

# WHERE LOVE & JUSTICE MEET



## Where Love & Justice Meet

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### **Micah 6:8**

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

*(New International Version)*

### **Matthew 22:37-40**

Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

*(New International Version)*

## Introduction

The title of this study – “Where Love and Justice Meet” – suggests two prior questions. What are justice and love? Where do justice and love originate?

Very often justice and love are understood as distinct and even opposing values and aims. On the one hand, justice is commonly depicted as harsh judgment, as punishment without mercy. On the other hand, love is perceived as sentimentality where wrongdoing is simply overlooked without consequence.

The Bible offers a different view of justice and love. Both are integral parts of God’s character. God is a righteous judge (Psalm 7:7; 2 Timothy 4:8). At the same time, God is love (1 John 4:8). How then does the Bible define justice and love? What does it mean that justice and love both characterize God? What do justice and love mean for us? Where do they meet in our world?

In this study, we will explore these issues and questions. We will look at what it means for followers of Jesus to “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with...God” (Micah 6:8). We will also pursue what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). We will engage these matters through studying and reflecting on the following topics.

- Lesson 1: Justice – A Part of God’s Character
- Lesson 2: Love – A Part of God’s Character
- Lesson 3: The Cross – The Uniting of Justice and Love
- Lesson 4: Victims – Justice and Love for the Hurting
- Lesson 5: Offenders – Justice and Love for Those Who Have Injured
- Lesson 6: Community – Living out Justice and Love

Through the course of this study, we will find that justice and love originate in and from God. We will learn that justice and love are not opposites. Nor are they completely distinct and mutually exclusive. They are both part of God in the unity of his being, and so they are both integral to God’s purposes in the world and to the very nature of the world itself.

Indeed, as we examine where justice and love come from and what they are, we will discover that justice and love meet first in God and then in our world where wrongs are righted, and the effects of wrongdoing are healed. We will find the focal point of the meeting of God’s justice and love on the cross. From the perspective of the crucifixion of Jesus, we will reflect on the meaning of justice and love for victims and offenders. We will then draw forth principles and practices whereby communities can live out justice and love.

### Suggestions for Using this Study Guide

Each lesson in this study begins with a Scripture passage or passages to read and consider. Along with Scripture, we will find a brief reflection on the particular study topic to read, ponder, and apply. We will also find related questions to assist in reflecting on and applying the topic.

The lessons in the study (Scripture passages, reflection, and questions) can be used individually or as part of a group. Here are a few ways to use the study:

- Daily devotional
- Training with staff, volunteers, or board members
- Bible study in prison
- Study or information session with local churches, student groups, or Christian professionals
- Study or information sessions for Christian prison personnel and justice officials

### LESSON 1: Justice – A Part of God’s Character

#### Psalm 9:7-9

The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

*(New International Version)*

#### Isaiah 5:16

But the Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.

*(New International Version)*

#### Romans 3:25, 26

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

*(New International Version)*

See also Psalm 103:9,10; 130:3,4; Acts 17:30, 31

### Reflection

What do we mean when we talk of justice?

The everyday use of justice usually reflects a couple of important ideas. One has to do with fairness – justice consists of fair treatment for people. People should be treated basically the same. When we respond to discrimination with “it’s not fair,” we are speaking of unjust treatment.

The other idea has to do with consequences – justice means that people get what they deserve for their actions, whether good or bad. So, we say “he got what was coming to him,” or “she got away with murder,” to sum up whether or not justice was achieved.

Is this everyday use of justice what the Bible means by that term? Clearly fairness and equal treatment are Biblical principles. Leviticus 19:15 warns, for example, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great but judge your neighbor fairly.”

But the Biblical concept of justice goes beyond fairness and equal treatment. It teaches that justice begins and ends in God. It is not something humans created or can fully achieve. When God – who is just in himself – brought the universe into being, he made it to be a place of justice. Human beings were made to live justly in relation to God, to each other, and to creation.

This justice which comes from God is intimately personal. It is meant to serve people, to foster their well-being. People, then, are at the heart of true justice. But justice is not merely personal and individual – relationships are at the heart of justice.

So, in the Bible, justice fundamentally has to do with right and good relationships. It describes conditions – material, emotional, and spiritual – in which people flourish in right relationships with God and with each other. When something damages or ruptures those relationships, doing justice

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involves setting things right. In both senses, justice involves integrity, wholeness, and wellness for people and their relationships.

Justice is closely linked to *shalom*. Shalom means “peace,” but it is more than the absence of conflict and wrongdoing. Shalom describes a state of material and spiritual wholeness, wellness, and fullness for people, both individually and corporately. Justice can be thought of as both a foundation for shalom and a result of shalom.

Yet humankind’s rebellion against God shredded the fabric of justice and marred the state of shalom. People, relationships, and all of creation suffered. Where justice had characterized life, now injustice had erupted and spread with terrible and devastating results.

God’s response is to continue to enact justice in the world. God neither ignores nor excuses injustice but hates it and its effects on creation. By establishing moral law for all humans and a special covenantal relationship with Israel and then the church, God seeks justice and calls us to pursue justice.

In a real sense, the integrity of God requires his acting to eradicate evil and reinstate good – in short, to set things right. This intrinsic integrity is God’s holiness. Holiness requires that creation reflect and express God’s nature and purposes. It is necessary for God and for his people to pursue justice in the face of evil and wrongdoing.

Justice in our sinful world, then, is about restoring shalom or wellbeing of individuals and relationships. It is concerned with upholding rules and laws only as they serve to overcome wrongs and restore people to rightness and wellness.

This means that God’s justice is not simply a matter of formal fairness or equality and “just desserts.” Psalms 103 and 130, among others, demonstrate that to God justice is more flexible, personal, and compassionate than it would be if it were simply a set of rules and punishments. As those psalms indicate, God does not deal with us as our wrongdoing deserves. God pursues justice within a context of grace for those who are wronged *and* for those who are wrongdoers.

We will see this even more clearly when we look at love as part of God’s character in the next lesson.

### Reflection Questions:

1. In your own words, how would you define or describe justice?
2. How do you think justice is understood or defined in your culture or society? In your legal and criminal justice systems?
3. Can there be justice apart from God? Explain your answer.
4. What roles do wrath (anger) and punishment play in pursuing and achieving justice?
5. What would Biblical justice look like in our world? In your society?
6. Has this reflection affected your view of justice? If so, in what ways?

### LESSON 2: Love - A Part of God's Character

#### **Deuteronomy 7:8, 9**

But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

*(New International Version)*

#### **Psalm 103:8**

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

*(New International Version)*

#### **John 3:16**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

*(New International Version)*

#### **I John 4:8**

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

*(New International Version)*

#### **Reflection**

What do we mean when we speak of love? What does it mean to love?

Our modern notion of love tends to equate it with physical attraction and intimacy, with sentiment and emotion. We use the word love to mean affectionate feelings toward something or someone.

There are different kinds of love: erotic love, familial love, friendship love, and sacrificial love. (For a good discussion of these, see C.S. Lewis's book *The Four Loves*.) The Bible teaches that all of these forms of love, when they are true and right, are grounded in God himself. God is love.

First, God is love within himself. Perfect love characterizes the relationships of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All true forms and acts of love stem from the nature of God's love within himself.

Then, God is love beyond himself in creation. From the incomparable greatness of his love and goodness, God decided to make the universe and care for all within it. As God's creatures, we are meant to enjoy, reflect, and express God's love. In imitation of God, we are to live in love through a right and good enjoyment of and care for others and even ourselves.

Some contrast the character of God revealed in the Old Testament with the character of God revealed in the New Testament. In this view, the God of the Old Testament is a God of judgment and wrath. The God of the New Testament, revealed and incarnated in Jesus, is a God of mercy and love.

This contrast cannot really be supported from Scripture. From the beginning, God acted in love in creating the universe and human beings. When we rebelled against him, God continued to love his creation and his people. God's covenant with Israel before Jesus and then with the church stems from God's steadfast love. The witness of Scripture from beginning to end is that God is love.

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At the same time, to say that God loves is not to say that God is always pleased with us. In that God knows, desires, and seeks what is truly and perfectly good for us, he is displeased when we do not know, desire, and seek the same, whether for others or for ourselves. God hates all desires, actions, and effects which fall short of or war against the good.

Nevertheless, God, in the perfection of his love, continues to desire and seek good for us even we do not desire and seek good for ourselves or others. We see this in God's covenantal love. God acts to redeem people and does this by establishing a relational bond first with Israel and then the church in the form of a covenant or binding agreement.

This covenantal relationship consists of a commitment between God and his people to care for and honor each other. In love God initiates the covenantal relationship. He pledges to direct his love and faithfulness to people for their good. In turn, people pledge of their love and faithfulness to him. Both God and people fulfill their covenantal relationship by meeting the terms of the agreement.

Even when we fail to meet our covenantal pledge, God persists in fulfilling his commitment to the covenantal relationship. He does this out of love. In the psalms and the prophets, we find ample testimony to God's steadfast love for those to whom he has committed himself.

In Jesus, as we will explore in our next study, we see the very essence – indeed the actual *incarnation* – of what it means for God to show steadfast love in our sinful world.

### Reflection Questions:

1. In your own words, how would you define or describe love?
2. How do you think love is understood or defined in your culture or society? Does love have any role to play in your legal and criminal justice systems?
3. Compare our human perspective on love with God's love as found in the Bible.
4. Can there be love apart from God? Explain your answer.
5. Has this reflection impacted the way you view or understand love? If so, in what ways?

### LESSON 3: The Cross – The Uniting of Justice and Love

#### **Psalm 33:5**

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

*(New International Version)*

#### **Psalm 89:14**

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.

*(New International Version)*

#### **Ephesians 1:7, 8**

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

*(New International Version)*

#### **Colossians 1:19, 20**

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

*(New International Version)*

#### **Reflection**

Having considered justice and love in relation to God's character, we may go back to one of the basic questions in this study and indeed in life, and ask, "Are justice and love incompatible, or at best completely distinct?"

Because God is one, and because God is both just and loving, justice and love cannot be essentially incompatible or distinct. In God's character and purposes, they meet and agree. Certainly, justice and love are united in God.

In the world as God intended and created it to be, justice and love were meant to be completely harmonious, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In God's good creation, justice is meant to spring from love for God and for people and to seek shalom for all people. Correspondingly, love is intended to seek justice and build shalom among people.

Yet the world is not as God intended it to be. We are sinful and have fallen short of the original goodness created by God. We ignore and rebel against God's good purposes and order, thus marring existence for others, ourselves, and the creation itself.

God, however, has not abandoned us in our sinful, fallen rebellion. Instead, God has responded justly and lovingly to overcome evil and to remedy the ills and death resulting from our sinfulness.

So, justice and love are still interdependent and mutually reinforcing, as God shapes and pursues them in and through our lives. However, now they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in complex and difficult ways. Tension and even pain characterize their joint working out in our world.



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We see this most clearly and concretely in Jesus on the cross. There, both God's hatred for sin and his care for the world come together – they “meet and agree” – in judgment and salvation. In suffering for us, Jesus holds together God's justice *and* God's love for us.

In our sinful world, then, God's justice and love take the shape of a cross, the cross of Jesus. God does not ignore wrongdoing, evil, and sin. The cross truly and fully executes God's absolute and holy judgment on sin. At the same time, it also enacts God's saving love.

Without the cross of Jesus Christ there would be no accountability and justice; justice would be only judgment and punishment. At the same time, without the cross there would be no love; love would be mere sentimentalism. The power of the cross is this: that God brings his justice and love together to condemn *and* to save both sinner and victim.

Of course, the cross is not final; resurrection follows the cross. The New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, presents the cross and resurrection as one continuous work of God. In John 13:31-32, on the verge of arrest and crucifixion, Jesus asserts that now he is glorified, and God is glorified in him. We may easily recognize this in the resurrection, but according to the New Testament it begins in the crucifixion. Both glorify God and Jesus. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus constitute one unified act of God for overcoming sin and saving the world.

Specifically, then, Jesus died that we, in our sin, would die. Jesus was raised that we, dead in him, would be raised to new life. Thus, through cross and resurrection, new life in Jesus yields transformed life, beyond our sin and its devastating effects on our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves, and with creation itself.

The re-creating, transforming effects of the cross and resurrection then – of God's justice and love – are new and right relationships with God and with others. We will explore these effects further in the next lessons.

### Reflection Questions:

1. How does the cross show or enact God's justice?
2. How does the cross show or enact God's love?
3. Is the cross more about justice or love? Explain your answer.
4. How does the cross overcome sin and evil and their effects?
5. In your own words, how would you say that justice and love come together and unite on the cross?

### LESSON 4: Victims – Justice and Love for the Hurting

#### Isaiah 53:4, 5

Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

*(New International Version)*

#### Matthew 11:28, 29

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

*(New International Version)*

#### Romans 8:26, 27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

*(New International Version)*

#### Romans 8:38, 39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*(New International Version)*

#### Hebrews 2:9

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

*(New International Version)*

#### Reflection

As we have seen in previous lessons, God is just, and God is love. Justice and love therefore cannot be essentially opposed or completely distinct. While they have different emphases, they are united in God's nature and character. Each aims for right, caring relationships that reflect and foster well-being in people. Because Jesus is the divine Word made flesh, justice and love are united in him. Jesus brings justice and love together concretely, personally, and redemptively.

In this sinful, fallen world, we commit wrongdoing and evil. We also suffer wrongdoing and evil. None of us evades the culpability of being the perpetrator of sin, and none of us escapes the devastation of being the victim of sin.

Jesus – by his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection – truly and fully identifies with both perpetrator and victim. On the cross, Jesus bears our responsibility as perpetrator as well as our trauma as victim. On the cross, Jesus saves both perpetrator and victim. In the resurrection both are given true life.

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In this lesson we will focus on justice and love for those who are hurting, for victims. How, then, do God's justice and love "meet and agree" for victims of wrongdoing and crime? How do we, as those who have been hurt, participate in Jesus' redemptive efforts on our behalf?

Jesus shares and therefore knows the effects of suffering and victimization on us. These include hurt, loss, fear, anger, despair, disorientation, distrust, and the like. Even when there is damage or loss of material goods and property, of life and limb, the emotional and spiritual effects often go deep and last a very long time.

Jesus bore this suffering on the cross. Consider his terrible cry, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). He bore suffering for us, on our behalf, to carry us through to new life. The risen Jesus is present with us in our hearts and souls even as we experience the painful effects of the wrongs done to us.

What resources do we have for knowing the caring and restoring presence of Jesus in our lives when we suffer? We have Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, worship, fellowship, and assistance from others (charity in the fullest sense, not just in the monetary sense).

We are reminded of God's steadfast love when we read and meditate on the psalms. In prayer, Jesus hears, acknowledges, and vindicates our hurt, loss, confusion, fear, anger, and grief. The Holy Spirit within us communicates our deepest selves to God and God to us even when we cannot articulate what we think and feel. Worship draws us out of ourselves as God comes to us and we come before him to know, enjoy, and glorify him anew. Fellowship with others saves us from increasing isolation and connects us with vitalities in their lives. Charity from others offers material, emotional, and spiritual support. Through such resources, hope, joy, trust, and purpose can reemerge for those who have been traumatized.

These help us move from suffering to new life. The old self can die, and a new self be raised. The resurrection of Jesus assures us that the forces of pain and evil do not triumph. Suffering and victimization are not final. Restoration – new life – follows hurt, loss, and even death.

Because of this we can be reconciled to and reconnected with God and others. In God's power and grace, this can occur even with the one who offended and caused the trauma. This is likely to involve a long and difficult process, with a number of steps and fitful progress. Forgiveness of the offender will be a key in the process. Forgiveness is challenging and emotionally costly. Yet, Jesus told us to forgive as God has forgiven us, and Jesus himself forgave those who abused and killed him.

### Reflection Questions:

1. What effects do victims experience when someone offends against and traumatizes them? What needs do victims have?
2. In what sense does God provide justice for victims?
3. In what sense does God provide love for victims?
4. How do God's justice and love for victims compare (a) with society's view of justice and care for victims and (b) with victim's on views of justice and care. For them?
5. How can God's justice and love transform and restore victims? What does it mean for victims to be transformed and restored by God's justice and love?

### LESSON 5: Offenders – Justice and Love for Those Who Have Injured

#### Isaiah 53:12

Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

*(New International Version)*

#### Matthew 5:23-25

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

*(New International Version)*

#### 2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*(New International Version)*

#### Ephesians 5:8-10

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

*(New International Version)*

#### Colossians 2:13, 14

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

*(New International Version)*

#### Reflection

Jesus, by his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, truly and fully identifies with both perpetrator and victim. On the cross, Jesus bears our responsibility as perpetrator as well as our trauma as victim. On the cross, Jesus saves both perpetrator and victim.

With this in mind, we will focus in this lesson on justice and love for those who have done wrong. How do God's justice and love "meet and agree" for perpetrators of wrongdoing, crime, and harm? How is it that Jesus bears our responsibility as sinner and saves us? How do we, as those who have injured others, participate in Jesus' redemptive efforts?

On the cross, Jesus bore the judgment we deserved. The New Testament refers to what Jesus did on our behalf in rich and various ways: an offering for sin as the Lamb of God; the substitute for us in our punishment; the perfectly obedient Son of God; the liberator rescuing us from the realm of darkness; the conqueror and captor of sin and death; the self-emptying servant; the lover of our souls; and more.

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All point to the mysterious but deep truth that Jesus, fully in keeping with God's nature and purposes, took upon himself our sin and its consequences in order to reverse them completely and finally.

This means that there is full acknowledgment of sin and its consequences. No wrongdoer, no perpetrator of sin and crime, can evade or minimize what he or she has done.

We have many devices whereby we seek to avoid responsibility both within ourselves and before others. We blame our circumstances. We blame other people. We focus only on our own needs and desires. We harden our hearts to the feelings of others. In these and other ways we deny the reality of our wrongdoing, or we try to justify it. We excuse ourselves from blame.

The cross of Jesus does not permit us to rest in these devices. The cross condemns who we are and what we do when we rebel against God and his good order for others and for ourselves. At the same time, the cross rescues us from despair and hopelessness. No wrongdoer is beyond God's forgiveness and love.

How do we, as those who commit wrong and thus injure others and ourselves, live in both the justice and the love of the cross? We do it through confession, repentance, amends and transformation.

A wrongdoer participates in God's saving justice in Jesus by acknowledging his or her acts through confession. By renouncing in repentance similar behavior in the future and taking steps to make it less likely that the wrongdoing will be repeated. Then the person engages in specific, concrete acts to take responsibility and to make amends with respect to the victim (e.g., through restitution or similar means).

Transformation requires that the wrongdoer participate in Jesus' saving transaction by spiritually "dying and rising." This occurs by accepting or receiving the sacrificial love of God in Jesus. The old self passes away; the new self begins to emerge. Transformation shows itself when the wrongdoer gains empathy for the victim of the offense. When the wrongdoer seeks to repair the damage to the victim. When the wrongdoer determines to live in new ways.

Yet an individual cannot do these things alone. In the next lesson we will explore ways in which a community can assist by living out justice and love toward those who hurt and those who injure.

### Reflection Questions:

1. What effects do perpetrators experience when they offend against and injure people? What emotions, attitudes, or needs do perpetrators feel?
2. In what sense does God deal justly with wrongdoers and offenders?
3. In what sense does God deal lovingly with wrongdoers and offenders?
4. How do God's justice and love for offenders compare (a) with society's view of justice and care for offenders and (b) with offenders' own views of justice and care for them?
5. How can offenders experience and live out God's justice and love for them?

### LESSON 6: Community – Living Out Justice and Love

#### Hosea 12:6

But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice and wait for your God always.

*(New International Version)*

#### Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

*(New International Version)*

#### Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

*(New International Version)*

See also *Zechariah 7:8-10; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 6:1, 2*

#### Reflection

Justice and love are qualities in God’s nature. They are integral to who God is and what God does. God is just and loving, so he acts justly and lovingly in the world and in our lives.

Because God is one, justice and love come together in the unity of God’s being and actions. Therefore, we cannot say that there is true justice without love, nor that there is true love without justice. Justice and love are not opposed to each other or even completely distinct from each other. In God’s nature and purposes, both justice and love serve the well-being of people and relationships.

In turn, human existence ought to mirror God’s nature and purposes. When things are well in the lives of individuals and communities, justice and love will characterize that well-being. When things are not well in the lives of individuals and communities, justice and love together should seek to achieve or restore well-being.

In this lesson, we will focus on ways in which communities can seek justice and love for those who hurt and those who injure. Not only do individuals suffer when victims go untended and offenders go

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uncorrected and unchanged, communities suffer. Therefore, communities have responsibilities to deal with the specific individuals involved and with the broader social effects.

The challenge is how to live out justice and love in ways that mirror God's nature and achieve God's purposes in our fallen world. Two important principles should be kept in mind. First, in the cross of Jesus we find that seeking true justice and love, necessarily involves suffering. This is not suffering without hope but suffering to bring an end to evil and a beginning to salvation.

Second, justice cannot be merely dispassionate, abstract, impersonal, punitive, or vengeful. Love cannot be naïve and sentimental. God's justice and love go through the cross even as they lead to resurrection or restoration.

In what specific and concrete ways, then, can communities live out God's justice and love? They can do this through prevention, by offering support to victims, by use of restorative and non-custodial measures for offenders, by provision of faith-based assistance, and by efforts to reintegrate the offender into society.

Communities can and should try first to prevent wrongdoing and crime. Communities, as well as families, should be sources of opportunity, hope, and care for people of all ages, perhaps especially those on the margins, such as children and youth. This hope has to be expressed tangibly through the provision of services.

When wrongdoing and crime occur, communities can and should provide support services for those who hurt, for victims. These services are needed from the time of the crime, through the criminal justice processes, and sometimes on a long-term basis. They may include emotional, medical, and financial assistance; crime scene clean-up; liaison with the criminal justice system; advocacy in the legislature or community organizations; alternative housing; mediation; reconciliation; and more.

Communities can and should find means to hold offenders accountable in ways that are as restorative as possible. In general, this would involve diverting many offenders now sent to prison to non-custodial sentences such as community service, fines, restitution, treatment (for drug, alcohol, or mental problems), conditional discharges, and close supervision. In most countries this would require transformation of public attitudes.

As for those offenders given over to custodial sentences, communities should insist that conditions are humane and restorative. In some countries, organizations are testing and running programs that provide complete correctional services from a faith basis within a section of a state-run institution. Communities could explore this option. Alternatively, faith-based and community-based organizations may provide specific programs to inmates, such as literacy development and improvement, structured dialogue with victims, life skills, Bible studies, correspondence, assistance to families on the outside, and the like.

Then communities can and should seek to reintegrate offenders into society. Possible means include the following: community contacts and support services for individuals after they are charged and for their families; community sentencing; housing and employment following completion of sentence; structured victim-offender dialogue; and more.

The immediate goal for a community in its response to wrongdoing may be to restore order and safety. (An example might be a neighborhood watch program.) This goal is good. Yet, the deeper, long-term goal for a community is to achieve justice and love for victims, offenders, and the community itself.

## Where Love & Justice Meet

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For we can confidently say that the God who gave his only Son on the cross to reconcile and restore all things in heaven and earth to himself will be satisfied with nothing less than true justice and love such as only he gives. Therein shall God's shalom flourish for people and communities.

### Reflection Questions:

1. How is a community affected by wrong-doing and crime in its midst? What are the short-term effects and the long-term effects?
2. How can a community be mobilized to live out justice and love for victims, offenders, and itself? How can a community try to live out justice and love in accord with God's justice and love? What are the challenges to this kind of mobilization? What are the opportunities?
3. To what extent can secular systems and organizations embrace and pursue God's justice and love for victims, offenders, and communities? Are faith-based communities – and more particularly, Christian communities and organizations – uniquely poised and equipped to provide God's justice and love? Explain your answer.
4. What specific, concrete programs can a community offer to support victims and offenders and their families? What aims should those programs and services pursue? What are the challenges and opportunities for a community in developing and operating such programs and services?
5. What are the short-term costs and the long-term costs of community involvement in caring and trying to make a difference in response to crime? (Keep in mind that costs are not only financial or material, but also personal and social.) What are the short-term and long-term benefits?



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