

Notions of Justice

In the country where we lived, based on our experience, justice for many must be bought. This means that if you are financially well off or able to scrape together enough money, you might be able to get justice. In many cases, if you hire a barrister (lawyer in British English) and your opponent also hired his own, the barristers will come together and work out a deal that benefits both of them, not necessarily their clients. I want to be fair and say that there are also some good and honest people in the country's legal system, but they're few and they don't really have a broad influence in the courts. I know some good judges (or justices) and state counsels (prosecutors) who believe in the law and rightly try to adjudicate by it, but there are others who are clearly on the take and only respond to political or social pressure or money.

- ❖ Societies where justice is reserved for the rich lack moral and social capital and are resistant to development.
- ❖ Societies where there's justice for all have a higher sense of moral and social capital, which leads to stability and trust in the economy, which promotes development.

We gained a lot of experience with the judicial system while living in our West African country during the 18 years we were there. This provided us with the opportunity to stand up many times for justice for

different individuals who had been wrongly accused of crimes and once for a group of young people who never would have had justice otherwise. The case of this group was particularly disturbing and difficult for us, because it involved people we knew personally, so it hit us close to home, literally.

It was several years ago, and we learned about a situation regarding the sexual abuse of some young people from a friend. It turned out that there were many involved. We were angry when we learned about this; in fact, I don't think I'd ever been that angry before in my life. The reason we were so disturbed was because we had relationships with many of those involved and when we asked our friend what they were going to do about it, the unhesitating reply was, "What can I do about it? I'm poor." That response shocked us and hit us very hard, and I tear up even now as I remember the feeling of helplessness in her voice that even we felt when they said that. Then they also told us that there were others we knew who were also involved. I told them that I wanted to take them to the local authorities immediately.

Upon arriving and talking with the person in charge, I explained the situation and told him that I'd brought them, together with some of their family who had been molested by this person, and that we'd been told that there were several others who had also been abused. He seemed interested and assigned someone to take statements from both parents and their families. This was done on a mechanical typewriter by a person who had no idea how to type and could only tediously pick and poke the keys, so the process took several hours. He ran out of forms at

one point in this process, I was told that if the interviews were to continue, I would have to drive down the road to a small business that had a copy machine and pay to have some more forms copied. This was very frustrating!

To make a long story short, at the end of the interviews, our friend and her friend and their families all came outside, and I asked them what the official had to say. They told me he said nothing. Frustrated, I went back inside to ask him what was next, and he said, "Well, you said there were more victims." I was somewhat taken aback by that and asked what they would do about the perpetrator. I told him that although there were more victims, I would think that the seven who have given their statements would be enough to at least have the man arrested. Over the next few days, we contacted all of those involved and their parents, and I acted as a taxi service, driving them all to the local law enforcement post to give their stories. We decided to do this because we were told we'd have to pay the transport for them (the police) to go to the victim's homes themselves. We finally got the process moving and after six months and nine trips to the court, the molester was convicted and sentenced. The sad part was that nothing would have been done had we not become involved. This is because the wheels of the justice system can turn very slowly without the grease of cold, hard cash, or in this case, our intervention. For this reason, many materially poor people have little hope of justice. Most of these people who work in the courts and in the police would tell you that they're Christians, and in fact, many did as I spoke with them.

I've been to the offices of divisional officers, and different police stations, and sat in judges' chambers and interrogation rooms on several occasions with friends who were wrongly accused of crimes or who had people conspiring with court officers to steal their land. In each case, had we not been there for them, they would have ended up in prison or without their land to farm. The saddest part of this is that there are many people who face a system conspiring against them who have no advocate.

Throughout this journey, I've also met several good lawyers, state counsels, and justices, and others in positions of greater influence. I introduced many of them to the idea of organizing a formal group of like-minded individuals that could support and encourage each other in doing the right thing in their professional positions. I will talk about this in more detail in *Putting It Into Action*, but since I will mention it several times before then, and it had already begun to form, I wanted to give a brief explanation of what I will be calling an "Integrity Group". I bought them some of the books that had been an inspiration to me and engaged them in conversations about how godliness and joining together in supportive groups would, first, honor the Lord, and second, make the country a better place to live.

We have a good friend who's an influential businessman who genuinely desires for the nation to develop economically. He has tried for many years to bring investors into the country. He's told me several stories similar to things our friends experienced but on a much grander scale. These are stories of fraud or misinformation that have cost

businesspeople hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet there's no legal protection for them. There were no repercussions for the people who committed the fraud or spread the misinformation. I told him that the reason why people are afraid to invest in many countries like this is because there's no legal protection for them. The lack of godliness in a society has huge consequences for both the political and economic systems of those societies. Imagine what an impact people in positions of influence could have if they would choose to live for Christ and stand up for godly values in their places of influence. The lack of godliness and unjust behavior has a negative impact not only on the physical aspects of life but also on the spiritual. What a testimony transformed lives would be to the Gospel! Here are a few verses that provide us with some of God's thoughts on justice.

Deuteronomy 16:18–20: *You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with **righteous** judgment. **You shall not pervert justice.** You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*

Acts 10:34: *So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,...*

Module | opposing Cultural Values— Notions of Justice [Pages 43 – 47]

Theme: *How justice systems reflect moral capital
and shape societal development.*

Grounding Scripture

Deuteronomy 16:18–20 – *“You shall not pervert justice... Justice, and only justice, you shall follow...”*

Acts 10:34 – *“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality...”*

Psalms 106:3 – *“Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!”*

Puzzle Piece

Insight: When justice is reserved for the wealthy or powerful, the poor lose hope and society loses integrity. Corruption in courts and law enforcement erodes trust, stifles development, and silences the vulnerable.

Challenge: A society cannot flourish when injustice is normalized.

Discipleship must include advocacy, integrity, and a biblical vision of justice.

Bridge Thought | Connection

- God’s justice is impartial, righteous, and protective of the vulnerable.
- Believers in positions of influence must embody this justice—not just preach it—to restore credibility and catalyze change.

Toolbox | Practical Tools

Integrity Groups: Form networks of professionals committed to godly influence and mutual support.

Advocacy Lens: Equip believers to stand with the voiceless and challenge unjust systems.

Justice Audit: Identify where partiality or bribery undermines biblical values.

Reflection Prompts

1. When have you witnessed injustice? What did it cost the victim?
2. How does your culture define fairness—and how does Scripture challenge that view?
3. What would it look like for believers to be known as defenders of justice?

Action Steps

- Teach justice as a core discipleship theme, not just a legal concept.
- Support believers in law, business, and government to live out biblical integrity.
- Encourage formation of Integrity groups to foster courage and accountability.