



Centenary Memphis UMC

Incarnational Faith: Week 1

Central Question:

What does God say about Justice?

What does the Bible mean when it calls God's people to pursue Justice?

Key Biblical Principle

Justice is not a peripheral concern in Scripture. It is connected to God's own character and to the way God's people are expected to live with one another. Biblical justice includes righteousness, mercy, protection of vulnerable people, opposition to oppression, and faithful action on behalf of human flourishing.

The biblical witness also **challenges the idea that faith can remain entirely private**. Hebrews 11 portrays faith as active confidence in realities not yet visible and that biblical faith moves believers toward action consistent with God's purposes.

This means that Christians should not ask only, "**What do I personally believe?**" They should also ask, "**What does my faith require me to do?**"

Biblical justice does not provide a modern political platform. Scripture does, however, establish moral principles by which Christians can evaluate the treatment of human beings, the exercise of power, economic conditions, leadership, and the well-being of communities.

Scripture First

1. Micah 6:8

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

Context: Micah addresses a people who have religious practices but whose social life has become characterized by injustice.

What it reveals about justice: Justice, mercy, and humility belong together. Biblical justice is not simply punishment or legal procedure. It involves right relationships with God and neighbor.

Contemporary application: Christians should ask whether their public decisions reflect justice, mercy, humility, and concern for others rather than only personal advantage.

2. Isaiah 1:16–17

"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Context: Isaiah condemns religious activity that is disconnected from ethical conduct.

What it reveals: God rejects worship that ignores oppression and vulnerable people.

Contemporary application: Worship and public life cannot be completely separated if public decisions contribute to or alleviate conditions affecting vulnerable people.

3. Amos 5:21–24

"But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Context: Amos speaks to a society that maintains religious ceremonies while tolerating injustice.

What it reveals: God desires justice to become embedded in the life of the community.

Contemporary application: Christians should consider whether institutions and public practices produce justice or merely preserve religious appearances.

4. Psalm 82:3–4

"Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy."

Context: Psalm 82 portrays God addressing those entrusted with authority.

What it reveals: Power carries responsibility. Those who possess authority are accountable for how they treat people who have less power.

Contemporary application: Leadership should be evaluated not only by personal character but also by how decisions affect people who are vulnerable.

5. Deuteronomy 10:17–19

"He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger."

Context: Israel is reminded that God is impartial and particularly attentive to people without social power.

What it reveals: God's concern for vulnerable people is part of God's character.

Contemporary application: Christians should cultivate concern for people whose circumstances differ from their own.

6. James 2:14–17

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them... depart in peace... notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful... what doth it profit?"

Context: James challenges believers who claim faith while failing to respond to concrete human need.

What it reveals: Genuine faith produces action.

Contemporary application: Compassion that never addresses actual conditions remains incomplete.

What Is Biblical Justice?

Taken together, these passages suggest several dimensions of biblical justice:

- Justice reflects God's character.
- Justice protects vulnerable people.
- Justice confronts oppression.
- Justice concerns relationships, not merely private morality.
- Justice requires action.
- Justice includes both mercy and righteousness.
- Justice places responsibilities upon those who possess power.

The Integration Paper reaches a similar conclusion through its biblical foundation: civic engagement should be understood as an expression of faith rather than an activity external to Christianity. Speaking about education, racial justice, policing, economic empowerment, and community healing can therefore become expressions of Christian concern when undertaken faithfully.

From Personal Faith to Public Life

Consider the difference between these statements:

Personal morality:

"I should treat the people around me fairly."

Community responsibility:

"Our congregation should care about the conditions affecting our neighbors."

Public policy:

"Policies and laws can affect whether people experience opportunity, protection, or hardship."

Civic responsibility:

"Citizens have responsibilities concerning the communities in which they live."

Biblical justice does not tell us automatically which policy is correct. It does tell us that the well-being of our neighbors is morally relevant.

Connect Scripture to the Integration Paper

Civic disengagement should not be understood simply as a lack of political interest. It describes the deeper problem as a rupture between **Christian identity** and **Christian practice**.

Civic disengagement is partly a problem of **Spiritual Formation**. Leaders need communal spaces where they can examine assumptions, interpret experiences, identify injustice, develop relationships, and discern collective action.

* Participants are invited to evaluate, challenge, and work through them rather than simply accept them.

Difficult Questions

1. Does biblical justice concern only individual behavior, or can it also concern communities and institutions?
2. What is the relationship between justice and mercy?
3. Why does Scripture repeatedly identify widows, orphans, strangers, the poor, and oppressed people?
4. What responsibilities accompany power?
5. Can a Christian sincerely believe that justice matters while remaining uninvolved in public life?

Group Discussion

1. When you hear the word "justice," what comes to mind?
2. Which biblical passage most challenges your understanding of justice?
3. Why do you think Scripture repeatedly addresses people who have less social or economic power?
4. What is the difference between charity and justice?
5. Can individual acts of kindness address systemic problems? Why or why not?
6. What might it mean for a church to "seek justice"?
7. What public issues in our community raise questions of justice?
8. Where do you see opportunities for Christians to practice justice without becoming partisan?

Personal Reflection

- Where have I understood justice primarily as an individual issue?
- Who are the vulnerable people I am most likely to overlook?
- How might my understanding of justice need to expand?
- What prevents me from becoming more engaged with conditions affecting my neighbors?

Action Step

Choose one public issue affecting your community and spend thirty minutes learning about it without beginning with a partisan source. Write down:

1. Who is affected?
2. What conditions contribute to the problem?
3. Who possesses decision-making authority?
4. What questions of justice or human dignity are involved?

Closing Prayer

God of justice and mercy, open our eyes to the conditions affecting our neighbors. Teach us to recognize injustice without becoming consumed by anger, and teach us to pursue justice without losing humility. Give us courage to act, wisdom to listen, compassion toward those who suffer, and love for people whose experiences differ from our own. Form our faith so that it becomes visible in the way we live. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
