

# ABSOLUTE JUSTICE

By

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Justice means that which is right. Biblically speaking it is that which perfectly satisfies the Creator. Jesus said to the young ruler, “None is good save one, even God” (Mark 10:18). Absolute rightness is to be exactly what God designed us to be in His image.

Man thinks in terms of relative justice. Jesus was too extreme. He claimed to be the only good person. Everyone else had to repent, even the religious leaders and the exalted leaders of state. He would build his own church and set the terms of admittance so narrow that only a few would enter (Matt. :14). The world doesn’t want this kind of justice, as evidenced by the crucifixion.

The world in its wisdom devises a relative justice. Jurors have admitted that they did not vote for a guilty verdict, in spite of conclusive evidence, because they recognize that all are sinners, and the guilt is only relative. A man is guilty, but only slightly more than other men. Ergo; not guilty. In man’s perverted mind this is love, to overlook responsibility, guilt and justice. The next step is to reason that God, in love, will not punish the guilty by death. The final step is to conclude that all are to be saved anyway, therefore all the business about justification and salvation is irrelevant.

In reality it is not love to withhold justice. The parent does not love the child if he withholds punishment. The child not only deserves justice — has a right to it from his parents — but he actually desires it, as proof that he lives in a world that is sensible. He requires the punishment in order that he might learn to live right. It is not love to withhold justice from the adult and to treat him as if he were not a responsible person. Even the church fails to confront men with the essence of justice by refusing to see man as God sees him, as sinners worthy of death. Church leaders would rather have a multitude of unregenerate members than a little flock of the redeemed, cleansed and justified by Christ.

The arch-sin of Adam was to set up his own standard of rightness which opposed the true justice of God. Adam would “be as God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). God does not give options. He has only one standard. Adam died for failing to be just, and the same penalty is imposed upon all men, because there are “none righteous.” Not a one of us actually measure sup to God’s justice. Justice demands that sin and sinner be abolished, that God’s justice may prevail. It would not be “love” for God to give the wicked eternal life that they might mar the joy of God’s creation forever! Adam was thrust from the garden lest he take of the tree of life and eat and “live forever” (Gen. 3:22).

Isaiah promised justice through Christ. “By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many: and he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11). The justice he predicted was a far cry from the justice generally sought either by Israel or by modern men. Most of the wars throughout history are fought for the cause of justice. In every civil war the claim of the rebels is that they want and deserve justice. What they man is not that they want to BE just, but they want a better deal from the other fellow. In one riot a few years back a student carrying a placard advertising “Love” had a bat in his hand

with which to bash in the heads of any who didn't relate to him in love. This is the way the world seeks justice: You treat me right, or you'll see how wrong I can treat you.

Justice predicted by Isaiah was not to come through a political figure with a big stick to make the haves give up to the have-nots, nor to force the majority to surrender to the whims of the minorities. Rather it was justice to be brought into the world by God himself.

Such absolute justice would not be acceptable to all. God never sought to treat all equally or to do the same thing for everybody. The justice to be brought by God was to "justify many," not everyone. Christ came into the world to settle man's just debt to God! There was only one way to do that, and that was by death. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Christ "bore our sins in his body upon the tree" (I Pet. 2:24). But only those that believe and are united in His death through faith and baptism are justified. "He that has died is justified from sin" (Rom 6:7). Justification, therefore, is not applied to all, but to many.

The penalty for sin is as absolute as God's justice. It is death. The amount of weeping, and gnashing of teeth and torment involved, we do not know. It will be sufficient for the punishment to fit the crime. But after the weeping and suffering, the end result will be death in final fire, where God is "able to destroy both body and soul" (Matt. 10:28). Christ did not merely come to suffer, but to suffer and die in the sinner's place, that God "might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). The punishment for sin must be the same as the penalty Christ paid, else justice was not met at the cross.

Theologians have sought to explain the death of Christ in numerous terms apart from justice. Not knowing God as absolutely just, neither can they conceive of Him demanding death as a just penalty for rebellion against Himself.. They suggest that Christ died as an expression of God's love, not as an expression of God's justice. But how in the name of sense could God be showing love to put His own Son through such a cruel experience for nothing more than to show that He was a God of Love? Some suggest that God wanted to demonstrate how sinful man is, thus subjected Christ to man's inhumanity. This is accusing God of even worse sin than the Jews who instigated the crucifixion. It also ignores the real issue that man faces, the issue of life and death. Perhaps one reason men so readily miss this point is the influence of Plato's doctrine of soul-immortality. If all men are inherently immortal and the think that is saved is an ethereal, invisible, intangible mysterious unknown something, and not the total person, then it is nonsense to talk of death in the Biblical absolute sense. But Plato was unenlightened by God. The first man was denied the tree of life lest he live forever. God's justice will not allow a place for eternal and immortal sinners! "The soul that sins it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20. Isaiah explained that Jesus would be cut off from the living for his people, "to whom the stroke was due" (Isa 53:8). Jesus willingly accepted the sentence of death as a just sentence, having taken upon himself our guilt. So "He opened not his mouth." He accepted the execution as just! God is Just! Through one act, the death of Christ, bearing our sin, He justified many!

Justification cannot be achieved by our works. No amount of good works can erase one sin for which death is due. A relative goodness — attaining a better character than the average — is better than no goodness at all, from a pragmatic standpoint, but it does not make one just before God. Furthermore, a relative justice actually prohibits faith

in God. It brings Him down to the human level. “Thou thought that I was altogether such a one as thyself,” He declares to the wicked (Psa. 50:21). We must not make the mistake of thinking that Christ entered the stream of fleshly life to tell us that it is only human to sin; that He became one of us so that we shouldn’t think the goal is too exacting or too high! On the contrary, He demonstrated that sin is to be resisted and can be, that the goal is the highest one possible and that it demands the very best and the very most, and even then we still come short of the glory of God and thus stand in extreme need of the substitutionary death of Jesus to make us just in His sight.

Neither can justification be achieved by subjective religion, which is so popular today. This is the religion of feeling and experience. “I had this fantastic feeling”, I could just feel the love of God flowing through me.” “I experienced Jesus; not I know I’m saved.” These feelings and experiences could be produced by justification, but they are not the cause of it, nor the proof of it. Many religions in the world produce the same sensations and experiences. A feeling of love and peace, however deep and sincere, does not pay the penalty for sin. This must be paid in reality by a flesh and blood death. For this reason Christ partook of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14) to meet God’s justice and justify us.

An understanding true faith in God’s act of justification is the source of the deepest peace and joy experienced by man. This act is the basis of both baptism and the Lord’s supper, the one the re-enactment of His death and resurrection upon or entrance into the life of faith and the other a continual reminder of His flesh and blood death by eating the loaf and drinking the cup. Here is both experience and deep emotional feeling, fruit of faith in the justifying work of Christ.

God works toward a purpose — His own! As He is unchanging so is His purpose. Nothing is more indicative of man’s loss of relationship with God than the present clamor to change the laws and traditions based upon God’s commandments. Self-styled liberators are forever talking about the “changing times” and “new life styles.” It is obvious that the changes are away from, not toward, the pattern set forth by God. The churches that watch the popularity polls, to see what will attract the worldly-minded, are looking in the wrong direction, and will get the wrong results. Luther once advised his friend Melanethon, “So preach that those who do not fall out with their sin may fall out with thee.” This sounds more like Christ’s sense of right and justification than the present attempt of the clergy and church to fill their building by pleasing the populace.

The Christian is to strive to please God, to bend his will to fit God’s perfect will, to be satisfied with nothing in himself short of obedience to Christ’s commands. Of course, he will still come short of perfect performance, but he is a hypocrite unless he actually desires to perform correctly and sincerely tries to do so. What greater lie than for one to say he desire to be in the image of God, yet to deliberately head the other way? And God knows whether or not we really mean it and really try.

Still, we are not justified in God’s sight by our performance, but by Christ’s performance. It is He that took the rap for our sins. This is why He came into the world, that we might be justified before God and thus have eternal life. “By the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities.”

The greatest impact that can be made on our world today to restore true justice and order, as well as to bring men to a right relationship with God, is to uphold the gospel of Christ in which the absolute justice of God is set forth in God’s own graphic terms.

This not only forms the basis of a Christian society, but directs man to the Center and Source of life, giving him direction and the only assurance God gives for his success.

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