



Seeing Justice Done

Proverbs 17:15,26 Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both. ...It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their integrity.

- Justice. Yet another hot-button topic about which there is great debate in our society. Are our courts just and fair? Are our laws indiscriminately applied to rich and poor, black and white? How do we respond to these questions as Christians? Thankfully we don't need to be legal experts or life-long observers of our criminal justice system in order to contribute to the debate. God's Word clearly makes the case for justice.
- From Scripture we know that God has established every government and gives governments the right and the responsibility to mete out rewards and punishments to ensure a safe and orderly society (cf. Rom. 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:13-14; Jer. 18:5-10). Within this framework God gives the governing authorities great latitude about what their particular laws may be and how they should be enforced. However this latitude does not mean that the Bible is silent or squishy on the issue of justice. The LORD is the Judge of All the Earth, and he does provide us with clear principles to follow (Gen. 18:25).
- Justice should be universally and equally applied. When Moses established the judicial system in Israel he told the judges and elders, "Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien. Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God" (Deut. 1:16-17). The Lord also said, "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit. ...Do not deny justice to your poor in their lawsuits" (Exodus 23:2-3, 6). In short the holy God hates when justice is perverted and corrupted—when the guilty are pardoned and the innocent are condemned, when the innocent are punished and competent officials are flogged for their faithfulness.
- All this means that those who make the laws and the judges who enforce the laws are involved in serious business. They are responsible to God for being fair and impartial in their decisions and decrees. No judge or ruler dare ever imagine that the law is their personal plaything, that they are free to pardon and condemn whomever they want with impunity. Yes, mercy does have a place in our lives—as those who have been freely forgiven all our sins, we cannot withhold God's forgiveness or our own personal forgiveness from those who ask for it (cf. Matt. 18:21ff)—but in a court of law the Lord says that undue leniency is not mercy, it's injustice. Acquitting the guilty doesn't do anyone any good because it only breeds a disrespect for law and contempt for authority.
- So where does that leave us as Christians? Clearly we are to submit to all the laws of the land—no matter how impractical or personally inconvenient they may be. Those who hold legislative and judicial offices are to make laws that are fair and apply them impartially. As godly citizens we are to respect and obey the government (as the 4th Commandment tells us), but we can never condone or defend injustice, rather we must stand up for the innocent. Lastly, we can be thankful that our God rules over the nations, and though justice is often neglected and perverted in this wicked world, the Day is coming when God will see eternal

justice done. Then the innocent will be vindicated and the ungodly condemned. No one great or small will escape God's perfect judgment.

Prayer: Judge of All the Earth, grant us good and honest leaders and judges, who do not seek their own interests, but the welfare of those they are called to serve and protect. Work justice for all the oppressed and bring down the corrupt so that law and order and harmony may rule in our land. Amen.