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Series: Doing Justice

Part 1: Just 5

Text: Isaiah 1:16-17

The scriptures articulate not only problems, but the word of God gives answers as well. The issue here, in Isaiah, is the behavior of the people of Israel. The people of God are rebellious, unclean and disobedient. God has, however, not forsaken them. In fact, God answers the unasked question. How may I do that which pleases you, God? God tells His people, through Isaiah, to clean up their acts and themselves (16). Here’s a general word to all people: Cease to do evil. That is, address injustice. Fix what is not right.

H(Henry). L(Louis). Mencken (journalist, satirist, cultural critic)- ‘Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice. “

Notice that the command is not for Israel to change their thinking. Israel is told to change their collective behavior. It is relatively easy to hold radical thoughts. One can change one’s thought every hour. A behavioral change takes longer. Although the time of this text is 700 years before Christ, it sounds soooo contemporary. We’ve done evil in the sight of God. Evil pervades our culture, our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces. What do we do? Glad you asked.

Note with me, five imperative verbs, five short commands. Let’s look at them. You won’t *need* the Hebrew language translation to understand this text. We won’t need to study philosophy to get behind the text. No, this is plain. It is so plain it leaves no option but to do!!!

Just 5 verbs:

1. Learn
2. Seek
3. Rebuke
4. Defend
5. Plead

 1. **Learn** to do good. Nearly every person on the planet knows good from bad. Good is non-evil. We don't need theological training in order to do the good. To do good is to protect life rather than end it. To do good is to not shoot a person just because that person came onto your property. It is to hear a person say, “I can’t breathe” and believe him. Choose the good. Every time.

**2. Seek** justice. That is, address injustice by seeking justice. To address justice is to “determine authoritatively/judicially what is right”. Although the theme of justice weaves its way throughout the entire Bible, there is no singular definition of it. God is called just. In the New Testament, Jesus calls us to be concerned about injustice and the way the poor and the disenfranchised and the marginalized are treated (Matthew 25:35-40). Here in Isaiah 1, the command is simple: seek justice.

**3. Rebuke the oppressor.**

This appeared in a church bulletin and was quoted by Ray Stedman:

Our children may be cheated out of a vital Christian life if their models are Christian adults who continually place a priority on getting and keeping more and more things and experiences. The only alternative to the threat of materialism in our children's lives is the adult model of "gaining your life by losing it." This is the Biblical model kids must see from us in order to grow up spiritually healthy. So, while we are pondering over Christmas lists and checkbooks, let us also consider practical ways we can live intentionally Christian lives before our children.

Rebuking the oppressor can be theoretical. However, it is an action imperative. When we see oppression taking place, we are to address it. Rebuke it. There may any number of reasons we don't:

Fear

Pride

Desire to save face

Desire to keep the peace

Silence is consent when we see oppression. Indifference leads to complicity, which is sin. The oppressor must be rebuked.

The Hebrew language rendering of this phrase is *rescue the oppressor.* When we stand up to oppression, we rescue both the oppressed and the oppressor.

I want to put numbers four and five together. They are part of a class of people whom we will call *the most vulnerable.*  That class would include orphans, widows, the weak, the needy and the poor. These are most likely to be taken advantage of. Today, we think of elder abuse and scams perpetrated on the unsuspecting. These are most likely to be mistreated by the very people from whom they expect care.

**4. Defend the fatherless.**  In the Bible, the father was the covering for a family. When the father was dead or otherwise absent, all his family suffered. The people are commanded to demonstrate sensitivity to the orphan and the widow (Zechariah 7:10; Jeremiah 7:6)

**5. Plead for the widow.** Just as the people of God were to care for orphans, they were top look after widows (Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 24:17-21). God is portrayed as One who has this sensitivity (Psalm 68:5-6) and we are represent and imitate Him.

Vance Havner has this to say about social work in the church (orphans, widows)…

In these days of social emphasis, we do well to remember that before God ordered His people to "… seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" ([Is 1:17](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Isa%201.17)), He bade them, "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well!" ([Isa 1:16](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Isa%201.16), [17](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Isa%201.17)). **Social reform by an uncleansed and unconverted people is not the program of God.**

Do you want to be just? Begin by doing the just 5.

Learn to do good

Seek justice

Rebuke/rescue the oppressor

Defend the fatherless

Plead for the widow

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Amen