



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V23 N35 August 29, 2021

NOT OF THIS WORLD

“Let Justice Roll Down”

Amos 5:18-27

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Peace

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7



What does
God demand
from his
people?

The creed of the Core Competency Peace speaks to the personal experience of the virtue sensed when things are right between me, God, and others – suggesting that when things are wrong between me, God, and others, I do not and perhaps cannot experience peace. In a nutshell, the creed implies that when things are right, peace is possible; when things are wrong, it isn't. In this context, “right” and “wrong” refer to doing what is right versus doing what is wrong. Furthermore, what can be said regarding the personal experience of peace can also be said about its social experience. Take a church, for example. Peace exists in the church when things are right between its members, God, and others, but is missing in the church when conversely things are wrong. Peace is vitally related to righteousness and justice, which are both virtues birthed out of behaviors, namely, doing what is right and doing what is just. Peace, not to mention unity, is hard to come by in the church and the society when certain people are done wrong.

Scripture implicitly and explicitly condemns discrimination, namely, the unfair treatment of individuals or groups of people based on arbitrary personal characteristics. For example, the apostles *implicitly* condemned discrimination against Hellenistic widows in the church. Acts 6:1 reads: “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” The Twelve responded by correcting the injustice, suggesting that there's no room in the church for discrimination based on ethnicity. And James explicitly condemns discrimination against poor people in the church. James 2:1-4 reads: “My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not *show favoritism*. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here's a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become

judges with evil thoughts?” Discrimination based on economic status, as well as on ethnicity, is wrong because both are violations of the royal law, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Jas 2:8). This implies neither should be welcome in the church or in society.

Nowadays, racism is the elephant in the sanctuary, the violation of the royal law du jour. On the one hand, the white evangelical church in North America has been outspoken in its opposition to abortion, but on the other hand, not to racism – so much so that a number of Christian scholars have researched and published books on the church's ironic silence on the subject (e.g., Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019] and Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, [New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020]). While you might push back against the findings of such books, namely, that racism is alive and well in America and largely disregarded in the white evangelical church, consider what Christians themselves have to say about race. The Barna Group asked this question, “When it comes to getting ahead in life do practicing Christians think of their race as something that has helped or hindered them?” And reported these findings, “Recent research from *Beyond Diversity* shows that white practicing Christians are generally hesitant to think about their own race, hesitant to say racial minorities face discrimination – and, likewise, they are hesitant to say that being white gives them a boost. Meanwhile, Black practicing Christians are the most likely racial group to acknowledge a disadvantage due to their race” (barna.com/research/practicing-christians-race/). In a few words, nearly 40% of Black Christians surveyed consider being “Black” a *disadvantage*, while a nearly equal percentage of white Christians surveyed consider being “white” an *advantage*. And so it comes as no surprise that Black practicing Christians are twice as likely as their white brothers and sisters to see race as a problem and are twice as motivated to address racial injustice in society (barna.com/research/problems-solutions-racism/).

18 Woe to you who long
for the day of the Lord!

Why do you long for the day of the Lord?
That day will be darkness, not light.

19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion
only to meet a bear,
as though he entered his house
and rested his hand on the wall
only to have a snake bite him.

20 Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light –
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

21 "I hate, I despise your religious festivals;
your assemblies are a stench to me.

22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings
and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
I will have no regard for them.

23 Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

25 "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

26 You have lifted up the shrine of your king,
the pedestal of your idols,
the star of your god –
which you made for yourselves.

27 Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,"
says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "Woe" in v. 18 and write "Cf., 6:1" in the margin.
- Bracket "the day of the LORD" in vv. 18, 20.
- Box "as though" indicating *comparison* in v. 19.
- Circle "religious festivals" and "assemblies" in v. 21.
- Underline "will not accept," "will have no regard" in v. 22 and "will not listen" in v. 23.
- Highlight v. 24.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 24.
- Circle the question mark at the end of v. 25.
- Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 24.
- Double underline "shrine" and "pedestal" in v. 26.
- Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 27.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Around 760-750 B.C., Israelites wrongheadedly longed for the day of the LORD (v. 18). How so?
 2. Amos' rhetorical question (v. 20) asserts that the day of the LORD will be "darkness, not light – pitch dark, without a ray of brightness." Put what his string of metaphors means in your own words.
 3. Explain the point of the two *comparisons* introduced by "as though" (v. 19).
 4. What *exactly* does God hate (v. 24)?
 5. Why would God close his *nostrils*, his *eyes*, and his *ears* (*anthropomorphisms*) to his people's religious observances?
 6. *Justice* and *righteousness* – explain their relationship to one another.
 7. Explain their *relevance* for worship (cf., Mt 22:37-39).
 8. Explain the two *comparisons* introduced by "like" (v. 24).
 9. When it comes to being outspoken campaigners for what is right, do you think the evangelical church is doing enough to promote *biblical justice* in general?
 10. **Discussion:** Some argue that it's time for the evangelical church to do more to eliminate racism. Talk about whether you agree.
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Commentary On The Text

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” in the Northern Kingdom of Israel c. 760-750 B.C. It was the best of times economically. According to one writer: “These were times of political stability, material prosperity, and geographical expansion for both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms (cf. 1:6; 6:2, 13; 2 Kings 14:23-29; 2 Chron. 26:1-15). Jeroboam II and Uzziah were two of the most competent and effective kings that their respective kingdoms enjoyed. They brought their nations to heights of success, second only to those in Solomon's golden age. Archaeologists have found hundreds of ivory inlays in the excavations of Samaria, proving the Northern Kingdom's prosperity” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Amos,” 2021 ed., 3, plano-biblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/amos.pdf). But although religion flourished, it was the worst of times spiritually. It was a time of idolatry, extravagant indulgence in luxurious living, immorality, corruption of judicial procedures, and oppression of the poor (cf., 4:1-5; 5:10-13; 6:4-7; 8:4-6), which caused God to declare he hated and despised their hypocritical religious observances (5:21).

Amos 3-6 contains five messages of judgment against the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The fifth, denouncing her hypocritical religious observances and announcing her coming “exile beyond Damascus,” is found in 5:18-22. Putting it in context, one commentator writes: “In the preceding group of oracles, Amos announced that God would pass through Israel's midst to do them to death. Undoubtedly that message met with skepticism on the part of those who bothered to listen to this prophet with a Judean accent. Like everyone who is prosperous and comfortable, most of those in Israel who counted for anything felt that they were enjoying the results of God's favor toward them, or, if they took no thought of God, that that their good life was secure. In 5:18-6:14, the prophet therefore sets about to show how ill-placed is Israel's confidence in every area of their life. And significantly the section begins with an oracle concerning the day of the Lord, because finally it is the day of the Lord that will bring Israel's death” (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, NIBC, 209).

Amos' message can be divided into three movements. In the first (vv. 18-20) he corrects Israel's wrong-headed notion that the day of the LORD will be a good day for them. They expect it to be a bright day; he tells them it will be a dark day. Throughout these verses he contrasts “light,” a metaphor for blessings, and “darkness,” for judgment, resulting in inescapable death. Using two *comparisons*, he explains that they may escape death once (from a lion), even a second

time (from a bear), only to ultimately face death (from a snake) when they feel safe and secure for sure at home. The point of the *rhetorical* question that closes the movement can be stated declaratively. “The day of the LORD will be darkness, not light – pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness!”

In the second movement (vv. 21-24), God reveals what he *really* thinks of Israel's religious observances. He hates and despises (or absolutely despises) their religious festivals, repeating himself to emphasize how repugnant their celebrations of Israel's three great pilgrim festivals are to him. He holds his nose during their celebrations of sabbaths, feast days, and other less important occasions because they are a disgusting “stench” to him. Their burnt offerings are voluntary, entirely consumed by fire expressions of their dedication, but he refuses to smell them. Their fellowship offerings are also voluntary but only partially consumed by fire, the remainder being eaten at a thanksgiving meal, but he refuses to look at them. And as far as their worship songs are concerned, he refuses to listen to the noise of them! One writer explains: “As long as Israel will not practice justice and righteousness in its courts and commerce, fulfilling its covenant obligation toward the poor and oppressed, its worship is not acceptable” (Achtemeier, 211). The LORD wants justice and righteousness to cascade through Israel's daily life like a mighty river that never runs dry, unlike like some desert wadi that runs full only during rainy season. His words make contemporary readers wonder what God thinks of their worship; they force us reflect on our own practice of justice and righteousness.

In the final movement (vv. 25-27), God clarifies that religious hypocrisy is nothing new for Israel. It goes back to their wanderings in the wilderness when they often engaged in idolatry. One writer observes: “From the very beginning their worship had been falsely directed. It was often not to Him, but to a golden calf, to the sun, moon, and stars, and to Molech and other false gods that many of them brought **sacrifices and offerings** during their **40 years in the desert** (cf. Stephen's reference to Amos 5:25-27 in Acts 7:39-43)” (Donald R. Sunukjian, “Amos,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1442). And so because of their hypocritical worship coupled with idolatry, God warns he will send the nation into “exile beyond Damascus” (v. 27), which is a clear prediction of the brutal Assyrian captivity three decades later in 722 B.C. (see “Assyrian Campaigns Against Israel and Judah” and “Exile of the Northern Kingdom,” *The NIV Study Bible*, 594-95, 600). God not only removed them from their land, but he also removed them from his presence (v. 27; cf., 2Ki 17:18) for idolatry and their habitual disobedience to the covenant of Moses.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 18 **Woe**

“Woe (hōy; cf. 6:1) was ordinarily the wail of grief over the dead . . . Pronounced over the living, ‘woe’ was a prediction of death (cf. Amos 6:1; Isa. 5:8-24; 10:1-4; Micah 2:1-5; see comments on Amos 5:1) or an interjection of distress in the face of present or coming calamity (cf. comments on Isa. 3:9; 6:5)” (Donald R. Sunukjian, “Amos,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1441).

v. 18 **day of the LORD**

“In Israel’s thinking ‘the day of the Lord’ was to be the time of God’s culminating vengeance against her enemies, the day when their mighty Sovereign would fight on their behalf (Isa. 34:1-3, 8; Jer. 46:10). On that day, she thought, He would turn His wrath on the wicked nations, punishing with disaster and death those who had threatened His people (Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:1-3). On that day Israel would be permanently secured from danger, and exalted among all nations of the earth (Isa. 24:21-23; Joel 3)” (Sunukjian, 1441). “When the OT speaks of the day, it is referring not to a definite extent of time, but to a definite event in time, whose nature will be determined entirely by the Lord . . . The optimistic belief arose in Israel that God would always fight for it and that on a climactic day, when God came to establish a kingdom over all the earth, he would destroy all of its enemies and exalt Israel above all nations” (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I*, NIBC, 209, 210).

v. 21 **festivals, assemblies**

“The **feasts** referred to in verse 21 were the three great festivals—Tabernacles, Passover or Unleavened Bread, and Weeks (Exod. 23:14-17; 34:22, 25; Deut. 16:1-16)—which Israelites celebrated with pilgrimages, probably to Bethel or Gilgal (see comment on 4:4). ‘Solemn assemblies’ (RSV) were feast days celebrating sabbaths, new moons, and other less important occasions, when all work ceased and the people gathered together to worship and sometimes to eat (cf. 8:5; Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35; 2Kgs. 10:20; Isa. 1:13; Joel 1:14)” (Achtemeier, 211).

vv. 22, 23 **will not accept** . . .

“God will not **accept** the burnt offerings; literally, the verb means ‘savor’ or ‘smell,’ as in Genesis 8:21, so God closes his nostrils to Israel’s offerings. God **will have no regard** for the grain offerings; that is, God will not ‘look upon’ them, so he closes his eyes. And God **will not listen** to the singing and playing on lutes, so he closes his ears. Indeed, the festal songs were nothing but **noise**” (Achtemeier, 211). References to God’s body parts are figures of speech called *anthropomorphisms*, the attribution of physical characteristics to God, who doesn’t have a physical body.

v. 24 **justice, righteousness**

Cf., Hos 6:6; Mic 6:8. “This is the key verse in the book, since it expresses so clearly what God wanted from His people. It is a clear statement of the importance of moral and ethical righteousness over mere ritual worship. Amos’ concerns boil down to justice toward man and righteousness toward God” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Amos,” 2021 ed., 52, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/amos.pdf). Justice connotes fair and equitable treatment of all people in the courts (cf., Zec 9:16); righteousness connotes doing what is right in obedience to the covenant.

v. 25 **did you?**

Does the rhetorical question assume a negative or positive answer? The answer is debated. According to one commentator, it expects a negative reply (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 299). But offerings and sacrifices were apparently offered in the wilderness on more than one occasion (cf., Ex 24:4, 6; Num 7; 19). So the same commentator explains: “It means that the sacrifices offered went to another [cf., v. 26], not to God . . . or that such sacrifices were brought with less than a pure heart” (Bock, 299). “With another rhetorical question (cf. v. 20), the Lord asked if His people really worshipped Him with their animal sacrifices and grain offerings when they were in the wilderness for 40 years. Animal sacrifices and grain offerings represent the totality of Israel’s Levitical offerings. As He clarified in the next verse, they had not. Their hypocritical worship was not something new; it had marked them from the beginning of their nation (e.g., the golden calf incident, Exod. 32)” (Constable, 53).

v. 26 **shrine, pedestal**

Cf., NIV marg. “Or *lifted up Sakkuth your king/ and Kaiwan your idols,/ your star gods.*” “The rebuke from Amos points to the ignominious history of the wilderness wanderings. Sacrifices were not offered to God but to others . . . The Hebrew text of Amos has (*Sikkût*; probably Assyrian Sakkut) and (*kiyyûn*; probably Assyrian Kewan), Mesopotamian gods of the sky, the latter referring to Saturn, also known as Ninib” (Bock, 299).

v. 27 **exile beyond Damascus**

I.e., a prediction of the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 722 B.C. (cf., 2Ki 17).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Worship that God accepts must be offered by those who actively pursue righteousness in their lives and justice in their world.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

Believers are called to be Christlike, and therefore, concerned with justice. We should be advocates for the marginalized, but where do we start? Honestly, is there a better training ground for how to live life with other people than the home? Kids have to learn how to get along with others, share, love the unlovable and be kind and gentle, all before they can speak in full sentences! Kids have a spidey sense when it comes to justice (ahem, sibling rivalry). The hair on their arms stands straight up when there is even the slightest perceived injustice headed their direction. Kids, and let's face it, adults too, get so caught up in their perceived injustices and bubble of reality that they can't peel their eyes off themselves long enough to notice the world around them. The best way to teach compassion and an awareness of others is to model it. Absolutely you should serve with your kids as well as show empathy with and pray for those on the margin. Also, consider modeling compassion in your home with your kids and your spouse. Share personal stories of times when you were shown great empathy, and when you weren't. Helping your kids build compassion at home will have a ripple effect as their community widens. They will notice others in a whole new light as they grow in compassion. They'll also begin to understand why compassion is important and the value of standing in the gap as an advocate for others. We are praying for you as you lead your children to be image bearers and compassionate advocates of justice.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Amos 5:18-27.

1. What will the day of the Lord be like?
2. Explain verse 24 in your own words.
3. What were the Israelites lifting up?

What Do You Think?

What does it mean for justice to roll on like a river?

What Do You Do?

How different would our lives be if God didn't care about justice?

CORE COMPETENCY: Peace

I live without worry because things are good between God, myself and others.

MEMORY VERSE: Micah 6:8

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for 12 years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Central Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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**CENTRAL
BIBLE CHURCH**

8001 Anderson Boulevard
Fort Worth, Texas 76120
817-274-1315
wearecentral.org