



"Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

—John Adams

**02-Aug-02**

## *Sign of the Times*

Two sets of news stories intersect this week to reveal just how far America has declined from her heights of morality and greatness. Both of them involve justice—or, rather, injustice—a sure sign of approaching crisis.

Two scriptures should set the stage and the standard:

- He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death. ([Exodus 21:16](#))
- And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. ([Exodus 23:8](#))

Many other verses could be brought to bear on these two subjects, kidnapping and bribery, but these convey the essence of God's law on them.

A rash of kidnappings of girls and young women has occurred across the nation from Southern California to Philadelphia. Too many have ended in the discovery of the girl's body, left as refuse after being abused by their abductor. A few have ended joyously with a reunion of child and parents. In most of these cases, the perpetrator is still at large.

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Just yesterday, two young ladies were kidnapped just north of Los Angeles, and twelve hours later, their kidnapper, a career criminal, was shot dead by sheriff's deputies. Kern County Sheriff Carl Sparks, interviewed on "Larry King Live" last night, expressed a common feeling of many law-and-order Americans: "This guy, we don't have to worry about him being rehabilitated. We don't have to worry about the Supreme Court. He is deceased." Swift and certain—some would call it Wild West—justice is far more satisfying than the snail-paced and often appeals-happy criminal "justice" system in place today. Our present system appears as if it does not want to punish the guilty.

The other set of news items involves two elected officials, Representative Jim Traficant (D-Ohio) and Senator Robert Torricelli (D-New Jersey), both of whom took bribes to influence their votes in Congress on business matters. Traficant was nearly unanimously expelled from the House for his misdeeds and sentenced to an eight-year jail term for ten counts of bribery, tax evasion and racketeering. Torricelli, however, was merely "severely admonished" by the Senate even though he accepted far more than the \$50 in gifts a senator is legally allowed to receive—including a television, CD stereo system, grandfather clock, jewelry, suits, and fourteen envelopes of cash.

Why the hypocrisy by the Senate? Kicking Torricelli out of that august chamber would return Republicans—and thus President Bush—to control, and the Democrats would lose their stranglehold over, among other things, judicial nominations and scheduling bill debates and votes. Booting Traficant meant nothing, and it even helped Democrats in that the Ohio congressman often voted with Republicans! So, instead of doing what is just in both cases, Democrats did what was politically expedient: heaving one and coddling the other.

Some might say, "Hasn't this kind of chicanery gone on all along?" Yes and no. Certainly, human nature has made liars and hypocrites out of many politicians throughout American history, but it is more blatant and widespread in these humanistic, relativistic times. Besides, these kinds of political moves are not made in some smoke-filled backroom, but in the light of day on national television. There is not even a sense of shame or embarrassment over them!

The prophet Amos shows that when things like this begin happening across the nation, time is short:

"Therefore, because you tread down the poor and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them.

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For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes; diverting the poor from justice at the gate. . . . There shall be wailing in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, 'Alas! Alas!' . . . In all vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through you," says the LORD. ". . . But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream." ([Amos 5:11-12](#), 16-17, 24)

Injustice in all its forms is a sign of the time. [God](#) will not let too much time slip by before He begins to require true justice—and it will come at His hand. Woe to the unjust when God says, "I will not pass by them anymore" ([Amos 7:8](#))!

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [The Right Use of Power](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all creation, man is the only creature made in God's image and given dominion over the rest of creation. When God breathed in the spirit of man (Genesis 2:7) to enable thinking, feeling, and creating, He imbued God-like characteristics, giving mankind the capability of subduing, controlling, and directing the rest of creation—a power not given to animals (Genesis 1:26, 28). With dominion comes responsibility to maintain (Genesis 2:15). The sad history of mankind shows that he has badly mismanaged his power, bringing about disease, war, and famine. Such people will be brought into account (Revelation 11:18). God's Spirit enables us to direct this power in a responsible, godly manner.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Panting After the Dust](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

In every culture in every century, the rich and the strong have oppressed the poor and weak for their own gain. America is no different. How long will it be until God calls them into account?

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