

Series: Exodus

Title: Thou Shalt Not Wrest Judgment

Text: Ex 23: 1-3, 6-8

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Exodus 23: 1: Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. 2: Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment: 3 Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause....6: Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. 7: Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. 8: And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.

These laws are chiefly judicial in a court of law: but we are always before God—his court of law will bring to light everything we have done in this life. Most would never bear false witness in a court of law—you put your hand on the bible and swear not to. But what about in everyday life? Everything we think is open before him.

God says *Thou shalt not raise or bear false witness*—we must not lie about what someone did or didn't do—not even a little white lie.

Thou shalt not put thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude—a majority—to do evil. We are not to follow the majority in injustice simply because everyone is doing it. The majority will look down on you if you do not go along with them, still, you are not to follow them.

Thou shalt not wrest judgment from the poor—neither be lenient OR harsh simply because a man is poor—*"thou shalt not countenance a poor man; neither wrest the poor in his cause."* If a man is poor no sympathy is to be given and no injustice is to be tolerated simply because of his poverty. As the Scriptures put it elsewhere, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

Take no gift—no bribe—*"for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous."* Justice is blind and cannot be bribed.

This is the main point: *"keep thee far from a false matter—THE INNOCENT AND THE RIGHTEOUS SLAY THOU NOT"*—GOD GIVES THE REASON *"FOR I WILL NOT JUSTIFY THE WICKED."*

Proposition: God is just therefore the law and justice of God does not take into consideration anything except guilt or innocence.

God's law specifically forbids any mercy on the basis of the offender's circumstances and condition such as respecting persons because they are rich or poor. Justice does not respect persons. If they are guilty they are to be punished. If they are innocent they are to go free. This and this alone is JUSTICE! THIS IS RIGHTEOUSNESS!

In matters of justice, there are no "as if's" with God. When it came to calling Abraham the father of the faithful when as yet he had no children, God may call those things that be not as though they were. But not in justice! This is GOD'S CHARACTER—he is HOLY AND JUST!

God says, *"I will not justify the wicked."* Some use Romans 4 to argue that God does indeed justify the wicked. Paul wrote, *"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him*

that worketh not, but believeth on him that JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:4-5). Some use this to say that God justifies the wicked. Why would anyone argue that God judges unrighteous judgment? Paul is simply referring to the state God finds his child in when God gives us faith in Christ and imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. But Christ has answered justice for his child and made us righteous. God justifies his child justly. But he never justifies a man who is ungodly and wicked. Christ has made his child righteous therefore God justifies his child through faith in Christ.

John Gill said, "Particular reference is had to Abraham, who IN HIS STATE OF UNREGENERACY WAS AN UNGODLY PERSON; as all God’s elect are in a state of nature, and are such when God justifies them, being without a righteousness of their own; wherefore he imputes the righteousness of another, even that of his own Son, unto them: and though he justifies the ungodly, HE DOES NOT JUSTIFY THEIR UNGODLINESS, BUT THEM FROM IT; nor will he, nor does he leave them to live and die in it.”

So when God says, “*I will not justify the wicked*” he means he will not declare one just who is guilty of the crime charged against him. If sin is found on the person, God declares him guilty. If Christ has not made him righteous then God will not impute righteousness to him and declare him just.

THE MOST COMFORTING ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

The most comforting attribute of God to a righteous man is God’s chief attribute: holiness. This is the most comforting attribute of God because it means God is the just judge who only judges justly. Read Proverbs 17:15 and take time to understand that God is declaring himself to be the judge who only judges righteously.

Proverbs 17:15: He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.

Nahum 1: 3: The LORD *is* slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit *the wicked*: the LORD *hath* his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds *are* the dust of his feet.

Romans 1:18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Romans 2: 5: But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6: Who will render to every man according to his deeds.

ALL MEN ARE GUILTY IN ADAM

Left to ourselves, all men are guilty. God will not justify any sinner because we are ungodly by nature due to Adam our first head.

This one law is enough to find us guilty. We have all borne false witness about another in some regard. Even if it be a small matter to us, it is not to God. In all these laws in which God commands what we are not to do, we did against Christ Jesus the Lord.

God says that thou shalt not raise or bear false witness. We lied and bore false witness against Christ.

Mark 14: 57: And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, 58: We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. 59: But neither so did their witness agree together.

God says that thou shalt not put thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. God says that thou shalt not follow a multitude—a majority—to do evil. Yet, simply because everyone was doing it, the blood thirsty mob joined together to crucify the Redeemer.

God says that thou shalt not countenance a poor man; neither wrest the poor in his cause. Christ Jesus, though God over all, was the poorest man on earth. He said that he did not own a place to lay his head. Therefore, to the world, he had no power. The poor are oppressed because men know they can get away with it. No one was afraid to bear false witness or oppress the Lord Jesus because he was poor in the eyes of men.

God said that we are not to take bribes in matters of justice. But the political leaders were bribed in our Lord's day by the political gain they stood to get by consenting to his crucifixion.

We may not have been there to do these things personally to our Lord but this is the heart that is in every sinner. If you and I were there, but for God's restraining hand, we would have done the same thing. Any one law among these laws given at Sinai would be enough to condemn us because we have broken them all. We broke the one law God gave in the garden in Adam our head. And because we are born guilty, with a sinful nature, we have broken every law of God. To break one is to break them all. *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"* (Jas 2:10).

JUSTICE MANIFEST IN CHRIST CRUCIFIED

When God the Father dealt with his Son in place of his people on the cross, that which was being manifest is the righteousness of God. Christ came, first and foremost, to manifest how God is just and the Justifier of all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8:32 this is why we read *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"*

Regardless of how men think Christ was made sin, the reason scripture declares that the Lord laid on him the iniquity of all his people is because God is just. It is to declare the righteousness of God. It is because God manifests his righteousness in Christ and him crucified. However men believe God made Christ to bear the sin of his people, the reason remains the same. We read throughout scripture that the Substitute was made sin because Christ was manifesting that God is righteous and only judges righteously. It was necessary, in order for God to be just in pouring out wrath on his Son, that his Son first be made to bear the sin of his people.

Christ Jesus, in himself is the spotless Lamb of God. It was absolutely necessary that he be without sin in order for Christ to be fit to bear our sins. He is the Just One who laid down his life for the unjust. Even while he bore the sin of his people, Christ never himself sinned against God. Through the eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot to God. So be sure to get this: Christ was not made a sinner! Let me say it again, Christ was not made a sinner! In case I am not understood, Christ was not made a sinner! A sinner is a rebel against God who actively transgresses against God. Christ never transgressed against God. It was by his obedience as God's faithful servant that Christ presented himself in the garden of Gethsemane as the spotless Lamb so that God then could lay on him the iniquity of us all and Christ be made to bear the sin of his people.

We see this typified in the old covenant. In the old covenant ceremony, the lamb that was brought had to be spotless. But when the hand was placed on the head of the lamb, ceremonially in type, the sin of the sinner was transferred to the lamb. Only then, in type, was the lamb fit to be slain by justice. Christ is not the type

but the anti-type. The law was a shadow, Christ is the express image. What Christ did was not in type or ceremony. It was a real transference of sin from God's elect to Christ.

Therefore, God spared not his own Son. He delivered him up to justice for all his people. Romans 8:32 declares that God is just! When sin was found on his Son, in strict, unbending justice, God spared not his own only begotten Son but delivered him up to the sword of justice in place of all his people.

The purpose of this was to manifest the righteousness of holy God. On the cross, God is manifesting that he only does right. To argue against this is to argue against our very peace! Do we really want to charge the holy and righteous God with smiting the innocent Lord Jesus with the sword of divine justice without our Substitute first being made to bear the sin of his people so that God might be just in doing so? If God did so once then God could do so again. If that were the case then sinners like you and I would never have peace. Every believer's peace comes from knowing that what God did to our Substitute on the cross was done justly, righteously, so that we never have to worry about God turning his sword of justice upon us ever again!

In Christ crucified we behold our Redeemer fulfilling the law of our text, the same as Christ fulfilled the whole law of God. When the spotless Lamb of God willingly had all the sin of all God's elect transferred to him, God did not wrest judgment. He did not receive a false report. God did not follow a multitude to do evil. The just Judge of heaven and earth did not countenance a poor man in his cause. He showed no respect of persons even when the person was his only begotten Son. In himself the Lord Jesus Christ was the sinless, innocent perfect GodMan. But when the sin of his people was found on him, God kept himself far from a false matter. He unsheathed the sword of divine justice and God is so just that he spared not his own Son but delivered him up to justice for all his elect people.

Therefore, Christ satisfied justice for his people by dying under the justice of God in our place.

THE DEMAND OF JUSTICE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS

Now, the same justice of God declares that those who believe on Christ are made righteous and are innocent. Our iniquities are gone, covered, and cannot be found because Christ bore them all away. Therefore, the justice of God declares that we have no sin to impute. The same justice that demanded we die due to our sins, now demands we live eternally due to our righteousness—which is the righteousness Christ worked out for us by his obedience unto the death of the cross.

Romans 8: 6: Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 7: *Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities ARE forgiven, and whose sins ARE covered. 8: Blessed *is* the man TO WHOM THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN.

God will not impute sin to us because we have no sin to impute since Christ our Scapegoat carried them away to a land not inhabited. We see our sins because we still have a sin-nature and sin is mixed with all that we do. But before God, before the law and justice of God, it is a fact that his people have no sin because Christ put our sins away. The sins we commit today, Christ put away on the cross over two thousand years ago. That does not make us want to sin more; his love for us constrains the believer to live for him. It is because,

Psalm 103:12: As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 43:25: I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Jeremiah 31:34: And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 50:20: In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve.

Now, the same justice of God recorded in God's law in our text protect us. God says, "*the innocent and righteous slay thou not!*" Therefore, knowing that we are innocent and righteous before the law of God by the work Christ accomplished on our behalf, the best news there is to a believer is that God is holy and just! God will not slay the innocent and righteous because God is just. In Christ, by Christ, we are righteous therefore according to the righteous nature of God, he will never charge us with sin but will, with Christ, freely give us all spiritual blessings.

Romans 8: 32: He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?

Since God is holy and his own just law declares we have no sin and have obeyed the law perfectly, there is no way that God will not, with Christ, freely give us every spiritual blessing that God gave us in Christ before the world was made. His righteous nature demands that God freely give us all things.

Romans 8: 33: Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. 34: Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

It is God himself that justifieth his elect! It is Christ himself that died for us! Christ is at God's right hand interceding for us, declaring that we have perfectly obeyed the law of God, without sin. What Christ did, we did in him because he is our Head. Therefore, God's own justice demands that no one can charge us with sin nor condemn us!

This is why the most comforting attribute of God to a believer, who is innocent and righteous in Christ, is God's chief attribute, holiness. God is the just judge who only judges justly. As we saw from God's word, "*He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD*" (Pro 17:15). Therefore, God will not condemn us because by the blood and righteousness of Christ we are just!

THE GLORY OF GOD'S WISDOM

This is the glory of God's wisdom. It is written, "*By mercy AND truth iniquity is purged*" (Pro 16:6). It is the very GLORY OF GOD shown to Moses when

"the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping MERCY for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, AND that will BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE GUILTY; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex 34: 6-7).

This is what is revealed in the newly created heart when *of God, Christ is made unto us Wisdom* (1 Cor 1: 30). The glory of God's wisdom is in God providing the way to show mercy to his guilty people while

honoring his justice which demands we die. Oh, the wisdom of God! God our Father found a way to save us from our sins while slaying us because of our sins.

God does not say “*by mercy*” is the iniquity of his people purged. Nor does he say “*by truth*” is our iniquity put away. But the glory of his wisdom says “*by mercy AND truth*” is the iniquity of his people removed forever.

That way is called “Substitution!” And that substitute is God’s only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! It was a real substitution. If it were not real why then was Christ really made flesh? Why was Christ really made under the law? Christ took our place so that he really became the only sin-bearer who alone satisfied, honored and magnified God’s holy justice! By doing so he put away the sin of his people forever! Oh, what good news! Oh, what glory!

We know our Lord Jesus is holy and spotless and knew no sin. We never want to say anything that would diminish his glory. But do not forget the purpose of God in sending his Son to the cross to be crucified in place of his people. I do not know how to say this as it ought to be said. So please do not misunderstand me. Please do not misquote me. Please do not imagine that I am trying to diminish the glory of our sinless Lord Jesus Christ in any way. Our Lord Jesus Christ knew no sin. He is himself the innocent, spotless Lamb of God, who never sinned. But the chief purpose of God in the Lord Jesus being crucified on the cross was not to manifest his innocence. The chief purpose of Christ crucified is to manifest the righteousness of God! The chief purpose for which the Son of God was made flesh, made under the law, made sin and made a curse for us was to manifest that the Judge of heaven and earth only judges just judgment according to his righteous, holy nature!

The devil in his subtilty will trick men into defending the glory of Christ’s innocence in order that they might dishonor the very glory of God, which is the righteousness of God. When God showed Moses his glory, the glory God declared is that he keeps “*MERCY for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, AND that will BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE GUILTY.*”

Psalms 85:9: Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that GLORY may dwell in our land. 10: MERCY AND TRUTH ARE MET TOGETHER; RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE HAVE KISSED EACH OTHER 11: TRUTH shall spring out of the earth; and RIGHTEOUSNESS shall look down from heaven.

As I behold the Son of God hanging upon the cursed tree, made sin for me, bearing all the terror of God’s holy wrath for me, forsaken of God and slain for me, I see the glory of God’s absolute truth—his infinite inflexible justice and infinite immaculate holiness—in complete harmony with his infinite mercy.

The glory of God is revealed as it could not be revealed in any other way in Christ and him crucified. An ocean of tears could be cried and a lifetime of pleading yet they cannot turn away the sword of justice. Mercy may beg leniency for a thousand lifetimes, and love beg for pardon until the very last breath, but justice is unaffected and unbending. Justice “*will by no means clear the guilty.*”

But God, in infinite wisdom and love, found a way to both give his people the wages of sin we earned while at the same time forgiving us all our sins. We behold this glory of God in the cleft of the Rock typified by that rock where God put Moses when he showed him his glory and that Rock is Christ! In the face of his only begotten Son we behold the glory of God—his Righteousness!

Those born of God’s grace and given faith in Christ Jesus are justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Since Christ honored and magnified the law of God, how shall the just

Judge not with Christ freely give us all things? The same justice that demanded we die in Christ, now demands we live by Christ!

Job 33:24: Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.

Romans 3:25: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26: TO DECLARE, I say, at this time HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS.

Now, you who rest in our Lord Jesus, are righteous and innocent. And God promises, according to his holiness, that he will never slay the innocent! This is our hope! This is our salvation! God is holy and just!

NOT UNDER LAW BUT UNDER GRACE

But, what about God's law in our text? In Christ we have fulfilled it perfectly, along with every other law! By Christ establishing the whole law of God, his people established the whole law of God in him. This is the good news that faith lays hold of when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Through faith in Christ we have established the whole law of God.

Now, we are not under law but under the gracious rule of our Redeemer. What does it mean to be under the rule of grace? It means that it is not legal obligation or fear of judgment that constrains us to walk in a way so as to honor God. It is Christ's great love for us that is our constraint to put away lying and to speak truth and to deal justly and mercifully with one another. God says,

Ephesians 4:25: Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

1 Thessalonians 5:22: Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Micha 6: 8: He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

We do justly—*we cease wresting judgment and cease bearing false witness*—when we take sides with God against our own sinful selves and believe on Christ who magnified and honored the law when he satisfied justice for us. We love mercy when we are brought to confess our sins and beg God for mercy, delighting that God shows us mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. We walk humbly with our God when God has created in us a broken and contrite spirit to own ourselves to be the sinner and Christ to be our Savior. And by the constraint of Christ's love for us, from our new heart, it is our earnest desire to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God in all our dealings with our brethren and with all men.

Thank God that in Christ Jesus he has made mercy and truth kiss in harmony as he saved us from our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the law!

Amen!