

# Justifying and Condemning - Abomination

Proverbs 17:15

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*“He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.” (Proverbs 17:15 (Cf. 24:24)).*

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I’m certain that that there were some events and happenstances that prompted Solomon’s statement here; we don’t have a clue as to what exactly they were, but it seems obvious that there was something going that Solomon found distasteful and that he was convinced that God hated and found more than a little objectionable Himself. While we don’t want to just take another’s word for a matter, I think it essential that we lend some greater (if not a good deal greater) credence to that which the Word of God puts forth as reliable and binding to the way we think and act.

I read a short article by Dr. John MacArthur recently about the definition of truth in the modern world and whether or not the concept of truth has any hope of surviving in our modern world today!

He asked a very stirring question for us to consider...Is truth subjective? Does it hinge on our preferences and perspective? Many today would answer yes to both questions. That’s why most social media platforms today are weighed down with endless debates that boil down to “my truth” versus “your truth.” But that kind of relativism is nothing new. It merely echoes the ancient question that Pontius Pilate asked of Jesus: “*What is truth?*” (John 18:38).

Where, after all, does the concept of truth come from, and why is it so basic to all human thought? Every idea we have, every relationship we cultivate, every belief we cherish, every fact we know, every argument we make, every conversation we engage in, and every thought we think presupposes that there is such a thing as “*truth.*” The idea is an essential concept, without which the human mind could not function.

Even if you are one of those trendy thinkers who claims to be skeptical about whether “*truth*” is really a useful category anymore, to express that opinion you must presume that truth is meaningful on some fundamental level. One of the most basic, universal, and undeniable axioms of all human thought is the absolute necessity of truth. (And we might add that the necessity of absolute truth is its close corollary.) He then strove to give a Scriptural definition of truth:

So what is truth?

Here is a simple definition drawn from Scripture: *Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God.* Even more to the point: *Truth is the self-expression of God.* And because the definition of truth flows from God, truth is *theological*.

Truth is also *ontological*—which is a fancy way of saying it is the way things really are. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard, and final judge of all truth.

The Old Testament refers to the Almighty as the “*God of truth*” (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 31:5; Isaiah 65:16). When Jesus said of Himself, “*I am . . . the truth* (John 14:6, emphasis added), He was making a profound claim about His own deity. He was also making it clear that *all* truth must ultimately be defined in terms of God and His eternal glory. After all, Jesus is “*the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (Hebrews 1:3). *He is truth incarnate*—the perfect expression of God and therefore the absolute embodiment of all that is true.

Jesus also said that the written Word of God is truth. It does not merely contain nuggets of truth; it is pure, unchangeable, and inviolable truth that (according to Jesus) “*cannot be broken*” (John 10:35). Praying to His heavenly Father on behalf of His disciples, He said this: “*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth*” (John 17:17). Moreover, the Word of God is eternal truth which “*endures forever*” (1 Peter 1:25).

Of course there cannot be any discord or difference of opinion between the *written* Word of God (Scripture) and the *incarnate* Word of God (Jesus). In the first place, truth by definition cannot contradict itself. Second, Scripture is called “*the word of Christ*” (Colossians 3:16). It is *His* message, *His* self-expression. In other words, the truth of Christ and the truth of the Bible are of the very same character. They are in perfect agreement in every respect. Both are equally true. God has revealed Himself to humanity through Scripture and through His Son. Both perfectly embody the essence of what truth is.

Remember, Scripture also says God reveals basic truth about Himself in nature. The heavens declare His glory (Psalm 19:1). His other invisible attributes (such as His wisdom, power, and beauty) are on constant display in what He has created (Romans 1:20). Knowledge of Him is inborn in the human heart (Romans 1:19), and a sense of the moral character and loftiness of His law is implicit in every human conscience (Romans 2:15). Those things are universally self-evident truths. According to Romans 1:20, denial of the spiritual truths we know innately always involves a deliberate and culpable unbelief. And for those who wonder whether basic truths about God and His moral standards really are stamped on the human heart, ample proof can be found in the long history of human law and religion. To suppress this truth is to dishonor God, displace His glory, and incur His wrath (Romans 1:18–20).

Still, the only infallible interpreter of what we see in nature or know innately in our own consciences is the explicit revelation of Scripture. Since Scripture is also the one place where we are given the way of salvation, entrance into the kingdom of God, and an infallible account of Christ, the Bible is the touchstone to which all truth claims should be brought and by which all other truth must finally be measured. As He prayed to the Father, Jesus said, “*Your word is truth*” (John 17:17).

That is the ultimate answer to Pilate’s question and the unchanging reality for all of mankind. As we’ll see next time, truth cannot be defined, explained, or understood apart from God and His inerrant Word.

So, the matter of a comparing of what God finds distasteful and men find distasteful personally and individually is one that seems to be the case in a number of the passages we find in the writings of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived; the one who wrote and thus declared the mind and heart of God. It seems unwise, even dangerous for us, as believers to disregard or cast aside what Proverbs has to say about anything what it clearly puts forth. Solomon was not only the wisest man who ever lived, but was a great writer and was clear and definite in what he wrote.

Interestingly, this passage has particular application to our own time, as it seems to speak to the tendency of many today to play fast and loose with what Solomon, in many places, calls the just and unjust, exactly, it seems, as was happening in some circumstances in Solomon's time and circumstance.

Notice that he begins the first two short phrases with the couple words "He who...". It was a common way of making a general reference to that which a known or one who was seen as an acquaintance conducted himself and which Solomon wished to address in a specific fashion regarding either the statement of his behavior or the consequences of that behavior. The mechanism occurs in some 550 verses in the both the OT as well as the NT. In the NT it is particularly prominent in the Gospels but is present in the Book of Acts as well as the Epistles.

He speaks of two kinds of people and of the qualities of their walk on the earth and among men.

1. **First**, he speaks of the wicked and how the one in view treats or speaks of them.
2. **Second**, he speaks of the righteous and the implication is the mentioned response to them his treatment of them.

"Justifies", in this context refers to treating them as if they were in the right. It speaks of declaring or treating them as if their behavior was not only acceptable in the human realm, but as if it were pleasing and meeting the standard of God. The word speaks, in this kind of situation, of declaring to be clean, just, or to be in the right. The only way we can make any sense of this, and not be left trying to figure out these matters via human standards.

Particularly troubling is the ready application to our modern time for which the idea applies. How often do we see the idea that completely contrary ideas can be held by two (or more) people or groups as right and acceptable, as the good and needful course of action.

For instance, there is a huge difference in numbers of people who assert that the act of abortion is an acceptable, and even needful thing, a "right" so to speak for Women to undergo; depending on the circumstance in which she finds herself. Since there is no "truth" that bears on her situation, it is entirely up to her to choose, and no one else has any "right" to make any statement, let alone take any action in regard to the matter. On the second side of the matter we have the fact that Biblically, as well as historically, once a child is conceived in the womb it is a person and thus is protected by the laws and protections by

which all “persons” are protected. This does not change under any circumstances! But many, many people will assert that this truth does change due to the personal feelings and perceptions of individuals. But, Biblically, that cannot be so.

We can figure out whether we are speaking human or Divine standards by noting that the adjectives that are used to define what kind of group of which we are speaking.

- The first phrase speak of this “justify” action being applied to the “wicked”.
- The second phrase speaks of the “condemning” action being applied to the righteous.

Looking back our Proverbs passage (17:15) it seems fairly obvious that the adjectival action in the two phrases is pretty much exactly opposed to that which should be used to describe their actions and character. It is clear throughout the rest of the Proverbs and also the rest of the Old and New Testaments.

Righteous, by the way, is from the same basic word and “justifies” in the first phrase. There is no indication here, or elsewhere in the Bible that any standard for righteousness rests on the individual and NOT on what the Creator of all men and which He has revealed in his Word.

It is the wicked that is justified here, clearly the opposite of what should have been done to/for them insofar as Solomon views them. “*Wicked*” speaks of those who are guilty, they are “pronounced guilty” and, according to Scripture that pronouncing or legal guilt is speaking of the declaration of God. According to both the Old and New Testaments, all men are guilty before God because of the sin of Adam imputed to his progeny. The point here is that Solomon does not believe that this “justifying” of the “guilty” is not a thing that either God, nor His children ought to approve.

Likewise, Solomon moves to what is virtually the same basic action (at least theoretically) but regarding the treatment or thinking concerning the “righteous”. Where the ones in view “justify” the “wicked”, those in view in the second phrase “condemn” the “righteous”. The word “condemn” refers to the act of declaring to be guilty or actually evil and under the curse of God. It would speak of those whose way, or character is consistent with the unredeemed or the hates of God and His way.

Just to summarize, it is easy to see just what is going on here. Solomon is speaking of those who set themselves up as the judges of what is righteous or good and of what is wicked or wicked. This decision or judgment is clearly that which is reserved to God Himself. He has, by means of His character and Being, already defined these truths and has made them clear in His Word. It is not for men to either make that decision or to violate or contradict what the Word of God clearly says.

But yet they do! How often do we hear, read or see those who are clearly not redeemed, not of the group that the Word of God defines as “the righteous” speaking bold and “confident” words that, in spite of the fact that they do what is directly contradicting in the Scripture, declaring what is “wicked”, (from the actions of people and their conduct) as “justified” or, as we have said, right and

acceptable before God and thus, what ought to be accepted and approved by God's children. Many times, they DEMAND that their view be accepted and seen as right.

Likewise, how often do we see, hear and/or read about how wrong or evil those who are redeemed or believe what the Bible teaches as moral and right before men completely wicked and wrong. Like what we said above, they insisted, often vehemently, that anyone who styles themselves as a child of God both accept and embrace these terrible views. For them, what the Bible teaches and what is, in fact, His desire and even command for all men, is unacceptable. Why? Because they know and, after all... They're smarter than other folks! We, believers and followers of the truth of the Bible, ought to allow them to speak for us and for all others. If we don't they condemn us as either old-fashioned or backward "haters" of whatever form of wickedness is in view.

What is particularly important here is that the real issue here is that Solomon says that either action, justifying the wicked, or condemning the righteous, BOTH OF THEM ALIKE, are what Solomon calls an "Abomination" to the Lord. "Lord" is the basic word for "Jahweh" the supreme God of all men. The word appears an immense number of times (6519) in the OT, by and large by itself; but also in combination with other names for God, or character qualities as well. It basically means: "the Existing One". In other words it refers to the "One Who is" with the implication that He is due to Himself, He is because He is! The idea here is that this One Who is and always has been, Who is the only self-existing one that I am present in the universe, thus making Him different and superior to all men is offended by seeing the action in the verse, both sides of it as an "abomination".

An "abomination" is a disgusting thing, it is unclean and unacceptable. In the ritual sense, it has only the ability to cause God to reject it and condemn it (as in the sense of a pagan idol). In an abbreviated sense it speaks of that whose only function can be to hinder the worship and service of the One True and Self-Existent God. In contrast to the human molding and reshaping that the verse has spoken of; instead of being acceptable and pleasing to God, what is seen in the beginning sections of the verse is entirely unacceptable to and, in fact is a hindrance and is unclean to Him. It is interesting that BOTH of the cited actions are abominable to Yahweh, the One True God. No matter what men see as acceptable, unless it agrees with what God has said in His Word, or via the OT, what He has said via His Prophets, there is no good to come of it.

That is surely NOT what so many would say in our present day. From the endorsement of sexual evil, or mocking the ones who uphold Godliness before society to the condemning of those who vigorously proclaim the need for redemption for those who are unredeemed. Likewise, for those who argue that any form of behavior is right, that the taking of lives of those who are still in the womb, and on and on we could go...

All of these are what is perhaps the worst kind of those who offend God due to their refusal to bow the knee before He and His Word. As we have said before, The Bible is clear in that there is no justification for the "I didn't know" argument. Romans 1 & 2 clearly state that ALL men know and have known since

conception that there is a God and that they are accountable to Him. There is no such thing as someone who honestly doesn't see any evidence for the existence of God. It may be that they are dissuaded, but they are thus because that is not a hard argument to be made to their willing and rebellious mind. They choose to not believe and to disagree. It's in their nature (as well as the nature of all those to whom the Spirit has not made the evidence seem clear). To believe takes the persuasion of the God's Spirit. Paul said that no one comes unless they are drawn.

Just be wary of a summary to the interpretation here - "*He that treats the unjust as just, and the just as unjust*" (such is the literal translation), "even they both are an abomination to the Lord." The force of the word "both" lies in this, that whereas it might *seem* a more pardonable offence to be too lenient than to be too severe, the injustice of the one and the other is equally abhorrent from righteousness, and therefore equally an abomination to Jehovah.

There are some illustrations that can be cited here:

- Samuel's sons "took bribes and perverted judgment," as did those in Isaiah's time, upon whom a woe was pronounced (Isa. 5:23).
- The same crime, in its forensic aspect here condemned, reached the perfection of iniquity when Barabbas was acquitted and Jesus sentenced to the cross.
- They also are condemned "who call evil good and good evil" (Isa. 5:20),
- Likewise were those Jews who called Jesus "a sinner" (John 9:24) and confounded the works of the Holy Spirit with those of Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24, etc.),
- Those teachers in the Church who, out of "greed of filthy lucre," pervert the truth or "shun to declare" any part of "the counsel of God."

**Application** - The judge is "the minister of God" (Rom. 13:4), even, His representative on earth. His office is to restrain evil and promote righteousness. To misuse his power for the inversion of these ends must needs be a dire offence against God. The same is true of juries, witnesses, prosecutors, counsel, in their degree. In every case one object should be paramount—to do justice. Personal considerations must all give way to this. If I am a juror, let me put aside all prepossessions and all thought of personal convenience. If a witness, let me be careful to say neither more nor less than the truth, to colour no statement for or against another. If a prosecutor, let me take heed that eagerness for my own cause does not hurry me into hasty assumptions, wrong constructions, misleading assertions. If an advocate, I must be sure not knowingly "to justify the wicked," nor yet to asperse the innocent; and must throw up my brief when to hold it would involve me in either this or that injustice. As a layman, I must endeavour to "judge righteous judgment" on all matters that come before me, and never for fear or favour confound evil and good by countenancing the one or

discouraging the other. Let me beware of allowing my judgment to be warped by arguments drawn from expediency, which, when it pleads against truth, is the devil's advocate, and has often done the devil's work. And should I have been ordained "a preacher of righteousness," oh, may I be able to say at each stage of my ministry, "I am pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26)!