

# Voices: Justice looks like living in the light of justification

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.*

*You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudice. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.*

*[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.*

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First and foremost for Christians, justice is seen in light of God's justification of sinners.

The cross is the demonstration of God's righteousness and the pronouncement of God's condemnation upon all human sin and injustice in human history (Romans 3:21-26; 8:1-4). Yet, even as all stand under the judgment of the cross because "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), so all stand under the cross' single mercy.

That God's final word was not to give us the wages of what we deserve but to save us by the gift of his grace in Christ should drive Christians in gratitude to embrace mercy and seek justice. This fact disallows moral hubris and self-righteousness without diminishing the seriousness with

which God takes sin.

For those who follow Christ, justice, mercy and humility must be bound together as a three-fold cord (Micah 6:8). Kindness without justice is sentimentality, as justice without kindness is vengeance.

From these convictions, Christians are propelled to strive for justice and oppose injustice in the present beyond the boundaries of the church.

## **Christian convictions about justice**

### **Creation & God's image**

Because all people are created in the image of God—which is the image of Christ—Christians will uphold and lend their aid to elements in the cultural, societal and political order that uphold the dignity of all people—and do so with special compassion for the vulnerable.

Christians will uphold justice for those who are wronged, without depriving those punished for wrongdoing of their own humanity, praying and working for their eventual spiritual and societal restoration.

### **Sin & salvation**

Because all people are caught up in and willingly embrace the powers of sin, Christians will defer to God absolute judgments upon persons, focusing instead on provisional judgments and on the actions and injustices of individuals.

The witness of David's and Paul's lives in Scripture teaches us persons can be both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. Persons are captive to forces and powers larger than themselves, while also possessing the dignity of responsible agency before God—a precondition for justice (Deuteronomy 10:17-19; cf. Leviticus 19:15).

The tragedy of this current state is not the last word. God has not abandoned the world to its own dissolution (Romans 8:18-39). Christians, therefore, can work for justice without either naïve optimism or unyielding cynicism about the human condition or the possibilities of social arrangements.

## **Final justice & future hope**

Christians know final justice is established by God alone and awaits a future hope. This strange time between Christ's resurrection and return is marred by perpetual conflict. Justice in this context is debated perennially, not only because of human limitations of knowledge, but because any current society is not the kingdom of God and never will be.

Despite having their eyes on a prize beyond this world (Hebrews 11:1), Christians should not be passive but should be faithfully obedient to God in the present order. It is not in spite of but because Christians are heavenly minded that they are of earthly good.

The prison reforms of Gladys Aylward in China; the love and care for thousands of orphans in England by George Müller; the protection and compassion given to Jews by Corrie ten Boom and her family during the Second World War; the striving for the abolition of slavery by individuals like Sojourner Truth, William Wilberforce and Olaudah Equiano—all of these were efforts for justice and opposition to injustice by people driven by faith in a coming kingdom, a faith that did not stifle but propelled their work in our own present world.

The vision of the peaceful kingdom of the future drove Christians to pray and labor for justice and peace in the present and to keep their eyes on a heavenly prize making an earthly one possible. It motivated Christians in ancient Rome to collect and raise unwanted infants—most often girls—abandoned to die on the hills surrounding the city. It also upheld

those who marched in Selma for the recognition of the human dignity of all United States citizens, and the extension of full civil rights and enfranchisement regardless of skin color.

## **Reconciliation**

Christians embrace justice—a mark of peace and harmony—because they embrace its true goal of reconciliation, for we are the objects of divine reconciliation and called to its ministry (2 Corinthians 5:18; Colossians 1:20).

For Christians, the peace we have with God is the basis for the peace we have with one another within the church, and the reason we can pray and work for peace and justice in our world. This peace in the church is the gift of God, not the achievement of humanity, for he alone has broken down the walls of division through the cross (Ephesians 2:15-16; Galatians 3:28).

The final peace to come will be his gift, as well, where “righteousness is at home” (2 Peter 3:13).

## **Perseverance in doing good**

Christians are called to pray for God’s perfect justice to come, even as they work to struggle for it now and to embrace all that might reflect it. That they can do so tirelessly is possible only because they do not place their hope in the effervescent whims of human interest, the simplistic optimism of cultural progress, the narrow belief that politics is the only significant lever of human change, or even their own fervent activity.

Instead, Christians place their hope in and wait upon the Lord, the one who renews their strength for calm, resolute and clear-eyed action within the church and within the world. He allows them to run and not grow weary in

doing good while they await their future hope. There is a “hastening that waits.”

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