



**New year 2**

## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

**Amos 5:24** - *But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Psalm 146* - *God executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. Yahweh sets prisoners free, Yahweh gives sight to the blind, he lifts up those who are bowed down, Yahweh loves those who live justly. Yahweh watches over the refugee and sustains the orphan and widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.*

### ***God shall bring forth justice to the nations***

Is this statement from Isaiah not a little bit confusing? This greatly anticipated messiah will be tasked by God with bringing “justice” to the peoples of the earth. Not just the Hebrew people, but every man, woman and child on the earth. Here is the key point, one that must guide us in our coming year in Christ. In the Bible, the word “justice” means “to make right.” Justice is, first and foremost, a term that speaks of relationships — people living in right relationship with God, with one another, and with the natural creation. From a scriptural point of view, justice means loving our neighbour as we love ourselves and this in turn is rooted in the character and nature of God. As God is just and loving, so we are called to **do** justice and **live** in love.

### ***Israel has always struggled with doing justice and living in love.***

Jeremiah 9:3-9 gives us a list of Israel’s social injustices. He tells us of the people’s misplaced confidence and hope: *Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches...’*. Israel turned to these three things as the source of their joy, hope and pride: wisdom, power, and money. But it never worked as they had anticipated.

The key word here is in verse 23: “his.” It is not that wisdom itself is bad. It is not that power or might is bad. It is not that money is bad. But all wisdom, power and money become terrible things when they come solely from *human resources* rather than from God. Leave God out of these daily ventures and we build an unjust world.

Have a look around the Church and world today and we find too many people trying to save themselves and base their lives (and security) on human wisdom, human power, and human wealth. People put their confidence in going to the best schools and getting the best education. People seek strength and power so they can defeat (even destroy) their enemies and never have to rely on others. People will do nearly anything for money and determine their personal worth by their net worth and their worldly possessions. Not much has changed since Jeremiah’s day.

For our purposes, it is important to see that this same love of human wisdom, human power, and human wealth can influence our notions of justice. Leave God out, out of even little things, and we end up dooming ourselves to futility and disappointment.

## What is a secular view of justice?

Michael J. Sandel's book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*, helpfully breaks the major secular views of justice into three categories:

- **Utilitarian**—"The highest principle of morality is to maximize happiness....". If happiness could be monetized, then the just and moral thing to do would be that decision or action that leads to the most happiness for the most people – accumulating worldly wealth.
- **Libertarian**—"People should be free to do whatever they want, provided they do no harm to others". The person belongs to themselves and cannot or should not be forced to give up their earnings, labour or persons.
- **Moral Virtue**—The challenge is to do the right thing "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with right motive, and in the right way".

There are at least two things common to each approach. Each approach requires that we need to (a) define what is "moral" and (b) say something about what comprises "the good life." This is really what debates about justice come down to—how are we going to define what is right or wrong (morality) and how are we going to define the 'good life', a definition all men and women must honour?

### *And our Christian hesitation in simply adopting these views?*

There is a major, significant problem with all three: *They all leave out God in their formulation.* These approaches seek to offer an atheistic vision of the good life. Some of these approaches simply treat God and religion as a matter of individual freedom. Other approaches intentionally rule out any mention or consideration of God and religion. They promote a vision that seeks to build life on human wisdom, power and wealth. That is why no Christian can simply adopt any worldly view without correcting the problem at the starting point—the omission of God and His word. The key question we must ask of all new ways of thinking, acting and speaking (both within the Church and in the "secular" world) is this: in what ways do these things reveal the activity of God in the world and respond to the call of God? God must be the starting point of all things and the end of all things. If it is not about God then it cannot come within our Christian framework.

Paul reminds us of this fundamental truth: *For the word of the cross is stupidity to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* <sup>19</sup> *For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." . . . . For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger the strength of humans.*

If our approach to justice (i.e to living with self, others, the world) leaves out God and starts with human ways, then we're going to end up foolish and powerless.