

Tremors of Injustice and Retribution in the Christian Community

What do you think? Does injustice resolve another, previous injustice?

Can injustice demand injustice to remedy it?

Does my experience of injustice qualify me to demand "justice" through injustice inflicted upon another?

Can I require you to pay another's debts to me?

Can I attribute guilt to you for a crime that you did not commit against me?

Doesn't the Bible require Christ followers to do justice?

Tremors of Injustice and Retribution in the Christian Community

These questions identify tremors unfolding within the Christian community today. Ethnic minorities plead for punitive justice from today's Christians for injustices committed hundreds of years ago. Callousness, complicity, and concealment only make it worse, they claim.

Not to be out done, multitudes push their claims of injustice:

- Disparities of income with demands for income redistribution;
- Calls for race-based hiring policies; and
- Equality of opportunities and outcomes in education.

Although some victims can identify their offenders, popular movements today place guilt upon huge segments of the present-day Christian community. Because of postmodernism's cultural relativism, standards of right and wrong depend upon one's cultural beliefs, not a Biblical, objective standard of truth. They demand repentance, retribution, and reparations from innocent people today for injustices committed, in some instances, centuries ago.

In the process, these social justice warriors transfer culpability upon Christians now for injuries committed in the past upon relatives and even nonrelatives. This contradicts the truth that two wrongs do not make a right.

Zacchaeus's Gifts and Restitution

This popular social justice movement seeks to justify its claims based upon the familiar story from the life of Jesus: Christ's meeting with Zacchaeus, a Jewish publican. You can read the story in Luke 19.1-9. During Christ's last year of earthly ministry, he headed towards Jerusalem for the last time to appear before the religious leaders who would ultimately

crucify Him.

As He passed through Jericho, crowds lined the path which hampered Zacchaeus, a man of short stature, from accomplishing his desire, to see Jesus. To enhance his view, Zacchaeus climbed a Sycamore tree to enable him to see Jesus as He passed by.

When Jesus came to the tree that Zacchaeus had climbed, Jesus looked at him and said, "Zacchaeus, come down from the tree and take me to your house."

Zacchaeus quickly descended the tree and took Jesus to his house. Through his meeting with Jesus, Zacchaeus experienced a life changing transformation. As a result, he told Jesus that he would give half of his riches to the poor.

Further, Zacchaeus said that he would restore four times the amount of money he had defrauded from people. In that day, tax collectors stole from their subjects by taxing them more than the proper tax.

After Zacchaeus declared his intentions, Christ commented that salvation had come to Zacchaeus.

Purpose of the Story

Why did the Holy Spirit prompt Luke to include this story in his gospel?

In the introduction to his writing in Luke 1.1-4, Luke stated that he wrote his gospel to Theophilus to give an orderly account of the events of Christ's ministry. Jesus performed many miracles during His 3-year earthly ministry. Perhaps this story of Zacchaeus made the rounds because of its unusual results.

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector who supervised other tax collectors who worked for him. In Matthew 9.9-13, Jesus met with Matthew the tax collector and other tax collectors. Christ had called Matthew to follow him, which he did, and then Matthew assembled fellow tax collectors to meet with Jesus. Had Zacchaeus heard of Jesus' call of Matthew, a fellow tax collector, and the meeting of other publicans with Jesus?

Perhaps Zacchaeus attended that meeting, although Scripture does not say that he did. But he no doubt heard about it.

Who would believe the stories of the life changing experiences of these hated persons? Who would want to believe them? Tax collectors? Thieves? Sinners? Traitors experiencing new life by faith in Christ? No chance.

But the Holy Spirit moved Luke to record this amazing story of Zacchaeus to confirm it, and the impact of Christ's message upon terrible sinners. Christ could change anyone's life, even tax collectors and publicans deemed the worst of people by the Jews at the time of Christ's earthly ministry.

At his meeting with Matthew and his fellow tax collectors, Jesus said that He had come to call sinners to repentance, even lying, stealing, defrauding tax collectors. (See Matthew 9.13.) This story confirmed the power of Christ to transform even the worst of sinners.

Further, the Holy Spirit wanted to show to Theophilus and others who read Luke's gospel the effects of Christ's grace in a person's life. The one so changed would exhibit grace and mercy to others as well as obedience to God.

Jesus saw the change of Zacchaeus's repentant heart that brought obedience to God plus grace and mercy to others.

Zacchaeus to the Rescue for "Social Justice"

How does this centuries old story correlate to you and me? How can the Holy Spirit apply this story to your life and mine today? What does it say, if anything, about the present "social justice" discord in the Christian community? Does the story of Zacchaeus confirm the rectitude of the social justice warriors' demands?

Yes, this story does correlate to our present circumstances. All that was true then is true today. Doubters still disbelieve the transforming power of Christ and reject him. We live in a culture vastly different from this first century episode. Therefore, what worked then cannot work now, can it? Can Christ change lives today?

Without question, millions of people from history and in our current times, in diverse cultures, nations, and ethnic peoples world-wide confirm the reality of the life changing power of Christ in a person's life.

Like Zacchaeus in his day, sinners of every degree of perversity, who trust Christ, experience his power at work in their lives, converting them from rebels to repentant, obedient Christ followers.

But how does the story of Zacchaeus relate to the present social justice debate? Does it, in fact, confirm the correctness of the demands for retribution for past injustices? Can today's peoples claiming injustice upon past individuals and people groups use the account

of Zacchaeus to justify their demands for payback now?

Those who believe that it justifies their claims make 3 popular mistakes of so called “Christian” social justice from this story of Zacchaeus.

Mistake #1

The present debate on injustice and retribution depends upon the fallacy that people today have culpability for past injustices. Its proponents demand justice for whole groups of injured peoples in society, injustices to others that arose like:

- ethnicity;
- financial disparity;
- educational opportunities and outcomes;
- and more.

Many advocates of this so-called social justice within the Christian community pressure professing Christians to adopt their philosophy, one which lacks Biblical support.

Some leaders demand repentance, reparations, and retribution from Christian organizations as well as professing believers for alleged, even actual injustices of the past. Others support the more aggressive organizers of this idea with complicit agreement through mutual leadership in organizations like “The Gospel Coalition” and “Christianity Today.”

Associations like “The Gospel Coalition” “Christianity Today” and their leaders publicize the assertive messages of the social justice advocates thereby granting tacit approval of their unbiblical assertions.

Mistake #2

In the attempt to develop Biblical authority for their message, which it lacks, these advocates use this example from the Bible of Zacchaeus's change of heart to restore his victims and gifts to the poor as the pattern and prod to apply to the demanded social justice of today.

Let's examine this story in greater detail to guide our thinking.

According to the Law of Moses, under which Zacchaeus lived, he had a personal, legal obligation to those from whom he had stolen by false accusation. In actuality, the term “false accusation” means that he defrauded them when he sued his victims in court, lied in his suits, and won the judgments that he sought against them.

The Law of Moses commanded him to repay those whom he had defrauded a restoration of three options:

- 120% of the original amount stolen; or
- four times the original amount stolen, e.g., 4 sheep for 1 sheep stolen; or
- five times the original amount stolen, e.g., 5 oxen for 1 ox stolen.

As you see, the repayment depended upon the type of theft.

Similarly, Roman Law, which governed tax collectors, required a retribution of four times the amount that a tax collector had stolen from a subject. This fine came due by the publican upon discovery of the publican's theft.

Zacchaeus paid his victims, and only those victims whom he had defrauded, the payment stipulated by Roman Law. That amount also equaled one of the demands for retribution recorded in Exodus 22.1 under the Law of Moses for such crimes. He did not pay for the injustices of others, even though those crimes existed. His guilt came from his own crimes, not the injustices of others.

Mistake #3

As to his gifts to the poor, he gave generously to them. The Law of Moses directed the individual responsibility of Israelites, not some form of social justice or governmental mandate, to care for the poor. It provided numerous options one could use for gifts to the needy. It did not dictate any specific amounts or percentage of one's possessions to donate. Nor did it specify the kinds of gifts to the needy.

In the example of Zacchaeus, Jesus did not require Zacchaeus to give to the poor. Zacchaeus gave with great grace and generosity to those in need, without any compulsions from the Law of God nor of Christ.

These transactions revealed the life changing transformation of Zacchaeus, which Jesus verified.

Therefore...

What implications do these truths have for you and me?

Believers

The example of Zacchaeus provides insight for Christ followers on how the Holy Spirit can use this story in our lives.

- Christ followers show their life changing transformations by obedience to God.
- As Christ followers, we have a Biblical command in Micah 6.8 to live and practice justice.
- The example of Zacchaeus reminds us that as God showed grace and mercy to Zacchaeus and to us as Christ followers, so we must show grace and mercy to our brothers and sisters in need.

Like many Christians, you may live your life in accordance with God's commands for justice in your transactions with others, believers, and unbelievers alike, and in your care of the poor. I encourage you to continue in obedience to God, and he will bless you for your obedience and sacrifice.

However, if you claim allegiance to Christ and profess that you trust him as lord and savior, but do not honor justice nor give to the poor, I call you to repentance. You cannot claim what you do not live in daily life. A true follower of Christ will live justly and contribute to the poor as God commands. Confess your disobedience and selfishness, repent of it, and turn to Christ to experience his forgiveness. Begin to show justice in your daily life and contribute to the needs of the poor.

Unbelievers

Perhaps you make no claim to salvation. You have never trusted Christ. You show no interest in God or his son Jesus. You live your life to satisfy your selfish desires. You may even doubt the existence of God. If he exists, he has no interest in you or your life.

The Holy Spirit can also use the example of Zacchaeus to unbelievers like you because it proves that the grace of God in Christ, as revealed in the gospel, extends to the worst of sinners, like you and me.

When God created Adam and Eve, he planned for them to honor and glorify him and to fill the earth with their progeny who would also honor and glorify God. Thus, they became the head of all humanity who would originate from them.

But Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the tree in the Garden In Eden that God forbade them to eat.

Sin now defiled their natures. They looked at each other in different ways. Guilt replaced freedom. They knew that they disobeyed God and began to experience the consequences of their sin. Their sin separated them from fellowship with God, and they fled from his

presence.

Since all mankind issues from Adam and Eve as heads of humanity, Adam's sin assigns to all humanity, too, including you and me.

From conception, we become enslaved to our sin which separates us from God with no desire for him. We have no desire to believe God, let alone worship him. Sin engulfs us into bondage to it and permeates our whole beings. In addition, our sin makes us helpless to remedy our condition.

Because of your sinful helplessness and lack of desire for God, you need divine intervention in your life to redeem you from your sin and bondage to evil, and to reconcile you to God.

Hear God's word to you. The gospel tells us that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to earth, born of a young virgin girl, to secure redemption for sinners and to reconcile them back to God.

During His life on earth, Jesus obeyed every command and demand of God, living a perfect and sinless life. Though tempted in all ways like us, he resisted every time. Because of his sinless life, he could provide the perfect, complete sacrifice to God on behalf of the sins of others as their substitute. He lived a life that neither you nor I could live.

Major Ian Thomas said it this way:

"The life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died."

When Christ shed his blood on the cross and died there, he offered himself to God as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners like you and me. He paid the penalty to God in full that people like us deserve to pay because of our sin. He died the death that we should have died. God accepted Christ's sacrifice in atonement for the sins of others.

Our sin separates us from God and requires a suitable sacrifice to God to atone for them and to reconcile us back to himself. The sacrifice of Christ fulfills that obligation on behalf of people like you and me.

Jesus commanded all people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel which calls us to believe:

- The virgin birth of Christ;
- the sinless life of Christ;
- the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross where he sacrificed his blood for sinners

like you and me; and

- His resurrection to new life, victorious over sin and death, destroying the devil and all his evil works.

Jesus promised to accept everyone who comes to Him in faith, turning from their sin, self-reliance, and rebellion against God, to trust his sacrifice to God on their behalf.

Further, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to indwell those who come to Him in faith. The indwelling Holy Spirit enables Christ followers to fulfill his commands.

God promised to pardon and forgive all who come to him by faith in Christ, God's appointed substitutionary sacrifice to God for them.

As a young boy, I called upon Christ to be my savior. I have experienced Christ's transforming power by the Holy Spirit in my life and attest to its reality.

I ask the Holy Spirit to come to you today:

- to give you the new birth that will regenerate you, giving you new life from above;
 - to give you the faith to turn from your sin, self-reliance, and rebellion against God;
 - to give you the faith to trust Christ's provision for you in his life, death, and resurrection as fulfilled for you and that will reconcile you to God; and
- to come to you today and to indwell you as Christ promised, so that he will begin to form Christ's life in you.

I pray that this will become true for you today.

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