

How wrong can a person be? Genesis 4 is the answer to that question. God made everything good.

This is not good. But this is where our sin and alienation from God take us. No, we don't all become murderers, but it is an illustration of what happens when the seeds or roots of sin that are in all of us are allowed to bear fruit. All of us will experience things like jealousy and resentment and these are the seeds (or roots) that can bear such fruits as hatred or even murder.

Jesus said: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."* Matthew 5:21,22

Jesus' point appears to be that following through and committing heinous acts based on how we feel toward someone is not the root of the problem but the fruit of the problem. However the root issue is itself a very serious one; serious enough to incur what we would consider severe judgment.

Genesis 3 & 4 make it clear that when we are not rightly relating to God, all of our other relationships suffer as a result. It is unjust to treat people in any way not according to God's design and His divine stamp upon their lives. That's why our very first priority for justice should be getting right with God. All our sin is first and foremost against Him. (Psa 51:4)

Prayer: Lord God, I confess to You that envy and jealousy and resentment are in my heart and often prevalent in my heart. I know from Your Word that a right relationship with you is the key to all my other relationships. So, help me to know You in the kind of personal way that results in life, not death. Thank you for providing forgiveness for my sin and for the new life I have in you, Lord Jesus. Help me to live out of that new life and new relationship. Help me to walk with You. Amen.

**3/ Read Exodus 20:1-21
Being Good – Just the right thing to do**

None Like Him

The commandments of God are not arbitrary; they reflect God's character. The law of God is what it is, because God is Who He is.

God alone is to be worshipped because there is none like Him. We are never to confuse anyone or anything with God or in any way equal to God. And for this reason we are not to attempt to create images or representations of God, because they would always be grossly inadequate. And we are not to use His name in any way that would show anything less than genuine respect, because He deserves only the ultimate respect because of Who He is, and what He is like, and what He has done.

We are to observe rest times because He rested. We are to honour our parents because they represent God's authority over us. We are not to murder because God is a God of life, not a God of death. He takes no pleasure in the death, even of the wicked (Ezek 33:11). We are not to commit adultery because God is faithful. We are not to steal because God is just. We are not to lie because God is true. And we are not to want after what others have because God will satisfy us. He is more than enough.

This is part of what we mean when we speak of absolute truth. Because God is absolute. We live in a world that is constantly changing and different situations are characterized by different factors. However, God never changes (Malachi 3:6 & Hebrews 13:8). Absolute truth is truth that is based on the nature and character of God. And absolute truth is critically related to a virtuous life. Keep that in mind as we continue these reflections on 'being a good human'.

Prayer: Almighty God, I thank You for Who You are. Lord, grant that I might see Your character and your attributes for what they are and know You for Who You are so that I might be who you created me to be and live my life in accordance with Your Word; Your will. Amen.

4/ Read Psalm 89:1-14 God's Throne Being Good – Just the right thing to do

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of [God's] throne." (Psa 89:14a).

When David's son Solomon became king of Israel, the nation was in its glory days. Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule the people well and God was pleased (1Kings 3:9,10).

Solomon had a great hall constructed that was part of the royal residential complex. In it he constructed a great throne. It had six steps ascending up with lions on both ends of each step and another two lions, one beside each arm rest all made of ivory and overlaid with gold. It was like nothing seen before in any kingdom (1Kings 10:18-20). This hall was also known as the '*Hall of Justice*' (1Kings 7:7). A central part of what it meant for Solomon to be the chosen king was the responsibility to see that justice was established in the nation. The king was to rule the nation on behalf of God. This throne was even referred to as '*the throne of the Lord*' (1Chron 29:23).

Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness." 1Kings 10:9

The defining marks of righteousness and justice were to be the greatness and glory of God's kingdom Israel. (Prov 14:34). The prophets would all point to the lack of justice as the nation's

repudiation of their relationship to God (idolatry) and as a key reason for the eventual collapse of the empire.

As King of all the earth, God's rule in our lives is in accordance with His righteousness and justice, as well as His love and grace. We are to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Some may not be unaware how the entire justice system of the country we live in today is built primarily upon the laws that God gave to Israel along with the Christian contributions to the understanding of those laws. Justice, equity and equality are all sourced out of biblical revelation.

Prayer: Lord God, You are the Great God, the Only Lord of heaven and earth. I worship You alone as my God and my King. Please make me an instrument of Your righteousness and of Your love and mercy. Please enable me to act justly and to love mercy that I might represent You and Your Kingdom well. To You be all the glory. Amen.

5/ Read Isaiah 42:1-7

Rescued in Judgment

Being Good – Just the right thing to do

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. Isaiah 42:1

Christians believe Jesus is the Messiah who came to save us from our sin. He came and suffered paying the price for the forgiveness of our sins dying on the Cross then rising from the dead. He ascended victorious to the right hand of the Father but will come again someday, we know not when.

We know He came to save us, but we sometimes get confused about what that looks like going forward. The Scriptures are clear though that Jesus is and will be making all things right (see Heb 2:8&9). When Jesus returns, He will be coming in righteous judgment. All of the Parousia (Greek for 'arrival' or 'coming' or 'presence') sections of the NT (and there are a lot of them) present the returning Lord in those terms. He will bring ultimate peace and salvation, but He will do it by way of justice because God's justice must be satisfied.

Another thing that is consistent in all the Second Coming material is the need for His people to get busy doing good while we wait for Him.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and

Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-14

We tend to associate judgment with the God of the Old Testament. But when Jesus comes again He will be coming in judgment because He is the God of the Old Testament. The only way to escape is to flee to the Lamb before you have to flee from Him. (Rev 6:16,17)

“Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” Psa 2:12

Prayer: Lord, Your Word is clear. A righteous Kingdom with You as our King is where this is all heading. In the meantime help us to put every effort in that direction. Help us Lord to be watchful and help us to be faithfully serving You until the day we see you face to face. Amen.

6/ Read Romans 12:9-21

A Kind of World

Being Good – Just the right thing to do

What type of world do we end up with when people honestly think that if they can get away with something in this lifetime there will never be a judgment day for them; there will never be a time when they have to give an account? We should reflect well on that.

And yet, this is exactly where the atheistic, materialist worldview takes us. It sounds crazy, when we think of it in these terms, but it becomes like a game where if you can get away with something until you die, then somehow you win!

Compare that to the biblical teaching that no-one is going to get away with anything!

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:29-31

The Christian worldview is just so totally different. Check out these words from Jesus:

“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.... Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” Luke 8:17; 12:3

Even those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, will stand before the Lamb and be judged by Him someday. We will not have to pay for our sin, but our lives will be judged according to how we lived for Him.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2Cor 5:10

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we acknowledge You as the One who has ultimate judgment as well as the only One who brings salvation to the world. Help us to not only act justly and love mercy but help us to share the gospel of Your great justice and mercy with people. Give us a sense of urgency about people's need for forgiveness and restoration, but also an assurance that our efforts are not ever in vain; that they matter for all eternity. Amen.

7/ Read Judges 17:1-6 Good Intentions

Being Good – Just the right thing to do

There is a recurring phrase that resounds throughout the book of Judges - *"In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* (See also Judges 18:1; 19:1 and 21:25) The time of the judges was a time in some ways like our own. People often feel that they are a law unto themselves. Left to ourselves we just don't have what it takes to live righteously. Not only are our intentions often misguided but our motives are often flawed. And we can be deceived and even deceive ourselves about what's really going on in our own hearts too. The Bible pictures this as a form of blindness and we are often blind to our blindness!

To say we need divine help is an understatement. Unless we bow our lives to the King of kings, we are occupying the throne of our own lives and none of us is big enough to be our own God. We need God and we need Him to guide us into the truth. Wisdom (applied knowledge) is completely essential to virtue.

In our day there are many voices crying out for justice. But there is often little consensus about what the just thing is. In his excellent book *Toxic Charity*, Robert Lupton writes:

"The compassion industry is almost universally accepted as a virtuous and constructive enterprise. But what is so surprising is that its outcomes are almost entirely unexamined.... Yet those closest to the ground – on the receiving end of this outpouring of generosity – quietly admit that it may be hurting more than helping. How? Dependency. Destroying personal initiative. When we do for those in need what they have the capacity to do for themselves, we disempower them." Robert D. Lupton in *'Toxic Charity'*, pp.2,3

This is simply one example, but in this case it is error/harm committed even with noble motives! It is not enough to say that we should simply do the loving thing or the right thing. We need

God's help in order to come even to a good understanding of what the good, or right, or loving thing is.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths. Prov 3:5,6

Prayer: Lord God, you are Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25). And we are so finite and so fallen and so limited and broken. Lord, please give us faith to look to You. Thank you so much for giving us Your Word to guide us in our lives. Please use Your Word in our lives so that we can walk in Your ways and reflect Your glory. Amen.

Week 2

Honest to God – just the truth about justice

8-14

8/ Read 1Kings 3:1-28

Wisdom for Life

Honest to God – just the truth about justice

We should be careful to make the connection between Solomon's wisdom from God and his role as king. He was responsible to see that justice was done in the nation. That is why the story of the two mothers follows immediately behind the story of Solomon asking for wisdom to rule well. The whole episode is an indication of how much justice depends upon truth. Without truth, there can be no justice.

Someone was not telling the truth. Solomon's wisdom gave him the ability to discern and to resolve the situation. Justice was done because the truth was revealed. The whole process of a legal trial focuses on determining what really happened (and what did not).

Look at the close connection between truth and justice in this passage.

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. Jer 5:1

When you think about it, it was a lie that got us all into trouble in the first place when the serpent (the enemy of God we know as Satan) misrepresented the truth to Adam and Eve in the garden. He lied, and justice has been subverted by a lack of truth ever since.

We are not naturally good (because we are fallen). We need God's intervention in our lives, and we need two things on a most basic level. One, we need to be forgiven and restored back into relationship with God. Second, we need to learn to do good – to act justly, to love mercy, and to

walk humbly with our God. We need to learn the truth so that we can better live the truth. We need to become wise which also means becoming more virtuous.

Prayer: Oh, dear Lord, we are so much in need of You. We need for You to show us the truth. We need Your forgiveness for our shortcomings. We need Your strength to do Your will. Because we know according to Your Word, we can't do any of this in our own strength. We look to You for these things, and we thank You for Your Word which tells us, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Amen.

9/ Read Prov 1:1-19 So Help Me God
Honest to God – just the truth about justice

We were created to live in dependence upon God. We need God to truly live. We also need God to reveal truth to us. We need to be guided and we need to be guided according to the ways of God our Maker (Proverbs 1:1-3).

If we do not follow the wise guidance that we receive that comes from the Lord, we will find ourselves living lies. There was a commercial on television years ago where some young people are heading out the door as their mom says, "*Be good. And if you can't be good, be careful.*" Parents appreciate the sentiment, but the truth is that the only careful way to live is the good way; the right way, the way of truth. Truth be known, if we take the path of the unjust, we end up destroying ourselves in the process. Why? Because there is such a thing as justice, and it is always aligned with what is true.

"Perhaps we should be less concerned about being on the so-called right side of history – a phrase so easily deployed to feel good about ourselves and demonize our opponents - and more concerned with being on the right side of truth." Thaddeus Williams in 'Confronting Injustice', p.145

God is not only a just God who will judge and extract justice. But He has also designed the world in correlation to His justice. There are '*built in consequences*'. Perhaps you've heard the old saying, "*Virtue is its own reward.*" Or maybe this one – "*What goes around comes around.*" The old people used to call it getting our '*comeuppance*'. O, how we need to hear from God on these matters.

Truth is indifferent. It needs no reason or justification for what it is, it just is. And virtue (any goodness in us) depends on God being in us and upon the truth He brings into our lives. Being just, merciful and humble – those are key virtues. And a virtuous life is a wise life. The wisdom literature pictures it as a path we choose when we look to God for His help; for His strength and for His guidance, as well as His forgiveness when we come up short.

Prayer: Father, we need for You to show us the path of life, but then we need Your help to stay on the path. And we need Your forgiveness every time we fall or fail to live up to the truth You have given us.

Thank You for showing us the path of life. Please help us to stay on the path. Amen.

10/ Read 2Tim 3:1-17

Spiritual Formation

Honest to God – just the truth about justice

Living lives of righteousness and good works figures prominently throughout Scripture. It begins with God making us *‘in His image’*. There is no doubt about God’s intention for us in this regard, nor is there any doubt about how we come to know these things with certainty. God has given us His Word so that we will know Him and know how to live for Him.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” 2Tim 3:16,17

Knowing what’s right and doing what’s right are not the same thing but the latter is dependent on the former.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22

We can be deceived, and we can deceive our own selves. Paul Tripp refers to this as being blind to our own blindness. Not only do we have blind-spots, but we are blind to our blind-spots! We really need God to illuminate our understanding of what is true.

Being a good human is about being virtuous because virtues are a reflection of God. When we are shaped (spiritual formation) by the truth - taught, reproofed, corrected and trained by it - we become good people. The Scripture does not teach moralism – that we are saved by being good. But it does teach moral formation – that we become more like Jesus as we allow his truth to shape our lives and learn to live by grace and truth.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, we know that we will not reach our full potential to reflect Your glory this side of heaven and that sin will plague us until we see You face to face. But please keep forming our hearts and lives according to the truth of Your Word while we seek to live for You in this world. Help us to feed on Your Word like we crave our daily bread. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

11/ Read 1Kings 18:20-40

Battle Ground

Honest to God – just the truth about justice

I can still remember many years ago reading this passage and being struck by this statement from the mouth of the fiery prophet – “... *If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.*” (v.21) What struck me then still impresses me today - the supreme value God places on truth. If Baal were God, we would be right to follow him. We have nothing to fear from the truth.

But we are living in a propaganda deluge. Revisionist history is quite literally attempting to rewrite the past in order to create a new narrative for our lives; one based not on what actually happened, but on what some want to see happen in the future according to their own self-interest.

People in our day love to say, ‘*trust the science*’, which is not bad advice at all, depending on what we mean by science. Sociology and psychology were not part of what has been known as science prior to the 19th century. They undoubtedly produce some very good insights on life, but a lot of the time it ends up looking more like what we might want to be true rather than what is true. And we seem to have come to the point where we trust inventive psychology over basic biology.

All of this is an assault on truth. But what our world often fails to realize is that without truth there is no opportunity for justice or for virtue to exist. Right and wrong depend on truth. So justice and virtue are destined to be casualties of the war on truth. It can’t go any other way.

Yet, intellectual integrity is at an all-time low. It’s now common practice for people to simply shout down those they disagree with, or run them out of town, or prevent them from having a voice at all. It is the rule these days in our universities to simply silence those we disagree with without even giving them a chance to show us something we might be able to learn from them. How does this happen? It happens when we care more about what we want to believe than we care about the truth.

Our culture in a very real sense has ‘taken up arms’ against the truth; seeking to destroy wisdom. The initial result is ignorance. The long term results is destined to be disastrous.

Prayer: Oh Lord, our world seems to be spiraling out of control. We are lost without You and lost without truth. And we are seeing some of the terrible carnage as lives are destroyed. But this is not a surprise because You tell us clearly in Your Word where the world is headed without You. Help those who look to You to keep our eyes on You and the hope that you give us. And help us to be Your ambassadors in this needy world, to share the gospel and to speak the truth in love. Amen.

12/ Read Eph 4:11-31
Honest to God – just the truth about justice

Oh To Be Like Him

The discerning of truth is set out in this passage as being of first importance. We need to know what is true. And we need to speak the truth to one another. There is nothing to be gained by 'fudging' it. But we also need to speak it in love. If you can't say it in love (for real) then don't say it. The passage goes on to emphasize the truth that is in Jesus that we learn about and from Him. You will recall that John says that Jesus is '*full of grace and truth*' (Jn 1) and that Jesus himself said, "*I am the truth.*" (Jn 14)

And that this truth plays a vital role in our being remade in the '*likeness*' of God our Maker (Eph 4:24). Then Paul talks about doing '*honest work*' as opposed to thievery; to become givers rather than takers. This again illustrates the relationship between truth and virtue.

So, the goal is clear. It is '*Christ-likeness*'. Isn't that the most wonderful aspiration you can think of! The list of virtues in verses 25-31 are so wonderful. They are what we should be aspiring to be, and praying for, and pressing hard into, and claiming by faith from God's heart.

O, to be like Him!

*Oh! to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer, this is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures, Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.
Oh! to be like Thee, oh! to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness; stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.*

Thomas Obadiah Chisholm & William James Kirkpatrick

We are ever always only as true as we are true to Him.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, You are so wonderful and so amazing. When we look at You, we so want to be like You. And we know that's what You want for us. We are so thankful for Your truth and grace as You work in our lives to shape us and to transform us more and more into Your image. This is our greatest blessing as Your people. Thank You precious Lord. Amen.

13/ Read John 8:31-59 Following Jesus Honest to God – just the truth about justice

There is such a thing as objective truth. Some things are just true, and always are, whether I know them to be true or remain ignorant of them; whether I acknowledge them or deny them. A belief in objective truth gave rise to mankind's aspirations of virtue for more generations than we can count. But in our day, the very concept of truth in that sense is challenged or even outright denied.

There is also a sense in which truth can be subjective. Truth can be said to be subjective when we receive it in our hearts. That's when the truth becomes '*true for us*' (maybe better to say '*true of us*'). When we align our thinking (attitudes) with objective truth and make it a subjective reality

in our hearts we experience the truth (of it). Then when we then act on it, we become obedient to the truth. This is wisdom. God wants this for us.

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
Psa 51:6

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

1John 1:6

Truth can also be said to be subjective when we are *'true to ourselves'* in this sense – when we have integrity; when the different parts of our lives are consistent with each other. And, of course, this involves us being honest with ourselves before God.

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.
Proverbs 11:3

But all of this is very different from the whole *'my truth' / 'your truth'* paradigm the world has been celebrating in recent years. That view makes truth only always subjective or relative effectively creating a scenario where there is no fixed truth. This is a very foolish thing to do. Jesus makes a promise to all those who will remain in Word – we will know the truth AND the truth will set us free. Do we want freedom and justice? We will need the truth for that.

Prayer: Father, Your Word says that we need to allow You to search our hearts and that You use Your Word to do that by Your Spirit. Please use the truth of Your Word to enlighten the darker places of our lives and to align our thinking with Your will. We want to be people of integrity and we want to walk in Your ways. Amen.

14/ Read John 17:1-19

Guarded by Truth

Honest to God – just the truth about justice

This is Jesus' high priestly prayer to the Father the last night he spent with his disciples; the night he was betrayed and handed over to be crucified. He had been teaching them for 3 years and His words here were undoubtably meant for their ears and ours as much as the ears of the heavenly Father.

He has much to say in this prayer about *'unity'* and about *'joy'* and other things. But it's hard to miss the significance of Jesus' words here about truth (essential to both true unity and true joy). The statements made by Jesus in verses 15-19 indicate that truth is what we need to protect us while in this world, from evil and from the evil one.

Earlier in John, we read about a confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders where Jesus says this about Satan.

“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (See John 8:44)

From that graphic description of the evil one, we see the relationship once again between truth and goodness (or righteousness). Jesus contrasts truth with the murderous and deceptive character of Satan. He draws a straight line between valuing truth and valuing human life; between deception and murder; between evil and deception on the one hand and truth and virtue on the other.

In John 17 Jesus is clear that it is the truth of the Word that protects us in this dangerous world because when we are in the Word and the Word is in us, the truth has a sanctifying or cleansing effect on our lives and a protecting role over us. The truth protects us from evil (sin) and from the evil one. The truth protects us from evil by keeping us on the right path. Remember, *“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”* When Jesus confronted the temptations of the devil in the wilderness, in each instance He responded with God’s Word (see Matt 4). We need to learn the Word so that we will become knowledgeable of the truth, so we can depend on the truth and live the truth and not be *“outwitted by Satan for we are not ignorant of his devices.”* (2Cor 2:11)

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for giving us the truth. Help us to learn it and know it and apply it in our lives in a way that keeps us on the path of righteousness and protects us from lives wasted by sin and the deception of the enemy. Thank you that He is a defeated foe and that we have nothing to fear if we only keep our eyes on You. Amen.

Week 3

Doing Justice – just giving people their due

15-21

15/ Read Micah 6:8-15

Honest Dealings

Doing Justice – just giving people their due

It’s good to take a good look at more of the immediate context of Micah 6:8. In what immediately follows the profound statement in Micah 6:8, the prophet graphically describes Israel’s failure to live out the virtues that God had shown them. Instead of virtues, he talks about there vices and about deceiving and defrauding people in particular.

These statements are very helpful to our understanding of God’s ideas about justice. (Consider the following passages for very similar content: Leviticus 19:35-37; Prov 16:11 & 20:10; Amos

8:4-6) The prophet talks about ‘*deceitful weights*’ and ‘*deceitful tongues*’. We see here yet once again how truth (honest dealings) relates to justice. They were not being true. They were not being just. So God pronounces judgment on them for their lack of justice. “*You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be hunger within you; you shall put away, but not preserve, and what you preserve I will give to the sword. You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine.*” In other words, they were being judged according to their own actions toward others. The reference to grapes and wine is interesting because the next verse he speaks of them following the ways of the house of Ahab. One of the things that king Ahab was best known for was having Naboth killed so that he could confiscate his vineyard (See 1Kings 21).

So, our dealings with one another are a main justice concern for God. God’s sense of justice and what He calls us to do is based on regard for others. When we consider this in light of the whole of Scripture the picture that emerges is one of love. Love is the just thing to do.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Rom 13:8-10

Prayer: Lord, may we live by your golden rule of doing to others as we would have them do to us. We thank You for creating a world where nothing matters more than people do. Thank You for making every man, woman, old and young, of every tribe, tongue and nation in Your own image and giving all of us such incredible dignity and worth. And you didn’t stop there. You went to the Cross to save us from our sin and put us back in your forever family. Help us to love others like that. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

16/ Read Psa 112 True Success Doing Justice – just giving people their due

How do we define success? How do we measure it? Often it’s money or fame or both. But how about the success of being the kind of person we should be? Look at the virtues in this passage ... the fear of the Lord (v.1 and which proverbs says is the very beginning of wisdom and therefore all the other virtues), delighting in truth (v.1) being upright, gracious, merciful and righteous (v.4), being generous and just (vv.5&9), trusting in the Lord (v.7).

And look at the rewards! Prominence and power and blessing (v.2), wealth, riches and righteousness (v.3), light (v.4), well-being (v.5), continuance (v.6), steadfast hope (vv.7,8), victory (v.8), and honour (v.9).

These lists are more than impressive. They are fantastic. But here are a few important qualifiers:

One, when we confuse the rewards for the virtues themselves and start valuing the rewards above the virtues we are off the path.

Two, when we think we can have the rewards of a virtuous life, without living a virtuous life, we are off the path.

And three, when we start to think of this as a sort of contractual arrangement between us and God rather than the working out of a relationship with Him in His grace, we are off the path. This is part of the mistake of the prosperity gospel that we hear from the lips of so many. We must not only value the virtues above the rewards, we must seek God and allow Him to satisfy us in such a way that recognizes that He Himself is the Reward (Genesis 15:1) regardless of our situation at any given time in this fallen world or whether we have worldly success.

If we live our lives to be successful in God's eyes, we will fear of the Lord and delight in the truth. We will be upright, gracious, merciful and righteous, generous and just, trusting in Him. Being a good human is first of all about being right with God. He is first. But God cares ultimately about others and so are we to if we are going to hear His words, *"Well done good and faithful servant."*

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to understand well what it means to be a success in Your eyes. Teach us to long to hear those words, *"Well done good and faithful servant."* Enable us to live our lives before You seeking Your approval above all else. And thank You again Lord that you love each and every one of us; that Your great love for all assures me that You love me too. The love you put in my heart for others is a confirmation that You love me too. Thank You, in Jesus' name. Amen.

17/ Read Isa 1:10-20 **God's Priorities**
Doing Justice – just giving people their due

Do you remember Samuel's fateful words of rebuke to Saul?

And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams."
1Sam 15:22

God has priorities. It's not that some things are valueless. Rather some things just matter more than others. That's all. And further to that, failure to do what's more important renders what we do 'vain' or meaningless (Isa 1:13-15)

And we best take note of what God says matters more in this passage. It doesn't get much clearer than this:

16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. Isa 1:16,17

There were things they needed to stop doing and things they needed to start doing. One of the important lessons here is that justice does not just call us to refrain from doing evil. Justice requires that we do good. It's a matter of both omission and commission. (See James 4:17)

And it's hard to miss the connection here between how we treat others and how God treats us (see v.18 particularly). We know from the rest of Scripture that acting justly and mercifully doesn't earn us salvation. But those who have recognized and experienced the grace of God in our lives will have His love and grace in our hearts for others. To put it in other terms, we are not saved by our good works, but neither are we saved apart from them. (This is a key theme in the book of James. See also Eph 2:8-10 and Titus 2:11-15.)

Part of the key to understand these things is understanding the biblical teaching of what we are saved from (our sin) and what we are saved to (good works).

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Eph 2:8-10

Prayer: God, thank You for Your grace that not only saves us from our sin but becomes then the operating principle of our lives. Thank You for the plan You have for my life and help me to realize how wonderful it is to be used by You to be a blessing to others by doing good to and for them. Help us to see that even as Jesus was always about the Father's business and doing always only those things that please You, so our lives in Your hands become a testimony to Your saving grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

18/ Read Rom 13:7-10

A Debt of Love

Doing Justice – just giving people their due

Defining justice as '*giving people their due*' is an interesting way of looking at it. In one sense it has the feel of a 'tit for tat' approach. If someone wrongs us they deserve to be punished for it. That is part of what justice involves. And if someone does good to you they deserve to be rewarded or paid back somehow. But the biblical concept of justice includes the 'rights' that people have inherently in their humanity being endowed by our Maker.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” A key portion of the preamble of the US Declaration of Independence

This view is dependent upon our view of humanity as a special creation of God endowed with those rights. The Romans 13 passage says there is something due to all people and that one thing is love. Love is the supreme value therefore it is the supreme virtue. Love is the fruit of the Spirit, and it consists of joy and peace and all the others.

But the kind of love that these passages speak of is the kind of love that God demonstrated when it says that *“while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”* (Rom 5:8) It is a type of unconditional love that is not based on our ability to merit it or deserve it or repay it somehow.

We will be learning more about this great love and the mercy it brings in our studies next week. But for today, consider this: God has made others worthy of our love. Put another way, we owe it to God to love people and to live lives of love. We owe it to people not only to treat them as we would want to be treated (Lk 6:31) but in accordance with the way that God has treated us (Lk 32-36 and see also Eph 4:32).

*Oh, to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be.
Let Thy goodness like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee.*

Christopher M. Rice

Prayer: Lord, I realize that I am forever indebted to You for my life. Lord, help me to realize that I also owe a debt to others – a debt of love. Not because they love me, but because You love me. It is the dignity and worth and love that You bestow on them that demands I love them too. But people are not easy to love sometimes Lord. I guess, You know that far better than we do. If you can love me, then I know that I can love others with the love You place in my heart. Thank You for loving me. Amen.

19/ Read Ezekiel 22:23-31
Doing Justice – just giving people their due

Stand in the Gap

This is yet another passage where we see graphic descriptions of what true justice looks like (or what the absence of justice looks like). But inescapable in this passage is the responsibility we have before God to not only abstain from unjust acts, but also to ‘act justly’. This is a most important point.

Take a look at this 2017 news headline.

“A group of Florida teens who taunted a drowning man while filming his death from afar will not be criminally charged, according to police. In the more than two-minute long video, the five

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:4-6

We can rightfully say that Jesus' mission was to stand in the gap on our behalf, but we can also say that Jesus' mission was also to find others who will stand in the gap like He did. (Heb 2:10-13) To be clear, only Jesus can save people or give people a new heart. But we can have the privilege of being His hands and feet in this needy world and when we do, we are pointing people to the One who stood and still stands in the gap between them and God (1Tim 2:5).

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for taking my place and for bridging the gap between us. And thank You for calling me to serve You by standing in the gap for others. Help me to have a burden to pray for others and to represent You well by personally extending my help by Your grace when and where I can. Help me not to be defeated by the thought of all I can't do. Help me to follow Your leading into the gap knowing that You're already there.

21/ Read Luke 10:25-42

Bill Me

Doing Justice – just giving people their due

The story of the Good Samaritan is undoubtedly one of the most well known and loved stories of all time told by the master story teller Himself. Starting tomorrow, our devotional readings move on from the subject of justice to the subject of mercy. But we have been seeing how justice and mercy really go together throughout Scripture.

Sometimes people hear the story of the Good Samaritan and think the lesson is that we receive eternal life from God if and when we love our neighbour as ourselves; in other words, by what we do. This could be why Luke places the story of Mary and Martha immediately following the parable of the Good Samaritan, to help steer us away from such an interpretation. The legal expert who asked Jesus about receiving eternal life testified that he was personally living up to all the law. The point of Jesus' story was to show what it really means to love your neighbour and how we all come short of the perfect law of love.

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Matt 7:12

This self-righteous scholar needed the mercy of Jesus. So all of Martha's doing was not the one thing that is needful that Mary chose. Mary chose to receive from Jesus and was doing nothing but sitting at His feet.

In the story of the Good Samaritan we see the cost involved in the law of love and mercy.

He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Luke 10:34,35

What the Samaritan man in Jesus' story did was what Jesus did. He saw us in our pitiful condition and had compassion on us. He took care of us, dressing our wounds. He gave us the benefits of what belongs to Him, and He agreed to pay the price in full for all our need. Jesus is our 'Good Samaritan'. He satisfied the perfect law of justice while loving us perfectly. He did justly and He showed mercy.

Prayer: Thank You so much Lord Jesus for loving us so much and taking pity on us in our sorry state. You are our perfect Saviour. There are none like You. I worship You and adore You. Lord, help me to love like that. I know I don't merit Your love by anything I do, but I want so much to serve You by serving others. Help me to be like You. Help me to be willing to pay the price of serving the needs of others. Glory to Your name. Amen.