

(Love is not) "... rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and **it keeps no record of being wronged.**" (1 Cor 13:5, NIV)

God does not record our sins for the purpose of being sure that each one is punished. He does not have to. The punishment is built into every sin as its natural consequence. When God is said to punish or execute judgment, what we might see as retributive justice is really allowing natural consequences of chosen actions. This is expressed in such verses as:

- "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:15)
- "... sin pays its wage—death ..." (Rom 6:23, GNT)
- "Evil shall slay the wicked ..." (Psa 34:21)
- "... whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Gal 6:7)

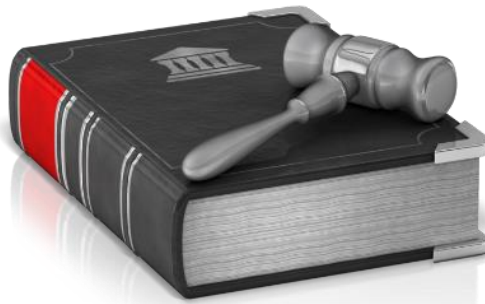
The truth is that there are no verses using the word "justice" (KJV) which support that justice means to punish sin.

#### How the Bible uses "Justice"

"Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face." (Psa 89:14)

In this example using Hebrew synonymous parallelism, the verse equates "justice" with "mercy" and "judgment" with "truth." It is Divine justice to extend mercy and forgiveness. God always does the just or right thing. His goal is always to heal and save. Thus, "**The Biblical Healing Model**" of the gospel.

In the media of today's society, there is much talk of even very old court cases with an emphasis on the need for justice in the form of retributive action. This promotes the idea that every sin must be punished



as though that is the solution to problems. The real solution is to heal the hurt even in the case of the perpetrators of crime. In many cases, extending forgiveness would go a long way towards that end.

"Imagine a genuinely loving parent who tells his child to never touch the pesticides in the garage, even warning, "in the day you do you will surely die." One day the child disobeys the explicit instructions of the parent, that parent's "law," and messes with the pesticides even accidentally drinking some. Now, the child, from exposure to this toxin develops leukemia, what does justice require?

Would justice require the parent let the child die, even if the parent had bone marrow which could save the child? Would justice require the parent beat the child, or worse yet kill the child in order to be just, to satisfy the "legal" requirements their broken "law" demanded? What would justice require? What does justice look like when it is based on the law of love? What does love compel the parent to justly do, if capable? Of course, save the child! Likewise, God's justice is all about salvation.

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## Two Ways to Understand the Gospel



### No. 3 – God's Justice

In tract 2, we learned that all of God's laws were designed by a loving, other-centered Creator for our good, not His. When we think of laws, we naturally think of the penalty that goes with them. In our system of justice, those are imposed penalties to go with imposed laws. Since God's laws are design laws, there are natural consequences to breaking them. He tells us not to do certain things because doing them will hurt ourselves or others. There is no need for Him to impose a penalty. And it would not make sense for God to do that because the "penalty," the hurtful consequence, is exactly what He is trying to protect us from.

God's justice is not Him imposing penalties which, if He did, would fit into the **Traditional Legal Model** of the Gospel. Rather, it is Him doing the just or right thing to warn and protect us from harm, to heal and restore which fits into the **Biblical Healing Model** of

the gospel. Here are definitions of justice from each model:

**Traditional Legal Model** – justice demands the penalty/wages of death and eternal separation from God. It is only satisfied if the guilty person pays that penalty or if someone else pays on his behalf. Justice is retributive.

**Biblical Healing Model** – justice is doing the right thing which is to restore to a right state, to heal and to save. It is right to treat others as we wish to be treated, to not hold grudges and to not keep account of sins. Justice is restorative.

It is reasonable to say that God is just and always acts justly because He is love. He is not love because He acts justly but He acts justly because He is love. We do what we do and act the way we do because of our nature; who and what we are. God will always do the just thing because of His nature of love. So, we can be assured that any justice coming from God will be done in love. Justice is based on love not the other way around. God's justice will always manifest His love and therefore will never be angry or uncontrolled or done with a vengeful spirit. And it will always be done for our good, not His.

When we base our understanding of God's character on His nature of love (tract no. 1) and see that His laws are all



for our benefit (tract no. 2) it is easier to understand the nature of His justice.

Correctly defining Biblical justice will help us to understand some apparent inconsistencies such as why King David wasn't stoned for adultery and the murder of Uriah the Hittite.



### Justice in the Bible

Here are some verses describing justice:

"Wash yourselves clean. Stop all this evil that I see you doing. Yes, stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done---help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows." (Isa 1:16-17, GNT)

"This is what the LORD says to the dynasty of David: 'Give justice each morning to the people you judge! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors ...'" (Jer 21:12 – NLT)

Justice is not primarily about punishment but about fair treatment and protecting people's rights.

In discussions of God's character, sceptics will often say that "God is love but He is also just" implying that He will surely impose punishment. However, that is found nowhere in the Bible. Scripture does say that God is love (1 John 4:8) and it does say that God is just (Deut 32:4). However, combining them with the "but" puts the two in opposition. It suggests the idea that God is love but if you cross Him, watch out! - He will change His attitude towards you and show His just side. In fact, every use of "just" or "justice" in the Bible reflects a loving action. It will say to show justice to the poor, to widows or the elderly. Never does it suggest the idea of retribution as many believe.

### How God's Justice Works

"The LORD is known for his justice. The wicked are trapped by their own deeds ..." (Psa 9:16, NLT)

The clear meaning of "justice" is "what is right" or "what is normal" — the way things are supposed to be according to God's design laws. So, justice simply means putting things right again — repairing, and restoring anything broken, especially relationships.

Some will want to question how justice fits with the idea of "an eye for an eye" - that sounds like justice. The question is: was Moses specifying what action should be taken or setting a limit on revenge? Understanding that God's revelation of spiritual light is progressive (as we are able to bear it) and that Jesus is the ultimate expression of the character of God, let's see what Jesus said about an eye for an eye. When Jesus came, He spoke of a higher standard. On the subject of retribution, He said it like this:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt 5:38-39)

And what did Jesus do when we would judge that He certainly had cause (as He was being arrested) for retribution? He did not resist even though He could have:

"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt 26:53)

Surprisingly, when it comes to justice, to imposing a penalty for sin, not only does God not execute retributive justice, He does not even keep track of sins in order to punish them.