

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

The Least of These: Ministering to Those in Need

Lesson 4: Mercy and Justice in Psalms and Proverbs

What is “injustice”? Injustice is defined in a law book simply as “an unjust state of affairs; unfairness, and unjust act.” Which does not provide us with much information. We must learn what “just” and “fair” mean before we can understand what being “unjust” or “injustice” are. What is “just” and “fair” may mean different things to different people or groups of people.

What is “justice”? According the same law book, justice is the “fair and proper administration of laws.” By this definition, we must have laws in effect before we can know how to administrate justice. There must be a standard in place by which we can make our decision about justice.

Both of these definitions have been developed through the concept of a social contract among persons or people groups, and are necessarily administrated through the “law of the land,” or through the government of the nation or tribe of people who developed them and are willing to abide by them.

Is this the same thing as biblical justice and injustice?

An evangelical Bible dictionary defines “justice” in a general sense by saying that justice is the “practice of giving reward or punishment for what is rightly due to a person or group of people. From a theological perspective, because God is sinless and holy, the justice of God demands that all persons and nations receive punishment because of their sin. In Christ the requirements of divine justice are met, and as a result, individuals can find mercy from God through Jesus Christ as the Holy Spirit draws them and convicts them of sin” (Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling; *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, InterVarsity Press, 1999).

However, the *SDA Bible Commentary Dictionary* (vol. 8) gives us this definition of justice: This term is generally from the Hebrew *sedeq* or *sedeqah*, both of which mean righteousness and are generally so translated.” The first instance in the Bible where this word is found is in Genesis 18:19, where God is speaking of His friend, Abraham, saying, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice (*sedeq*) and judgment (*mishpat*).” *Mishpat* is related to *sedeq* and “closely approximates the meaning of justice as understood today” (ibid.), but *mishpat* is more centered in government or law.

From this definition we find that in order for us to know how to teach and administer justice we must first know God, as Abraham did, friend to Friend. Without this intimate and guiding knowledge of God, all of human “justice” and “judgment” will be self-centered. A false understanding of God will give us a false concept of justice and judgment, as we read above in the evangelical definition. In that definition God had no mercy toward the sinner, until Jesus “did something” by giving His life to satisfy the “justice” required and demanded by the broken law—only then can “individuals find mercy from God.”

A current social construct of “justice” claims that for justice to rightly function, Jesus Christ must be considered “king of this nation” so that the “gospel” will be the foundation of all national law. The Christian movement promoting this idea has a deep taproot that goes back to the 1800s. In 1890 A. T. Jones addressed this error in an article of April 17, 1890, in *The American Sentinel*. After quoting from the National Reform magazine, *Union Signal*, which claimed that “every loyal Christian heart must answer the question in the affirmative” that Christ is King of this nation, and that the “gospel” must supersede the moral law, Jones stated, “Now this is worse than nonsense. The idea that the gospel shall supersede the moral law is destructive of the moral law, of morality, and even of the gospel itself.” He proceeds with this argument:

“Now by any means to supersede or take away the law is to take away all transgression or imputation of sin, which at once nullifies the gospel; because it is alone the remedy for sin, and is the power of God unto salvation from sin. If there be no sin there can be no gospel. To offer pardon to the innocent, is an imposition and an insult; and therefore any proposition to supersede the law by the gospel, or by any other means, is worse than nonsense, because it strikes at the foundation of God’s throne which is justice and judgment, and so uproots all morality. God is the source of morality, the foundation of his throne is justice and judgment, and the gospel is ordained in order that He might be just and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.”

And this brings us to the biblical definition and administration of justice found in Romans 3:23-26. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: 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; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

E. J. Waggoner wrote in his great treatise on the Book of Romans, “The heathen idea, which is too often held by professed Christians, is that men must provide a sacrifice to appease the wrath of their god. All heathen worship is simply a bribe to their gods to be favorable to them” (*Romans*, p. 74; CFI Book Division ed., 2019) This is the idea behind the above quoted evangelical definition of “justice”—God must be appeased first *then* He will provide “mercy” to the sinner, who otherwise really deserves to die in the lake of fire.

Waggoner further stated, "God justifies sinners, for they are the only ones who need justification. The justice of declaring a sinner to be righteous lies in the fact that he *is actually made righteous*. Whatever God declares to be so, is so. And then he *is made righteous by the life of God given him in Christ*" (ibid., p. 75, emphasis supplied). And here is the definition of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. God makes the sinner righteous "in Christ" so that they who were formerly unrighteous and unjust are now, in Christ, declared by God Himself to be "made righteous by the life of God given to him in Christ."

That is powerful good news for sinners! We don't have to grovel like the pagans in the blood of slaughtered animals or even in the blood of Jesus *before* God will love us. No! He *already* loves us and gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sin. "For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" and while we were "enemies of God" we were "reconciled" to Him (see Rom. 5:6-10). "Of course the idea of a propitiation or sacrifice is that there is wrath to be appeased. But take particular notice that it is *we* who require the sacrifice, and not God. He *gives* the sacrifice. The idea that God's wrath has to be propitiated in order that we may have forgiveness finds no warrant in the Bible" (ibid., p. 74).

True justice comes only from God. It is part of His character. It is merciful and righteous, and will bring an end to all sin when the unrepentant wicked, evil angels (including Satan), and death and hell are all cast into the Lake of Fire after the millennial judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

The world's greatest need is the reception of the message of Christ and His righteousness. This message is the only "cure" for the problems this world is facing, whether they be related to lack of food, shelter and clean water, issues related to overpopulation or disease, "climate change" and serious weather shifts, pollution of land and sea, destruction of earth's habitats, or any other disastrous event that is currently making the news. All of these have only one solution: the message of Christ and His righteousness that will prepare a people for the second coming, and bring an end to suffering in this wicked and lost world.

Why hasn't it happened yet? We've been preaching the second coming as "soon" for 175 years! How "soon" *is* soon? Does the world have to reach a predetermined level of disaster, destruction, and sin before God says, "That's enough! I'm coming now"? Like those pagan priests on Mount Carmel, have we just not been crying loudly enough for the Lord to hear our pleas for Him to "Do something"?

"If Christ would only come the second time, He could end all this misery. Even the saints, who aren't supposed to be angry with Him, can raise serious questions in court: Why does the Lord wait so long to come? Doesn't He *feel* for the world's woes? Why doesn't He *do* something? The only way that God can defend Himself against a charge of indifference [and injustice] is to plead some circumstances beyond His control which have delayed His intervention" (Robert J. Wieland, "The Greatest Court Case in History: God ... on Trial!"; *Adventism Triumphant*, vol. 1, no. 1).

Christianity is on the brink of repeating God’s confrontation with ancient Israel on Mount Carmel. And just like them, we have difficulty answering Elijah’s question: “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” because they had slidden so far away from a real knowledge and experience with their Eternal Friend that they could no longer tell the difference between the false god of paganism and the true God of heaven and earth. In this condition, how can we “keep the way of the LORD, to do justice (*sedeq*) and judgment”?

Today Satan has created so many counterfeits to God’s true Gospel message of Christ and His righteousness that it is difficult for most people to recognize truth from error. Error imbibed from broken cisterns is more pleasing to our unconverted hearts and therefore more easily accepted than God’s truth that will work a transformation in our characters. “Our work now is to enlighten the world, in the place of bearing a peace-and-safety message. A banner has been placed in our hands, upon which is inscribed, ‘Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’ This is a distinct, separating message,—a message that is to give no uncertain sound. It is to lead the people away from the broken cisterns that contain no water, to the Fountain of living waters” (Ellen G. White, Letter 60, 1898).

“This means that Satan will endeavor to commandeer the whole system of substitution just as he took over the old sacrificial system to fight against Christ and the preaching of the new covenant. [Satan] will proclaim that the gospel of the Reformation, the preaching of Martin Luther is sufficient to prepare a people for the second advent and the Lord will come when we have done enough proclaiming. ... As long as he can veil apostasy in the garb of orthodoxy, he has the Remnant deceived in the same way he had the Jews deceived. As they were enveloped in the routine of the sanctuary services being the goal of life and guaranteeing their salvation, so we have been content to have the blood of the Lamb provide a legal cancellation of the record in the books of heaven without the law being written in the heart” (Donald K. Short, *Then Shall the Sanctuary Be Cleansed*, p. 97; CFI Book Division ed., 2018).

The only “song of hope” that will help the “oppressed” is found in Revelation 14:1-4, and 15:3, 4. This is the psalm that all the redeemed from the earth will be singing when Christ comes to take us to heaven with Him at the second coming. And all the people said, “AMEN! Even so come Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

—Ann Walper

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRBz87V1TIU>

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