



What is Biblical Justice?

Description



This article began as the first section of [my article on CRT](#)

[and Social Justice](#). However, I ended up publishing that article in “skeleton form” so it was a readable length. However, the concept of Biblical justice is well worth exploring in more than just “skeleton form”. Thus, this article will have meat on its bones. ?

We'll start by looking at the Greek and Hebrew word definitions, then move to the different types/applications of justice, then talk about the administration of justice. Without further ado, we'll dive in.

The Greek and Hebrew words for Justice

Since the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek (*and a smattering of Aramaic*) we'll start with the Greek and Hebrew word definitions. Specifically, we'll look for where their definitions overlap to give us a solid understanding of what God means in the Bible when He speaks of justice.

The Hebrew word for Justice

We'll look at Hebrew first, starting with my very favorite Bible verse. It should be noted that doing

justice isn't optional for Christians.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good;
And **what does the LORD require of you?**
But to do justice, to love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God.

The Hebrew word translated "justice" there is "?????????" (mishpat). The [Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon defines mishpat](#) perfectly. If you're not familiar with this lexicon, this quote sums it up nicely: "*Gesenius's influence as a master of Hebrew is widespread. The editors of the Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon refer to him as the father of modern Hebrew Lexicography.*" ([quote source](#).)

Anyway, here's the definition:

- (1) judgment
 - (a) **used of the act of judging**,
 - (b) of the place of judgment
 - (c) a forensic cause, Numb. 27:5. ?????? ?????????? to set forth a cause,
 - (d) sentence of a judge, judgments of the Lord,
 - (e) fault, crime, for which one is judged, Jeremiah 51:9. ?????????? ?????????? capital crime, Ezekiel 7:23.
- (2) **right, that which is just, lawful, according to law.**
 - (a) a law, a statute (as a rule of judging),
 - (b) **used of that which is lawfully due to any one**
 - (c) a manner, custom.
 - (d) fashion, kind, plan.

Definition #2 is the most relevant to our discussion, especially 2.b. Definition #1 has more to do with cases in courts, which ensure that everyone gets "that which is lawfully due". However, don't miss the primary application of the word: justice in court and in law.

That's the idea.

This could refer the things which are "lawfully due" to a man as in definition 2.b., or the process of someone getting what is "lawfully due" to them in court, as in definitions 1.a. through 1.e. The Hebrew word makes them one and the same because denial of one is a denial of the other.

(Also, Hebrew has very few words so most of the words pull double duty. Most Hebrew words have multiple related definitions like this.)

The Hebrew word Mishpat – which is typically translated "justice" – primarily deals with making sure that everyone gets what's "lawfully due**" to them, whether good or bad.**

We'll look at this in practice after we look at the Greek words.

The Greeks words for Justice

There's two Greek words that we'll look at. They are almost the same word, with one being the noun form and the other being the adjective form of the same word. We'll look at the noun form first, which is the Greek word "?????????" ([dikaiosuné](#)), and it means:

Strong's Concordance:

Definition: righteousness, justice

Usage: (usually if not always in a Jewish atmosphere), justice, justness, righteousness, righteousness of which God is the source or author, but practically: a divine righteousness.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon:

1. in the broad sense, **the state of him who is such as he ought to be, righteousness** (German Rechtbeschaffenheit); the condition acceptable to God (German Gottwohlgefalligkeit);

2. in a closer sense, **justice**, or the virtue **which gives each one his due**; it is said to belong to God and Christ, as bestowing ???????? ?????? upon all Christians impartially, 2 Peter 1:1; of **judicial justice**, Romans 9:28 R G Tr marginal reading in brackets; ???????? ?? ??????????, Acts 17:31; Revelation 19:11. (See references under the word ???????? at the end.)

Notice: the ideas of justice and righteousness are absolutely **inseparable** in Greek. The one **is** the other. They are **inextricably** linked. To be righteous is to be just; to be just is to be righteous. You can't be righteous without being just, and you can't be just without being righteous.

Pretty cool, and that agrees well with Micah 6:8.

Notice definition #2 in Thayer's, which agrees perfectly with the Hebrew word mishpat. In Greek, Justice is "the virtue which gives each one his due".

This will become even more clear when you see the other Greek word, which is "?????????" ([dikaios](#)). It's the adjective form of dikaiosuné (*the word we just looked at*) and is usually translated "just" or "righteous". Again, notice that being just and being righteous are inescapably linked.

They are literally the same word in Greek.

Strong's Concordance:

Definition: correct, **righteous**, by implication innocent

Usage: **just**; especially, just in the eyes of God; righteous; the elect (a Jewish idea).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon:

1. in a wide sense, **upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God**

2. In a narrower sense, **rendering to each his due; and that in a judicial sense**, passing just judgment on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them: Titus 1:8; so **of God recompensing men impartially according to their deeds**, Revelation 16:5; in the same sense also in John 17:25...

...**what is due to others**, Colossians 4:1; what is agreeable to justice and law, Luke 12:51; ??????? namely, ?????, it is **agreeable to justice**, 2 Thessalonians 1:6; **accordant with deserts**, Matthew 20:4, and Rec. (See references under the word ???????, at the end; cf. ???????, at the end.)

Again, notice that the Greek words portrays justice very similarly to how the Hebrew word does. Hebrew has the additional nuance of also mentioning the court through which someone gets what's "lawfully due". Greek has the additional nuance of "just = righteous".

So this is Biblical justice:

Both the Greek and Hebrew words agree that **true biblical justice is giving each one his due (whether good or bad)**

This makes a lot of sense, and we use the words just/justice in a similar manner today.

Now we'll unpack what someone is "due" (*owed*).

What is someone justly "due"?

The Greek words lend some clarity here. In Greek, the idea of justice is closely related to being right in God's eyes. Thus, there's a focus on not only what God is due/owed, but also what God says we owe to each other since we must obey God.

I could write volumes talking about what we owe God (*what He is due*), but I can sum it up in one word: everything.

We owe Him everything.

Foremost among that is obedience. Thus, we'll look at God's judicial standard for what someone is due/owed in several different contexts. I have created the following categories, but I think they fit neatly. We'll look at these four categories of justice:

- **Restorative justice** – Focuses on restoring what someone has been deprived of (*if possible*)
- **Retributive justice** – Focuses on punishment for those who do wrong.
- **Contractual justice** – Focuses on abiding by our agreements
- **Property Justice** – Focuses on the use of all types of private property

Restorative Justice

This will probably be the least controversial form of Justice that the Bible discusses. When someone is wronged by being deprived of something, the person who wronged him should restore what was lost (*as much as possible*). Typically this includes some additional compensation for the hardship incurred because of the deprivation.

Leviticus 6:1-5

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 “**When a person sins and acts unfaithfully** against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted *to him*, or through **robbery**, or *if* he has extorted from his companion,

3 or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that **he sins** in regard to any one of the things a man may do;

4 then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that **he shall restore what he took by robbery or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him or the lost thing which he found,**

5 or anything about which he swore falsely; **he shall make restitution for it in full and add to it one-fifth more**. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day *he presents* his guilt offering.

God clearly delineates what constitutes the various forms of theft, then proscribes a way to make it right. The one who stole must repay all that he stole, plus one fifth (20%); probably as compensation for any hardship caused by the temporary loss of the items/money.

This is restorative justice.

The man who was wronged is owed a restoration – as far as is possible – to fix the wrong done to him. **The wronged man's “lawful due” is restoration** (*as much as possible*).

Notice too that God specifies who should do the restoring: the man who caused the loss. There

is no indication anywhere that anyone else must restore what the man lost. None. God is very clear on this point, and we'll look at it more under the next heading.

In addition to the restoration of what was lost, the wronged man is also owed/due some additional compensation. Being short of money, or a deposit, or any of those other things can incur hardship, and the additional one fifth is almost certainly an attempt to compensate for that hardship.

Again, this is restorative justice.

Few people – if any – will have a problem with this concept, so we'll move on to retributive justice.

Retributive Justice

There is something deep and visceral in the heart of man that recoils when we hear that someone has committed a great injustice and then wasn't punished for it.

We **hate** that.

Apparently – and thankfully – so does God.

Proverbs 11:21

21 Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, But the descendants of the righteous will be delivered.

Nahum 1:3

3The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
And **the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.**
In whirlwind and storm is His way,
And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

Sin demands punishment, and God won't let the wicked go unpunished.

Now, we can disagree on what's an appropriate punishment for a given crime. While we are outraged when someone gets away with a crime, we are also outraged when someone is handed a punishment that is far too severe. No one would advocate the death penalty for shoplifting a candy bar, nor a mere night in jail for mass murder.

We won't get bogged down in what penalty fits what crime, but instead we'll focus on two things: **(1)** who does the punishing, and **(2)** who gets punished.

Who does the punishing?

The answer is “not us”.

Leviticus 19:18

18 ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

And again.

Romans 12:17-20

17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”

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

In the very next chapter, God makes it clear who has a responsibility to punish evildoers.

Romans 13:1-4

1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

And Peter repeats this:

1 Peter 2:13-14

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

The punishment of evil is a governmental function, not a private one. That answers the question of who inflicts the punishment.

Who is punished?

Again, the Bible is clear on this. I recommend you read all of Ezekiel chapter 18 as the whole chapter is on this topic, but the excerpts below should give you a good enough snapshot.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 | 25 | 30

19 “Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?’ When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.

20 “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

...

25 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?

...

30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.

God devoted a whole chapter to rebuking Israel for the practice of punishing one man for another man's sin. God is clear that Retributive Justice is an ***individual*** thing, based on what ***each individual has done***. This is restated in the New Testament many times, and here are only two of them:

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must **all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ, **so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.**

Matthew 16:27

27 “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and **WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.**

Remember that Biblical Justice is the idea of giving each man his due. Not what is due to another man, but giving each man his own due. As it is written: “*the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself*” and again: “*each man according to his deeds*”.

Mercy, Grace, and Justice

Mercy and grace can broadly be defined as similar but different:

- **Mercy** is not giving someone a punishment they deserve
- **Grace** is giving something good to someone who didn't earn it.

As far as Biblical mercy goes, the best way to understand it is this: Someone who has been wronged has the right to both restorative and retributive justice in regards to the offender; that is what's owed/their due. However, they can choose not to make use of that right.

For example, let's say you're walking and minding your own business and then someone walks up and punches you. The police catch the fellow who committed the crime. You – as the wronged party – can let prosecution proceed, but you can also choose not to press charges.

That's mercy.

When a wronged party chooses not to make use of their right to restorative or retributive justice, that's mercy.

Sin is primarily an offense against God, thus He can choose to “press charges” in judgement to each one according to his deeds. However, if He chooses not to, He shows us mercy. This is the case for Christians, whose sins were dealt with at the cross.

Grace is different.

There's [a whole article here on Berean Patriot about Grace](#). To sum the basic concept up, grace is when someone gives something good to someone who hasn't earned it. For example, God showed us

mercy when He didn't "press charges" for our sins because of Jesus' work on the cross. However, after that He also gave us the Holy Spirit and gifts, and He guides us and bestowed magnanimous favors on us.

That's grace.

I will remind you of my favorite Bible verse:

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you?
But to **do justice**, to **love mercy**,
And to walk humbly with your God.

God commands us to "do justice", but He commands us to "**love** mercy". Do justice, but love mercy. God's justice remains on the unrepentant in the form of wrath, but the moment they truly repent, they receive mercy. We should be like that. We should do justice, but love mercy.

Contractual justice

This is the simplest and most commonly agreed on form of justice... until it's not. Almost everyone agrees with the premise, but many disagree with Jesus' application.

Contractual justice says that we must honor our contracts because honoring our contracts is giving the other party his due.

God commands this in in Scripture:

Numbers 30:2

2 "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes **an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.**

If you make an agreement with either God or man, you must not violate the agreement. To violate the agreement means you haven't given either man or God what they are due.

For example, let's say you agree to work for one hour in exchange for \$20. If you work one hour but then aren't paid the \$20, you have been wronged. That \$20 was your "due"; it's what you were owed by the terms of the contract. Conversely, if you pay someone \$20 in advance to do a job and they don't do it, you've been wronged. The work was your "due"; it's what you were owed by the terms of the contract.

Contractual justice is important to God, as both Numbers 30 and a parable that Jesus tells illustrate.

To summarize the first half of the story, the owner of a vineyard hires workmen at various points throughout the day to work in his field, starting at dawn, and ending at the “eleventh hour”. He tells the first group that he will pay them each a denarius (*a 1st century coin which was the going rate for a day’s labor*) to work that day. He tells the other groups that he’ll pay them “what’s right”.

We’ll pick up the story in verse 8:

Matthew 20:8-15

8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and **pay them their wages**, beginning with the last *group* to the first.’

9 “When **those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.**

10 “**When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.**

11 “When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner,

12 saying, ‘These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’

13 “But he answered and said to one of them, ‘**Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?**

14 ‘Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.

15 ‘**Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?** Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’

The landowner and each batch of workers made a (*verbal*) contract. The contract with the first batch went like this: “*Work in the vineyard today and you will receive a denarius*“. The workers worked in his vineyard that day, and at the end of the day the landowner paid them what he promised to pay them.

Both parties did what they promised to do.

This is contractual justice; both parties honoring their contracts by giving the other party what they are owed/due according to the terms of the contract.

However, notice verse 13.

The men who worked only an hour got paid the same amount – one denarius – as the men who worked all day. The men who worked all day complained about this, saying they should get more because they worked longer.

Jesus says they are wrong.

(Note: this brings up to topic of “justice vs fairness”, which we’ll get to in a minute.)

In verse 13, Jesus says that the landowner has done no wrong. He then cites the (*verbal*) contract, reminding them that both parties agreed to the terms of the contract. The landowner says he lived up to his end of the contract, and thus had done “no wrong”. The landowner did everything that he said he would do according to the terms of the contract.

Now, each group of workmen were paid the same in one sense – a denarius for that day according to the verbal contract – but very differently in the sense of their hourly wage. The ones who worked for 12 hours made 1/12 of a denarius per hour, while the ones who only worked for an hour made 1 denarius per hour; 12 times more.

Someone will say: “But that’s not fair!”

No, no it most definitely isn’t not fair. So let’s examine the concepts of fairness and justice.

Justice vs Fairness

God is perfectly just, and there is no injustice in Him:

Romans 9:14

Then what will we say? *There isn’t injustice with God is there? May it never be!*

God is also impartial:

Romans 2:11

For there is no partiality with God.

However, while God is perfectly just and totally impartial, He is most definitely not “fair”... and thank God for that!

If you disagree, then consider:

- It's not fair that Jesus suffered and died on the cross to deal with our sins.
- It's not fair that we benefit from God's goodness
- It's not fair that He promised to never leave us or forsake us when we constantly leave and forsake Him.
- It's not fair that He gave spiritual gifts to us.
- It's not fair that He leads and guides us even though we never listen as we should.
- It's not fair that... well, you get the point.

And that's just with God; consider other things that aren't fair:

- It's not fair (*to your parents*) that they fed and clothed you in your early years.
- It's not fair your parents expended a ton of work, energy, and resources to keep you alive while they got almost nothing in return.
- It's not fair that they made sure you were educated enough to read this article.
- It's not fair that... well, you get the point

I could go on forever listing examples, but I think you get the point. **Life isn't fair... and that's a good thing!** Thank God that life isn't fair! Justice and impartiality are both Godly, biblical virtues.

But fairness... not so much.

- **Justice** is concerned with everyone getting **his due**.
- **Fairness** is concerned with everyone getting things **equally**.

Fairness isn't a virtue, and it isn't necessarily a vice either....

...but it can be.

(We'll come back to that in a moment.)

God is perfectly just and perfectly impartial. **However, the route to our salvation led through the cross, which was arguably the least "fair" event in world history.** Remember that God Himself ordained and orchestrated it. He caused and took part in the "least fair" event in human history. God seems content with the unfairness of the cross, and even boasts about it displaying His greatness. It's not fair that the just/righteous (*Jesus*) died for the sake of the unjust/unrighteous (*us*).

That means unfairness isn't wrong in and of itself.

All sin is unfair, but not all unfairness is sin.

That's important.

God intentionally caused the cross, which was unfair. However, God is never unjust, even though He is sometimes "unfair". That means "unfair" does not equal "unjust". That statement is so incredibly important that I'm going to repeat it in big, bold letters so no one can miss it:

“Unfair” does not mean “unjust”

God was “unfair” when Jesus went to the cross, but He wasn’t unjust because He can’t be unjust.

It’s understandable that we want things to be fair. However, be careful because pursuing fairness (*instead of justice*) can actually lead you into sin. In fact, **we have an excellent biblical example of how wanting “fairness” (*instead of justice*) can actually lead someone into sin:**

Remember the parable of the worker’s pay that we just looked at.

In that parable, Jesus explicitly said that the landowner did “no wrong” when he paid the workers at different rates. However, it seems incredibly unfair to pay two workers different rates for the same work. Frankly, in our world many would call that unjust.

However...

Don’t forget that Jesus said that the landowner did “no wrong”.

Jesus is God Himself come in the flesh. The Bible testifies in 1 Peter 2:22 that He “*committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth*“. So when Jesus – God Himself – says the landowner didn’t do anything wrong, that means the landowner didn’t do anything wrong.

According to Jesus – to God Himself – it’s not wrong or unjust to pay two people different wages for the same work. (*provided that they agreed to the terms.*)

This isn’t stretching the text either; it’s explicitly stated by Jesus, who is God Himself in the flesh. Most people would agree that it’s not fair to pay two people different hourly wages for the same work. They are 100% right; it’s not fair. Even so, Jesus says the landowner did “no wrong” when he treated the workers differently by paying them different hourly wages for the same work.

The landowner was unfair, but not unjust.

This means that “fair” is not another way to say “just”. Justice and fairness are not the same thing, as this story by Jesus proves.

- Fair doesn’t equal just.
- Just doesn’t necessarily equal fair.

They overlap often, but not always. For absolute proof of this, remember verse 15.

Matthew 20:15

15 ‘Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’

Jesus goes a step further here. He not only says the landowner did no wrong, he says the workers

were ~~envious~~ **wicked**. Yes, wicked. The Greek word translated “envious” there is “???????” ([ponéros](#)), and it means:

Strong’s:

Definition: toilsome, **bad**

Usage: **evil, bad, wicked, malicious, slothful.**

Thayer’s

- 1. full of labors, annoyances, hardships;
- 2. **bad, of a bad nature or condition;**
 - a. in a physical sense
 - b. **in an ethical sense, evil, wicked, bad, etc.**

Strong’s Exhaustive

evil, grievous

From a derivative of [ponos](#); hurtful, i.e. **Evil**

The worker’s desire for “fairness” at the expense of justice led them into wickedness/sin.

Again, that’s because justice and fairness aren’t the same thing. Again:

- **Justice** is concerned with everyone getting **his due**.
- **Fairness** is concerned with everyone getting **things equally**.

Don’t confuse the two.

They often overlap, but a focus on fairness can lead a person into sin as with the workers. A focus on Justice honors God and is even required. Again, justice and fairness can overlap a lot – and often do – but they aren’t the same thing.

Property Justice

These days, this often seems like the most ignored form of justice. Remember that justice is concerned with someone getting what’s due/owed to them. According to Jesus in this same parable, that includes the right for a man to do what he wishes with what belongs to him.

Matthew 20:15

15 ‘Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’

According to Jesus, a man has the right to do what he wants with the things that belong to him. To deny him that right is to deny him his “due”, which is an injustice because it denies someone what they are lawfully due.

Now, there’s a built in limitation here, and it’s that a man can’t infringe on another man’s property rights. Each man has the right to do what he wishes with his own things, *but not another man’s things*. Confusing the two can be a huge problem. **A man can do what he wants with what belongs to him, but not if he prevents another man from doing as he wants with what belongs to him.**

And of course, you cannot harm someone else either.

These two principles combined with another command regulate nearly every single human interaction – as it regards justice – when properly understood. The other command is that we must obey God’s moral law.

Thus:

A man may do as he wants with what belongs to him, provided:

1. He doesn’t violate God’s moral law
2. He doesn’t harm another person
3. He doesn’t prevent another man from doing what he wishes with what belongs to him.

Interestingly, points 2 and 3 are the foundation of Libertarianism. However, Libertarianism is primarily a secular ideology and ignores the first and most important requirement: that we don’t violate God’s moral law. Thus Libertarianism misses the goalpost, since it only has two of the three requirements.

For those who would like a short (*fairly inoffensive*) interlude to see how these three ideas interact with politics and government, [click here to expand it](#).

The Roles Of Government

According to Romans, here is the job of government:

Romans 13:3-4

3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, **an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.**

5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for

conscience' sake.

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

First, notice in verse 3 that those who do good “will have praise” from governments, but not anything more than praise. It is not the government’s job to reward those who do good, though praising them for it is honorable. This passage is also clear on the primary purpose of government.

The job of a government is to punish evildoers.

That’s almost it.

That requires a few things though. First, there must be a standard for deciding what is and isn’t evil before it can be punished. That’s why governments have the authority to create laws. Evildoers also much be caught before they can be punished, which is why governments all have some form of police. Then once the evildoers are caught, it must be proved that they committed a crime before they can be punished, which is where courts fit in:

Deuteronomy 19:15

15 “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.

We’ll talk more about this lower down in the section on the administration of Justice.

Notice too that God addressed taxes in verse 6.

I hate paying taxes too, but they are legitimate according to Romans 13:6. True, often they are spent on illegitimate things, but taxes themselves are legitimate. Scripture says that we pay taxes so the government can do its God-given job of punishing evildoers. Thus, taxes are legitimate (*yes I hate that too*).

The final role of government is a natural extension of rule #3 about not preventing another man from doing what he wishes with what belongs to him. The sad fact of the matter is that we live in a fallen world. As such, many will seek to take away what belongs to the citizens of a country by military might in war.

Thus, the final job of government is national defense. God seems to have no problem with this:

Judges 3:1-2

1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (*that is*, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan;

2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who

had not experienced it formerly).

God explicitly wanted Israel to “be taught war”. Obviously we can’t be sure why, but I suggest that’s because knowing warfare is necessary to defend a nation.

Thus, the jobs of government are:

1. Catch, prosecute, and punish evildoers
2. National defense

Notice that taking care of the poor isn’t on the list.

If you look at [my article on tithing](#), you’ll see that even in the Old Testament, taking care of the poor was an individual responsibility, not a governmental one. In the New Testament church, all giving was voluntary and not government mandated.

For most of human history, the “social safety net” was provided by friends, family, the community, and (*once Christ had come*) the Church. God also places the onus on the people, requiring us to be generous to the poor. Ironically, [having the government try to help the poor does not help the poor](#).

Further, it’s unjust/wicked/wrong for the government to take care of the poor

The poor aren’t owed money from society, and thus it isn’t their due. There’s no moral requirement for the government to give them money. Thus, for the government to take from one man and give the money to another (*the poor*) is essentially legalized theft. Generosity with another man’s money is no virtue. In fact, it comes perilously close to being like the evil workmen by being, well, evil.

Theft is wrong.

Even a wrong done with good intentions is still wrong. (*Look up Uzzah’s story in 2 Samuel 6:1-7 if you disagree.*)

Further, giving preferential treatment to the poor in the legal sphere – like welfare programs – is explicitly condemned by God.

We’ll look at those verses in the next section.

Next, we’ll talk about the administration of Justice: that is, how it should be meted out according to God.

The Administration of Justice

Remember that justice is every man getting his due, whether good or bad. God has a few things to say about how we should go about making sure that happens, especially where it concerns court cases.

Leviticus 19:15

“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 1:17a

‘You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s.

Exodus 23:2-3

2 “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert *justice*;

3 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

There are many more passage in the Bible where God commanded us not to be partial. James repeats this in the New Testament, though it’s not quite a judicial/courtroom context.

James 2:1-4

1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality.

2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,

3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,”

4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Notice, the idea of showing partiality to the rich or to the poor, or to the small or the great is thoroughly condemned. Remember that justice is every man getting his due, whether good or bad. God commands that we do this impartially, showing favoritism to no one whatsoever. We are to “*hear the small and the great alike*”, judging a case on the merits alone so every man gets his due, whether good or bad without partiality.

James 2:4 even goes so far as to say that partiality makes you “judges with evil thoughts”.

Partiality = bad.

Whether small or great, rich or poor; all should be heard impartially. (*This is why the stature of Lady Justice is blindfolded: to indicate that verdicts should be impartially based on facts, not merely what looks good.*)

Further, BOTH sides of a dispute should be heard:

Proverbs 18:17

The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him.

So hear both sides of a dispute/case (*as in a jury trial*) and then make a decision as impartially as you know how.

God demands nothing less from us.

Conclusion

The Hebrew and Greek words for justice overlap on the concept of every man getting his due, whether good or bad. Then we talked about what it means for someone to get his due, specifically in these areas:

- **Restorative justice** – Focuses on restoring what someone has been deprived of (*if possible*) plus some additional to compensate for the hardship of being without their goods.
- **Retributive justice** – Focuses on punishment for those who do wrong. According to Ezekiel 18, the punishment is dealt out to the wrong doer, and no one else. The punishment is dealt by God Himself or governments, and we aren't to take vengeance for ourselves.
- **Contractual justice** – Focuses on abiding by our agreements/contracts.
- **Property Justice** – Focuses on men being able to do what they wish with the things that belong to them.

We also talked about fairness vs justice, and how it was unfair for the just (*Jesus*) to die for the sake of the unjust (*us*). God can never be unjust, but He can be unfair. Therefore, unfair does not mean unjust.

As it concerns "property justice" any man may do as he wishes with what belongs to him, provided:

1. He doesn't violate God's moral law
2. He doesn't cause direct harm to another person
3. He doesn't prevent another man from doing what he wishes with what belongs to him.

When it comes to administering justice, God wants us to be impartial. Everyone – small or great, rich or poor – should be heard impartially. Further, a case shouldn't be decided until both sides have been heard. Once they have, those who make the decision should do so as impartially as they know how.

That's biblical justice.

Now, just about the farthest thing from Biblical Justice is "Social Justice" and Critical Race Theory (*CRT*), which we examine in [my article on the topic](#). Further, you'll see how CRT and "Social Justice" are merely a repackaged form of Marxism, and Marx both idolized Satan and borrowed Satan's philosophy when he created Marxism. Thus CRT and Social Justice are ultimately descended from Satan's own philosophy.

No joke.

The article has the quotes to prove it.