

# Connecting with God through Our Desire for Justice

Series: Connecting with God

Brad Bailey – April 21, 2024

## INTRO

Continuing in our series “Connecting with God”... allowing God to speak to us **about how our nature provides connections to God. [1]**

Today... we’re engaging the process of:

## Connecting with God through Our Desire for Justice

**Every one of us knows** that we have an **innate sense** that **some ways** of acting out **are right...and others are wrong.**

**Even at the youngest of age...**if a child sees that their sibling got more treats... they might raise the cry of justice... that it’s “not fair.”

Despite a world that is far from equal... we have an innate sense that equality seems right.

**By our teenage years...** we **begin to see how cruel the world can be...**as one begins to see around them... that there appears to be the **haves and have nots.... the bullies and the bullied...** as we begin to **learn of atrocities** like the holocaust...slavery...and so much more.

We begin to face something that is **hard to face...**which is just **how wide and deep** our moral failures can run...and how **fundamental to humanity.**

**We know that something is not right....that many things around us are not playing out as they should.**

**We feel it...we might call it justice ...or moral order... or simply the way things should be.**

As N.T. Wright describes,

**“All people know, in cooler moments, that this strange thing we call justice, this longing for things to be put right, remains one of the greatest human goals and dreams.” - N.T.**

**Wright**

We sense that this **desire for justice** is a **part of our human nature.**

This cry for justice ... relating to others in a way that reflects what is right...what is fair... makes us **feel more human.**

It’s a part of **our nature.**

**And that raises the question...**

**What does this desire for justice seek to align with?**

**Is it our biology?**

Are we just having a relationship to our biological nature... at some chemical level...some genetic level?

It’s **never been easy** to explain our moral nature as **purely material in nature.**

And since Darwin’s theory of evolution suggests that what guides our evolvment is merely the **survival of the fittest...** the **social implications** are **hard to reconcile** with our **moral nature.**

***If biology says our development is inherently dependent the survival of superior over the inferior... it doesn’t explain the cry of justice that cries for quite the contrary.***

This **has been a challenge** for those who presume the **position of the atheist...** who try to make sense of our existence as purely material. **They know that the Darwinian theory** of

evolution **cannot be reconciled with our desire for justice**... with our **belief in equality**...with **care and compassion** for the suffering of others.

This has led some... to suggest that our moral nature...is simply a reflection of our **social development**.

**Richard Dawkins**, one of the **most strident atheists of our time**, proposes that **we are indeed nothing more than chemicals**...that human beings are **just "gene machines"**... **which have a selfish gene**...but now that we have a **social nature**...**we can fight this selfish gene**...by agreeing to ways we will treat one another that provides more communal security. [2]

He suggests that **the selfish gene is what guides our biological survival** ...but that having become social creatures... **we must now fight it**... we must overcome the biological force that has formed us. As thoughtful as such explanations may be, I believe that **they simply do not explain our actual experience**.

This view from atheism believes that **nothing is actually inherently good or bad**...right or wrong... but rather...justice is whatever is agreed to at whatever common point it is decided.

**They suggest that humanity has long agreed on basic values**.

But history would suggest otherwise. The truth is that **many have believed that one group had a right to rule over others**... and those beliefs are rising up afresh again.

It also **doesn't explain** why feel **inspired by goodness** and sacrificial "love" rather than react with rational assessments.

It **doesn't explain** why we feel **those we love** should be **valued beyond merely their functional value**.

**Kai Nielsen**, an **atheist philosopher** who attempts to defend the viability of ethics without God, in the end admits [3]

***We have not been able to show that reason requires the moral point of view. Pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality. The picture I have painted for you is not a pleasant one. Reflection on it depresses me . . .***  
.. - Kai Nielsen

**In a world without God**, we **cannot speak of anything as inherently right or wrong**... such words have no meaning, For in a random universe without God,... good and evil do not exist. [4]

As another atheistic ethicist points out, "**The concept of moral obligation [is] unintelligible apart from the idea of God. The words remain but their meaning is gone.**" [5]

**So I would encourage each of us to take a moment** ...and get in touch with something you feel is deeply right or wrong.

If someone steals from you... or deeply wrongs you... what we sense it that it is wrong... actually objectively wrong.

**When we feel something is wrong or right, we are appealing to a "good" ... a "right"...** **that is fundamentally true and real**... beyond merely personal or social opinion,,, beyond merely subjective deductions and dispositions.

**We may debate the exact nature of moral principles**... but even in doing so...we can only do so because we assume that there is some meaningful reality to the idea of right and wrong.

**Plato and the great philosophers** described justice as **one of the great transcendentals...** one of the qualities **that lie beyond us ...transcend us...and call out to us.** (including love, beauty, and goodness... also referred to as perfect justice.)

***The desire for justice is something within us that reaches for something that is beyond us.***

And today... modern humanity has become so **enamored with our ourselves...that we don't like to imagine anything beyond us...that could have a claim on us.**

But **as so many have noted...** the very **idea of ultimate justice...** could **not have come from the world around us** because the world around us manifests only imperfect justice and goodness. It **could not have come from our biology and brains** because it is beyond such physical processes and structures.

**From where does this call come?**

**The Scriptures** tell how that **calling is personal...** human life is created to share something of God's very image... and nature.

**We claimed our separation...** choosing to go our own way... but **there are echoes of these qualities that still can be heard.**

Within every one of us are **the echoes of a voice which calls us to live justly.**

The echoes are calling us, beckoning us, luring us to think that there might be such a thing as justice, as the world being put to rights, even though it seems beyond us to grasp. [6]

**1. Our desire for justice is rooted in God... it transcends the state of our world or ourselves.**

**Justice is rooted in God's character and creation. [7]**

***"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He."*** - Deuteronomy 32:4

***"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you."*** - Psalm 89:14

**Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the LORD that one gets justice. - Proverbs 29:26**

**The desire for justice is not ultimately rooted in a book of laws or rules... or any set of propositions ...but in the very nature of the source of our existence. It is rooted in the very character of God and it is the outworking of that character, which is never less than just.**

**And God began to reveal such justice...** to give voice through the prophets...and the law. **And ultimately...** in Jesus **that voice became human and did what had to be done to bring it about."**

Here is how God spoke of the coming of Jesus... first through the prophet Isaiah... and then quoted in the Gospel of Matthew ...

**Isaiah 42:1-4, 7**

**“Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring justice to the nations.  
<sup>3</sup> ...In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;  
<sup>4</sup> he will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes justice on earth.  
...<sup>7</sup> to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.**

Jesus "will proclaim justice to the nations...(and lead) justice to victory."

**It declares that Jesus brings what had not been possible. He brings justice that we had not fully known... he fulfills what we could not fulfill.**

**And this involves knowing that what flows merely from our nature will never reflect perfect justice.**

As we read in the Biblical Book of James...

***Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. – James 1:20***

What is he referring to?

**Only God is truly fair and just.** Our nature operates out of insecurity and defensiveness. Human anger tends to see others as needing to be judged...and in the process... tends to see ourselves as very righteous.

**This speaks to challenge that our desire for justice faces... in connecting us with God. When we are self-righteous we don't want to face God very intimately. We become dishonest with God...and distant from God. We** begin to revolve around our own orbit ... and drift away from the pull of God.

Demands for justice can be righteous... but one does well to consider how easily they begin to focus so much on projecting all that is bad on others...in a way that hides what is not good in ourselves.

The truth is that **our desire for justice... usually wants to define justice on our own terms.** If we are honest... **we don't simply desire justice...but rather our relative version...** in which God gets rid of everything that doesn't touch us is

The truth is that we **want to shine our light into the places we choose...** usually the one we that reflect others...and that we can feel morally superior about.

We may want to point such issues out to God.

**But the light of God brings light to everything.**

Entire Romans 2... captures how we are condemned by what we know... and do or don't do...

**Romans 2:1, 3-4 (NLT)**

**When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things.... <sup>3</sup>Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same**

things? <sup>4</sup> Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

In a fallen state, **our ego strives to preserve an idealized**, but inaccurate self-concept about what "good and upstanding" people we are.

If we cry out for justice in such a way that we forget how much we also need mercy... we will **build a wall of self righteousness**... that will separate us from God.

We feel so deeply about the wrong which we see ....but don't know how to feel about the wrong we see in ourselves.

**The truth is that moral responsibility is not so easy to face.**

**What do we need?**

As we heard... we need **the kindness of God.**

**2. Our desire for justice must face the need for mercy.**

Our desire for justice leads to a **great dilemma... what we need is justice...and mercy.** And this is what God bears... justice and mercy.

**Romans 3:21-26 (NCV)**

**God has a way to make people right with him without the law, and he has now shown us that way which the law and the prophets told us about. <sup>22</sup> God makes people right with himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same: <sup>23</sup> Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard, <sup>24</sup> and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. <sup>25</sup> God sent him to die in our place to take away our sins. We receive forgiveness through faith in the blood of Jesus' death. This showed that God always does what is right and fair, as in the past when he was patient and did not punish people for their sins. <sup>26</sup> And God gave Jesus to show today that he does what is right. God did this so he could judge rightly and so he could make right any person who has faith in Jesus.**

He **both judges rightly... and make us right with Him.**

God did not lay aside His good and perfect desire to completely wipe out all evil, and yet neither did He lay aside His grace—He became *both just and justifier*, righteous judge and gracious redeemer.

**He fulfills justice and mercy... to those who receive it.**

**God reaches beyond justice...**

- For **while we are sinners** Christ died for us... to provide life with Him to all who receive him.
- He **brings light** to all who will receive the light... but knows that the light that is needed can also try to refuse the light.
- He is the **Father of the prodigal son** who returns after having wasted his wealth with riotous living... but such mercy will not force the older son to come join the party of grace... if he refuses it come in. [8]

**The point is this: Our desire for justice... must face the need for mercy.**

- It is this mercy that allows us to truly enter the process of justice.

- It is this mercy which leads us **from merely desiring retribution to that of redemption.**
- In light of God's mercy we realize that it is **not the suicide bomber who enacts justice...** but **those who know mercy and show mercy...** those who see those less seen... who become a voice for the voiceless.

**3. Our desire for justice, when most fully desired, is that which only Jesus fulfills.**

***Our desires for justice reflect God's nature echoing within us....to which Jesus becomes the voice that truly connects us to the source and fulfillment of ultimate justice.***

In listening to Jesus, we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along.

And when I look and listen... I realize that **I wouldn't want justice without Jesus.**

**Let me quickly bring it home with these three reason. [9]**

**Jesus reveals what justice is.**

"If we look at the history of thought, we'll find that our basic assumptions about what justice even means have **come to us from Jesus's teaching.**

So the assumptions that we and our atheist or agnostic friends might share—for example, that **all human beings are equally morally valuable**, that men and women are morally equal, that **the strong and the rich and the powerful shouldn't trample on the oppressed and the poor and the weak and the marginalized**—these things **have come to us from Christianity.**

Without Jesus's teaching, our standards of justice would be entirely different. We wouldn't even know what justice is." - Rebecca McLaughlin

**Even the most anti-religious atheist, Richard Dawkins**, just stated over the recent Easter weekend (May 30, 2024) that he is **concerned about the decline of Christianity in the Western world** and even described himself as a "cultural Christian." He said he doesn't want to see the benefits Christianity has brought to the culture disappear...and added, "If we substituted [Christianity] with any alternative religion, that would be truly dreadful." [10]

**Jesus reveals the mercy we need to actually desire justice.**

We wouldn't want justice without Jesus, because **were it not for Jesus's death in our place, justice for us would be the horrifying prospect of eternal death and God's judgment against us.**

The cry for justice will not connect us to God... unless we step back and see our own need for mercy.

**Without grasping our position...** our cries for justice will drive us towards a self righteousness... our **causes and crusades become ends** in themselves... **sources of pride that only separate us from God...**and the actual nature of justice.

**Jesus reveals that justice will be fulfilled ...and reign forever.**

*Jesus reveals that justice already reigns over eternity. The central proclamation of Jesus is that the Kingdom of God (Kingdom of heaven), which already exists, will ultimately redeem creation.*

As N.T. Wright describes...

**God's new world has been unveiled in Jesus Christ and you're now invited to belong to it. The new creation has already begun. The sun has begun to rise. Christians are called**

**to leave behind, in the tomb of Jesus Christ, all that belongs to the brokenness and incompleteness of the present world ... That, quite simply, is what it means to be Christian: to follow Jesus Christ into the new world, God's new world, which he has thrown open before us. - N. T. Wright**

It is this reality that **sets us free from futility. [11]**

**It means that every moment of how we relate to others is filled with meaning... eternal meaning.**

- **When dignity is shown to a patient or customer...** we are affirming that evil does not reign... and that another Kingdom ultimately reigns.
- **When we pursue peace and reconciliation...** we are affirming that evil does not reign... and that another Kingdom ultimately reigns.
- **We are operating in relationship to another kingdom...**

**Closing: Jesus invites us beyond mere retribution... to that of restoration. In Jesus the primary point of justice and mercy is not based on 'they deserve it' but 'this is the way God's world should and will be.' We are called to do those things that truly anticipate the way God's world WILL be.**

## **PRAYER**

### **Communion**

When Jesus wanted to explain to his disciples what his death was all about, he didn't give them a theory, he gave them a meal. (N. T. Wright)

### **Resources:**

Further reading:

Justice Bible Studies – Intervarsity - [here](#)

Justice in the Bible By Dr. Timothy Keller - [here](#)

NT Wright, Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense (Book)

C. S. Lewis and 8 Reasons for Believing in Objective Morality by Stephen S. Jordan - [here](#)

Moral Atheism?: What Morality Looks Like without God (March 11, 2019) By Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker [here](#). – Expounds on how atheism and Christian belief create different ideas about what is moral. (ie. Darwin was led to encourage procreation as among the highest goals... in a way that would suggest polygomy.

The Amoralism of Atheism By Robert S. Smith - [here](#)

### **Notes:**

1. Many have noted that our human nature has transcendent longing... which can point us or connect us to God. N.T Wright has captured this well in his writing.

“God is the one who satisfies the passion for justice, the longing for spirituality, the hunger for relationship, the yearning for beauty. And God, the true God, is the God we see in Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's Messiah, the world's true Lord.”

— N.T. Wright, [Simply Christian](#)

“We honor and celebrate our complexity and our simplicity by continually doing five things. We tell stories. We act our rituals. We create beauty. We work in communities. We think out beliefs. No doubt you might think of more, but that’s enough for the moment. In and through all these things run the threads of love and pain, fear and faith, worship and doubt, the quest for justice, the thirst for spirituality, and the promise and problem of human relationship. And if there’s any such thing as ‘truth’ in the absolute sense, it must relate to, and make sense of, all this and more.”

NT Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, p. 49

Made for spirituality, we wallow in introspection. Made for joy, we settle for pleasure. Made for justice, we clamor for vengeance. Made for relationship, we insist on our own way. Made for beauty, we are satisfied with sentiment. But new creation has already begun. The sun has begun to rise. Christians are called to leave behind, in the tomb of Jesus Christ, all that belongs to the brokenness and incompleteness of the present world ... That, quite simply, is what it means to be Christian: to follow Jesus Christ into the new world, God's new world, which he has thrown open before us.

N. T. Wright

2. The ways in which those who embrace atheistic worldviews explain a basis for morality are best represented by Richard Dawkins ([PBS Faith and Reason series](#)) and Ronald A. Lindsay ([How Morality Has the Objectivity that Matters—Without God](#)). Dawkin’s “Selfish Gene” work has been criticized by some as simplistic, and in need of a less machine like view, and one more updated by the complex interactive nature of our development. See: [The Dangerous Delusions of Richard Dawkins](#) by Jeremy Lent, originally published by Alternet, August 8, 2017)

While each of these are certainly thoughtful and may seem “reasonable”...I believe when one steps back and considers if they truly align with human nature and history...that they are less coherent and compelling. They suggest that humanity has long agreed on basic values. History would suggest otherwise. They imply that there is no actual goodness...just practical choices to serve our communal survival. This itself implies that we have no inherent value...but just should operate “morally” out of a purely rational decision based on serving a functional value. One must ask if this explains why we desire to be valued beyond our functional value? Why do we feel inspired by goodness and even sacrificial “love” rather than react with rational assessments?

Some other basic challenges to Dawkins atheistic contentions in general, one might value:

[A Critique of Richard Dawkins' Views on Religion](#)

[Can Morality Be Based in Our “Selfish” Evolutionary Past?](#) By Henry W. Middleton

[What is wrong with Dawkins' selfish gene metaphor](#) – postings at Biologos Forum

3. Kai Nielsen, "Why Should I Be Moral?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984)

4. For a good challenge to the attempts to provide a moral basis from atheism, see: *The Amorality of Atheism* By Robert S. Smith - [here](#)

5. From Richard Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1985), 90, 84.] as cited by William Craig

6. For more about the transcendent quality for justice, see: *THE 5 TRANSCENDENTALS (AND HOW THEY PROVIDE EVIDENCE FOR THE SOUL)* - MAGIS CENTER FEBRUARY 17, 2023 - [here](#). He notes the following regarding our awareness of Justice



"We may now return to the familiar question we have asked twice above. How could we recognize every imperfection in fairness, justice, and goodness—instinctually—without having to learn it?

It could not have come from the world around us because the world around us manifests only imperfect justice and goodness. It could not have come from our brain because it is constituted by restricted physical processes and structures.

Therefore, it would have to come from—you guessed it—perfect justice and goodness itself.

Recall what Plato said: only perfect justice itself can induce our awareness of it."

7. Other verses referring to God's nature of justice:

"The Lord is righteous, he loves justice" - Psalms 11:7

"The Maker of heaven and earth ... upholds the cause of the oppressed and ... loves the righteous" - Psalms 146:6–8

"The Lord Almighty will be exalted by his justice" - Isaiah 5:16

God's character includes a zeal for justice that leads him to love tenderly those who are socially powerless (Psalms 10:14 – 18).

The Almighty—we cannot find him; he is great in power; justice and abundant righteousness he will not violate. - Job 37:23

But the Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice. - Psalm 9:7

"Follow justice and justice alone," Moses told the children of Israel, who were called to be lights to the unbelieving world.

Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you. - Deuteronomy 16:19-20

Of Solomon we read, "Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness." 1 Kings 10:9

Further can be found at: 26 Bible Verses about Justice - [here](#).

8. In a god piece about our desire for justice, one notes that: "All that worry that somebody might be getting away with something and all that anxiety that God might not be an exacting judge, suggest that we, like the older brother of the prodigal son, might be doing a lot of things right, but are missing something important inside of ourselves. We are dutiful and moral, but bitter underneath and are unable to enter the circle of celebration and the dance. Everything about us is right, except for the lack of real warmth in our hearts." From OUR LONGING FOR GOD'S JUSTICE - [here](#)

9. Drawing from "2 Reasons We Wouldn't Want Justice without Jesus" by: *Rebecca McLaughlin* - [here](#)

10. From [From U.K. radio show](#). Another potent admission comes from lies in George Orwell's book 1984... a dystopian novel and cautionary tale published in 1949.

Prior to the book, he had described the dilemma he saw with the rejection of the Christian worldview.

"For two hundred years we had sawed and sawed and sawed at the branch we were sitting on. And in the end, much more suddenly than anyone had foreseen, our efforts were rewarded, and down we came. But unfortunately there had been a little mistake: The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all, it was a cesspool full of barbed wire...It appears that amputation of the soul isn't just a simple surgical job, like having your appendix out. The wound has a tendency to go septic."

-"Christianity Today," 1/13/84, pp.25-26

11. For a good presentation of why belief in a personal God provides the only means to see ultimate justice beyond this world, see: [The Case for a Personal God from Morality: Justice](#) (December 13, 2021) by Stephen S. Jordan. He concludes: "...if there is such a thing as ultimate justice (which I believe there is), and if there is to be legitimate hope of it being enacted, it is reasonable to posit the existence of a personal God."