

Jesus and Our Desire for Justice:

An Exploration into Ourselves
and the Heart of God

We Want Justice!



But What Kind?

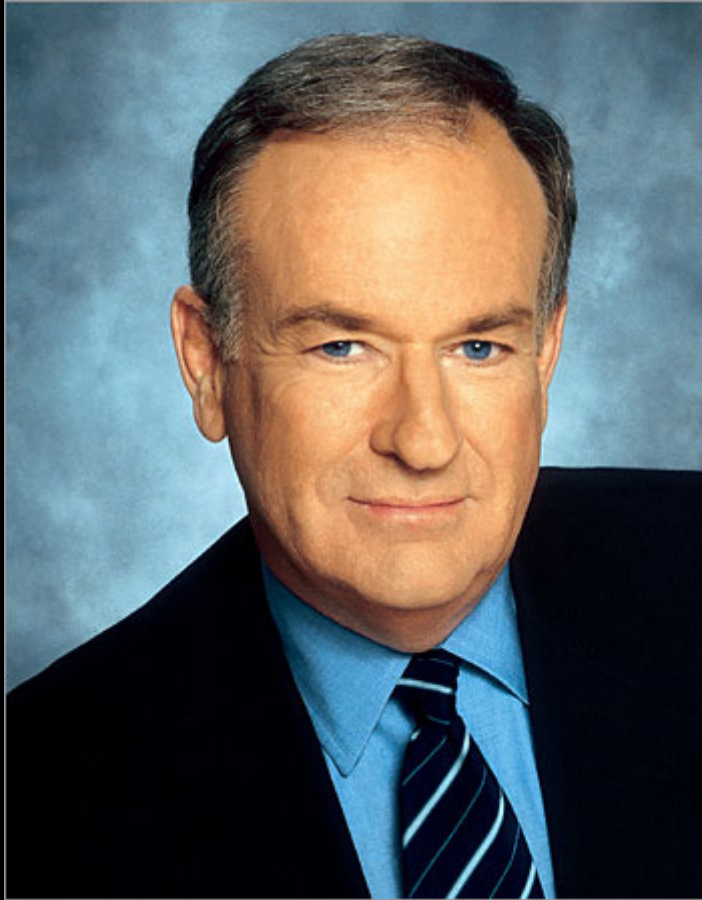
Four Types of Justice

- Meritocratic: Reward, punish
- Distributive: Baseline wealth
- Libertarian: Maximize freedom
- Restorative: Relationship

The Right in the U.S.

- Libertarian: Maximize freedom (economic)
- Meritocratic: Reward, punish

The Right in the U.S.



- ‘White Americans fear government control. They don’t want the feds telling them what to do. And they don’t want a bankrupt nation. For decades, African-Americans have supported a bigger federal government so it can impose ‘social justice.’ The vast majority of Blacks want money spent to level the playing field, to redistribute income from the white establishment to their precincts.’
- Bill O’Reilly, August 6th, 2010

The Left in the U.S.

- Distributive:
Baseline wealth

- Libertarian:
Maximize freedom
(social)

- Meritocratic:
Reward, punish

The Left in the U.S.

- ‘The American people will never knowingly adopt socialism, but under the name of liberalism they will adopt every fragment of the socialist program until one day America will be a socialist nation without ever knowing how it happened.’
- Norman Thomas, six-time Socialist Party presidential candidate and one of the founders of the ACLU.



Whose Justice? Which Order?

- Meritocratic: Reward, punish
 - Distributive: Baseline wealth
 - Libertarian: Maximize freedom
 - Restorative: Relationship
-
- How do you order and organize these?

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- Is your order philosophically grounded, or fundamentally arbitrary?

The Christian Order of Social Justice

- Restorative: God's relational order
- Distributive: Wealth for all
- Meritocratic: Reward, punish
- Libertarian: Legitimate concerns, but incompatible premises

- Grounded in the historicity of Jesus and his resurrection, with Scripture as a witness

Restorative Before All Others

- Jesus restores God's original creation order for how we:
 - Forgive and reconcile (Mt.5:21 – 26; 6:12 – 15; 18:1 – 35)
 - Express sexuality and marriage (Mt.19:3 – 12)
 - Share wealth (Mt.19:13 – 30)
 - Share power and honor (Mt.20:1 – 28)



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 - Share wealth (Mt.19:13 – 30)
 - Share power and honor (Mt.20:1 – 28)
- God designed relationships for us to fit into
 - 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning...Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you... but from the beginning...' (Mt.19:4, 8)
 - 'In the regeneration...' (Mt.19:28)
 - Thus, we have responsibilities, not just rights

Implication: Receive Down's babies

- The U.S. aborts 92% of detected Down Syndrome babies



Distributive Before Meritocratic

Mosaic Israel: Land

- Leviticus 25
- Deuteronomy 13
- Isaiah 58

- Proverbs 10:4, etc.



Distributive Before Meritocratic



Church: Table

- Matthew 6:19 – 34; 19:13 – 30
- Luke 6, 12, 14; Acts 2, 4, 6
- 2 Corinthians 8 – 9

- 2 Thessalonians 3:10 – 12

Jesus & Restorative Justice: Wealth as Aspect of Relationships

Jewish Law

- Promised land
- Family land inheritance
- Forgive debts after 7 years, or every 49 years
- Lend without interest
- Partial restoration of creation order, though Israel still has 'hardness of heart'

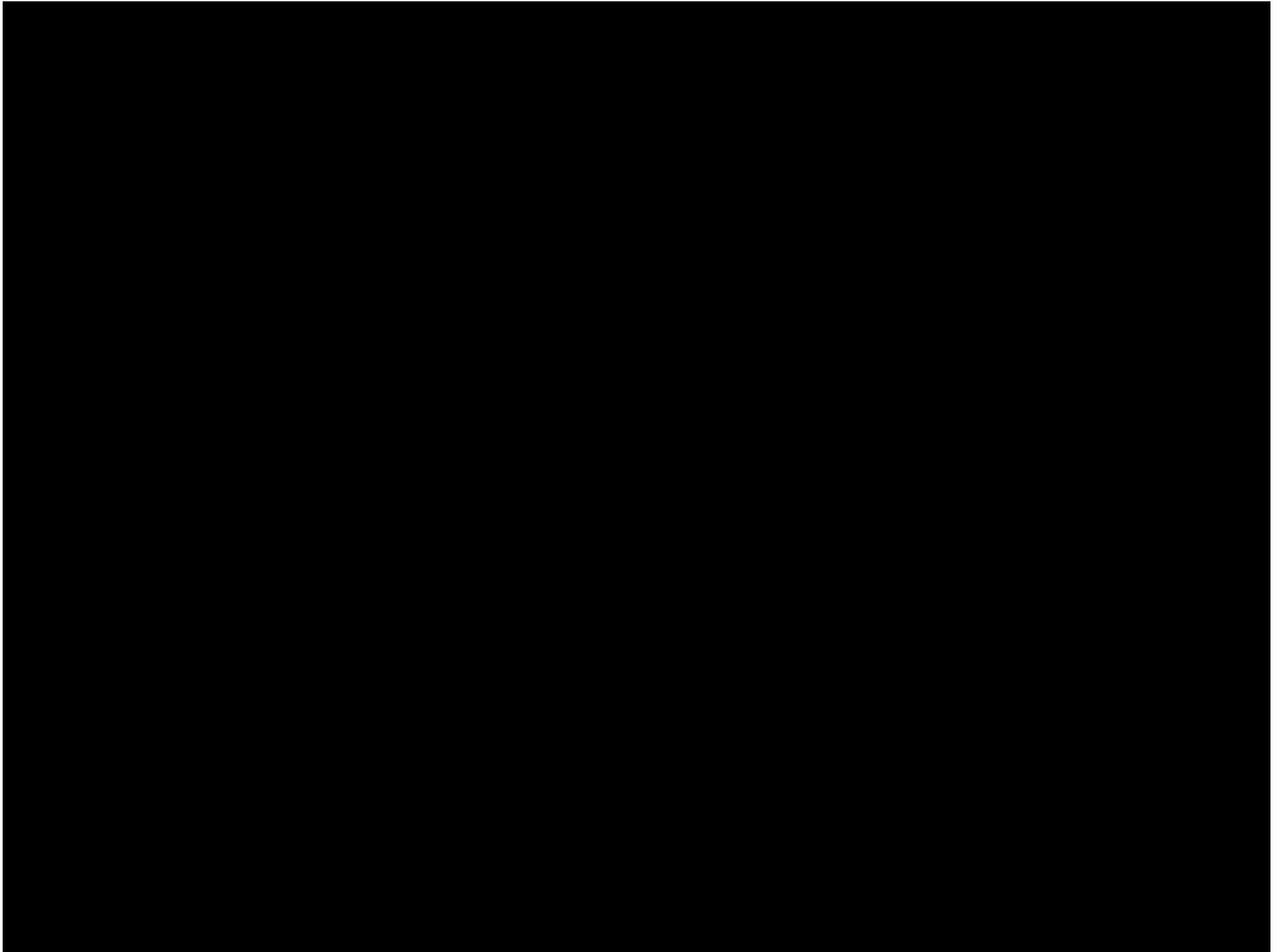
Jesus on Wealth

- Forsake promised land
- Disinheritance
- Forgive debts all the time, frequently
- Lend without interest, without expecting return
- Restoration of creation order; Jesus reverses 'hardness of heart'

Implication: Race Relations and the Distribution of Work

- 1989 Supreme Court Case *J. A. Croson v. City of Richmond, VA*





Israel's Insight: The Obstruction of Justice

- Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your **heart** and the **heart** of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your **heart** (Dt.30:6)
- Create in me a clean **heart**, O God, and renew a steadfast **spirit** within me. (Ps.51:10)
- I will put My law within them and on their **heart** I will write it... (Jer.31:33)
- I will give you a new **heart** and put a new **spirit** within you... (Ezk.36:26)

Israel's Insight: The Obstruction of Justice

Romans 7:14 For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. ¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Israel's Insight: The Obstruction of Justice

Romans 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. ¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. ²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

'Flesh'

1. Flesh (Greek *sarx*): a negative term
 1. Paul, to the Romans: For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my *flesh*; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. (*Romans 7:18*)
 2. Philo, 'The Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not remain among men forever, because they are *flesh*.'" ('On the Giants', *Commentary on Genesis*, 5.19)

An Example of 'the Flesh'

- 'Vain, immoral, bigoted: this is your brain in action,' Cordelia Fine, Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University (*A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*, Publishers Weekly) 'The brain, she shows, distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, an optimist who fails at something edits the truth by blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people's behavior (how could he do that?), while at the same time interpreting one's own actions in the best possible light (I would never do that!).'

An Example of 'the Flesh'

- Why do people refuse to admit mistakes – so deeply that they transform their own brains? They're not kidding themselves: they really believe what they have to believe to justify their original thought... Most terrifying: The justice system operates this way. Once someone is accused of a crime - even under the most bizarre circumstances - the police believe he's guilty of something. Even when the DNA shows someone is innocent, or new evidence reveals the true perpetrator, they hesitate to let the accused person go free. (Review of Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson's book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts*)

Jesus' Judgment on 'the Flesh'

Romans 8:3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Jesus' Struggle: An Analogy



Jesus' Struggle: An Analogy



HP7

The Meaning of Jesus' Life

‘When it is asked how, after abolishing sins, Christ removed the discord between us and God and acquired a righteousness, it may be replied generally that he provided us with this by the whole course of his obedience...From the moment he put on the person of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation for our redemption...In order, however, to define the manner of salvation more surely, scripture ascribes it to Christ's death as its property and attribute. Yet there is no exclusion of the rest of the obedience which he performed in his life...

The Meaning of Jesus' Life

...as Paul comprehends the whole of it, from the beginning to the end, when he says, 'he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' ... Nor was this without inward conflict, because *he had taken our infirmities*... And it was no mean specimen of his incomparable love to us, to contend with horrible fear, and amid those dreadful torments to neglect all care of himself, that he might promote our benefit.' (John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.5)

Jesus & Restorative Justice

- God is a God of restorative justice; He has a vision for human relationships
- Jesus cuts through the arbitrariness of human attempts to order the four types of justice
- Jesus restores our true humanity to us, and calls us to acknowledge the true humanity of others
- Jesus loves us so we can fight the ways we obstruct justice and manipulate the word 'justice' for our own ends

Questions for Discussion

1. Which of the four aspects of justice do you feel most strongly about? Why?
2. Do you think there is 'justice' in a true sense? Or is it just 'revenge' using more polite language?
3. Justice in all its aspects must be rooted in some form of individual 'human dignity.' Otherwise human beings don't really matter. Jesus' love for each person is the foundation for human dignity in the Christian faith. What is your foundation for it?
4. Do you think there is a God who cares about justice? Why or why not?
5. What do you think about the Christian ordering of the four types of justice?
6. Why do you think human beings often obstruct justice? Is there a flaw in human nature?

Resources

1. Paul Mills and Michael Schluter, *After Capitalism: Rethinking Economic Relationships*
2. Paul Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*
3. Paul Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*
4. Emmanuel Katongole & Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things*
5. Fred Bahnson & Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*
6. Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*