24:22
- ▮ You shall treat the immigrant ...as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt...” Lev. 19:34
- ▮ “You shall not unjustly treat an immigrant or oppress him.” Ex. 22:21

Waiting Times for Preference Categories as of March 2013

Visa Bulletin

Family-sponsored	All other countries	<u>China</u>	<u>India</u>	<u>Mexico</u>	<u>Philippines</u>
F1	15FEB06	15FEB06	15FEB06	22JUL93	015OCT98
F2A	22NOV10	22NOV10	22NOV10	15NOV10	22NOV10
F2B	01MAR05	01MAR05	01MAR05	15JAN93	08JUN02
F3	15JUL02	15JUL02	15JUL02	15MAR93	15SEP92
F4	22APR01	22APR01	22APR01	15AUG96	15JUL89

Wait Times Based upon Current Rate for Mexico:

Family-sponsored	All other countries	<u>Mexico</u>
F1	7.5 yrs.	49 yrs.
F2A	3.39 yrs.	3.8 yrs.
F2B	10.49 yrs.	119 yrs.
F3	21.81 yrs.	106 yrs.
F4	22.7 yrs.	162 yrs.

No right to legal representation

- ▮ Because immigration law is considered civil law, low income immigrants that are unable to afford an attorney will not have one provided to them.
- ▮ This is true even when immigrants are arrested, detained, and facing deportation to a country where they may be executed on return.

Our Service to the Vulnerable is Service to God

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was an immigrant and you welcomed me, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these..., you did for me.” -Mt. 25:35