

## Understanding Justice and Repentance



The relationship between Justice and repentance is inextricable. Therefore, to understand one, we must understand both. With that mind, consider the following regarding Repentance and Justice:

### 1. As it relates to Justice:

1.1. God loves justice and those who pursue it. This was also His goal in creating a people for Himself. They would be a people loving justice. Justice is therefore a pre-requisite to receiving the gospel. As such, salvation (or mercy) is not afforded to those who refuse to serve justice and see justice served (Isa 30:18, 33:5, 42:1-4, 56:1, 61:8; Jer 4:1-2, 5:1, 9:24; Eze 45:9; Hos 2:19; Amo 5:13-25; Mic 3:9-12, 6:8; Psa 18:26; 2Co 4:1-2; Act 10:34-35).

1.2. Justice and righteousness (or just and righteous) share the same word in the (Greek) NT (δικαιος). As such, to practice justice means to practice righteousness (e.g. Rom 3:26).

1.3. Justice requires:

1.3.1. Recognizing/honoring/submitting to God's appointed judges and their judgment – internally/externally (Deu 16:18; Rom 13:1-5)

1.3.2. Agreement with God's Word/Law (Isa 8:20)

1.3.3. Innocence/Guilt is determined by facts not feelings, direct evidence versus circumstantial evidence (Exo 23:7; Deu 17:4-6; 1Ti 5:19).

1.3.4. One law for all (Num 15:15-16; Lev 24:22; 1Ti 5:20)<sup>1</sup>

1.3.5. Unbiased judgment of others or *self*: it is the crime that determines the punishment not the person ("lady justice is blind"; 1Ti 5:21<sup>2</sup>; Deu 16:19, 19:21)

1.3.6. No pity/pardon or feeling sorry for the guilty; pity/ protection/recompense to the innocent (Col 3:25; Deu 19:21a; Exo 23:6; Deu 24:17)

1.3.7. The punishment fit the crime (Exo 21:24; Deu 19:21b; as such each crime must be assessed separately and degrees acknowledged - e.g. child rebellion)

1.3.8. Capital crimes (now) result in excommunication<sup>3</sup> (1Co 5:2, 13 w/2Co 2:6-7).

1.4. Justice is therefore consistent with and the fulfillment of God's Word/Law (Job 37:23; Psa 25:9-10, 37:30-31; Psa 89:14, 97:2, 111:7-9; Pro 2:6-9; Isa 42:4, 51:4; Eze 18:5-9, 19; Hab 1:4) and the opposite of sin (which is "lawlessness" – 1Jo 3:4). As such, all attempts to obey God's Word/Law are equally attempts at seeking justice and loving others (Mat 18:15 w/Lev 19:15-18 w/Mat 22:39 w/Rom 13:8-10).

1.5. In situations where it is not explicitly communicated or specifically prescribed, God's Word/Law requires that the appointed judges/elders of the covenant community determine the application of justice (e.g. number of lashes = Deu 25:1-3; time of excommunication 1Co 5:1-13 w/2Co 2:5-11). At times, God's Word/Law does also require contact with secular authorities/courts. Compliance with the secular justice system is expected when their law demands it and is not in violation God's Word/Law (Rom 13:1-7).

1.6. Justice includes seeking to learn all of God's Word/Laws and teaching them to those under our authority. As such, it also means never refusing to share with or warn them in relation to God's Word/Law. To neglect this duty makes us equally guilty of their sins (Gen 18:19; Eze 33:7-9 w/Act 20:26-27).

1.7. Though Jesus died to remove the eternal penalty of justice required for our rebellion, His death was never meant to remove the temporal penalty – or our obligation to seek and serve justice. If we want His eternally justifying work, then we must both accept God's temporal justice (or discipline) and (once more) commit to a life of seeking and serving justice (Deu 16:20; 1Co 6:8-11). This is why then Christians are not excluded from suffering in this life - including physical death. As a matter of fact, Christians are guaranteed to receive such temporal justice (or suffering or discipline) for their sin since without it, there is no hope of being eternally just or in the eternally just place of heaven (1Co 6:8-11, 11:28-32; Heb 12:3-14; 1Pe 4:17-19; Pro 11:31, 16:6, 20:30, 24:12). Hence, the way to avoid additional suffering in this life, is by avoiding additional sin (Pro 13:21).

1.8. There is a direct relationship between understanding justice and how a person views God and their sin. The less a person thinks of God (and their sin against Him as serious), the more obstinate they become in relation to justice (Pro 28:5).

1.9. There is also a direct relationship between how much time a person meditates/thoughfully reads God's Word/Law and their passion for justice. The more a person is in God's Word/Law, the more they will be predisposed or biased to justice and its practice (Psa 119:97; e.g. Deu 17:18-20).

<sup>1</sup> To lessen therefore what justice requires in relation to certain people equally communicates the lie that Christ's Lordship or authority is "less" in relation to them. This is the Evangelical heresy which makes a distinction between believers and disciples.

<sup>2</sup> This is why we do not allow those under assessment (judgment/restoration) to be present. Our judgment must not be influenced by the person but determined solely based on the crime/acts of penance.

<sup>3</sup> The only exception to a capital crime not ending in excommunication, is a plea of ignorance. In such cases, the penalty required by justice is removed and atonement made by confession (Num 15:22-28).

1.10. Love and forgiveness are functions of justice. As such, both love and forgiveness mean seeking the person's justice (or that they serve justice). That love and forgiveness do indeed involve justice (or seeking justice) in relation to others is seen by the fact that this also represents their highest good: the path of justice; since God will (once more) only accept those who love and seek justice (Lev 19:15-18 w/Mat 22:39; 1Th 5:15; Isa 56:1; Mic 6:8).

1.11. The pursuit of justice (or righteousness) is the path to abundant life (Mat 5:6; Psa 106:3; 1Ki 3:11; Rom 2:6-8; Pro 2:1-22, 8:32, 35, 9:10-11, 10:3, 6, 27, 11:3, 5-6, 8, 19, 21, 23, 12:2, 21, 15:10, 20:7, 22:8, 28:18).

## 2. As it relates to Repentance

2.1. God loves those who repent. Repentance is also a function of justice (and therefore) a pre-requisite to receiving the gospel. As such, salvation is equally not afforded to those who refuse to repent (Psa 51:17 w/Mat 5:2-5; Mar 1:14-15; Mat 4:17; Rom 2:1-5; Psa 7:11-16).

2.2. To repent means:

### 2.2.1. You own your sin<sup>4</sup>

You are not making excuses for your sin (i.e. acting as though it were not sin or you had no choice or it was someone else's fault; attempting to be seen as the victim when you are the perpetrator) but rather taking full responsibility (1Jo1:5-8; 1Co 10:13; Isa 5:20; e.g. Gen 3:12).

### 2.2.2. You confess your sin

You are acknowledging your sin to God/Jesus and asking forgiveness (1Jo 1:9; Psa 32:5; Lev 26:40; Pro 28:13; Mar 1:5).

### 2.2.3. You abandon your sin

You are forsaking all sinful behavior by doing whatever it takes (including suffering) to see that sin is no longer practiced (Mat 5:29-30; 1Pe 4:1-5; Pro 28:13; Eze 18:28; Act 26:18-20).

### 2.2.4. You embrace justice

You are committed to serving justice (i.e. practicing righteousness – 1Jo 3:10; Luk 3:4-14; Act 24:16; 2Co 8:21) and seeing justice served (i.e. that all penalties or payments necessary to making our wrongs right are fulfilled). As discussed this may include what the secular authorities require as well (Luk 19:8-10; Eze 18:27; Act 19:18-19; Rom 13:1-5).

2.3. Repentance therefore requires more than simply acknowledging you are a sinner. All such forms of "theoretical repentance" are useless and damning. Hence, the reason for John's rebuke of the Pharisees who were seeking to be baptized by him ("Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?...Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.", Luk 3:7-8). Their commitment was limited to the theoretical only; a position John knew would get them nowhere come Judgment Day.

2.4. Repentance therefore also means more than feeling sorry for what we have done. Zeal for righteousness/justice is the key (2Co 7:9-11; Mat 27:3-5 versus Luk 19:8-10)

2.5. Those unwilling to do what justice requires<sup>5</sup> are considered unrepentant by God and in danger of going to Hell should they die in that state – Christian or otherwise, since no-one can be unrepentant and receiving God's forgiveness (Deu 29:18-20; Rom 2:5; also again Luk 19:8-10 – notice that Jesus does not proclaim salvation in re: to Zac until he proclaims his commitment to seek justice).

2.6. Since justice is not determined by us (e.g. what we think is just/righteous), but rather by God's Word/Law, it is to God's Word/Law that we must look when determining what qualifies as justice in our repentance (Psa 119:72; e.g. Luk 19:8 – "If I have defrauded/stolen...I restore it fourfold" w/Exo 22:1).

2.7. Though Jesus died for the Christian's sin, He did not remove our responsibility to continue mortifying and repenting of our sin. This includes and requires a renewing of the mind (Rom 8:12-13; 1Jo 1:9; Rom 12:2 w/1Co 15:34).

2.8. Repentance is a gift that God must give if a person is to truly turn from their sin and seek justice. This (then) is the means by which God calls people to Himself for the purpose of entering into a saving covenant relationship. It is however the responsibility of that individual once called, to maintain that relationship. Such is possible and expected since all that is needed to remain just, is applied/supplied at conversion (i.e. through their baptism). Christians are therefore without excuse and guilty of highest treason when that saving relationship is forfeited by their sin. To be restored, they are asking God to perform yet another miracle of amazing grace in supplying the gift of repentance again (2Ti 2:25-26; 1Th 1:4-10; 2Pe 1:1-4 w/Act 2:38 w/Eph 1:19; Heb 10:26-30).

2.9. Apostasy communicates a person's continued desire to despise Christ and His sacrifice, but also that God has not chosen to extend the gift of repentance to such despisers (2Ti 2:25 – "God may perhaps grant..."; 1Co 10:21-22; Heb 10:29; Exo 8:32 w/ 9:12, 10:1; Heb 12:17).

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<sup>4</sup> All sin represents some violation in relation to God's Word/Law. As such, sin is: lawlessness (1Jo 3:4); determined by God's Word/Law, not personal preferences, traditions or taboos (Mat 15:1-9; Joh 7:23-24).

<sup>5</sup> Justice may require simply confessing our wrong to God as is the case with sins of ignorance (Num 15:22-28; 1Jo 1:19); whereas other sins require far more.