

January 15, 2006 AM

**LOVE JUSTICE?
GENESIS 4:8-16**

1. COVENANT AS THE CONTEXT FOR JUSTICE

Covenant provides the context in which justice is understood: Covenant = the way that God relates to man and, at different levels, the way men relate to other men. It is a relationship which is defined by stipulations, responsibilities, privileges, promises, etc.

Covenant provides the context for understanding right and wrong and good and evil. *Justice* has no meaning apart from covenant.

Biblical justice finds its framework, its context, within God's covenant dealings with us. Therefore, the covenant is the fundamental thing; i.e., it provides the basis for our understanding of justice. But justice is fundamental to the covenant; i.e., it is necessary within the covenant.

Justice is not "confined" to the courtroom. Covenant provides the context for the judgments made in the courtroom.

The purpose of the covenant defines the nature of justice: "What is the covenant?" or "What does the covenant demand?" or even "What is the purpose of the covenant?"

We tend to limit justice to *distributive justice*; i.e., he gets what is coming to him because of what he has done. This is only one aspect of the broader sense in which justice is understood biblically.

Two essentials that need to be understood: (1) Man's *position* within this covenant and, thus, in the world. Man's position was to be *lord* or *ruler* over creation.

(2) Man's *purpose* within this covenant, and, thus, in the world. "Rule" is an activity. Man was to bring God's order to the world.

The world was created as a *project* for man. He was to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth taking dominion over every aspect of creation for God's glory. Man was to reflect the image of God, the King, in the world in his creativity in all of life. He was to develop the world into a beautiful house for God. God would be King of all of creation with man being his viceregent.

In order for that to be accomplished, God's image must be reflected in relationships. Adam would not accomplish this task as a single individual. It would be as humanity multiplied and spread throughout all the earth and lived in loving relationships that these tasks would be accomplished.

God established this covenant so that man would bring *shalom*, peace to the rest of creation. This *peace* is more than just a cessation of conflict. It is a wholeness of life. It is living life as life should be lived.

Justice = ***Things are as they should be.*** I.e., man as a loving community is expressing God's wise and loving rule in the world.

Justice of God and man: The covenant has two principal figures: God and man. Both have their particular responsibilities within the covenant. These responsibilities define whether or not *justice* is being done or whether or not a person is *righteous/just*.

These two words cannot be torn apart in the Scriptures. While in the OT there are different words to express justice and righteousness (they are not completely synonymous), they are inseparably linked to one another. In the NT both of these words are linked within one family of words. A person who is just is righteous, and a righteous person is just.

God: God has made promises to those within the covenant. He has promised to be their God and for them to be his people. He has promised to forgive their sin when they come to him and confess it based upon the blood sacrifice that he himself provides.

Now, God is counted as *just* or *righteous* when he fulfills his promises. Another way the Bible puts it is this way: When God reveals his *righteousness* he is acting in fulfillment of his covenant promises. Cf. e.g., **Rom 1:17**

That which we know about God from the Scriptures is that he is always true, just, faithful to his promises. It is on this basis that John gives us the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins when we confess them. Cf. **1John 1:9**

Man: Man also has covenant obligations. He is to be faithful to the stipulations laid down by God in the covenant. By this he is judged to be *just* or *righteous*.

Just does not necessarily = morally perfect (i.e., without sin). It has the broader meaning of *covenant faithfulness* which includes fulfilling the command to confess and repent of sins based on the sacrifice that God provides. This person is then faithful and *righteous* (cf. e.g., Noah, **Gen 6:9; 7:1**; Zechariah & Elizabeth, **Lk 1:5-6**; Simeon, **Lk 2:25**; Joseph of Arimathea, **Lk 23:50**; Lot, **2Pt 2:7**).

If there are *absolutely* no righteous people in any sense of the word, how is it that these people are said to be righteous, walking in all the commandments of God blamelessly (as in the case of Zechariah and Elizabeth)? They are faithful to the terms of the covenant *which provides for the forgiveness of sins*.

Praying for God's justice: Cf. **Ps 7:8-11**, "... *judge me*, O LORD, *according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me* ..." And **Ps 35:22-28**, "*Vindicate me*, [judge me and find in my favor; also could be translated "Judge me"] O LORD, my God, *according to your righteousness* ..."

Meaning: "God, my God (covenant language), make good on your promises and set things in proper order. I have been faithful to your covenant. I am righteous. You said that if I was faithful you would deliver me. Now Father I am calling on you to make good on your promises."

These are the prayers that we are to be singing as God's people!

2. JUSTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVENANT

Justice and dealing with evil: Since the entrance of sin (evil) into the world, justice takes a particular shape. For things to be *as they should be* in the world, sin/evil must be dealt with. Justice demands it.

Evil is injustice. The nature of evil is to pervert or distort that which God created to be good.

Evil seeks to destroy or eradicate the image of God in the world. This not only finds place in our individual struggles with evil attitudes and actions, but it also finds place in the fact that evil people want to destroy the people of God.

As God's people faithfully bear God's image in the world—being true worshipers of God and seeking to transform the world according to God's wise and loving order—evil fights them at every turn. So, in order for justice to prevail in the world—in order for things to be as they should be—evil must be defeated. It is the enemy of justice. Things will not be as they should be with evil reigning in the world.

Justice and the rule of God's people: The purpose of God's covenant is for God's true image-bearers to be reigning in the world. When justice rules in the earth it will be because evil has been defeated and God's true image-bearers have assumed their rightful position and purpose in the world; i.e., faithful lord(s) of the world bringing God's wise and loving order to the creation.

Adam gave the lordship of the world over to sin (and, thus, death; cf. **Rom 5:12-21**; esp. **14, 17, 21**). It must be dethroned.

God's (covenant) promise from the beginning is that evil would be defeated and man would bring the world to its intended end. Because this is a promise of God, God's deliverance—or his vindication or justification—of his people is an act of righteousness; i.e., covenant faithfulness. God delivers on his promises.

God breaks the power of sin over his people in order that they may be his faithful image-bearers. God's justice *restores* people to where they are supposed to be in his image. God's justice is healing. It brings *shalom*, peace, wholeness. Bringing this *shalom* to the world, therefore, includes both exalting the righteous and putting down the wicked. (Cf. e.g., Noah; **Dan 7**)

This is seen ultimately in the resurrection of Jesus in which he was vindicated or declared righteous. [cf. **1Ti 3:16**; **Ro 1:1-4**] In the resurrection of Jesus things are as they should be. Justice is back because evil has been defeated and God's people are enthroned. All who are participate with Christ in his resurrection—that is, they have become a part of that new creation begun and embodied in Jesus, the one through whom the world is being put back right—those who are participate in that resurrection are justified or vindicated with him. That is, we are declared to be the true people of God (cf. **Rom 4:25**). We are set free from sin (cf. **Rom 6:7**).

Justice in the present: (1) God has declared who his true people are in Christ Jesus. (2) We have the responsibility to bring God's justice to a sinful world. (3) Justice will be brought to the world on the day that we as God's people are finally vindicated in the final resurrection of the dead.