

FAMILY INTERVENTIONS TO RESTORE LOST SHEEP

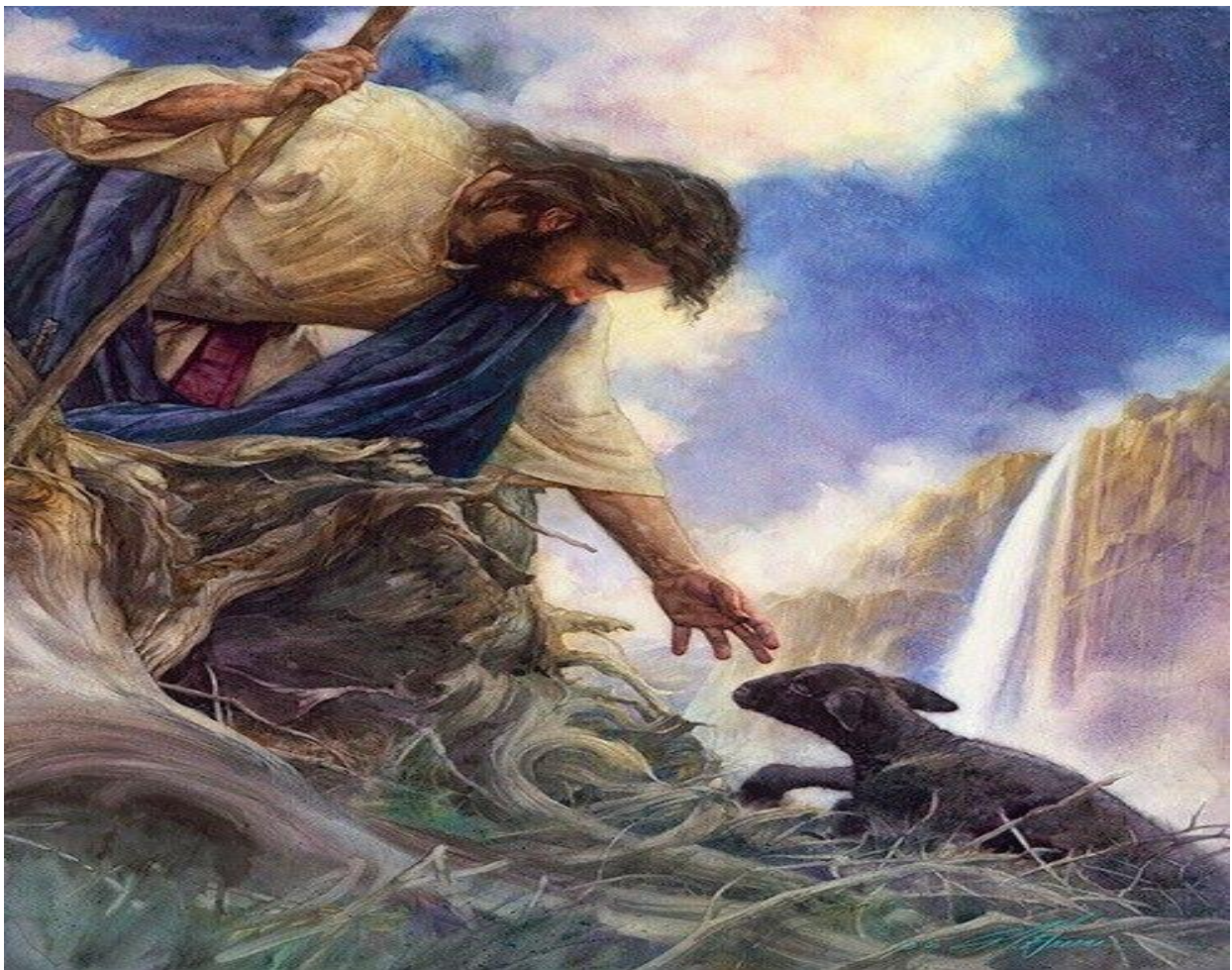
By David Lee Burris



THESE PICTURES ADORNED MY MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS KITCHEN IN NEDERLAND, TEXAS



MANY IF NOT MOST PEOPLE WOULD IDENTIFY WITH THIS ARTIST PORTRAYAL MUCH BETTER



Four Types of Justice

There are 4 types of justice that people can seek when they have been wronged.

Distributive justice

Distributive justice, also known as *economic justice*, is about *fairness* in what people receive, from goods to attention. Its roots are in social order and it is at the roots of socialism, where equality is a fundamental principle.

If people do not think that they are getting their fair share of something, they will seek first to gain what they believe they deserve. They may well also seek other forms of justice.

Procedural justice

The principle of *fairness* is also found in the idea of *fair play* (as opposed to the *fair share* of distributive justice).

If people believe that a fair process was used in deciding what it to be distributed, then they may well accept an imbalance in what they receive in comparison to others. If they see both procedural and distributive injustice, they will likely seek restorative and/or retributive justice.

Restorative justice

The first thing that the betrayed person may seek from the betrayer is some form of restitution, putting things back as they should be.

The simplest form of restitution is a straightforward apology. Restoration means putting things back as they were, so it may include some act of contrition to demonstrate one is truly sorry. This may include action and even extra payment to the offended party.

Restorative justice is also known as *corrective justice*.

Retributive justice

Retributive justice works on the principle of punishment, although what constitutes fair and proportional punishment is widely debated. While the intent may be to dissuade the perpetrator or others from future wrong-doing, the re-offending rate of many criminals indicates the limited success of this approach.

Punishment in practice is more about the satisfaction of victims and those who care about them. This strays into the realm of revenge, which can be many times more severe than reparation as the hurt party seeks to make the other person suffer in return. In such cases 'justice' is typically defined emotionally rather than with intent for fairness or prevention.

Restorative Justice

Unlike classical criminal justice theories that focus primarily on punishment as a deterrent to crime, the restorative justice perspective seeks to repair the harm caused by crime. Restorative justice offers an approach that centers on community-based responses to crime by providing opportunities for redemption for offenders and encouraging reconciliation with victims. The theory encompasses both individual and social approaches, placing victims at the center of crime control and positioning community members as facilitators in this process.

Restorative justice theory rests on the fundamental principle that the people most directly harmed by crime should be the ones to participate in its resolution. Offenders must take responsibility for their criminal activity and the harm it has inflicted. Accountable to both the victims and the community, offenders must engage in a process with victims to determine how to make amends and provide restitution to the victims with the goal of reintegration of both offenders and victims within the community.

Over the last 40 years, restorative justice theory has informed criminal justice policies to reduce recidivism, address the needs of victims, and improve public safety within communities. The principles of the theory have been applied to prison rehabilitation programs and conflict resolution initiatives in schools and social service agencies. The application of restorative justice in criminal cases allows victims to testify at sentencing hearings about the impact of the crime on their lives and gives them a role in the decision-making process to hold offenders accountable.

Some common restorative justice applications include **family interventions** and mediation and peacemaking circles. Family intervention and mediation programs use skill-building methods to address acts of juvenile violence against family members. Peacemaking or "talking circles" rely on the practice of "deep listening" and dialogue between offenders and victims to develop trust and understanding. This process culminates in sentencing circles that include the participation of judges, probation officers, defense counsel, prosecutors, and community stakeholders.

Retributive Justice

Retributive justice theory argues that everyone who commits a criminal act deserves to suffer a punishment, administered by courts of law, and that the severity of this punishment should be in proportion to the harm caused by the crime committed. It is therefore morally wrong to punish innocent people for crimes they have not committed, and is unacceptable to inflict disproportionately large or severe punishments not warranted by the damage caused by the crime.

RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE THEORY POSITS THAT DETERRENCE PROVIDES THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND FOR MAINTAINING LAW AND ORDER.

Contemporary versions of retributive justice theory emphasize rational choice and deterrence. These approaches argue that humans make rational choices to either abide by society's laws or to violate them. Individuals may decide to commit a crime because it brings them pleasure or satisfies their wants and needs. The theory argues that punishments must cause enough pain to outweigh the pleasure derived from committing the crime. The principle of deterrence rests on the assumption that, if punishment is certain, severe, and swift enough, individuals will weigh the costs and benefits and then choose to refrain from committing crimes, thereby maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain.

Retributive justice theory posits that deterrence provides the foundation for the criminal justice system and for maintaining law and order. The major focus of retribution rests on the nature of the crime itself and accountability for the offenders rather than the effect of the crime on the victims.

Deterrence provides the justification for contemporary policies that impose maximum prison terms and mandatory sentences. Programs such as Scared Straight that arrange encounters in correctional facilities between juvenile offenders and convicts serving life terms operate on the premise that scare tactics and threats will deter these young offenders from continuing criminal activity and avoid prison terms. Boot camps and shock incarceration programs also use fear, strict disciplinary techniques, and brief periods of incarceration to deter offenders from further criminal activity.

Retributive vs. Restorative Justice

Retributive Justice	Restorative Justice
Crime is an act against the state, a violation of a law, an abstract idea	Crime is an act against another person and the community
The criminal justice system controls crime	Crime control lies primarily in the community
Offender accountability defined as taking punishment	Accountability defined as assuming responsibility and taking action to repair harm
Crime is an individual act with individual responsibility	Crime has both individual and social dimensions of responsibility
Punishment is effective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threats of punishment deter crime • Punishment changes behavior 	Punishment alone is not effective in changing behavior and is disruptive to community harmony and good relationships
Victims are peripheral to the process	Victims are central to the process of resolving a crime.
The offender is defined by deficits	The offender is defined by capacity to make reparation
Focus on establishing blame or guilt, on the past (did he/she do it?)	Focus on the problem solving, on liabilities/obligations, on the future (what should be done?)
Emphasis on adversarial relationship	Emphasis on dialogue and negotiation
Imposition of pain to punish and deter/prevent	Restitution as a means of restoring both parties; goal of reconciliation/restoration
Community on sideline, represented abstractly by state	Community as facilitator in restorative process
Response focused on offender's past behavior	Response focused on harmful consequences of offender's behavior; emphasis is on the future
Dependence upon proxy professionals	Direct involvement by participants

Comparison Between Retributive and Restorative Justice

According to retributivism, which is a central pillar of the retributive form of justice, the reason for punishing is attributed to the fact that the wrongdoer deserves to be punished. This statement may sound simple not unless one looks at the underlying implication that forms an essential aspect concerning morality and law. Retributivism requires retribution to be the central rationale for the law. The retributive form of justice assumes that there are rules whose purpose is primarily ensuring good morals of people. The crime, on the other hand, in spite of being victimless harms the society. As such, when a person violates the law, he/she offends the rules governing the state and rules governing the behavior of the citizens(Fiala, 2015).

The restorative form, on the other side of the spectrum, is anchored in the entirely different logic and philosophy. It is considered as the philosophy and social movement that offer an entirely different approach to handling crime and punishment. In comparison to retributive justice in which the state is the major victim of a felonious act and punishes the wrongdoers, who do not participate in finding the solution to the offense, the restorative form of justice, elsewhere strives at healing and rehabilitating the parties at war. The assumption of this form of justice is that individuals mostly affected by criminal acts need to be presented with an opportunity of participating in finding the solution to the conflict. The objective of restorative justice is allowing the offenders to be liable for doing misconducts to their fellow citizens and aid the victimized to overcome their bad encounters(Rotondi, 2015).

Advantages of Restorative Form of Justice

The restorative form of justice holds that the offenders be accountable for their actions although in a constructive and meaningful way and this may result in a more maintained experience of justice for the victim and the society as a whole. The victim and the offender both get highly gratified with the approach and the results.

This form of justice measures the success, and this makes it unique than retributive and other forms of justice. For instance, rather than merely measuring the extent of the imposed penalty, the restorative form measures the degree to which the damage has been mended or avoided to reoccur in the future. This property is an essential benefit of this form of justice since this helps to ensure the presence of truth and reconciliation. Moreover, justice to all is ensured(Gavrielides, 2015).

The engagement of the victim and the offender is observed at all times for the benefit of the restorative form of justice. Through this participation, the victim and the offender are provided with the responsibility, which at times is decision-making supremacy and the right to be heard. The Restorative puts the offenders at the kindness of judicial systems, and this may proceed in either way. For instance, the offender may be decided not be guilty or guilty. Therefore, this is essential since it ensures that the justice to the offenders is provided equally as to the victims(Fiala, 2015). – Internet Search Engine Free Source

Divine justice as restorative justice

The word “retribution” (from the Latin *retribuere*) simply means “repayment”—the giving back to someone of what they deserve, whether in terms of reimbursement, reward, or reproof. Usually the term is used in the negative sense of punishment for wrongful deeds rather than in the positive sense of reward for good behavior. When the word is used in isolation, it tends to evoke the idea of vengeance or retaliation. When it is paired with the word “justice” however, it implies a more measured delivery of punishment as due recompense for wrongdoing.

...In my view, there can be little doubt that biblical teaching on justice includes a definite theme of retribution. Most basically, the Bible recognizes that human deeds carry inescapable consequences. There is a kind of inbuilt law of recompense in the universe that means people “reap whatever they sow” (Galatians 6:7, cf. Ecclesiastes 10:8; Proverbs 1:32; 26:27; Psalm 7:15-16). In addition, the basic retributive concepts of guilt, desert, proportionality, and atonement are widely attested in the Old Testament legal and cultic system, and undergird moral and theological teaching in the New Testament as well. Furthermore, since God is inherently just, and God’s judgments are never capricious, biblical accounts of divine judgment on sin, both within history and at the end of time, may also be regarded as demonstrations of retributive justice. The biblical story ends with an affirmation of the retributive principle of just deserts: “See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone’s work” (Revelation 22:12).

...Biblical justice includes retributive components, but it cannot be adequately characterized principally as retributive justice. It is better described as a **relational or restorative justice**. The fundamentally restorative character of biblical justice is evident at four main levels of the biblical material.

– *Baylor College Series*

In his article “**Move Down! Clean Cup!**” Christian Piatt states:

For the most part, human beings think of justice in pretty cut-and-dried terms. There’s a winner and a loser, someone bad gets what he has coming to him. This kind of justice is obsessed with fairness, with getting even, making things *right*. I call this type of justice retributive justice. And there are plenty of texts throughout the Bible that justify our reliance on this kind of justice. For example, how else can someone interpret “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” in Exodus 21:24? But if we consider that before this law came along, the law of the land, as we read in Genesis 4:15, was that a person who does wrong should be “avenged sevenfold,” then the act of taking only one eye actually constituted a dialing-back of the law, a reversal of the system of ever-escalating retribution and violence. And then Jesus comes along and does them all one better with “turn the other cheek.” Helps us understand what he means when he says he was coming to fulfill the law, not abolish it. Things were headed in the right direction; they just weren’t all the way there yet. And Jesus was pointing the way.

So Jesus was trying to guide us **away from our addiction to retributive justice** and toward a more *restorative* kind of justice. This justice is more concerned with **making things whole**, with reconciling divisions and brokenness, with holding out hope that oppressor and oppressed, **lion and lamb**, actually have an opportunity to live together in peace. Sorry, says Jesus, **if one is lost, we’re all lost. It’s about restoring this entire mess to wholeness, not about picking winners and losers.**

From Retributive to Restorative Justice in Romans

Gordon M. Zerbe

“Therefore, welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you” (Rom 15:7).¹ Everything in Romans leads, in one way or another, to this dramatic and concluding exhortation. Brought together is the theological substance of the entire foregoing argument (“as Christ has welcomed you”) with the practical issue of increasingly critical importance (“welcome one another”). The prevailing theme at the outset is God’s new justice-righteousness and justification (making right) over against universal human injustice and foreboding retribution. But that motif is overtaken, as the letter unfolds, by images of reconciliation, mercy, forgiveness, liberation, filiation (adoption as heirs), transformation, and re-creation, and ultimately by divine and human welcome.

A whole new system of justice-righteousness is coming into play through Christ...such that God becomes known especially as the one who “justifies the ungodly.”

At the core of Paul’s theological argument, designed to realize and sustain a unified community into the future, is that Christ welcomes in a way that demonstrates a radically new framework of justice-righteousness, what can appropriately be called “restorative justice.” God’s new framework of justice and justification through Christ is not simply a pardon that otherwise leaves the prior and prevailing retributive justice system intact, where a select few receive a free ticket to heaven while the rest of humanity finds eternal damnation. God’s new system of justice, which truly transforms the offender and reconciles the offender and the offended, involves a complete reorientation and transfer into what Paul calls the Regime of Grace, away from the Regime of Law. Only by seeing the other through this new lens can one truly “welcome” and be reconciled with the other.

TERMINOLOGY, TRANSLATION, AND THEORIES OF JUSTICE

Two of the most pressing difficulties of working with Romans are (1) the inadequacies of the English language to render Paul’s Greek discourse, and (2) the persistence of received interpretations enshrined in mainstream English translations. Two of the most important examples are the translations “righteousness” for *dikaïosynē* and “justify” for the counterpart verb *dikaioō*, and “faith” or “belief” for *pistis* and “believe” for the counterpart verb *pisteuō*. Greek and most other languages do not distinguish lexically between personal “righteousness” and relational-social “justice” (rightness, justness). English has torn notions of “righteousness” apart from those of “justice,” whereas in the biblical world they belong together.

Interpreters of Paul are now regularly translating *dikaiosynē* with the cumbersome, but more appropriate “justice-righteousness.”² Paul uses the verb in the sense of “effectively making right,” “achieving justice,” just as software programs now effectively “justify” our margins.³ Meanwhile, the English word “faith,” especially in the phrase “justification by faith” has taken on a set of meanings not fully consistent with Paul’s use of *pistis*. *Pistis* has three ranges of meaning, but most fundamentally means (1) “loyalty, fidelity, faithfulness,” and is often a virtual synonym of *hypakoē*, usually translated “obedience” (e.g. Romans 1:5; 10:14–16). But *pistis* can also have the sense of either (2) “trust, dependence, submission, or faith,” or (3) “conviction, proof, or belief.” While there are some cases where these latter senses are most patent, the core sense of “loyalty” and “fidelity” is always very close at hand. For that reason, *pistis* is best translated with a cumbersome “loyalty-faith,” or “trusting {45} loyalty” or “loyal faith.” Meanwhile, the English “believe” has evolved to mean simply mental conviction and adherence, and thus increasingly inappropriate for Paul’s *pisteuō*, which often carries the meaning “to be loyal,” to “submit in trusting loyalty,” or such like.

When Paul declares *dikaiosynē* as a key theme at the outset (Romans 1:17), many readers would have immediately recognized that Paul is entering into what was already a rather involved history of discussion as to what really *dikaiosynē* is. Paul announces the distinctiveness of “God’s justice-righteousness” that is now being revealed in the gospel, with the clear recognition that he will need to explain what precisely he means in the context of competing definitions, theories, and frameworks of “justice.” What kind of justice is God now “unveiling”⁴ through Christ?

For hundreds of years, Greek scholars and public intellectuals had debated appropriate theories of justice. For instance, Plato’s most famous dialogue, *The Republic*, is a lengthy discourse on what is *dikaiosynē*, as applied both to the individual and to the citizen community. Starting with a blistering assault on traditional, conventional, and skeptical theories (of interpersonal, distributive, or pragmatic-political justice), the entire dialogue argues for an alternative understanding: that *dikaiosynē* is a state of health both for the individual and the community, where all parts of the organism play their appropriate role, and is realized partly by education and a good system of laws, but most importantly and necessarily by the coming of a truly just sovereign (philosopher-king), as unlikely as that might be. Paul thus plays on a well-known topic of debate as he announces his theme about the new form of *dikaiosynē* that God is bringing into reality through the agency of Christ.

At the outset of his discourse, then, Paul declares that the gospel concerning the enthroned sovereign Lord Messiah Jesus newly reveals the “justice-righteousness of God.” As the letter unfolds, it becomes clear that this phrase involves at least four dimensions. It is (1) God’s own “justness” of character;⁵ (2) God’s alternative system of “justice” in the world; (3) the process of “justification” by which God’s makes things, people, and relationships right, especially the new moral character and status of “righteousness” that humans obtain, first, as a pure gift (3:21–5:21), and then, as actualized, transformed moral character (5:12–8:13); and (4) the new state or order that emerges when God’s justice-righteousness is fully realized, taking on a meaning synonymous to “kingdom of God,” “salvation” (restoration, deliverance, safety, health)⁷ or “aeonic life.”⁸

As suggested above, the divine justice-righteousness that Paul methodically explains represents a form of what is called “restorative justice” in {46} recent theory.⁹ As developed especially as an alternative to the prevailing “criminal justice system,” the restorative justice paradigm (with its own multiple variations), sees crime especially as a **violation of people and relationships**, and asks the following questions: Who has been hurt? What are their needs? Whose obligations are these? What are the causes? Who has a stake in the situation? What is the appropriate process to involve stakeholders in an effort to address causes and put things right? By contrast, the traditional criminal justice system sees crime as a violation of the law or the state, and asks: What laws have been broken? Who did it? What do the offender(s) deserve (justice must primarily satisfy the demands of the law, especially through punishment)? Restorative justice can also be described in terms of its three pillars. Firstly, it focuses on harms and needs. Focusing on harm implies an inherent concern for the victims’ needs and roles, seeking to repair that harm as much as possible. Secondly, restorative justice emphasizes offender accountability and responsibility. There are obligations that the offender must learn to understand. Lastly, restorative justice promotes engagement for those impacted by the wrongdoing—victims, offenders, and members of the community. All of the stakeholders need to be part of the decision of how to move forward from the wrongdoing.¹⁰

While there are certainly significant differences between Paul’s explanation of “God’s justice-righteousness” and modern “restorative justice” theory,¹¹ and certainly different contexts of development and application,¹² there are some crucial points of similarity or correspondence. (1) Both show an awareness of the limited value, or even the counter-productive effects of a preoccupation on punishment as the key earmark of realizing justice (as primarily retribution, vengeance). (2) Both focus on the aim of justice to heal relationships and offenders, while at the same time meeting the needs of victims (or in Paul’s case, **repairing the breach in the broken relationship with the sovereign, God, as a result of wrongdoing and injustice**). (3) Both show an awareness of the role of the whole community, both in the process and in the restoring/restored outcome, not seeing justice as a transaction that occurs primarily in private or behind closed doors.

THE CONTEXT

In order to understand Paul’s multi-layered and multi-purposed letter, one must appreciate its context. In the winter months of early 56, Paul is lodging in Corinth at the house of Gaius, presumably one of the wealthier members of the Corinthian congregation (host-patron of the whole assembly). Paul is enjoying a short calm in the midst of a storm. He has just come out of a harrowing experience of imprisonment, torture, and hardship in Asia (where he was “unbearably and utterly crushed” so that he “despaired of life itself”; 2 Cor 1:8) and then in Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5–6), the {47} immediate context for his reflections on the meaning of suffering in Romans 5:1–5 and 8:17–39 (cf. 2 Cor 11:23–12:10). And just as he fears mounting opposition in Judea (Rom 15:30–32), in just a few more months he will be back in Roman detention, as things erupt in Jerusalem (Acts 20–25).

So, during a few months of reprieve (Acts 20:1–3), Paul is resting and convalescing, nursing his physical and psychological wounds. And he is no doubt rejoicing that he has won back the Corinthian congregation after years of protracted tensions, and especially that they have contributed to the relief fund for the poor of Judea (Rom 15:26), a project that has occupied him for six years. But mostly he is waiting, reflecting, studying Scripture, and praying. He has travel plans on his mind, but for the moment he must wait, as all the major sea-faring ships are moored at port for the winter season (usually from mid-November to mid-March).

Paul is especially contemplating what is happening on the horizon. From a vantage point a few hundred meters from town, he can see the sun rise on the sea to the east, and he can see the sun set on the sea to the west. Looking east, he thinks of Jerusalem. He has not been there for eight years, and the last time he was there he formally established a “partnership” with the leaders of the Jerusalem congregation, by which his ministry among the nations-gentiles was affirmed. Once travel season opens, he expects to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost, to deliver practical assistance to the poor of Judea (suffering from famine and an unjust system of imperial tribute). Paul sees this undertaking especially as a token of unity & “partnership” across the waters that divide.

Turning toward the horizon to the west, Paul sees both opportunity in Spain, but also foreboding crises in Rome. Though he has never been to Rome, he has numerous friends and co-workers there (Romans 16), and through correspondence with them he has kept up on the dynamics of this strategically located center. The Jesus loyalists in Rome are found in multiple house assemblies, and increasing disputes have meant that not all remain “in communion” with each other.¹⁴

This local divide thus replicates the mounting global gulf among Jesus loyalists. At one end are mainly Judean Jesus Messianists (“Christians”)¹⁶ committed to a detailed, literal interpretation and application of Torah (centered in Jerusalem, with thousands embracing this perspective; Acts 21). On the other side there are the overwhelming majority of non-Judean adherents. What it means to be “practicing” (in regard to regulations for “walking”) is a hotly contested matter, and the cause of increasing tensions and divisions.¹⁸ The letter is deliberately addressed to “*all* God’s beloved,” embracing all the factional components now tearing the community of Christ apart (14:1–15:13). Along the way, Paul makes it clear that both those of Judean heritage and those of non-Judean heritage are equally named specifically as “beloved” (9:25–26; 11:28).

Conscious of what is on the horizon and with travel on his mind, both east and west, and with a fair bit of time on his hands as he waits for the travel season by ship to reopen, Paul constructs his longest and most complex letter that is both essay and appeal in four densely packed movements, each concluding with a dramatic crescendo (4:24–25; 8:31–39; 11:32–36; 15:7–13), and all interconnected with recurring and developing motifs. With complex issues to discuss, and intractable issues to resolve, not all passages are easy to follow, and it is not always clear what particular points Paul wishes to score with his divided audience, each side carefully listening for how he either supports their position or rebukes the other side.

THE FIRST MOVEMENT: FROM RETRIBUTION TO GOD'S RESTORING JUSTICE NEWLY REVEALED IN CHRIST

In the first movement, God's newly revealed justice-righteousness (1:17; 3:21–4:25) is set over against the revelation of impartial divine retribution (“wrath”²⁰ in response to universal human injustice-immorality (1:18–3:20; 3:23). In a scathing indictment that first targets the gentile idolaters (1:18–32), then entraps the self-righteous moralists (2:1–5), and finally challenges the Judeans (2:17–29), no one individual or human {49} group is left unscathed. Undermining the Jew-gentile binary (2:9–16), all humanity is equally liable (*hypodikos*, lit. “under justice,” 3:19). The playing field has been leveled, completely flattened: all human beings are at the same level of disadvantage before God. Human failure in relation to God's impartial retributive justice is total, universal, and absolute. Arguing on the premises of the Law, he claims that justice will take into account varying awareness of the Law, thereby undermining all Judean advantage because they “possess” and “hear” the Law (2:12–29).

The traditional interpretation is that Paul is simply setting up the need and plight—the utter failure of guilt—of all humanity. But there are hints that there is more to it. Paul observes that the display of divine retribution operates by an exacting measure of the Law (3:19; it “counts” offenses, 5:13), and indeed intimates that the prevailing system of Law and retribution is incapable of truly resolving the human dilemma (3:20). Only as the argument progresses into the second movement will we learn that the prevailing system of Law, along with its retributive aims and assumptions, will itself be undone, as it gives way to God's new system of a restoring justice under the banner of merciful Generosity (Grace).

When Paul turns to the contrasting revelation of God's justice-righteousness (3:21–4:25), he thus immediately claims that it is manifested “apart from the Law,” even though attested to by the Law and the prophets (expressing a deep ambivalence and tension in the argument). Paul makes the following main points: (1) God's justice-righteousness is revealed through divine initiative and in particular through Messiah's own fidelity (3:22, 26);²¹ (2) it is displayed and proven precisely in an act of generosity (grace) and forbearance, whereby previously committed offenses are “passed over,” through the sacrificial death of Christ (3:24–25; 4:25);²² (3) it aims toward and is appropriated through an act of human fidelity (3:22); and (4) it means that the “justification” of those who respond in loyal [obedient faith] occurs as a pure gift (3:24a), whereby righteousness is “reckoned” simply in response to complete “fidelity, conviction, surrender, and trust” (4:1–12, 18–25). As will become clearer in the second and third movements, the display of God's justice-righteousness precisely through an act of forbearing mercy means that God's own divine retribution is rendered a mere potentiality²³ (albeit a continuing threat, since mercy cannot be presumed upon: 2:4–5; 11:22–24), and not the final outcome in the world.

Paul knows that he has dealt a decisive blow to the ongoing status of the Law.²⁴ But as a measure and means itself, all it can do is “retribution” (4:15); restoration and blessing can only come through justice-righteousness, not through the Law (4:13–14). As Theodore Jennings notes, Paul propounds an “Outlaw Justice.”²⁵

The point is that a whole new system of justice-righteousness is coming into play through Christ, one that precisely and literally “by-passes” (3:25) the rules of retribution, such that God becomes known especially as the one who “justifies the ungodly [damnable nations-gentiles]” (4:5; cf. 5:6–8). The prior system of divine retribution can only level the playing field, but is otherwise incapable of achieving God’s redemptive purposes in the world, leaving all humanity in a situation of no-exit (see further below on 9:22–32 and 11:32).

THE SECOND MOVEMENT: THE REGIME OF GENEROSITY (GRACE) REPLACES THE REGIME OF LAW, AS A WAY TO OVERCOME THE REGIME OF ERROR-INJUSTICE (SIN)

The second movement (chaps. 5–8) builds on the first, emphasizing at the outset that what results from the coming of justice-righteousness through Christ is peace and reconciliation with God, and relief from the threat of retribution (5:1–11). And Paul highlights that this restoring justice for the absolutely undeserving derives from God’s love (5:6–8), even as it engenders love (as becomes clear later: 12:9–21; 13:8–10; 14:15). The core of the second movement is the dynamism of the renewing regime of Grace (through the agency of Messiah) over against regime of Sin-Injustice²⁶ (through the agency of Adam), and the regime of Law (revealed through Moses) which turned out to be incapable of truly overcoming the regime of Sin-Injustice and Death (5:12–8:13).

Whereas the first movement stressed the human response of faithful trust in response to the divine initiative (1:16–17; 3:22; 4:1–25), while noting the crucial agency of Christ’s own fidelity itself as both prototypical and salvific (1:17; 3:22, 26),²⁷ the second movement first puts the emphasis on the agency of Christ (his obedience and righteous act) alongside its {51} universal effect to establish justice “for all humanity, the justice of life.” Moreover, the argument next orients the human response of fidelity in the wake of Christ’s fidelity and efficacy as obedient, willful, moral action (6:11–22; 8:5–13), by virtue of being moved, through absorption into Christ, from a debilitating Regime of Law into an empowering Regime of Grace (6:1–7:6; 8:1–4): “You are [now] not under the regime of Law, but under the regime of Grace” (6:14–15). As Paul puts it later:

You have died to the Law through the body of Christ,
in order that you might be joined to a different person, who was raised from the
dead, so that you will bear fruit for God....
And now we are released from the Law, having died to that to which we were
bound,
so that we might serve in the new way of the Spirit and not the old way of the letter
[written code]. (7:4, 6)

Ironically, only in this new condition and framework of liberation from the Law, Paul argues, can the actual “justice requirements of the Law” be truly fulfilled (8:4). A release from the Law is required before its own justice content can be realized. The assumed, necessary correlation between Justice and Law has been severed in God’s new restoring justice. Though on the positive side the Law reveals God’s justice requirements (8:3–4; 13:8–10) and in itself can be considered “holy, just and good” (7:12–13, 16), it has a limited value: it brings knowledge of injustice-sin (3:20) and allows injustice-error to be carefully counted (5:13). Worse, the Law as a system of justice, even though it promised life, became the occasion for death through its exploitation by the power of Error-Sin in the world (7:10); it helped to keep humans captive, being used by the power of Error-Sin in the world to deceive, kill, corrupt and enslave (7:6, 11, 13–15); and it became powerless and incapable of saving (6:14; 8:3). Ultimately, all the Law could do was enliven and multiply Error-Sin by arousing wrongful passions (5:20; 7:5, 8, 9).

Through his encounter with Christ, and after sustained biblical reflection, Paul has come to understand that there are two key limitations to the Law. Paul’s problem is not that it imposes a psychological burden on people, promoting a paralyzing guilty conscience (the classic Protestant view). Rather, for Paul, the main problems with the Law are (1) that it excludes those who do not “possess” it, against its own inner purpose, oriented toward God’s plan to reconcile the whole world; and (2) that it is powerless to truly resolve the problem of injustice (Error-Sin) and to establish justice {52} in the world. Crucial to Paul’s understanding is a focus on the Law’s inner meaning, not its detailed rules: “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6).

Whereas, then, the first movement emphasized “justification” as pure gift, with “justice-righteousness” as something “reckoned,” the second movement dramatizes “justification” as holistic moral transformation (e.g. 6:7), and “justice-righteousness” as moral obligation and commitment. As put earlier, “the abundance²⁸ of God’s kindness, forbearance and patience” is designed to lead to repentance; it must never be presumed upon (2:4–5). God’s restorative justice is not soft on recognizing, naming, and dealing with actual offenses and wrongs.

THIRD MOVEMENT: GOD’S MERCY ULTIMATELY CONQUERS ALL HUMAN INFIDELITY

In the third movement, the question that is posed is whether God’s restorative justice as demonstrated through grace and mercy can ever be truly victorious (achieving results) and not merely capricious and seemingly unjust (cf. 3:1–8). At issue in particular is the question of Israel’s failure to respond to Messiah: What was its cause, and what will be the final outcome? Paul will ratchet up his argument even further by stressing the persistence, efficacy, and justness of God’s mercy in bringing about the complete restoration of the world, while negating any recourse to retributive justice.

Paul asserts that God's agency always trumps human agency in the divine economy: the divine economy "does not depend on human willing or running, but on divine mercying" (9:11–17). Not only this, God's decision to show mercy is never unjust, even though it may appear capricious (9:18–21). God is entirely free to choose the path of mercy at will, even now, without compromising God's justice.

Indeed, God has decided to move away from a system of retribution to one of mercy, compactly expressed in a crucial passage:

But what if God, though wishing to demonstrate retributive justice ("wrath") and [thereby] to make known his power, [instead] endured with much patience ("long-temper")²⁹ vessels³⁰ of retribution ("wrath") marked for destruction, in order, ultimately, to make known the abundance of his kindness³¹ upon vessels of mercy prepared in advance for glory. (Rom 9:22–23)

And the scriptural proof texts immediately adduced to demonstrate that this mercy now embraces both Israel-Judeans and the nations-gentiles all emphasize God's sole agency to make it happen (9:24–29). {53}

An interlude to explain Israel's temporary and partial failure, however, will turn things around to focus on the nature of human agency that is efficacious toward justice-righteousness in concert with divine agency (9:30–10:13). Israel "pursued a Law of justice-righteousness" but failed to achieve that goal (of justice-righteousness through the Law.) What the Law in fact proclaims as its inner meaning—as a way to achieve salvation and justice-justification as it finds its goal in Christ (10:3–8)—is the response of loyal conviction in God's power to bring life out of death alongside an oath of surrender and allegiance to Lord Jesus Messiah (10:9–13; cf. 1:5, 16–17; 4:18–22).³²

But the third movement closes with a return emphasis on God's sole agency to complete the restoration of the world, by moving from retribution to mercy:

For God has confined (enclosed, imprisoned) all humanity into disobedience, with the ultimate aim that God will have mercy on all humanity. (11:32)

Finally claiming the universal effects of the decisive interruption of the Regime of Grace in the world, with its universal effects (5:12–21), Paul asserts that divine mercy aims toward a universal outcome. All he can do is stop and exult with a doxology that highlights the universal scope of the divine will (11:33–36): "For God is the source, guide, and goal of all things [the universe]." ³⁴ With the same grand horizon in mind, Paul will end the entire theological argument of Romans with an emphasis on the universal, worldwide dominion of Messiah ("the one who rises to rule the nations," 15:12; cf. 8:17–39), bringing to completion both "the promises made to the ancestors" of Israel and the "mercy" offered to the nations. ³⁵

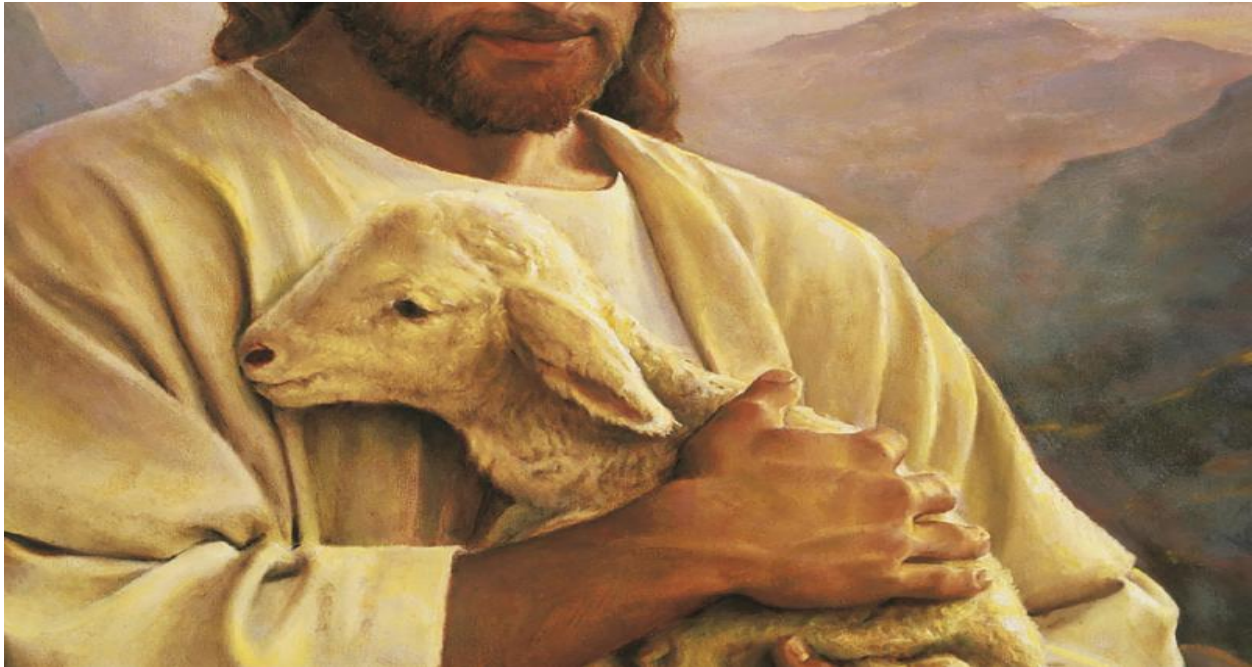
FOURTH MOVEMENT: GOD'S RESTORING JUSTICE SET IN PERSONAL PRACTICE

The fourth movement (12:1–15:13) contains sustained exhortation pertaining to practice. Crucially, Paul begins and orients the appeal (as a kind of moral code), not by reference to the sanctions of Law, but by reference to “God’s mercies,” the restoring action of God. In this way, Paul draws upon the entire discourse so far, on how divine mercy enacts God’s justice and thus **overcomes retribution**, but especially on how human {54} “justice-righteousness” is a **volitional commitment** and action in the Regime of Grace whereby one dedicates oneself to a **new mindset** and pathway (6:1–20). The virtues enjoined are especially social virtues, and the entire obligation of the Law is summed up in the command to love one’s neighbor, such that “the one who loves the other has fulfilled the Law,” an assertion important enough to be repeated, “love is the fullness of the Law” (13:8, 10; cf. 12:9).

The restorative dynamic in human relationships is consistent with the divine-human paradigm. Accordingly, Jesus followers are advised, toward the goal of peace and reconciliation with all people, to give up on their need to find retribution (“not repaying evil for evil”) and instead to **pursue restored relationships** (by “overcoming evil with good”), even with the enemy (12:14–21). The issue of finding vindication and vengeance is a matter to be left to the divine sovereign. This does not mean that God is reverting back to the retributive framework, but that believers are to let go of what is God’s prerogative (who may or may not choose actually to be known ultimately by retribution: Rom 9:22–23; 11:32).

Paul finally comes to the crux of the dispute that is raging locally and globally among Jesus followers, pleading for the “strong” to cease “despising” and for the “weak” to desist “judging.” Christians today are accustomed to thinking that the particular issues at stake (somehow pertaining to rules about food, or observances of days) are inconsequential, not among the things that really matter. But that would hardly have been the view of both parties.

Though he admits to being a partisan in the dispute, agreeing with the “strong” (14:14), he nevertheless spends more time challenging the “strong,” as they are under obligation to “support the weaknesses of the non-strong” (14:15–16, 20–21; 15:1). All must be attentive to the virtues of love, peace, justice, and **mutual upbuilding** (14:15, 17, 19). He carefully addresses both sides in the biblical dispute. The strong must not “destroy the brothers and sisters for {55} whom Christ died” (14:15). Though addressed differently, both sides of the dispute are invited to welcome the other just as God has already done. All must be convinced in their own minds (without prejudging or focusing on the other), ready to give an answer for their own behavior directly to Christ himself, whose tribunal is the only one that truly counts. They are not to be preoccupied about what is wrong with the other (14:5–12, 22–23). And recall what Paul has already explained: the divine tribunal considers **all things in the context of God’s restorative plans**, especially through mercy. All will be welcomed on the basis of absolute Generosity, as God in Christ has already welcomed them (15:3–7).



In his article titled “**The Good Shepherd**” Victor Conrado states:

If you have a hundred sheep and you lose one, well... too bad! One sheep out of a hundred is an acceptable loss. Hey, it's only 1 percent. When you think about it, our whole lives are based on the idea that there is an acceptable percentage of failure. We are at peace with this concept when we deal with other people, nature, and the environment. We send our young people to war knowing that not all of them will come back home. Well, it is a small sacrifice compared to the good that they do. We start every school year knowing there will be a certain dropout rate. Not everyone will graduate. We're happy when the unemployment rate is below 5 percent. We don't expect everyone to be able to keep a job. Marriages begin, but we know some will end. There is a percentage of failure. We accept it. So as far as we're concerned, losing only one sheep from a hundred isn't so bad. You might even say it's impressive.

We live in community with each other – all of us are inter-related – so when we talk about being “lost” we really refer to being separated from each other. In other words, the sheep was lost because, at the start, it was *part of the flock*. Being lost has to do with a broken connection. To say someone is lost is also to point to the effect that the lost one has on the others in the community.

In correlation of close community, the more intimately we’re connected to another person, the more we agonize when we’re separated. The less we’re connected, the less we’re affected.

This is the essence of the kingdom of God: we’re family! We are brothers and sisters in Christ, joined by our common allegiance to him. And because we belong to the body of Christ, when only one is missing, something of *us* is missing as well.

Likewise, the kingdom of God is not complete until everyone is safe, secure, and accounted for. We live in community with each other, or we don’t live at all.

May we remember that no one is lost to God. We must not think in the world’s terms of “acceptable percentages of loss,” but instead – like our good shepherd – we must seek out those who are lost and alone, missing from among us, and welcome them back to the flock with God’s love.

In Luke 15:4-7, Jesus told His audience about a man with 100 sheep. One of those sheep wandered off and became lost. Did the man simply say, “I still have 99 sheep left. One sheep isn’t that important”? No. The man was concerned about the lost sheep. He was so concerned that he left the 99 sheep to search for the one that had gone astray. When he found it, he called together his friends and asked them to rejoice. Why was he so excited? He said he was rejoicing because “I have found my sheep which was lost!”

What was Jesus’ point in this section of Luke 15? Was He trying to convince people of the value of a sheep? No. Jesus explained: “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

Jesus wanted the people around Him to learn two important lessons. First, in John 10:11, He called Himself “the Good Shepherd” and said that He would be willing to give His life for His sheep. Those “sheep” are Christians who listen to and obey Him. Just as actual sheep follow their shepherd, Christians follow Christ (1st Peter 2:21).



Second, Jesus wanted people to understand how valuable a single soul is, and to realize how horrible it is to be lost. In Matthew 16:26, Christ asked: “What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” In Matthew 18:11, He said that He had “come to save that which was lost.” There is nothing we possess that is more valuable than our soul. Jesus doesn’t want us to be like a sheep that wanders off, becomes lost, and dies. Instead, He wants us to stay close to Him, remain safe, and live forever in heaven. He wants us to be saved, not lost. Christ knew that our souls are far too valuable to be lost. The question is:

Do we know that?

