

Gospel Answers

The Gospel is the good news of our salvation: that we are no longer condemned by our sin, but forgiven through God's grace. Therefore, the Gospel provides the answer to our greatest need and question. Yet we have many other needs and questions. We desire answers to our pain, loneliness, shame, meaninglessness, and desire for justice. What about these questions? The Gospel is still the answer. It is the vastly better answer to our most fundamental questions and needs.

WEEK TWO

The Gospel provides a better answer to our desire for justice

Message Passage: Habakkuk 1:1-6 & Romans 3:9-26
Small Group Passage: Romans 12:17–21

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

Do you ever get a question asked in a small group and everyone is quiet? Of course you have. We have all been there. But in the back of your mind, you get that temptation to say the answer. Still more silence. Then someone sheepishly says.... "Jesus?" Why did they say that answer so sheepishly? Because it felt too churchy? Maybe you didn't say it because it feels like that is always the answer. You wanted a different, more original answer. I promise there is no need.

The reality is that, regardless of the question, Jesus is the answer. The Gospel is the answer to our greatest questions, all of them. In this series, we want to help one another see that the Gospel answers whatever we face. This includes our questions and cries for Justice.

THE QUESTION

Have you ever asked God this question? Why do people who choose wickedness and sin seem to get ahead, and I don't? We may be ashamed to ask it, but if we have, we stand in the company of Scripture's greatest prophets.

Jeremiah 12:1 *"You are always righteous, LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"*

The prophet Habakkuk asked the same question, just phrased differently.

Habakkuk 1:2–3 *How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?* ***3*** *Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.*

Why, God, do you tolerate wrongdoing and injustice? Habakkuk's complaint centers on widespread violence and the breakdown of justice within Judah—a situation where the legal system had become ineffective, and the righteous were being oppressed by the wicked. (Hab 1:2–11) The prophet's anguish reflects the conditions during Jehoiakim's reign, when systemic corruption plagued the kingdom.

As so often happens in Scripture, the Lord did not respond to a hard question by demanding silence. Instead, he answered.

Hab 1:5–6 *Look at the nations and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.* ***6*** *I am raising up the Babylonians, that ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwellings not their own.*

God reminded the Prophet Habakkuk that he was not blind to injustice and would not sit idly by and watch it happen. He would bring down the most powerful empire in the world at the time, Babylon, to exact justice. Our God is a God of justice. He does not tolerate sinful injustice.

Rebuttal: "But if that is the case, why does he tolerate so much of it today?" The Gospel is the answer. But first we must understand just how far injustice goes.

THE GOSPEL ANSWER

At the beginning of Romans, the apostle Paul addressed injustice. Not just the acts of an oppressor against the oppressed, the rich against the poor, but the wrongs the unrighteous commit against a righteous God.

Romans 3:9 *What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.*

Amongst the Jews of Paul's time, it was common for them to view the Gentiles as a wicked people. They were the pagans. They were the unjust ones. But Paul had spent the previous two chapters destroying that assumption. Sin was a problem for all mankind. Therefore, injustice was a problem amongst all mankind.

We need to hear this truth.

- Sin is not a them problem; it is an us problem
- Injustice is not only out there; it can be found in the heart of every man, woman, and child.

Rebuttal: "But I don't think I am all that bad. Yes, I have made mistakes, but not to the extent of others." Be wary of minimizing what Scripture does the opposite with.

Romans 3:10-18 *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;* ***11*** *there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.* ***12*** *All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* ***13*** *"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips."* ***14*** *"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."* ***15*** *"Their feet are swift to shed blood;* ***16*** *ruin and misery mark their ways,* ***17*** *and the way of peace they do not know."* ***18*** *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

God saw all of the injustice of the world. He saw it clearly. But it was not the problem of a single civilization or people group. Sinful injustice affected every man, woman, and child who had ever lived because it exists in every man, woman, and child.

Rebuttal: "But what about those who obeyed God's commands?"

Romans 3:19-20 *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.* ***20*** *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

Is every sinful act the same? Is all injustice equally severe? No! But no one among us is declared righteous based on our own efforts. Before a perfectly righteous God, we all fall short. No one is innocent. That falling short leads to death and eternal judgment.

We want to know how and when God will judge the injustice we see in the world. But we should be even more concerned about the injustice and sin in our own lives and hearts that he must also judge. **When we come to this reality, we see that the Gospel is good news, and Jesus is the answer**.

Ro 3:21–23 *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.* ***22*** *This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,* ***23*** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Righteousness is GIVEN. The judge gives his verdict: righteousness. The guilty are forgiven. The sentence is commuted, and the record is wiped clean!

Rebuttal: "But if we could be declared righteous simply by believing in Jesus Christ, hasn't God ignored sin and the injustice of the world?" No.

Ro 3:24-26 *and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* ***25*** *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—****26*** *he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

Why did God not show wrath at injustice? God withheld (delayed) punishment for the injustices he saw so he could send Jesus to justify the unjust.

But God could not ignore the injustice committed. It demanded a consequence. Every act of injustice had to be paid for (atoned). We, the unjust sinners, were incapable of paying such a high price. We could not atone for our own sin. Only Christ could do that.

That is the Gospel. It is not just an answer to the injustice that we see. It is THE answer to injustice. The injustice that is not only out there but even more so in our own hearts and lives. The question is: will we receive this beautiful answer by believing in Christ, receiving grace through faith? Because this committed sentence must be received. Many have rejected it.

Transition to small group: Wrath and justice await all who do so. But even this is not bad news. In fact, every act of injustice not covered by the blood of Christ will be fully punished, so we can respond to the world's injustice as the redeemed.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever found yourself asking the same question Jeremiah and Habakkuk asked: “Why does God allow this?” What makes that question difficult to wrestle with?

2. Why is it important to recognize that sin and injustice aren't simply problems “out there,” but problems that exist in our own hearts?

   Leader Note: Seeing injustice in both the world and our own hearts and lives is fundamental to the Christian worldview. If we ignore the sin and injustice in our own lives, we can easily make ourselves out to be perpetual victims. Victims who need to be delivered from oppressive people rather than the sinfulness in our own hearts.

   Read: Romans 12:17–21

3. Vs 17, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” This goes against everything that we want to do. Why shouldn't we repay evil with evil?

   Leader Note (follow up): The Gospel once again is the answer. Why would we NOT repay evil with evil? The Gospel is why. If your group does not see this, ask them, “How does the Gospel provide the answer for why we do not repay evil with evil?” The answer is that Jesus was confronted with our evil, and he responded with mercy and sacrifice. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

   Leader Note (Clarification): Many have argued that this passage contradicts the Biblical principle of an eye for an eye found in (Exodus 21:24-26). It does not! The passage in Exodus provides instructions for justice within a society. Not a license for personal revenge. Also, Jesus expounded on this passage in the Sermon on the Mount and set a higher standard for his followers (Matt 5:38-48).

4. Vs 19, What does it mean and look like to leave room for God’s wrath?

   Leader Note: If you would like to dive a bit deeper, you can ask, “What is the difference between leaving room for God’s wrath and completely turning a blind eye to injustice that you do see in the world.

5. Vs 20-21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” What did Jesus mean by this?

   Leader Note: “Heap coals of fire on his head” refers to an ancient Egyptian custom in which a person seeking to show public contrition carried a pan of burning coals on his head. The coals represented the burning pain of his shame and guilt.”[1] When we

[1] John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1718.

respond to wrongs against us with revenge, we give them a way to justify their wrongs. When we respond to wrongs against us with mercy and kindness, we do not give them an opportunity to justify their actions. Instead, our mercy and kindness give them an opportunity to see the error in their ways and repent.

PRAYER TIME

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