



A Renewed Mind Pt 5: Understanding Biblical Justice

Aug 30, 2020

Romans 12:1-2; 2 Thessalonians Chapter 1

Our roadmap today:

1. Offer some Clarification and Cautions
2. Give some Background and Thoughts on our Text
3. Attempt to define Biblical Justice
4. Attempt to help us Understand our Just God
5. Offer a Personal, Bible-based "Question Grid" to determine what is "just."
6. Also offer a Personal, Bible-based "Question Grid" for a Gospel response to injustice.
7. Pray for our families, communities, and Nation

Like last week, here are a few Clarifications and Cautions as we go forward:

1. Once again, we are not attempting to minimize or make light of personal experiences.
2. Like "race," the justice issue is difficult due to past and present sins, personal perceptions, and cultural projections and presuppositions.
3. This is made all the more complicated because we sometime lack the "full story" on issues.
4. We must also account for anger and other emotional responses which can cloud sound judgment.
5. Key point of Caution: We must turn to Scripture to define what justice looks like; if we do not, might perceive wrongly or fight one injustice with another!
6. Once we look to Scripture, we must accept God's Word on the issue.
7. We must also confess our need for the Holy Spirit to help us see clearly, think biblically, and respond in godly ways!

Background on the Text:

1. Writing in the early 50s AD, Paul, while he was likely in Corinth, penned this second letter to the church at Thessalonica, located in Greece on the Aegean Sea. This letter was written only a few weeks after the 1st. Why?
2. MacArthur wrote, "*Apparently, Paul had stayed informed of the happenings in Thessalonica through correspondence and/or couriers. Perhaps the bearer of the first letter brought Paul back an update on the condition of the church, which had matured and expanded (2Th 1:3); but pressure and persecution had also increased. So, Paul wrote to his beloved flock who were: (1) discouraged by persecution and needed incentive to persevere; (2) deceived by false teachers who confused them about the Lord's return; and (3) disobedient to divine commands, particularly by refusing to work. Paul wrote to address those three issues by offering: (1) comfort for the persecuted believers (2Th 1:3-12); (2) correction for the falsely taught and frightened believers (2Th 2:1-15); and (3) confrontation for the disobedient and undisciplined believers (2Th 3:6-15).*"
3. In other words, our Text today, in part, was given to the Thessalonians to comfort them during a time of confusion and persecution!
4. **I believe it is critical for the church to root and ground her concept of justice in Christ, in the sovereignty of God, and in a thoroughly New Testament concept of suffering and endurance. If we allow our heart to open, I believe this chapter can further prepare and shape our hearts to understand biblical justice.**
5. May we all be comforted by these words as we consider this most difficult subject.

Key Thoughts from the Text for today:

1. The letter begins with Paul, along with Silas and Timothy, offering the standard apostolic greeting of Grace and Peace (vv1-2), so simply and so often read in Scripture, but so profoundly needed! What if our lives and churches were characterize by grace and peace?
2. Paul then commends them for their growth in both faith and love one to another despite the persecutions and hardships they were suffering. (vv3-4) Would we merit such a commendation?
3. Verses 5-6 have some things to say to us today. Let us look at verse 5:
 - The tribulations of the church are a *“manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer.”* (KJV)
 - The tribulations of the church is *“evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.”* (ESV)
 - *“And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering.”* (NLT)
4. When we consider the issues of justice and injustice, we would to well to also consider the inescapable biblical fact that God will often allow injustice and use it 1) For His own purposes and glory and 2) To refine and strengthen the saints.
5. What the church was experiencing, though difficult, was somehow a part of God’s plan. Although hard to sometimes grasp, this is an important truth! Why?
 - Knowing that God is in control should comfort us when we are angry or frustrated!
 - Knowing that God is in control should temper or calm us...give us peace!
 - Knowing that God is seeking His own glory and that of His kingdom should inspire us!
 - Knowing that God has a purpose for us in these things should give us joy!
6. As we consider these issues, our goals today are to, by God’s grace, ease any frustrations you might feel and encourage your faith in a sovereign God! Verse 6 says:
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:6 (KJV)** *Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;*
 - **2 Thessalonians 1:6 (NLT)** *In his justice he will pay back those who persecute you.*
7. **Beloved, key to both understanding AND embracing biblical justice is the knowledge that our God is just and it is He who will establish ultimate justice. Despite any injustice that befalls a believer, he/she can KNOW that eventually, God will recompense.** Even when human attempts to right injustices seem to fail, we can be confident that the wrongdoer will not escape. All will be judged. Scripture says:
 - **Romans 12:19 (KJV)** *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*
 - **1 Thessalonians 4:6-7 (KJV)** *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. **7** For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*

- **Hebrews 10:30-31 (KJV)** *For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. **31** *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

8. To clarify, we live our lives not hoping for our enemies to “get theirs” but rather focused upon the LORD and trusting in His equity. Paul encourages this persecuted church along these lines in verses 7-10. He told them:

- That not only would God repay, but also give His people relief and rest when He comes! (v7)
- That His justice would be harsh...vengeance of flaming fire on those who don't know God or obey the Gospel of Jesus! (v8)
- That their punishment will be everlasting destruction, forever separated from the Presence of the LORD (v9)
- That the church would one day see and worship Him in greater fullness because they believed! (v10)

9. Beloved, injustice can make one angry, bitter, and joyless. These verses encourage hope!

- Know that our LORD is a God of justice. No one can run from His judgement forever.
- Take heart! Believe God's Word! Trust in Him and His plan! Pursue His will!
- This is the sort of heart that will rightly embrace biblical justice.

10. In the closing words of chapter 1, Paul mentioned how he prays for the church. If you will allow me to paraphrase in context:

- LORD, despite the persecutions and injustices, enable your church to live lives worthy of their calling. (11)
- LORD, despite the persecutions and injustices, give your church power and faith to fulfill your good works! (v11)
- LORD, do these things so that the Name of the LORD Jesus Christ would be glorified by your church! (v12)
- LORD, despite the persecutions and injustices, continue to pour out your grace upon your church! (v12)

Our attempt to define Biblical Justice:

Long version: *Biblical Justice is state in which God's commands related to the issues of man have been applied; it is the merciful, loving, but holy application of the Word of God in matters pertaining to human living and conflict. Its goal is always the glory of God, the blessing of the righteous, the upbuilding of the Kingdom, the punishment of the wicked, and the pointing of men to Christ.*

Short version: *The godly application of equity that man might pursue the dominion mandate.*

Understanding Our Just God

Any discussion of justice must include its author: The God of the Bible. Biblical Justice must be viewed through the prism of God's holy character, absolute perfection in all things, equity in judgment, eventual recompense upon the lawbreaker, and the Gospel of Jesus. So here are some attributes of our just God:

1. God is holy; this is connected to His Justice.
 - **Isaiah 5:16 (KJV)** *But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.*
2. God is always right; His law is perfect.
 - **Psalms 19:7-9 (KJV)** *The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.*
3. God is always fair; He is no respecter of persons.
 - **Colossians 3:23-25 (KJV)** *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.*
4. God loves justice and hates injustice.
 - **Psalms 67:3-5 (KJV)** *Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. 4 O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah. 5 Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.*
 - **Psalms 89:14 (KJV)** *Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.*
 - **Psalms 96:13 (KJV)** *Before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.*
 - **Leviticus 19:35-36 (KJV)** *Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. 36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.*
 - **Proverbs 20:10 (KJV)** *Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD.*

Because our LORD loves justice, so should we!

- **Amos 5:15 (KJV)** *Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.*
- **Amos 5:24 (KJV)** *But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*
- **Micah 6:8 (KJV)** *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

5. Transgression of God's Law can create injustice and oppression.

- Sin is defined biblically as "transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4) Injustice is sin, but is also the consequences of sin.
- Not every sin is an injustice.
- *Injustice can be thought of as the result of sin that violates another's God-given "rights."* (One might define "rights" biblically as "the ability to obey God's commands for the Home, Church, and State or "take dominion.")
- When one thinks of injustice, one often thinks of *oppression* as the state of those to whom injustice has been consistently applied.
- First use of "oppress" (lâchats in Hebrew): **Exodus 3:9 (KJV)** Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.
- To oppress is to afflict, crush, force, hold fast. (Strong's) The Webster 1828 Dictionary says it is "To load or burden with unreasonable impositions; to treat with unjust severity, rigor or hardship; to oppress one by compelling him to perform unreasonable service. To overpower; to overburden; as, to be oppressed with grief."

- **A Biblical Definition of Oppression:**

The use of one's authority or resources to continually and forcefully impose unjust treatment upon others.

- Beloved, God hates oppression!

Zechariah 7:8-11 (KJV) *And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, **9** Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: **10** And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. **11** But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear.*

- In the New Testament, James cries out:

James 2:6 (KJV) *But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?*

- The word *oppress* in Greek here means, 1) to exercise harsh control over one, to use one's power against one. (Thayer) James continues later:

James 5:1-6 (KJV) *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. **2** Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. **3** Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. **4** Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. **5** Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth,*

and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

- A few thoughts:
 - The injustice and oppression we see in Scripture has a “forced” element to it.
 - Thankfully, every life difficulty isn’t necessarily oppression. When one can choose, with little force-backed resistance, a response that leads to better circumstances, one likely isn’t oppressed in that area.
 - When we see true oppression, it should move us to prayer, to attempt to remove it via some kind of intervention, or to civil action.
 - Emotional and physical scars from oppression can remain, but be healed in Christ! (Lk 4:18-19)

Quick Recap:

- Biblical Justice is state in which God’s commands related to the issues of man have been applied; it is the merciful, loving, but holy application of the Word of God in matters pertaining to human living and conflict. Its goal is always the glory of God, the blessing of the righteous, the upbuilding of the Kingdom, the punishment of the wicked, and the pointing of men to Christ.
- Or more simply, it is the godly application of equity that man might pursue the dominion mandate.
- Sin is defined biblically as “transgression of the law.”
- Injustice can be thought of as the result of sin that violates another’s God-given “rights.” (One might define rights biblically as “the ability to obey God’s commands for the Home, Church, and State or “take dominion.”)
- Oppression is the use of one’s authority or resources to continually and forcefully impose unjust treatment upon others.
- ***Said succinctly, Justice is godly holiness and love applied. Sin is transgression of the law. Injustice is sin that results in a denial of the dominion mandate. Oppression is the state and results of such sin upon man.***

6. Ultimate justice comes through Jesus Christ! Hallelujah!

- His life, death, and resurrection provides the atonement for our sins! In Him we are “justified!”

Romans 3:23-26 (KJV) *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

7. Final judgment will come, wherein all unjust actions will be punished.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (KJV) *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

Revelation 20:11-15 (KJV) *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

A Personal Question Grid to determine whether something is “Just:”

1. Is the incident in question in keeping with God’s holy character?
2. Have I prayed and asked God for wisdom and clarity?
3. Do I truly know the truth? Have I heard both sides?
 - **Proverbs 18:13 (KJV)** *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*
 - **Proverbs 18:17 (KJV)** *He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.*
 - **Proverbs 18:17 (NLT)** *The first to speak in court sounds right—until the cross-examination begins.*
4. Are God’s image-bearers being oppressed...being forcibly kept from taking dominion?
5. Have I mined the Scriptures for precepts, principles, and patterns that may govern the incident? (The Ten Commandments and Law of God, the Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commandment, Apostolic Commands, etc.)
6. Has a “just” civil law been broken?
7. Have I consulted with godly counsel?
 - **Proverbs 11:14 (KJV)** *Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*
 - **Proverbs 24:6 (KJV)** *For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.*

A Personal Question Grid to determine what your Gospel Response should be to

Injustice:

1. Have I prayed and asked the Holy Spirit for His help before I respond?
2. Has godly counsel been consulted? If so, do they agree? Why or why not?
3. Does my response bear witness to the Gospel for those who look on?
4. Does my response demonstrate mercy and forgiveness (instead of vengeance)?
5. Does my response promote peace and peaceable, godly living?
6. Does my response help defend the widow, the poor, the fatherless, and the brokenhearted?
7. Which jurisdiction should I use to settle/adjudicate: personal, home, church, or state?

Closing Thoughts

We've done our best to define and quickly explore biblical justice. Determining what is just can sometimes be simple, but at other times can be extremely difficult. We should patiently and prayerfully make decisions in this area, not based on our opinions or feelings, but based in Scripture and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But please hear this again: there are aspects of biblical justice that will only be full manifested at the Final Judgment. This should encourage us!

When you get discouraged, please remember:

- **Ecclesiastes 12:14 (KJV)** *For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Prayer for our families, communities, and Nation

Great God and King, we humbly beseech Thee to bring healing to our land. We admit our wicked thought and deeds have brought much desolation and destruction upon us. Our families are in ruins, our children are scattered in their thinking, our churches are weak because Your truths seem too hard for us, and our cities are in turmoil: citizen vs citizen, image-bearer vs image bearer: American vs American, and sometimes, Christian vs Christian. We repent LORD. Our sins are at the root. Christ alone can heal us. So we ask you, our King, Lawgiver, and righteous Judge (Isa 33:22), to help us.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (KJV) *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

Perform it LORD. Amen!