**Justice (Amos 5:14-15, 21-24)**

 (After some initial greetings…) God requires a just lifestyle from us and only then orderly corporate worship. Today’s subject is justice and we hope that based on the news from this past week in various parts of the world, we sense the struggle of humanity against injustice. Having said this, we know that it was humanly impossible to live justly. Jesus’ self-sacrifice finally took us (believers) out from under the pressure of the Law of Moses and transferred us into the freedom of grace, based on Jesus’ shed blood and victorious Resurrection. However, that did not mean that we no longer were required to put effort into living a righteous or just life. Put simply, God gave us a means by which to put justice into practice by the power of Jesus’ grace. It is for this reason that today we’re going to study the call to justice (or righteousness) to understand the Lord’s requirement and to serve Him with a clearer focus. Once again, I reiterate: God requires a just lifestyle from us and only then orderly corporate worship. Let’s speak about this foundational concept, then…

 Obeying God puts us in a just/righteous position both personally and corporately. Let’s begin with a question: Why was God saying to the people, *“Seek good and not evil”*? The good is a deed that is obedient to God’s will. It is a responsible, considerate attitude, and is seasoned with an almost Divine generosity. However, God’s people were not in that righteous position before Him… The rich ignored the rights of the poor. When a rich man and a poor man would go to court at the city gates, the rich would ignore the judgment by the elders if given against him. In addition to this injustice, instead of building ordinary homes, they ostentatiously built villas with hewn and dressed stones, not considering the needs of the poor which they could address. They planted spacious vineyards and contributed to much drunkenness and debauchery. They took advantage of the poor and took away their lands and means of income. If these were exceptional cases, they would be forgivable. But these sins had already become the rule. On top of all this, the judges themselves persecuted the innocent and refused to hear the cases of the poor, often accepting bribes from those who were well-to-do. God was fed up with their situation. The Israelites supposed that the Day of the Lord would be a military deliverance for them as it had been previously under many of their kings – something that they even celebrated in their worship. They expected that God was going to deliver them from the nearby large and threatening empires. But Amos told them the truth. God had had enough of their unjust behavior toward each other and preferred a true lifestyle instead of their elaborate rituals and ceremonies.

 A few days ago we had a small sign of justice in the political arena. The Congress within the American government affirmed the historicity of the Armenian Genocide. However, many began to write, wondering whether this was truly an act of justice, or just a political game or show. Personally, at the very least, this is a positive beginning toward a (greater) political justice for Armenians all over.

 Beyond this aspect, however, today our Scripture passage shows us the other side, the spiritual aspect of justice. As I had written a few days ago on Facebook, though I was not fully understood, I’m pointing out that Justice is done when the fruits of righteousness (or justice) show up in our lives. Justice is done when love, pity, and what is right rule the day. Justice exists when the rich do not take advantage of the poor within our own ethnicity or nation, and when each individual considers his neighbor as greater than him or herself. We do right when we obey Jesus’ commands – to love each other, to forgive, and to work for the truth in love. This is why the kingdoms of Israel and Judah fell. Their utter lack of spirituality took them, by their own hands, out from under God’s protection and blessings.

 Dear brothers and sisters, we are called to do righteousness within our families, our church and ethnicity, in the whole world (wherever we find ourselves). The one who does not do this may very well see the wrath of God, even if they are a Christian. Therefore, let us examine ourselves today: what kind of attitude have we had toward each other? Have we cared for each other? Have we forgiven each other? Have we lifted up the needy among us? Have we comforted the brokenhearted? Have we stayed faithful to God’s commandments?

 If we want to live a Christ-centered life as the people of God are supposed to, then we are called to obey His commands. Obeying God puts us in a just/righteous position both personally and corporately. God requires a just lifestyle from us and only then orderly corporate worship. The Lord bless you all. Amen.