

5 Social Justice

Amos 5:4-6:7

"I used to think, when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when he warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on one's eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people's hands, eyes, lips, and hearts."¹

Israel in the eighth century B.C. was extremely prosperous and outwardly religious. An uneven distribution of wealth resulted in an immense chasm between the rich, bent on increasing their wealth, and the oppressed poor. Although externally devout, the nation was morally decadent. In the midst of this society God called out a shepherd and tender of sycamore-fig trees, a job reserved only for those at the bottom of the social ladder. He had no formal religious training or position. During the reign of Jeroboam II, around 760 B.C., this man, Amos, appeared on the scene. Speaking to a world not unlike our own, his message needs to be heard and obeyed in our day.

1. How can money or possessions tempt us toward insensitivity or compromise?
2. Read Amos 5:4-17. Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba were centers of idolatry during the time of Amos. What does Amos 5:4-6 reveal about the consequences of idolatry?
3. How can idolatry—both ancient and modern—lead to injustice and unrighteousness (Amos 5:7)?
4. How would the Lord's description of himself (Amos 5:8-9) cause Israel to fear his judgment?
5. What forms did injustice and oppression take in Israel (Amos 5:10-13)?

¹ Dom Helder Camara, *Revolution through Peace* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 142

In what specific ways are they manifested in our society?

6. How do the exhortations "Seek me" (Amos 5:4), "Seek the LORD" (Amos 5:6) and "Seek good" (Amos 5:14) provide the remedy for idolatry and injustice?

7. If Israel failed to heed these exhortations, God warned that he would pass through their midst in judgment (Amos 5:16-17). In what sense is this warning applicable today?

8. Read Amos 5:18-6:7. Describe the religious atmosphere and practices of the day (Amos 5:18-27).

In what ways were these attitudes and actions commendable?

9. Contemporary Christianity has been described as "privately engaging but socially irrelevant." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.

10. How might leisure, luxury and prestige lead to the sins described in Amos 6:1-7?

In what ways are you guilty of similar sins?

11. There are many areas of social injustice today: lack of concern for the poor and needy, racism, wasteful lifestyle, neglect of the plight of the cities, political injustice and so on. In what area do you most need to change your attitude or lifestyle to reflect God's concern for justice and mercy?