

## Biblical Principles Of Justice (Part One)

Underpinnings of Righteous Judgment

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I hope you are all having a very good Sabbath day, and you are all happy that this is the Sabbath day, and that we can get together and learn some things about God's way of life.

I am going to go into something that is probably pretty basic. I hope that does not make you turn off immediately to say it is below you. But I would appreciate if you would listen in because these are things that we should know; I am pretty sure that we do know them—we have been made aware of them, as the years have gone by. But I think there are things that are slipping away in this country and around the world, so it is probably good to have a refresher.

'Justice.' As it hits our ears, the ideas that come into our minds (the images, the emotions that flare up) are probably conflicting somewhat when we think of this word. We may think of blind justice, or Lady Justice—the statue you see in front of courts blindfolded, holding a set of scales that are balanced in one hand and a sword in the other hand, showing that there is fair judgment on the one hand but there is also the authority to punish.

Sometimes she is depicted standing on a book (in Christian countries, the book is usually the Bible or something along that line). Sometimes, also in Christian countries they do not have a book but they have a rock, which, of course, points to what Jesus said about building on a rock (the rock would be Him). Or you might think of, let us say the Supreme Court or a particular court that you might be familiar with, or maybe a particular judge (judges are called Justices in some cases). Maybe you think of your favorite courtroom drama ('LA Law,' 'Boston Legal,' or something similar, where there is a lot of courtroom activity) and that brings a smile to your face because they can be entertaining.

Overall, though, we tend to like justice. Justice is a good thing to us because it is a virtue that promises rectitude and equity. We think of these as good things, and they *are* good things. We believe that wrongdoers will get their just desserts.

On the other hand, we may grimace a little bit thinking about this because we understand that what I just said was an ideal—that there is rectitude and equity and that wrongdoers will get their just desserts. We know that in practice—in the way it works out

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in the real world—real justice is very rare; or at least it seems that way. Murderers and rapists do not get what they deserve, while otherwise law-abiding citizens have the book thrown at them for contravening some picayune environmental regulation where somebody came on their land and told them they were doing something wrong—when they were actually trying to improve the land in their own property.

So does real justice even exist? Well, yes, it does. But real justice, true justice, is no human. True justice is divine and divine justice is always right and true. Yet, even divine justice, as right and true as it is, leans heavily toward mercy and kindness. This is only possible because the penalty for sin has been paid by our Creator. If the penalty was not paid, God, being who He is (God of truth and justice), would have to enact the penalty. And He does.

But the penalty has been paid by our Creator, Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice of Himself. And so, God, then, demands justice, but He has the liberty to extend mercy because justice has been satisfied through Christ. Let us just go and see Ephesians chapter 2.

**Ephesians 2:4-7** But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead [We had the sentence of death over us.] in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

So it is only through what Christ has done for us that God is able, because of His sense of justice, to give us kindness and mercy and raise us up together, as it says right here and give us the kindness of grace. So godly justice, then, is true and right. But it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that allows God to be merciful and grant us grace.

Now, as Christians, we want to imitate God and Christ. That is what a Christian is: A Christian is a *follower of Christ*. And if he believes that, then that is what he does: he tries to walk in His steps. And so we want to be just, we want to make right judgments. This is a rudimentary concept that even those without the Spirit of God understand from Scripture—that if you are going to be a Christian, you follow Christ.

But, without the Holy Spirit, they do not have the spiritual strength to really accomplish that. We know how hard that is anyway, even with the Spirit of God, to do the things that Christ did. So people try to do this. They try to imitate Christ, and imitate God and His justice. So it has not hindered millions of professing Christians, over the last two

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millennia, from trying to establish just governments, just courts. Not only that, they have tried not to do it just personally, but they have also tried to do it societally.

So kingdoms and nations have extracted principles of justice from the Bible and put them into practice as well as they could. So a lot of biblical principles are at the foundation of governmental policies, governmental law, and whole sections of governments (namely, our judicial system).

A prime example of this is the United States of America. It was certainly the intention of the Pilgrims and the Puritans, some of whom came to these shores to escape religious persecution, to set up biblically-based colonial governments. Ultimately, 150 years later the Founding Fathers themselves, who were steeped in both classical and religious education (in biblical and classical literature and in various classical languages like Greek, Hebrew, and Latin), drew examples from history, particularly from the Bible, and then used these examples and principles when forming the American system of government.

In a ten-year study at the University of Houston, researchers examined 15,000 documents that had been written by the Founding Fathers (letters; court cases they heard) and found out that 34 percent of their quotations in these documents were from the Bible—far, far more than any other source. So they definitely had an understanding of what was there in the Bible and they tried to use it in a big way.

So the survey of American documents—which actually was not just of the Founding Fathers, but from the Mayflower Compact that came over on the Pilgrim ship, all the way to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, along with state constitutions and the writings of influential men—shows clearly that Americans were overwhelmingly biblical in their conceptions of proper government and justice. The Bible was one of the few books that they actually had, and they read it assiduously. They read it every week. A lot of them read it every day. They did their studies from it. Many of them learned to read and write from it. So it became foundational to their thinking.

Many of these people also possessed a strong streak of idealism. They believed that those principles, once they were implemented in civil government, would create a just and peaceful nation and so they enshrined them in our founding documents. And it is true that, when they are followed, they work. In this way, Americans may be more familiar with biblical principles of justice than those of other nations. We should be because they are the foundation of our daily life and daily interactions with government.

However, wherever we live, we need to know and understand these principles, not jus

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because God promises that we are going to be kings and priests in the Kingdom and, as Paul says, we are to judge angels. But that is not the only reason we need to learn these principles. One of the big reasons why we need to understand them is they undergird our personal faculties of judgment. We need to know these principles of justice so that we can make good judgments ourselves.

God wants us to be making proper judgments right now. If we are not making proper judgments, we are going to make bad decisions, and we are going to end up someplace else off the path to the Kingdom of God. So we need to understand these principles. And I want to give you today a survey of them from God's Word.

I think, as we go through these, you may be surprised at how many there are, how frequently they arise, how early they appear in Scripture, and how many are in use by governments today—not just the American Federal government, but state and local government. Governments of institutions (namely, corporations) have their basis in some of these same laws. Basically, English common law has these almost wholly as part of that system. The simple reason why these things are so ubiquitous is because they work, and people have recognized that.

But it is a sad thing to see that we are going away from them more and more. This should be a review to us. But we have to review it because we see this in other countries, and the educational systems in those countries moving farther and farther away from Christian values and moral absolutes. People are losing the basis for making these laws and principles work, and so they are losing their ability to make sound judgments.

As we get further and further away from Christian values, then the judgments that ever judges will make are going to slip. We have already seen it start. We just need to prepare ourselves to hear more and more judicial decisions that we will just have to shake our heads at, as we say: "How in the world did they come up with that decision?" Maybe it will not just be shaking our heads, but cringing in despair at how far this nation has fallen. We have experienced these things for a long time.

One of the big ones that started the ball rolling was in 1973 (Roe v. Wade). And then that just opened up the whole sexual revolution and all the things that have come from that, like homosexual marriage (I do not even like to say those two words back to back because it is saying a word that has lost its meaning; marriage has nothing to do with same-sex anything). There is also the transgender rights that are coming down the pike and worse.

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Even something that is not sexual in nature necessarily, like the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), was something that was brought to the Supreme Court. And the justices there, including Justice Roberts, made a horrible decision on it, saying that it was legal for the government to force you to buy something. That has never been part of the American way, just from that simple principle. I do not want to get into that.

We are seeing these decisions being made by the courts taking us further and further away from what is good and right and biblical. And I think, as we move further away from that basis, we are going to see worse decisions in the future.

Now we are going to start that survey of principles of justice. Let us go to the very first verse of the very first book because the principles of justice begin right there. They begin at the very beginning.

**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God. . .

That is the first principle of justice that we need to understand. God is first. God was there at the beginning. He has always been there. And since He is first, and He is powerful, and all of these other attributes that He has, He is the ultimate foundation of everything. But, then, there is the next word "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." What this shows is that God acted and He made all things.

**Genesis 1:26-27** Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him male and female He created them.

**Genesis 1:31** Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.

These verses that I have just read do not contain law or procedures, but they contain fundamental principles. In fact, these are the deepest bedrock of true justice. Simply, as I have already mentioned, they, first of all, establish God as the ultimate authority over us and over all things (the earth, the heavens, and everything in them). Like I said, He was first, and we could say that He has always been. He is eternal. He created us. So He has ownership over everything and over us.

What we see here, in Genesis 1, is not only that He is and that He created, He established the environment in which we live. He set the bounds for everything. He se

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all the physical laws in motion. He set time in motion for us. He set the stars in the sky. He made all of the animals and all of the trees and all the other flora and fauna that are on the earth. He created everything that is in the sea. He made everything for our benefit.

And then, He made us. He made Adam and then He made Eve. And then, as we saw in verses 26 and 28, He gave man instruction, and dominion and authority over the earth. There are all kinds of things that we see that He did and He gave. It all starts with Him. He established all the bounds. Everything that we see and do and think and plan and create is from Him. We do not have an original thought, an original invention, an original anything that does not ultimately derive from Him—unless, of course, it is evil. But He has heard it all and seen it all.

We can just say that everything begins with Him. I should mention too that I purposely put verse 31 in there, because I wanted you to see, be reminded that He pronounced all of that very good. So He gave us pretty much a perfect environment, perfect laws, a perfect beginning from which to start life on this earth. In short, all authority for law and justice resides in God.

What happens if we take God out of the picture? Well, we see verse 2: “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.” That was what had come from the destruction when Satan ruled.

What we see here is a black-and-white situation where, when God is involved—when He begins everything—there is good and light; and things are perfect when He begins them. But take Him out of the way and give it over to somebody like Satan, or anybody less than God, and what we get is something that looks like tohu and bohu (chaos, confusion, destruction, and all of those things that are not good). So that is the first principle of justice, that God is first. God establishes everything. God is the authority.

Let us go to Genesis 2. Verses 15 through 17 is another principle of justice that comes up.

**Genesis 2:15-17** Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

We all know this. It is a very simple principle. And here it is shown as a command specifically in verse 16 (“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat”) and at the

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beginning of verse 17 (“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat”). What He did here is He gave us a choice and a command in the choice. And He said, “This is good, this is right” on the one hand, and then, on the other hand, He said “This is bad and wicked and evil.” He said, “You shall do this. You shall not do that.”

So what He set up is a system of law. With just this command is a system of law begun. This is right, that is wrong. That is basically what all laws are. They delineate something that is good, or something that is bad.

A lot of times, laws are negative, like most of the Ten Commandments (“You shall not kill”; “You shall not commit adultery”; “You shall not steal”; “You shall not bear false witness”), telling us the things we should not do. But then there are others that are positive. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” is a positive command. So law can be either positive or negative, as it is pronounced. But, here, He begins the system of law and shows that law begins with Him. Right and wrong, and which is which, begins with Him.

So God says we can do what is right; and what we cannot do, or what He forbids, is wrong.

We will not go into it, but we know that His commands, His laws are based on the principle of love. It gets down to them asking Jesus what is the greatest commandment and He says, “Love the Lord your God. And the second is like unto it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” And so what it comes down to is that our relationship with God and our relationship with our neighbor are both based on the principle of love. What He allows is good; what He forbids is also good, meaning, if we follow what He says, what He forbids is good—if we do not do what He forbids, that is good. So it is all for our good.

I want to, at this point, go to Psalm 119 and just see some of these ideas repeated. We are going to hop, skip, and jump through this chapter. Of course, this whole chapter is about the law of God. It is a meditation on God’s law.

**Psalm 119:89-93** Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants. Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction. I will never forget Your precepts for by them You have given me life.

**Psalm 119:97-101** Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through

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Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word.

**Psalm 119:104-105** Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

**Psalm 119:137-144** Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments. Your testimonies, which You have commanded, are righteous and very faithful. My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words. Your word is very pure; therefore Your servant loves it. I am small and despised, yet I do not forget Your precepts. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding, and I shall live.

**Psalm 119:160** The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

What I wanted to show, as we went through those verses in Psalm 119, mostly was the idea that, (1), God established these things; (2), they are truth; (3), they are righteous and (4), they are forever. So, in giving what He gave there to Adam and Eve, in that first exposition of a law (that you can eat of all these trees, but you cannot eat of this particular tree)—in saying that and establishing that law—it begins the whole corpus of law that God has given, and all of those laws are from Him, true, righteous, and forever.

We need to remember that because that is a very important principle—that if God says something, it should not be thrown aside. There is truth there and righteousness, and there is at least a principle in it that abides forever. So we cannot just, either naively, or stupidly, or even contemptuously, throw these laws aside for any reason unless He says they can actually be put aside. That is where the arguments come—which ones has He said that we can put aside. But I do not want to get into that. I am just getting into the survey here of these principles of justice, and one of the big ones is that God gave the laws on which we have to judge.

Now these verses (going back to Genesis 2:15-17) contain another principle of justice and it is found in the last phrase in verse 17: “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Laws have penalties when they are broken. This principle’s most basic expression is that the breaking of law incurs a penalty. If you do the crime, you have to serve the time. If you cross the line, you have got to pay the fine.

Without the teeth of the penalty, the law itself is weak. It is worthless. Why have a law if there is nothing to back it up? There has got to be some kind of pain, or disadvantage or loss that results from transgression, or the law means nothing. If there is nothing behind the law—no penalty that is going to follow someone for breaking it—then people are going to commit the crime with impunity. If you break the word ‘impunity’ down, it means ‘no punishment.’ They know they can get away with it and so they will do it. If a law is not enforced, what good is it? So the principle here is that transgression incurs penalty.

There is something here that we have to understand and distinguish between human law and godly law, and that is found in the phrase “for in the day.” Breaking God’s law incurs the death penalty and, more than that, the sentence is read although it is not executed immediately upon transgression. So when you sin, God has already made the judgment, passed the sentence, but He withholds the execution of the penalty almost all the time.

How many times has it happened to you that you have sinned and suddenly you have been a grease spot on the earth? Never. But you have sinned and incurred the penalty and it is hung over your head until the blood of Jesus Christ is paid for it.

So, with God, He judges and sentences immediately. How can that be fair? Well, He believes in very swift justice, which is supposed to be a hallmark of the American system in which that has not happened in about 225 years—or ever. We are supposed to be able to go to law pretty quickly, after something has happened, and the person be punished fairly swiftly. But it does not happen. But, with God, it happens instantly. Now if this was part of human justice, it would not be fair. But, because it is God, it is extremely fair.

God is a Judge who knows all. He knows our motivations. He does not need arguments from the prosecution, and counter-arguments from the defense, to establish whether a thing is or not—to establish guilt or innocence. He does not need that. He has already seen it all. He knows exactly what the person did, how he did it, to whom and why and all those things, and so He can immediately say “Guilty!” and the sentence is death. That is how it works. If we sin, we are guilty. That is just how it works. We have a righteous Judge up there who never gets a decision wrong. He has got a thousand percent batting average here. So if we sin, we are guilty, we fall under the penalty of death.

But, as I mentioned, the sentence is not executed immediately. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says

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“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” It does not work the way God intended it to work. It should work that way for us. Let us look at that.

God is not a hanging judge who sends the guilty to the gallows the minute the gavel sounds, and the reason is that He wants something good to come from this. He lets the guilty live in their guilt. Now let us go to II Peter 3 and find the answer as to why He does this. I think you already know, this is not rocket science, but we will let Peter tell us.

**II Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

He does not want to have to execute that sentence that He handed down from the bench. He would rather someone repent and ask forgiveness by the blood of Jesus Christ. And then God could be merciful and say “Your penalty has been paid. You’re free to go. Don’t sin anymore.” It is like what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, although she did not repent necessarily—not that we know. He just told her “Go and sin no more.”

But that is the kind of thing that God wants to do for us. He gives us time between when the sentence is handed down and when the executioner’s axe falls. He wants to give us time to say “I’m sorry. I did wrong. I won’t do this again. Please forgive me.” And then He is very happy, if we do this on the blood of Jesus Christ, to set us free. That is what He wants because He is a merciful and loving God.

He does not want us to live under the penalty of sin and He certainly does not want us to have to pay that penalty of sin, if we do not have to. He wants us to change so that we do not sin. And so He is longsuffering toward us and gives us time to repent. We better be taking advantage of that mercy on His part, that He does give us time to repent and change.

So this brings out another principle, and that is: God’s law and judgment are designed to teach and to produce improved life and character.

Whenever God does something, He always has a bit of teaching behind it, something that we can learn, so that we will get better, so that we will *be* better. And that is what His law is designed to do: It tells us what is wrong. It tells us wrong ways to step, it tells us right ways to step, and then we are supposed to learn from that.

Oftentimes, we learn from that because we do wrong, we do not follow it; and we then reap the consequences and find out God was right—it was bad; and so we do good. As long as we are continually learning, repenting, seeking His forgiveness, moving forward growing, producing those fruits, He is on board with us, helping us, teaching us, moving us forward as much as we can so that we come to the image of Jesus Christ.

So He is willing to withhold the penalty, for as long as need be, in order to teach us to produce that improved life and character in us. Because His law is designed to lead to something better; His law is not designed against us, His law is for us. Paul says, in Romans 7, that it is “holy and just and good.” God’s law is designed to do good things for us. It is not against us at all.

The idea that the law is hostile to us, or it is bad for us, is totally part of human nature (Romans 8:7). That is the carnal mind’s reaction to the law. But God’s mind, God’s understanding, God’s perspective on the law is that it is a good thing and that we need to be abiding by it.

Another little part I can put on this too is that God’s law is not an end to itself. God does not want us to be only perfect law keepers. That is not the end. He wants the law, and everything that He has given us, to be in us so that we do not need the law—because it becomes not the law, it becomes character. There is a big difference. Law is something that is imposed from without. Character is something we have within.

Now this end of things, of this principle, is not usually a part of human law. Human law is enforced without concern for improving character, or for any necessary good beyond trying to get someone that is a lawbreaker off the street. Oftentimes, this part of the law or principle is left to the penal system, to try to rehabilitate prisoners, and it usually does not work. But God is always trying to use the law to teach us to be better. And that is why He gives us time to repent and change.

Back to Genesis. You might want to keep a finger or a bookmark in Genesis. We are not going to get very far actually today. We actually will get into Exodus.

But, I am telling you, these principles of justice are packed into the Bible, and we are only going to get so far with it today. I do not know if I am going to go any further. I will have to think about that in the next three weeks to see if I want to add more of these principles of justice. But I want to give you at least a taste of them so you can see how many of these principles are found in the Bible.

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Of course, in Genesis 3, we have the serpent deceiving Eve, and the sin, which is in verse 6. Let us read that.

**Genesis 3:6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

**Genesis 3:9-14** Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.” And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So the Lord God said to the serpent. . .

Of course, God cursed the serpent and told him that he would eventually get his head beaten in by Jesus Christ, the Seed of the woman. Then the woman is also given her sentence here. She would have trouble in childbirth. She would also have trouble in her relationship with her husband. And then, to Adam, the ground is cursed; and we find that he is going to be working all his life like a slave to make ends meet, and that he would basically turn to dust right there in the row that he was hoeing. So struggle, struggle, pain, and toil: That is what God said would happen, now that they had sinned.

When we look beneath the surface of what God says, to Adam and Eve especially (not so much to Satan), it becomes clear that what He is describing are the inherent consequences of their sinful actions, that they are not necessarily curses but more like “Look guys, I’m sorry you did this. But now that you’ve done it, this is the Pandora’s Box that you’ve opened.”

God really did not have to do anything because these were the consequences that were going to happen because now sin was involved in their lives. He had seen how Eve had interacted with Adam, and He saw how Adam had interacted with Eve (how he had given in to Eve, how she was easily deceived), and then He knew that those ways of acting toward each other were going to cause problems—especially because He was not going to be around necessarily because He was going to kick them out of the Garden, they were going to be cut off from God, and these things would then naturally erupt.

So the principle of justice that we find in this passage is that sin, or crime, has consequences. It is the principle of cause and effect. When you sin, it does not happen

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in a vacuum. When you commit a crime and even if it seems like you are getting away with it, you are not. There is no victimless crime. For one thing, you have destroyed your own character—or maybe ‘destroy’ is a pretty tough word, but, at least, you have put a big chink in it and it is likely to come down around you.

But what He is showing here is that when sin happens, it immediately begins causing domino effects. It has ripples, like a stone thrown in a pond—that it may hit in the center of the pond, but those ripples radiate out from where it happened and affect things all over the place. Those things—those effects, those consequences—reach beyond the sinner, reach beyond the act itself, and reach beyond the time that the act was committed. It just goes on and on. And as it goes, those effects may weaken but there are still effects.

So you could say that when a sin happens, it produces shock waves that go out from the sin and touch other people and situations, and it even goes down to succeeding generations. You do not sin in a vacuum. It has got to have consequences.

Let us go to Exodus 20 and see a principle here. This is, of course, part of the Ten Commandments. This is the second commandment.

**Exodus 20:4-6** You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

So what God shows here is that the effects of sin, particularly the effect of idolatry certainly apply to everything else. They go down three or four generations of time, and He mercifully stops them there. Whereas doing of good, worshipping the true God has effects for thousands of generations. Just think of what Abraham’s faithful worship of God produced. It produced the blessings of Abraham that we are still benefitting from today, dozens and dozens of generations down the line. So good has its effects too, and thank God for that.

But I think it is the effects of sin that we feel so acutely because they are bad things they are destructive things. There is death. There is sickness and disease. There is bad relationships. There is fighting and war. Those are the consequences of sin.

Think about this principle that sin, crime has consequences. This principle is supposed

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to be in our minds. We are supposed to remember this because it is so ubiquitous. It happens all the time. Unfortunately, we are all sinners and we have so many examples that we can look around and see how it has happened.

But what this principle is supposed to do is to bring us up short before we sin and make us think about what is going to happen if we do this, and how it is going to affect our lives, our spouses' lives, our children's lives, our friends, and our jobs. We are supposed to think "If I do this thing, it's going to cause so much grief and turmoil" that we do not do it, that we will step back from the brink and say "No, I can't do this thing. It's too horrible. Its consequences are too bad." That is what we are supposed to think. But do we often think that? No, not really.

Now, certainly, Eve did not think that. Of course, she was fairly innocent. And so was Adam. But think about what God showed, back here in Genesis 3, about the consequences of her actions of taking that fruit. She was going to have trouble in childbirth. She was going to have marital problems. It was going to make life rather hellish. There would be misunderstandings. There was going to be a lot of anguish. She and Adam were going to have constant struggles for dominance over their children, over their own home. It was going to be the battle of the sexes.

And then, for Adam, of course, immediately, they got kicked out of the Garden, and so he had to go to work and he had to till the ground that had been cursed with thorns and thistles. That was hard, being baked in the sun. He had to lug the water. He had to find the seed. He had to put the seed in the ground. He had to keep the weeds out. He had to sit there and wait and hope for rain—and if it did not, he had to bring water. And then the mites, the pests, the animals. He had a huge job and he was going to be working, working, exhausted at this all the time. It was going to put wrinkles on his face, gray hair on his head. It was going to make him die.

Do you think he would have gladly refused the apple if he had really thought about what was going to happen? Maybe. Eve had him wrapped around her little finger though. Suddenly, all of these things were set up to happen. And not only that, if he had been able to think about the future a little bit more, beyond himself, and think that not only he was going to have these problems but that every one of his children were going to have to deal with these consequences down through history. Like I said, he was naïve. He did not know these things. Sin was bound to happen.

But God has called us and given us an education in these things. He has given us His Spirit to give us insight into these matters. We now have to think about these things. We have to understand this principle of justice (that crime, sin has consequences) and we

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have to start thinking about these things. And when we lust for something—when we want to do this bad thing so much—we have to think of this and say “No. I won’t do this I won’t cause grief to myself, to my wife, to my family (brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles) anyone who knows me (employer; man on the street) because they’re all going to be affected.” It can help it. That is how sin works. It flows out and just grabs people right and left, and draws them into the sin.

Think about Paul. He said sin is like leaven. It leavens the whole lump. It is just a little pinch of yeast in there—little bit of corruption, little bit of sin—and before you know it the whole loaf is full of it. That is how sin works.

My dad had given a sermon about the lust of Amnon and how that affected one person after another until the whole family was broken up essentially; brother killing brother; a woman ruined for the rest of her life, who could not get over what had happened to her and then David, of course, having to bear with all of that that had happened. It just kept bringing others into it until it was just a pile of destruction.

So our sins may not be colossal, but the same principle holds. If we commit adultery, it damages our marriage, it damages our kids’ lives, it damages our trustworthiness. If we murder, it ends another life; it affects his relationships with his mother and father, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children. It goes on and on. It disrupts the entire community. And, of course, the murderer has to face all those consequences to himself. Sin has consequences.

That was this one. Let us go on to the next chapter. We have here the slaying of Abel by Cain.

**Genesis 4:8-14** Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.” And Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.”

What we want to pick up here is that Cain, immediately upon killing his brother and God

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calling him on it and giving him his punishment, knew just how it would ruin everything—everything in his life from that point on—and he quailed at the ramifications. It is like “Oh man, I didn’t know it would be this bad.”

But he suddenly realized that he was going to be driven from everything that he had known and everything that he had loved. And it sounds like that the curse upon the ground was going to be redoubled for his sake and that his life was just going to be horrible from that point on. Too bad he did not think of that before he killed his righteous brother, right? Well, he should have.

We have to notice here that Cain realized that breaking the law cuts him off from God, brands him a felon (that is, he was going to be stigmatized forever as the killer of his brother—he still is, today; he is kinslayer), and that it would make him a target for revenge.

Sin destroys life. Like I said, crime does not pay. It ruins. It ruins everything it touches. And he realized this. This is kind of like an explanation, in the first major sin after Adam and Eve sinned, of what happens to a life when a person commits a sin. He knew immediately once God pronounced this judgment. But let us go on to verse 15.

**Genesis 4:15** And the Lord said to him, “Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.

Here is another principle of justice that comes up in this. Execution of judgment is relegated to constituted authority. In this case, the constituted authority was God Himself. He had set the penalty. No one else was to interfere and exact retribution on Cain.

Now what this does is that this sternly disapproves of vigilantism, which is taking justice into one’s own hands. God put a very stiff penalty on vigilantism that whoever decides to become the vigilante would have seven-fold times on his own head. That is pretty big. That is a very stiff penalty.

Now, what this does, this principle deters blood feuds. It keeps one family or one party from killing another in vengeance for that party killing one of his own, and then it never stops. It is the Hatfields and the McCoys: One kills the other, the other kills the one, and pretty soon the only thing that really stops it is only one person left standing at the end and that is no good at all. God does not want that.

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Later, God instituted in Israel the avenger of blood and the cities of refuge for the same reason. The families within the tribes or clans had to designate one person as the avenger of blood, and he had the authority to kill a manslayer. It was very narrow what he could do.

And, of course, if the person who is guilty of manslaughter, that is, an accidental death ended up in a city of refuge before the avenger of blood could catch him, then he was free to live there in the city until the death of the high priest, and then he was free to go—the avenger of blood could not touch him. But if he was caught before, then he could be killed. But it was very narrowly prescribed what the avenger of blood could do.

Now the principle that comes out of this is, of course, that God says (and this is something that we have to understand) that vengeance is His own. He is still the arbiter here. He is still the final judge and executioner in all these things. So we have to understand that He is going to repay for these things. As long as it goes through the courts and the constituted authorities, we cannot touch the sinner or the criminal. We have to wait for God to execute His judgment on them.

He says “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” three different times in Scripture (Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19, and Hebrews 10:30). He repeats this all those times so that we understand that we are to keep our hands off of these matters unless we are given the constituted authority—and we are not given the constituted authority. So we have to let God take care of these matters.

And that is what this world does. These crimes that are committed have to go through the courts. They frown very vigorously on vigilantism and they will take the vigilantes down to make sure that society is stable. They do not want everybody taking things into his own hands.

Let us skip over the rest of Genesis here and finally go to the book of Exodus. There are many others in some of these stories that are told about the patriarchs, that we could have delved into. But I want to go to Exodus 12 and look at another one that is very important. It is one of the biggest principles of justice. It is actually part of the Passover instruction.

**Exodus 12:48-49** And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. [Here it is:] One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.

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The principle here is equity under the law. That is supposed to be a big principle of American justice but it has not been properly used. This means that everyone is equal under the law. It does not matter what your race or social standing. It does not matter where you were born. It does not matter whether you are a man or a woman. It does not matter whether you are an Israelite or a Gentile (here in Exodus)—all that was required was circumcision for the males. So rich or poor, high born or low, man or woman, none of that matters. All are to be treated the same. Everyone has to be judged by the same laws.

If similar situations come up and people are different, it does not matter, they are supposed to be given the same judgment. So a white person and a black person doing the same crime get the same judgment. Everything is supposed to be the same under the law. There is equity. There is to be no prejudice, no preferential treatment. As we saw at the beginning of the sermon, justice is to be blind to those external circumstances (birth, height, weight, color, social standing). None of that is supposed to matter. The evidence and the law are what do matter.

If American law and American courts had held to this principle from the very beginning of the nation, we would not be in this sorry state that we are in today. Now we have tried, more recently, to make it more equal, but the damage has already been done, and we are feeling now the rage of a people who have been undermined for many generations. That is the sad effect of human nature.

This was a principle that has been in God's Word for 3500 years.

Exodus 18. This is another big one, and the American courts have done this pretty well.

**Exodus 18:5** and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God.

**Exodus 18:13-22** And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws." So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God

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will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge.

This is a very well-known principle, in that a series of courts are set up to judge increasingly more difficult cases. And so, in our country here, we have local county courts, and they go up to appellate courts and state supreme courts. The federal courts are very similar: There is a federal court, then they have circuit courts, and then they have the Supreme Court. So cases are bumped higher and higher in terms of how intricate and consequential they are. And so this country has done pretty well in that.

But I want to bring this down to a personal level, in terms of our own judgments, and this should teach us to do a similar thing. Let us be frank, we are not experienced or wise enough to make certain judgments. Some of these things are beyond our pay grade, as it were. Either we do not know the law well enough, or we do not realize the full scope of the problem, or we have not dealt with anything similar before and so we do not know exactly what the right way to go is. Perhaps we are too close to the matter—we are too emotional—and do not see things clearly. Making a judgment on a matter may just be beyond us.

So we should be wise, like Moses was, and take Jethro's advice here, in principle: Take the matter to someone who is wiser or more experienced. Take it to somebody who can make a proper judgment for you or at least give you good advice about it.

Proverbs 3:5 says "lean not on your own understanding." I know it is saying that in terms of God, but it is a good principle. Make sure you question yourself. Make sure that you know what the right way to go is. Get advice. It does not have to be a minister, but make sure it is someone who has understanding, is sober-minded, is well-versed in Scripture and has some experience in things. Make sure this person is doing his best to live godly.

We are advised, in Proverbs 11:14 that we do not have to limit it to one person: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." If you have to, find out from several people what they believe is the right way to go.

So, the point is, if the situation is too much for you to judge, get some help. You do not

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have to do everything yourself.

I have a few more here that I will not go to. See, we are only here in Exodus 18, and there were several more. We have not even gotten into the Old Covenant which has several more principles in there such as do not take bribes, do not pervert justice for a poor man, do not commit perjury. There are all kinds of principles that are in there. But want to end in John 7. This is Jesus. It is always good to end with Him because He always puts a good capstone on things. That is part of His job.

**John 7:24** Do not judge according to appearance [He says], but judge with righteous judgment.

So Jesus commands us to judge righteously. He wants us to be able to discern truth or righteousness of a matter. He has provided in His Word all of these and many other principles by which we can make righteous judgments. We have to be thinking, we have to be remembering, we have to be bringing these things to mind and considering how they apply.

It does not matter if you are watching a program of Judge Judy, or if you are discussing something like Deflategate—or if it is something a lot more important, a matter that is far closer to home—we can bring these principles to mind, and then, after much consideration, after much thought, make a proper, godly, righteous judgment.

Hope this has been helpful. Have a wonderful Sabbath!

RTR/pg/drm