





n our previous series 'Is there a True Right and Wrong' we examined the idea of a standard for right and wrong that could be found across cultures and people groups. Some people call this concept 'the law of human nature,' or 'the moral law.' Once we agree on the premise of a true right and wrong, only then we can begin to discuss the idea of justice. It's preemptive to talk about justice if we don't agree on what actions demand it.

HE HAS SHOWN YOU, O MORTAL, WHAT IS GOOD. AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU? TO ACT JUSTLY AND TO

MICAH 6:8

FOUNDATIONAL IDEAS

f you are not sure that humans can agree on any basic idea of right and wrong, you're not alone. Especially in America, where our culture has become so focused on the individual, right and wrong has turned into something that sounds like 'that's right for you but not for me' or 'that's true for you, but that's not true for me.' In some circles this is called relativism or more specifically, moral relativism.

Let's be clear. When we disagree on right or truth, we are not talking about basic facts like 2 + 2 = 4. If anyone told you that fact was 'right for you but not right for me,' you might think they'd lost their marbles. These conversations about relative right and relative truth are really based in feelings. It could be how we feel about religion, it could be how we feel about a behavior or choice, it could be how we feel about a sports team. But in the end, what the speaker is really saying is that his/her opinion is 'their truth.' This is dangerous ground. In the bible this is characterized like this 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' (Judges 21:25b)

Why raise this point? Because it's fundamentally linked to the idea of justice. If we can't agree on a single standard for right or truth, how can we agree on any other elements of justice like when and how it should be distributed?

For those of us who are Jesus followers, we believe that the bible offers this single standard of justice. In fact, we believe the author of the Bible, God, is also the author of right and wrong, and therefore the author of justice. But this is a big concept to unpack, so let's be methodical about it. In order for you to accept this supposition you must first accept a few things as foundational:

Let's pause here to examine these two seemingly simple points. *First*, God exists. For people who reject this simple truth, it's easy to see how all things become relative after that, like dominos that fall after one is tipped over. It's unfair for people who believe in God to expect those who do not believe in God to behave in ways that the Bible prescribes.

This leads us to the **second** point. If we are created beings (which plenty of people disagree is true) we have been ordered and designed. Here again this seems like a pretty simple concept, but as it falls apart in some belief systems, so do the ideas that it supports. If we are created with order and purpose, that order and purpose will exert itself on us in some ways. Like the foundational sensibility of right and wrong. For those who resist the idea that humans have intrinsic order and purpose, it's easy to decide for themselves what is 'right for them' or as the bible says 'right in their own eyes.'

However, this paradigm of relativity falls apart in the face of injustice. And here we find the cultural rub. Or as Tim Keller calls it, the ultimate 'who sez?'. Often the same folks that declare the bible has no place or rule in their life will also be the first to call out for justice and liberty, two concepts that the bible is steeped in.

PRAYER OF RESPONSE

Let us, Lord please, find ways that we can gently steer people into seeing that justice, and liberty, and generosity, and kindness are all rooted, in fact, in a biblical worldview. As we do so, let us please win hearts for Christ.

A MOMENT ON RIGHT AND WRONG

S. Lewis realized that a truly productive conversation about justice could not occur without first having that fundamental conversation about right and wrong. He does an exceptional job of explaining the connection between justice and God in his book Mere Christianity. We used this book as a springboard for the conversation in our previous series, 'Is There a True Right and Wrong'. You can find that series and all of our content on **studywithfriends.org**.

Understanding the difference between relative right and wrong (like which side of the road we drive on) and fundamental right and wrong (like don't kill and eat your babies) is not as easy as you might expect. Sure, the examples provided there seem pretty clear, but what about the less easily defined rules that govern premarital sex or the death penalty or even veganism?? Folks have some pretty hard core opinions on right and wrong in those areas.

In order for society to function, we have to agree on some right and wrong. We call those laws. CS Lewis asserts that God's created order also has laws. Some of these we know and don't (or can't) argue with: the law of gravity for example. But what he calls the law of human nature is also a law of God's created order, so each time someone cries out 'injustice' we can draw a direct line back to that created order, if we have the roadmap.

Again, for more on this idea, please take some time with the previous series. These two series must be understood together.

BIBLICAL JUSTICE

"there is a direct relationship between a person's grasp and experience of God's grace, and his or her heart for justice and the poor." As we examine this topic together, I encourage you to start with prayer, asking God to remind you how much you need God's grace and for Him to keep you humble as you seek out His will for how you should engage this topic and the community as a whole.

Since we did the foundational work of right and wrong in that previous series, we can now look honestly at biblical justice. In this short study we can't cover all that the bible has to say about justice. The subtitles listed here are not a complete survey of biblical justice, merely the sample chosen for the purpose of this conversation, with the ultimate goal of helping you examine your faith and how it might play out in your life and relationships today.

THERE IS A DIRECT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A PERSON'S GRASP & EXPERIENCE OF GOD'S GRACE & HIS OR HER HEART FOR

& THE POOR.

TIM KELLER



| 1. Biblical Justice reflects the character of God. |
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| Read the following verses and reflect on how they <i>characterize</i> God. |
| PSALM 146:5-10 |
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| DEUTERONOMY 10:17-18 |
| DECTERONOMY 10.17-16 |
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| How do these verses impact your understanding of or relationship with God? |
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2. **Biblical Justice** includes equal treatment

Read the following passages and reflect on how they each characterize **equal treatment**. Look for ways these passages are similar and ways that they are different.

| 1 | PROVERBS 31:8-9 |
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| 1 | LEVITICUS 19:15 |
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| 1 | DEUTERONOMY 1:16-17 |
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| 1 | GALATIANS 3:28 |
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THERE IS NEITHER JEW NOR GREEK, THERE IS NEITHER SLAVE NOR FREE, THERE IS NO MALE & FEMALE, FOR

| 3. Biblical Justice includes generosity. Consider the following passages. Do they open up any new or fresh understanding for you of God, your faith, or how you should respond to either? Note your reflections . |
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| LUKE 14:12-13 |
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| PROVERBS 21:13 |
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| MATTHEW 11:5 |
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| JEREMIAH 22:16 |
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| 4. Biblical Justice includes right relationships and how we interact as a society. |
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| Read the following passages. How do they speak to you right now, as you interact with the society and culture where you live? |
| AMOS 5:21-24 |
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| MATTHEW 25:35-36 |
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| JAMES 5:1-5 |
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| ISAIAH 10:1-2 |
| ISAIAH IU:I-2 |
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| Biblical justice, then, is giving people <i>what they are due</i> : punishment or protection. This can play out in more ways than we can list here. Jot down some that come to mind: |
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| Reflect on what God is speaking over your heart today, and share any new facets of understanding you can practically live out as you leave this time of study: |
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5. **Biblical Justice** happens in God's time and God's way. This might be the most difficult point about biblical justice to absorb. There are plenty of times we see injustice in our world and it clearly violates the biblical rules that God has laid out. Have you ever wondered 'Why would He allow that?' Write your reflections on that here: Now consider examples in the bible where God's justice was served, but not in the timing that seemed right to those involved. Can you name any from memory? One of the best examples of this idea is found in the book of Job. Describe your understanding of that story here: **READ JOB 38-40** God's response to Job's impassioned plea to understand God's 'why.' This is a long passage, but worth internalizing. Write your reflections on this passage here: WHEN I LAID THE FOUNDATION

JOB 38:4

OF THE EARTH?

| Look over these explanations of God's 'why' in the each following passages. Respond to each with your <i>honest feelings</i> . It's ok that we don't always understand God's ' <i>why</i> .' |
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| READ JOHN 9:1-41 |
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| READ LUKE 13:1-5 |
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| READ JAMES 4:12 |
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| READ JOHN 3:16 (think hard about why this passage is included here). How do you think divine mercy and divine justice relate to each other? |
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