

Weightier Matters: Justice

Prepared by Steve Gregg

(Matt.23:23-24/ Mic.6:8/ Isa.1:11-17/Jer.5:1)

I. Definitions

A. Dictionary.com: “the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness”

Equitable: “having or exhibiting equity : dealing fairly and equally with all concerned”

Equitable: “justice according to natural law or right; *specifically*: freedom from bias or favoritism”

The concept is distinguished from mercy in that one gives what is deserved, and the other offers better than what is deserved.

B. God-seekers understand justice; others don't (Prov.28:5)

All of God's ways are justice (Deut.32:4; Psalm 92:15; Ezek.18:25)

This tells us more about the gravity of sin than do our instincts

C. Justice is defined with reference to rights, or what is owed

II. Justice, God's Law and human rights

A. The subject of desert (i.e., what is deserved) is inseparably connected to the concept of “rights.” Justice upholds the rights of all, while mercy involves one party surrendering one's own rights to the advantage of another (see Matthew 20:13-15).

B. God's laws reveal His concept of human rights.

1) The right to be compensated for one's time or labor:

It is assumed, everywhere in scripture, that fair and timely-paid wages are due to hired laborers (Deut.24:15; Prov.3:27-28; 1 Tim.5:18; 1 Cor.9:4-11; James 5:4).

It is injustice to deny to any person that which they have earned, or less than what they deserve.

The ideal of justice in business and economics is that every transaction involves the trading of goods and services for goods or services of equal value. To misrepresent the value of one's own side of the transaction is unjust (Lev.19:36; Prov.11:1).

2) “Honor your father and your mother” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery” presuppose a debt owed to parents (cf., 1 Tim.5:4), and to one's spouse (1 Cor.7:3-4).

The “debt of gratitude” (Luke 17:15-18 / 2 Thess.2:13)

3) “Thou shalt not bear false witness” is an acknowledgment of one's right to (or deserving of) his good reputation. One who has lived well deserves to be known for his virtue, rather to be slandered. (see Deut.20:15-19)

4) “Thou shalt not murder” and “Thou shalt not steal” presuppose the recognition of a neighbor's right to life and to private property.

To borrow and not to repay is another form of stealing (Psalm 37:21)

C. Governmental authorities are obliged to be just in meting out penalties (1 Kings 10:9; Ps.82:3; Prov.17:15; 31:5)

1) “An eye for an eye” (Lev.24:17-22)—Is intended to guide courtroom law, and forbids punishments that are disproportionately severe or disproportionately lenient.

2) No partiality can be allowed to influence justice—equality of opportunity, not of outcomes

Thomas Sowell:

“The fundamental difference between equal treatment and equal performance is repeatedly confused. In performance terms, virtually no one is equal to anyone. The same individual is not even equal to himself on different days.”

Modern misconceptions: “Social Justice Warriors” (SJWs) and “Identity Politics” (Ex.23:2-3,6)

No “special” rights for different categories (e.g., for gay’s, blacks, women, immigrants, transgenders, Third World nations)

Walter E. Williams:

“Let me offer you my definition of social justice: I keep what I earn and you keep what you earn. Do you disagree? Well then tell me how much of what I earn belongs to you—and why?”

Thomas Sowell:

I have never understood why it is ‘greed’ to want to keep the money you’ve earned, but not greed to want to take someone else’s money.”

3) Government authorities are not authorized to confiscate private property (1 Kings 21:7, 19)

“No matter how worthy the cause, it is robbery, theft, and injustice to confiscate the property of one person and give it to another to whom it does not belong.” —Walter E. Williams

III. Justice and the Kingdom of God

Psalm 106:3 A beatitude for the just

Isaiah 5:1-7 The fruit God demands of His vineyard is justice

Matt.21:33-43 Israel did not produce the fruit, the Church will (someday)

Isaiah 42:1-4 Christ’s mission: To establish justice in the earth (Matt.12:15-21)

Psalm 89:14 God’s throne is established upon justice