

Justifying the Wicked #2

Proverbs 17:15; Romans 4:4-5

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Rev. Greg L. Price

Last Lord's Day we considered how the office of civil rule was established by God (according to Romans 13:1-4) to be a terror to the wicked and a blessing to the righteous.

Paul states by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the office of civil magistrate was ordained by God to be a minister of God to thee for good (i.e. to be a minister of God for the benefit of the faithful Church of Jesus Christ and for the welfare of the citizens within that nation). That being the purpose for which God established the office of civil rulers, the magistrate who has access to the Word of God is bound and obligated to rule according to it in his administration of justice. For all his authority is delegated to Him by God—he is said to be God's minister, not his own minister, nor even his people's minister (first and foremost). He is, indeed, called to be a civil servant unto the citizens within his nation, but that is subordinate to the fact that he is first and foremost called to be God's minister as clearly delineated in Romans 13:4.

I would submit, dear ones, that he cannot legitimately be called a minister to the citizens of the nation if he is not first fulfilling his calling to be a minister of God, ruling on behalf of God and according to God's commandments revealed in Holy Scripture. For if he is not God's minister, he will not be the minister of God to thee for good, nor will he be a terror to the wicked in the nation, nor will he execute God's wrath and holy vengeance upon those who do evil as God requires him to do. Now when the civil magistrate refuses to do what God calls him to do (perhaps because the people do not want him to do what is right, or the Constitution, or Congress, or the President, or the Supreme Court forbids him from doing what is right), he still dispossesses himself from having legitimate moral authority to rule on behalf of God as God's minister. In such a case, we obey all lawful commands he issues because they are agreeable to God's Word, but we do not obey the magistrate as God's lawful minister to us for good. We submit for the sake of fear (because of the size of the sword he wields), not for the sake of conscience (because he rules as God's minister).

Let no one misunderstand our position. We love our country. We are not antigovernment. We seek peace with all men (especially with civil magistrates) as much as is possible, and we pray for that time when our civil magistrates will kiss the Son of God as stated in Psalm 2. We simply cannot acknowledge them to be the minister of God to us for good when they flagrantly and habitually justify the wicked and condemn the righteous (which is what the laws of this land require them to do as we shall see).

Last week we considered from our text in Proverbs 17:15, It Is an Abomination to Justify the Wicked. This Sabbath we shall consider the last two main points from our text: (2) It Is an Abomination to Condemn the Righteous; (3) It Is Not an Abomination for God to Justify the Ungodly.

II. It Is an Abomination to Condemn the Righteous.

A. Just as God, speaking through King Solomon, declares that it is a hateful abomination in God's sight for rulers (or anyone else for that matter) to justify that which is wicked, so it is likewise the same hateful abomination in God's sight for rulers (or anyone else) to condemn that which is righteous. Dear ones, we as humans (whether magistrates, church officers, the owners of a corporation, supervisors, or parents) never have some supposed "right" to approve of that which is evil or to disapprove of that which is righteous. A moral wrong (which violates one of the commandments of God) can never be a legitimate civil right. Our legitimate civil rights proceed from God and His Moral Law revealed in the Ten Commandments. God never

gave magistrates the “right” to disregard any of God’s Ten Commandments. But that is precisely what the magistrates and laws of this land do.

1. Let me illustrate how the civil magistrate by his law continuously condemns that which is righteous.

a. The civil magistrate condemns that which is righteous by legally protecting all false religion within this nation. In so doing, the civil rulers have not only justified that which is evil (contrary to God’s Law), but they have also condemned the one true Christian Religion of the Bible which alone should have legal protection according to God in the Second Commandment, “Thou shalt have not make unto thee any graven image.” Remember none are exempt in their callings from upholding God’s holy commandments (not even the President, Congress, or Supreme Court). The First Amendment to the Constitution actually forbids the magistrates of this land from keeping the First and Second of God’s Ten Commandments in establishing the one true Christian Religion and removing all false religion, for in tolerating all religions and giving them all equal status they put the one true Christian Religion of the Bible on par with all false religions. Legally, there is no difference between the one true Protestant Religion of Scripture and Witchcraft, Islam, Buddhism, or Romanism. Dear ones, those systems are leading millions of people in this land to eternal torment. God calls lawful civil magistrates who are the ministers of God to thee for good to remove all such monuments to idolatry. When the emperor, Julian (known as Julian the Apostate), sought to eradicate Christianity from the Roman Empire, his chosen method was not to forbid it absolutely, but rather to legally recognize all other religions so as to practice a universal toleration of all religions within the empire. Dear ones, our Constitution and laws likewise condemn the one true Christian Religion in their legally recognizing all religions.

b. The civil magistrate condemns that which is righteous by legally protecting businesses that are open on the Christian Sabbath. In so doing, the civil magistrate not only has justified the moral evil of Sabbath breaking (contrary to the Fourth Commandment), but has also condemned that which is righteous in God’s sight (namely, the Christian Sabbath revealed in God’s Word).

c. The civil magistrate condemns that which is righteous by legally protecting abortion so that unborn children have less rights than even animals. In so doing, the civil government not only justifies their murder but also condemns to death those who are innocent of any civil crime (i.e. the unborn baby). Therefore, the civil government justifies murderers and condemns the most helpless. It has been pointed out many times that if Hitler was devoid of any moral authority to rule because of his wanton slaughter of six million Jews (and many Christians as well), how much more devoid of any moral authority to rule is a government that legally protects the slaughter of roughly 40 million helpless babies (since 1973).

d. The civil magistrate condemns that which is righteous by legally protecting adultery so that it is not a crime, but rather a “civil right” to sleep around with whomever one chooses. In so doing, the civil magistrates not only justify the adulterer, but also condemn the faithful spouse because in “no fault” divorces the adulterer and the faithful spouse are equal before the law. The innocent party has no more legal rights before the law than the guilty, adulterous party. And so civil magistrates condemn that which is good and honorable among all men: namely, marriage.

e. The civil magistrate condemns that which is righteous by legally protecting sodomy (and the so-called “right” for sodomite partners to receive the same benefits that married spouses receive, adopt children, and in a matter of time be legally married). In so doing, the civil laws of this land not only justify that which is wicked, but once again condemn that which is righteous (namely, the sacred institution of marriage). The divine institution of marriage is, thus, placed on the same level legally as a sodomite union and thereby condemned as God’s sacred institution.

f. Many times throughout history, a civil magistrate, devoid of divine authority to rule, has condemned the witnesses of Christ to death.

(1) Whether it was Naboth who was condemned to death because he would

not sell his inheritance given to him by God to the wicked Ahab.

(2) Or whether it was Daniel who would not discontinue his praying to the one true living God of the Bible and was cast into a den of lions.

(3) Or whether it was Jeremiah who continued to preach against the apostasy of Judah and the captivity of Babylon which awaited them. He was cast into a muddy cistern by the king and princes for what they considered to be treason. But dear ones, faithfulness to God cannot be treason to the civil magistrate.

(4) Or whether it was our Lord Jesus Christ who was condemned to death by the Jews and then by the Romans.

(5) Or whether it was the apostles of Christ, or John Wicliffe, or John Hus, or Martin Luther, or Christopher Love, or Donald Cargill, or James Renwick, or any of the faithful witnesses and martyrs of Christ who have been or are being persecuted for righteousness and truth's sake. Dear ones, it is an abomination for magistrates to condemn the righteous, but that is precisely what Christ calls us to be willing to endure for His glory (if we suffer with Him, we will be glorified with Him). In so doing, we demonstrate that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

2. Let me briefly say as well that church officers can also condemn the righteous in tolerating that which is false and in censuring those who faithfully adhere to the truth. Christ did not give the keys of the kingdom to His ministers in order that they might teach and rule against the truth as revealed in Scripture (2 Corinthians 13:8).

a. Thus, when church officers simply tolerate false doctrine, corrupt worship, or unbiblical church government to be taught and practiced within the church, they also condemn that which is true and righteous (the same is true when we tolerate evil in our homes by what we watch on TV or the music to which we listen). Dear ones, toleration of that which is false is not neutral in God's sight. It is not neutral to the truth. It is not kind, loving, or forbearing. It is actually destructive. It destroys the truth by putting error and sin on the same level as the truth. It actually undermines the absolute authority of Jesus Christ as Head of His Church to determine what is true and what is false. Remember that Christ said He hates false doctrine that is tolerated within His Church. To the Church of Pergamos (Revelation 2:15) the glorified Head of the Church declared: "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

b. Although authority to discipline those who persist in obstinate sin or error is given by Christ to the ministers and elders of the church, we must be ever so careful that we do not misuse or abuse that authority so as to condemn the righteous, who faithfully stand for the truth of Christ. To do so is unwittingly to condemn Christ who revealed His truth to us. We must be ever so careful to use the Key of Discipline for the spiritual welfare of those who become obstinate in sin or error. We must do so in humility, not exalting ourselves in arrogance and pride as those who are filled with the love of power like Diotrephes in 3 John 9-11. We must do so out of love for erring brethren to see them restored, not out of personal vengeance to get even with them. We must do so in order to honor Christ who calls us (as church officers) to love Him and His truth more than we love anything else in this life. Thus, the Lord here in Proverbs 17:15 declares that He abominates those who justify (i.e. declare righteous) the wicked and those who condemn (i.e. declare evil) the just. Let us fervently pray that God would sear this truth into the minds of all those who serve as magistrates within our nation (from the President down). "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

III. It Is Not an Abomination for God to Justify the Ungodly.

A. This last point may seem like a strange divergence from what we have been discussing. However, follow closely what I am about to say, for life and death hinge upon it. The Church of Rome takes what has been said in Proverbs 17:15 (that he that justifies the wicked and condemns the just is an

abomination to God) and seeks to apply this truth in precisely the same way to our justification before God. The Church of Rome argues that if it is an abomination for a civil ruler or ecclesiastical ruler to justify the wicked, how much more of an abomination it must be for God (the supreme Ruler) to justify the wicked (as is taught in Reformed and Presbyterian Confessions and Catechisms).

B. It is indeed true that we teach God justifies the ungodly. Our *Larger Catechism* (Question 70) correctly states: "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners" (i.e. unto those who are legally accounted as wicked and ungodly before the bar of God's infinite justice). Paul states ever so clearly this remarkable truth in Romans 4:4-5.

C. How then do we reconcile Proverbs 17:15 (where it is an abomination to justify the wicked) with Romans 4:5 where God Himself justifies the ungodly?

1. Justify does not mean to make one righteous as Rome teaches, for no civil judge in hearing a case makes a person innocent. The person who stands before the judge may in reality either be innocent or guilty. The judge in a court of law does not "make" him who stands before him innocent or guilty, but rather "declares" him to be innocent or guilty.

a. Rome, you see, teaches that God "makes" those who are wicked righteous by infusing them with grace and giving to them faith, repentance, holiness etc., so that one is only righteous because God has made him righteous in his actual person. His/Her righteousness is determined by what has been infused within. His/Her righteousness is based upon something within. Therefore, if that righteousness which has been infused within the believing sinner can be lost through the commission of a mortal sin (as Rome teaches), then one can lose his/her justification and be forever condemned to hell. So your see, the Church of Rome must alter the meaning of justify from "declare" righteous (as they themselves take it to mean in Proverbs 17:15) to "make" righteous (as they reinterpret it to mean in Romans 4:5). Consistency requires that when speaking of a human judge or the divine judge we interpret the word "justify" in the same way in both cases.

b. To the contrary, our Protestant and Reformed forefathers condemned the view of Rome as a false gospel based upon the righteousness found in men. God, in fact, does not contradict Himself in Romans 4:5, for the word "justify" in Proverbs 17:15 and Romans 4:5 mean "to declare righteous." For the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not found in a righteousness which is worked within us and may be lost, but in the righteousness of Christ which is alien to us and external to us and which is accounted to us by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Dear ones, the reason we may be declared righteous even though we are legally guilty and ungodly in the sight of God is not on the basis of anything within us. It is on the basis of Christ's obedience in perfectly keeping the Law of God for us and perfectly suffering the infinite wrath of God for us. Rome teaches one to look inside himself to find the basis for his acceptance at the bar of God's justice. Whereas, the Bible teaches man to look outside of himself to Christ as the only basis for his acceptance at the bar of God's justice. And since the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us when we were legally guilty and ungodly, and since we were forgiven while we were legally guilty and ungodly, our future sin cannot remove us from that perfectly righteous standing we have before God, for we were not (in the first place) declared to be righteous on the basis of our own righteousness, but upon the basis of Christ's righteousness. Thus, God justifies the ungodly (not by excusing our sin or winking at our sin), but by condemning our ungodliness in our sinless Substitute who bore it all and paid for it all.

Does this doctrine give us a license to sin (as Rome teaches)? Absolutely not! For when we understand that Christ suffered to put away our sin and that He suffered to redeem us from the curse of the Law and from the power of sin in our life, we are moved out of love and gratitude to Christ, not to work in order to be justified or in order to retain our justification, but to work because we have been justified once and for all. We are never to justify the wicked because no man can truly bear the guilt and penalty of another, but God has

justified the wicked by placing all our wickedness upon His Son in order that we might forever become His beloved children. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ that is offered to you today. Turn not away from the offer of righteousness made to you today in Christ. To receive Christ and His righteousness is everlasting life. To turn away, to ignore, and to put off Christ and His righteousness is everlasting death in the eternal fire of hell. Come to Him and live.

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