

Pursuing Justice, the Biblical Way

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Anarchy is defined as a state of society without government or law. It is also defined as a state of political and social disorder due to the absence of governmental control.

Not having government or law is one thing, having political and social disorder because of a lack of government control is quite another. Some maintain that not having government involved in one's private affairs is a good thing. Some maintain that we do not need an overly-reaching government to impose ridiculously restrictive laws that limit, and thus harm, the freedoms and liberties of the individual.

Most will maintain that freedom is a good thing, and that liberty should be preserved, at almost all costs. I believe that this should be universally accepted and embraced by everyone. However, what happens when there exists a condition when, due to a lack of law and order, social and political conditions get so out of hand that individual liberties and freedoms are stolen or lost?

What we can see here is that while there is a definite need for freedom and liberty, there is also an equal need for law and order. Balance between these two forces seems to be necessary for the establishment and continuation of a healthy, peaceful and prosperous society.

Law and order versus freedom and liberty, are these really at odds with one another? Being that all these are vital, necessary and desirable, why should the achieving of a balance between them all be such a difficult task for society after society, throughout human history to acquire?

Is the problem that we human beings have not yet conceived of a proper form of government that would establish and ensure both freedom and order? Is the problem really the form and structure of government? Or maybe the problem is deeper than this. Maybe the problem is not government, maybe the problem is the people in government.

As a rule, we can say, where there are good people acting with good deeds, and motivated by good intent, the natural outcome should be good. In such a society, all invest in good and therefore all reap the invested good, and life is good for all. This is true regardless of the form of government. For when good prevails, life, liberty and freedom equally prevail. Regardless of its form, good government with good people works good!

However, as good is good, so too bad is bad. Any society built by bad people, acting with bad deeds, motivated by bad intent, will unequivocally produce a harvest of bad things, simply because that is what went into the building process.

Build bad, get bad. This is true regardless of the form of government, and it is also true regardless of how much liberty and freedom there seems to be. For when there is a society of bad deeds and bad intent, life, liberty and freedom cannot survive under these conditions, regardless of the words and proclamations such a society may make.

Anarchy can exist when there are no laws, and it can also exist when the laws are overly harsh and extensive, creating a backlash of resistance and rebellion. Needless to say that this is not the best way for human civilization to operate.

Balancing the liberties and freedoms of the individual, while maintaining sane and stable government was a directive and command proclaimed by none less than Moses himself. In Deuteronomy 16:18-20, it says,

*“You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that the Lord, your God, is giving you, for your tribes, and they shall judge the people [with] **righteous judgment**. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show favoritism, and you shall not take a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts just words. **Justice, justice shall you pursue**, that you may live and possess the land the Lord, your God, is giving you.”*

Law and order is one thing. Justice and righteousness are often another. In order to maintain true freedom and liberty, the laws that govern a society need to be both just and righteous. Unfortunately, as history has shown us on almost every occasion, once governments are established and power solidified, those in power tend to rule in accordance to what is right and good for themselves, even at the expense of the justice and righteousness for everyone else. As long as there are bad people out there, we will have bad governments that are made by them.

This warning was exactly what Moses was talking about. Moses very well understood the human heart. His admonishment was that government, in order to be proper must pursue justice and that which is right. The laws of the land must be written in such a way to be flexible enough to be able to handle this. Laws therefore cannot be “proverbially” etched in stone, rather their language must be fluid and able to be subjective to the specific circumstances at hand. Essentially, the letter of the law must be subservient to the spirit of the law.

Unfortunately, courts of law can and do corrupt justice and righteousness. In order for courts to be places of justice and righteousness they need to work with pliable laws that can address individual circumstances. Only in this way can justice be guaranteed.

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One who violates or harms another is subject to justice from that other. The role of the court is to make sure that this style of justice is executed. This is what Moses meant when he said to pursue justice. In the end, the purpose of a legal justice system is not to serve the law, rather it is to serve and protect individual citizens, who have suffered some form of wrong at the hands of another.

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Levels of punishment or retribution may vary depending on the circumstances of the matter, and not based on sentencing guidelines which have no relationship to the individual issues at hand.

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The law is the law, true, but that does not make the law to be right and just. When the law is morally wrong and unjust, or when the law itself is abused to inflict harm and loss on individuals, then such applications violate justice. Justice and righteousness, therefore, shout out that enforcers of such laws are violators of justice itself, and thus they themselves, need to be brought to justice. This might not be the law, but it is certainly what is right.

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In a conflict between the law and what's right, what's right must triumph on every occasion. This alone is true freedom and the definition of liberty. This is what Moses commanded us when he said, "**Justice, justice shall you pursue.**"

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