

Justice

Exodus 34:6 – 7 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.”

- Merciful: God’s nature includes a compulsion to fix what ails us.
- Forgiving: God’s nature includes the inclination to push history out of the way to enable a fresh relationship based on mutual trust and selfless concern.
- “Justice” does not appear in this passage, but the idea is present as “not clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children...” God’s nature includes dedication to penalties for bad behavior.

Justice is generally interchangeable with righteousness

- The Hebrew word translated justice or righteousness appears over 75 times in the Old Testament. This Hebrew word and another word translated “judgment” are used together perhaps a third of the time, perhaps influencing the translators to pick justice over righteousness in those places.
- The Greek word translated “just” in the New Testament is more often translated “righteous.” The same is true for “justified” versus “made righteous,” and other parts of speech. The word, “justice,” does not appear in the King James Version.
- “Righteousness” would sound less religious if we used the word, “rightness,” to be counted acceptable by God.

Jesus is said to have redeemed us, or atoned for us.

- Jesus’ death was a ransom (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45, Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, Titus 2:14, Hebrews 9:12, 15, 1 Peter 1:18); redeeming from slavery to sin; having become the place where we meet with God (propitiation, mercy seat, Romans 3:25). To the readers, this rescue was in the past (1 Corinthians 1:30), and in the present (Ephesians 1:7).
- Redemption was also future (Romans 8:23, Ephesians 1:14, 4:30). Transformation by the Spirit that we see in ourselves is our down payment toward the “resurrection body.”
- Other words used in connection with Jesus’ sacrifice are atonement (Romans 5:11), and justification (Romans 3:20 – 30).
- Although not stated using the word, “justice,” Jesus purchased us from something inescapable. We were “slaves” because of our debt incurred through sin.

Jesus’ faith made Him the acceptable payment

- This is the importance of the “faith in” versus “faith of” passages. Our faith cannot satisfy justice because our debt was incurred through right-and-wrong.
- Jesus’ faith could satisfy justice because His faith allowed Him to avoid the pitfalls of life (sin, Hebrews 4:15), so He had no debt to right-and-wrong and could pay off the debts of others by paying off the system of right-and-wrong (Hebrews 7:27).
- By paying off the right-and-wrong system, all people were redeemed, not just the faithful (1 John 2:2).

- Hebrews makes a big point that Jesus died once for all. If He died for each person individually, He would need to die repeatedly from the time of Adam until the end of time (Hebrews 9:26). Instead, He paid off the system, which could have occurred at any point in history before Judgment.

Our faith makes us eligible for forgiveness

- Forgiveness does not address justice. Ephesians 1:7 includes both ideas, but not as parallel thoughts, but as the completion of a process.
- Illustration: Someone convicted of a crime receives a sentence. On our legal, human scale, this theoretically “pays the debt to society.” However, the effects of the crime are not reversed, only partially compensated. Further, the ex-con faces a life of discrimination, barred from many jobs, from voting, and from free association.
- Jesus' sacrifice paid our debt to justice. Our faith pushes aside the future repercussions. God may be expected to distrust us after our many failures. Forgiveness pushes that potential distrust to the side so that we may enjoy a relationship of mutual trust and selfless concern.
- We tend to stress our trust of God, acting on that which He promised without being able to see exactly how the promise works. But He must trust us as well, setting aside well-deserved distrust. This is the heart of forgiveness.