Gender and Justice in the New Testament

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Introduction

The topic of gender and justice in the New Testament raises two preliminary questions: First, what modern sense of “justice” and of “gender” is closest to the intent of New Testament writers, and, second, how was gender related to justice in Greco-Roman society? How we answer these two questions should reveal the relative role of cultural expectations in relation to transcultural ideals the New Testament envisages.

‘Gender’ and ‘justice’

One of the most interesting current debates in justice studies is between those who hold modernist enlightenment conceptions of rights and justice as universal, uniform, formal, and ahistorical, and the critics of these modernist conceptions, who either reject universal, uniform, formal, ahistorical conceptions of rights or who reject the idea of rights and justice altogether.

The former position is sometimes referred to as Liberalism with a capital “L,” and it includes both right-wing liberalism (libertarianism) and left-wing Liberalism (welfare liberalism or welfarism). ‘Libertarians’ want liberty defined as an absence of coercion or interference, the rule of law protecting the equal rights of individuals, and the abolition of public welfare programs. ‘Welfare liberalism,’ on the other hand, wants some balance between liberty and equality that usually involves requiring some significant redistribution. These modernist enlightenment views of justice are challenged by several alternative views, especially the communitarian and the radical feminist critiques.

Communitarians believe that modern Liberals, whether on the right or the left, are excessively individualistic, rationalistic, and without a real place for interpersonal values or societal teleology in their systems. Such Liberals, it is alleged, want to put individual rights and liberties on the same level with the ‘common good.’ Communitarians want instead to allow communities to set their own standards, to distribute harms and benefits to individuals in ways that strengthen their membership in the community.

Radical feminist critiques argue that liberal forms of justice fail to take women into serious consideration in their theories of justice that are framed with the ‘public’ male in mind and assume that the ‘domestic’ or private sphere where women are traditionally found is governed by other rules outside their systems. According to one such writer:

The unequal distribution of rights, benefits, responsibilities, and powers within the family is closely related to inequalities in the many other spheres of social and political life. There is a cyclical process at work, reinforcing the dominance of men over women, from home to work to what is conventionally referred to as the ‘political’ arena, and thence back home again.¹

At this point, a question is appropriate. Which view of justice is right? From a Christian perspective, this is to also ask to what extent a biblical view of justice agrees or overlaps with any of the above or does Scripture teach an alternative view?

A biblical view of justice

First, I think it is fair to say that most Christian scholars would agree that the New Testament view of justice rests squarely on the Old Testament perspectives and not on Greek or Roman understandings.² In the Bible, justice is closely associated with ‘righteousness’ (meaning ‘straight’ or ‘norm’), and both are directly derived from God’s revealed character and perceived through his words and particular divine acts in human history.³ This is the theological aspect of biblical justice and righteousness.

There is also a distinction in Scripture between God’s justice and righteousness in ‘general providence’ and his actions in ‘redemption.’ In ‘general providence,’ God is active in his care for the whole world, but he especially acts to aid the poor, weak, vulnerable, and oppressed in bringing his justice and righteousness to help them.⁴ And as Nardoni states, ‘Israel was called to imitate the saving conduct of God by carrying out actions of saving justice toward the poor, the orphan, the widow and the foreigner.’⁵ In the area of ‘redemption,’ God acts in justice and righteousness to condemn the unjust and wicked and to save, deliver, and vindicate the just or righteous of his people.

A distinctive of biblical justice is its inseparable connection with God’s mercy, compassion, and love:⁶

Love raises justice above the mere equal treatment of equals; biblical justice is the equal treatment of all human beings solely for the reason that as human they possess bestowed worth from God. . . . It is need which determines the distribution of justice, rather than worth, birth, merit, or ability. It is this assumption that all have equal merit which allows justice to be expressed by the principle of equality. . . . The presence of grace and love in justice universalizes the formal principle of equal treatment of equals, shows a regard for the needs of each person, and creates the obligation to seek the good of each.⁷

Justice, then, becomes one of the means through which love expresses itself. George MacDonald has captured the concept well: “Man is not made for justice from his fellow, but for love, which is greater than justice, and by including supercedes injustice. Mere justice is an impossibility, a fiction of analysis. It does not exist between man and man, save relatively to human law.”⁸

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Further, biblical mercy/justice is dominated by the principle of redress, which postulates that inequalities in the conditions necessary to achieve the standard of wellbeing be corrected to approximate equality. "According to each one's need" became the basis for redress as seen in the early church (Acts 4:35). This may from time to time require unequal response to unequal needs. In these cases, justice, then, must be partial to be truly impartial. Finally, the biblical principle of "from each according to each one's ability" also modifies the formal definition of equality and was practiced also by the early church: "The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the believers living in Judea" (Acts 11:29). As God's people, we are to practice the kind of justice that characterizes God's mercy/justice and righteousness (Isa. 1:17), with the exception that we are never to retaliate vengefully against those who harm us, since God has reserved vengeance for himself alone (Rom. 12:19).

So, where does this lead us in response to the question of which modern justice system is right as measured against the brief sketch of major themes of biblical justice? In Scripture, one may detect elements of both modern Liberal systems of the right and of the left as well as communitarian concerns. But it would be wrong to suggest that the biblical view simply combines elements of each into some type of synthesis of these traditions. Rather, we must allow the biblical construct to take precedence and to be applied first on a case-by-case basis and then related to elements in various modern systems that may be compatible with the biblical principles. For example, biblical justice will be much wider in scope in considering gender issues than the single, reductionist category of 'oppression' as is often the case in modern studies.

The question we will explore below is to what extent the New Testament describes cases in point or teachings involving women who suffer injustice, or who experience justice as liberation, vindication.

'Gender' in contemporary literature

We must now glimpse briefly the meaning of the term 'gender.' The term originally meant kind, sort, class; genus as opposed to specie. Later, it was used as a grammatical term to distinguish masculine nouns from both feminine and neuter forms. The 'gender system' was the name for what we now call the nervous system. Gradually, the term came to be used to distinguish the male sex from the female. In modern (especially feminist) use, it is a euphemism for the sex of a human being, often intended to emphasize the social and cultural, as opposed to the biological, distinctions between the sexes (see The Oxford English Dictionary).

In this more modern sense, what is still debatable is the extent to which biological sex differentiation impinges on and influences 'gender' characteristics independent of cultural and social influences. This is not the place to argue for a more maximum or more minimalist position. For our purposes, in this study we will use the term 'gender' to refer to women in their social and cultural arrangements vis-à-vis men in their social and cultural arrangements.

Judaic, Greek, and Roman social and cultural backdrops

The narrative and teaching materials of the New Testament are played out in the context of first-century Palestinian and diaspora Judaism as well as Greek and Roman culture and society. When the New Testament texts deal directly with or allude to women's social and cultural arrangements, an attempt will be made to utilize such extrabiblical materials that may cast light on issues of justice. We should remember that the use of such materials, as helpful as they may be, is never definitive, since social and cultural arrangements varied geographically as well as from class to class, time period, and even within specific localities.9

Gender and justice in the New Testament

For our purposes of a brief look at gender and justice, perhaps taking cases in point for each of the major divisions of the New Testament, and yet identifying areas of social life where justice concerns are involved, may be the most instructive.

Jesus and impurity laws

In Luke 8:1–3 we read:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magadanene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.10

Jesus, significantly, heals women directly and delivers them by crossing harmful boundaries created by impurity concepts and social marginalization.11 As Turid Seim notes:

There is implicit in the motif of healing, a Christological motivation to service. The benefaction of Jesus finds a response in the women's subsequent benefactive activity as they follow him. The activity is not directed to Jesus alone but benefits the whole community. . . . They share what they have, in order to meet the needs of those who no longer have anything of their own.12

Such diseases as Luke mentions rendered these women ceremonially impure and, as such, they would be avoided and excluded by the larger community and, in particular, by the religious who wanted to draw closer to God and avoid anything or any person who would defile them. The effect was to deny these women full participation in their own communities, which was tantamount
to injustice from a biblical perspective. By healing them, Jesus not only alleviates their personal distress, but at the same time restores them justly to meaningful service and to full inclusion in the broader Jewish and Greco-Roman society and, in particular, to the Christian community.

Before leaving this passage, I should note that these women (Luke uses the word “many”) were apparently traveling with Jesus and the disciples in public view. Such a spectacle would be quite unusual in Palestinian Jewish circles where women were often, but not exclusively, restricted from public appearances, especially when men outside their families were present.13

Another text of this same type is found in Luke 8:42–48:

As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.” Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

It is generally assumed that this woman had some abnormal form of menstrual blood flow. If this were the case, she would be unclean, and anything she touched would also be unclean. In Jesus’ culture, this condition is not just a bothersome medical condition, but carries with it all sorts of social and religious marginalization. According to the rabbis, this unique condition, true only for women, was interpreted as part of the punishment meted out to Eve because of her sin in Eden.14

Instead of avoiding the woman, Jesus again crosses over a purity taboo boundary and allows the woman to touch his garment. As a result, she is delivered from both her medical problem and from the unjust social exclusion she has suffered these many years. She can be married now if she chooses and rejoin the broader and, more importantly, the Christian community, as a full participant. And Jesus, instead of being himself defiled by the woman’s impurity, is the source of her cleansing.

Another similar taboo-crossing action of Jesus is in the case of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in John 4. In rabbinic law, Samaritan women (also Sadducean women) were considered always as unclean as menstruants.15 Jesus violates Pharisaic law in even carrying on a conversation with a woman, especially a Samaritan woman (vv. 9, 27). More importantly, Jesus drinks from the jar she was holding and thus allows himself to contract her impurity, an action contrary to rabbinic law for anyone who seeks to be approved by God. By doing this, he reveals himself to her as the promised Messiah and removes her marginalized status by empowering her as a legitimate public witness to this truth of who he is, even though her testimony is not accepted by many of the men of the city until they hear and see Jesus for themselves (vv. 39–42).

To sum up, the words of deSilva are helpful here:

Jesus’ healings of the diseased and encounters with ‘sinners’ are immersed in issues of purity rules and pollution taboos, in which we see Jesus consistently showing a willingness to cross the lines in order to bring the unclean ones back to a state of cleanliness and integration into the community. Jesus enacts a conceptualization of holiness as mercy, love and compassion. Such a position is very much in keeping with the prophetic tradition of Israel that he quotes so frequently. . . . The holiness God seeks, according to Jesus’ understanding, entails reaching out in love and compassion, restoring the unclean and the defiled and the sinner to wholeness. The command to “be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45) is fulfilled not in the protection of purity (“separate yourselves from uncleanness,” see Lev. 15:31), but in the action of extending wholeness to the unclean (“be merciful, just as your Father is merciful,” Lk 6:36).16

Again, Jesus repeatedly crosses over taboo borders in his contact with prostitutes in order to forgive, deliver, and restore them to wellbeing within the larger social and religious community. In Jesus’ day, many Jewish widows and their daughters were forced into prostitution because they could not find jobs to support themselves and their families. Prostitutes abounded in the large Roman cities in Palestine, and two brothels have been uncovered in the cities of Sebaste and Caesarea.17

One example among many recorded in Luke’s account is that of a prostitute (likely) who deliberately enters into the home of the Pharisee, Simon, when he hosts a dinner for Jesus. She approaches the feet of Jesus, wets them with her tears of repentance, wipes them dry with her hair, kisses them repeatedly, and pours a whole bottle of perfume on them. Then Jesus turns to his host with all his guests in front of him and honors the prostitute for her forgiveness. “Your sins are forgiven,” Jesus says to her. “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:36–41). Jesus was doing justice in that Pharisee’s home.

I cannot read this passage without thinking of an incident in Tony Campolo’s life. Not being able to sleep due to the time zone change from Eastern to Hawaiian, at 3:00 a.m., Tony wandered into an all-night greasy-spoon dive in a dark alley and ordered a cup of coffee and a donut. He sat there munching his donut at the counter when in walked eight or nine provocatively dressed, loud, smoking, cursing prostitutes who had just finished their night’s work. Tony was planning a quick getaway. But, just then, he heard one of them tell the others that tomorrow was her birthday. Tony turned to the manager and said, “What do you want me to do, get you a cake and sing happy birthday to you?” Agnes said, “I’ve never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?”

After the women left, Tony turned to the manager and said, “What do you think? Could we throw a birthday party for Agnes tomorrow at the same time when she comes in?” The manager,
Harry, agreed and insisted on making the cake, and Tony would decorate the whole place. Harry spread the word around on the streets, and the next morning at 3:00 a.m. almost every prostitute in Honolulu showed up. When Agnes finally arrived they all shouted, “Surprise! Happy birthday!” She broke down in tears. And when the birthday cake with all the candles was carried out, that’s when she totally lost it. Agnes looked down at the cake and, without taking her eyes off it, slowly and softly said, “Look, Harry, is it all right with you if . . . I mean, if I don’t . . . I mean, what I want to ask, is it OK if I keep the cake a little while? Is it all right if we don’t eat it right away?” She got off her stool, picked up the cake, and carried it high in front of her like it was the Holy Grail. Everybody watched in stunned silence and, when the door closed behind her, nobody seemed to know what to do. They looked at each other. They looked at Tony.

So Tony stood up on a chair and said, “What do you say that we pray together?” And there they are in a hole-in-the-wall greasy spoon, half the prostitutes in Honolulu, at 3:30 a.m., listening to Tony Campolo as he prays for Agnes, for her life, her health, and her salvation. Tony recalls, “I prayed that her life would be changed, and that God would be good to her.”

Jesus and widows

Another area of interest is Jesus’ attitude and action toward widows. A widow or divorced woman in Palestine had an ambiguous life experience. On the one hand, she enjoyed a sort of legal liberation, making her a legal entity unto herself apart from the legal oversight of her husband. She was free to remain single (Luke 2:37) or to remarry whomever she chose (in contrast to her earlier arranged marriage). Some feminists have emphasized that widows were freed also from their primary patriarchal, instrumental purpose in marriage, i.e., of serving the male progenitor’s quest for immortality through his progeny by becoming a wife and mother. Widows gained authority and power over their own sexuality that was otherwise denied them as women.

Despite these advantages, widows, orphans, and divorced women were among the poorest and weakest members of the society. Their vulnerability exposed them to easy abuse by greedy persons in power. Jesus warns certain scribes against such injustice: “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely” (Mark 1:40). As Joel Green comments, “Distancing themselves from the population-at-large by their concerns with public honor, they manifest no concern for widows.”

Jesus tells a parable about a widow who must ‘box’ a corrupt judge into finally granting her her rights. The widow’s powerlessness before the court is evident by the audacious way she must act to get a just settlement from this godless man (Luke 18:1–8).

Jesus also calls attention to a very poor widow whom he observed in the temple precincts putting two small copper coins into the treasury. One hundred thirty-two of these coins would be equivalent to a day’s wage for a day worker. So, this is a pit- tance amount, but Jesus says, “. . . she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:3). He goes on to contrast the affluence of the teachers of the law with her poverty, their wealth with her deficiency. Joel Green’s remarks are worth repeating:

And thus does Luke draw attention to a system, the temple treasury itself, set up in such a way that it feeds off those who cannot fend for themselves. What is worse, because it is the temple treasury, it has an inherent claim to divine legitimation. How could it be involved in injustice? It is God’s own house! This widespread assumption about the temple only highlights the necessity of Jesus’ criticism of the temple. . . . Because it has fallen into the hands of those who use it for injustice, Jesus must comport himself and his message over against the temple and its leadership in prophetic judgment.

Jesus and divorced women

As noted above, the plight of a divorced woman was much like that of the widow. Rabbinical law required a man to issue a contract of divorce (a get) to the woman, a certificate that legally freed her from any further obligation to him and allowed her to marry another man of her choice. The contract also obligated him to pay her the sum he settled on for her when they married (the ketubah). Despite these speed bumps that inhibited wholesale divorce in the Jewish community, the divorced woman frequently suffered economically because she had to pursue a legal process to collect the settlement of the divorce. Additionally, her guaranteed maintenance from her former husband under the marriage contract was now terminated.

Jesus’ teaching on divorce can be seen as addressing the plight of a woman who could be easily divorced for any reason that brought displeasure to her husband, and thus be put into a social situation of poverty. The four main texts on divorce in the synoptic gospels have been the object of intense scrutiny and diverse interpretations within the Christian community. It is not my purpose here to engage that debate.

In my opinion, the most recent significant contribution to understanding the teaching of Jesus on this matter in his own social and religious context is David Instone-Brewer’s Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context. In Instone-Brewer’s learned opinion, the statements of Jesus are given in the context of the debate between Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1. Hillel introduced an “any reason” basis for divorce, while Shammai was more strict and allowed divorce only for “an indecency” (understood as adultery). Jesus declared that “any matter” divorces were totally invalid, and that any remarriage that took place on this basis placed the remarried parties in adulterous relationships because the former marriages were still valid. In Instone-Brewer’s interpretation, Jesus probably allowed also the other valid biblical grounds for divorce, namely, neglect of providing food, clothing, and love (Exod. 21:10–11). These recognized violations of the marital covenant (contract) are assumed and not stated in the words of Jesus.
One effect of Jesus’ teaching was to argue for monogamous, lifelong marriage. This limited the casual view of divorce that brought harm to women. Another consequence was that the woman could use adultery now as a reason to divorce her unfaithful husband, since he could no longer shield himself from this marital responsibility of faithfulness to only one spouse. Under Jesus’ teaching, women could now, if they desired, obtain a legal divorce formerly denied them in rabbinic law.

In another related text, Jesus equates the deliberate harboring of a desire to have sexual relations with another’s wife to “adultery”: “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:27).

Jesus combines the seventh commandment with the tenth and discloses the injustice against women that reduces them to mere instruments of men’s passions. Consequently, women are not honored and respected as full persons. Likewise, Jesus’ teaching puts the responsibility for adultery on the man and corrects the imbalance in Jewish society of that time that blamed only the woman for this offense (see John 7:53–8:11).

A further teaching of Christ about deliberately choosing celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God has not only freed males to remain unmarried, but has also opened up the way for women likewise to choose celibacy as a calling from God: “For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of God’s will for those who are so called (1 Cor. 7:7, 8).

Another feature of the context of Acts and the Epistles is that the new community of Christians, made up of Jews and Gentiles, met together in homes, not in religious buildings. These homes were often open to the public for business and, in addition, housed families, including husbands/fathers, wives/mothers, children, and slaves. This presented a unique opportunity as well as challenges as to how to exist in a Gentile cultural context without offending Jewish or Gentile sensitivities and, at the same time, live as the followers of Christ, a new community.

For example, in the early Jerusalem church, a problem arose concerning the Greek-speaking-enculturated Jews whose widows were being neglected in the daily food distribution of the new community. They brought their complaint in this matter against the Hebrew-speaking-enculturated Jews to the attention of the apostles. We are not told exactly why this problem arose, but apparently the cultural differences had created the discriminative neglect of the widows. The problem was wisely adjudicated by the appointment of a committee made up largely of Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 6:1–6). In other instances, such as at Corinth and Rome, the Jewish believers were mixed in with the Gentile Christians, each with their own cultural and social differences.

In Acts and in the New Testament letters, there are several features that may be considered concerning justice and gender. First, the cultural and social situation of the new community of believers in the Greco-Roman world is very different than the Jewish, Palestinian context of Jesus’ life and ministry. In looking at various texts in this material, I believe, it is important to recognize both the diaspora Jewish context as well as the larger Greek and Roman context in which the church lived.

At Philippi, Paul and Silas encountered an obnoxious slave girl who had a fortune-telling spirit that her owners had marketed as a profitable business. When she was delivered from this human bondage and prostitution by Paul’s preaching and exorcism, her owners became bitterly angered by their loss of revenue and engineered Paul’s and Silas’s imprisonment. Here we see God’s act of justice in delivering the girl from this dehumanized life. Incidentally, in this case, we may see also how the apostles themselves suffered unjustly as they brought God’s liberating message. They paid a price for bringing biblical justice to this woman by being beaten and put into jail (Acts 16:16–24).

We should not overlook Paul’s amazing chapter of greetings to the Roman believers as he wrote his letter to them from Corinth. Virtually the only historical information we have of the composition of a Christian church in the middle of the first century,
Romans 16 cites no fewer than ten women who are singled out for high commendation by Paul for their work in the ministry of the gospel. These are in addition to the very special commendation given to the church leader Phoebe, and also to Priscilla. What I am suggesting is that, by so commending these women, Paul is doing biblical justice by recognizing their equal status with the men who also labored with him. This had the important effect of enfranchising these women in the eyes of all as full participants in the ministry of the gospel.

Others have called attention to the elevation by Paul of wives’ rights to conjugal marital relations and, at least in this area, his recognition of the equal authority of the woman over the body of her husband as well as the husband’s over the body of the wife (1 Cor. 7:2–5). While this exhortation is given in the context of an ascetic group in the church who wanted to brand all marital sex as having an inferior spiritual quality (cf. St. Augustine!), it may find application to the high respect that both partners are to have for the body and the needs of the other. This certainly would bring justice concerns into the domestic sphere, a place not generally considered a part of any of the major systems of justice.27

Paul’s great text about gender justice in Galatians 3:28 should be seen in the immediate context of baptism into Christ. That women were baptized as well as men (contrast with circumcision in Judaism) signals their full participation in the new community of Jesus where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female.” It is important to note that these religious, social, and sexual distinctions are not erased in Christ, but are relativized and transformed. The distinctions remain, but carry no significance in terms of status or privilege in the new community of Christ’s followers, where all are mutually in Christ, mutually interdependent by means of equally honored but different gifts of the Spirit, and equally participants in the community and mission of Jesus in the world. This is a statement of biblical justice as it operates in this age.

Conclusion

Perhaps this is enough to demonstrate that the New Testament provides numerous cases of biblical gender justice in operation—this despite the various local forms of patriarchal social systems that constrained the early Christians and challenged them to live as much as possible within the social structure in their localities without fostering unnecessary ill will toward the gospel from either the Jewish or Gentile populace who lived under these societal structures.

On the other hand, early Christians could, first within their own communities and then in the larger social cultural contexts, exhibit such justice and thus subvert both individual and systemic evils by protest and by following the example of an alternative way of doing justice, which they learned from Jesus and experienced in the new community of Christ’s church. Here, they would live together as equally valued, fully accepted members of the one body of Christ with all their individual diversities of generation, race, social status, religious background, or gender preserved, but carrying no special privilege as they shared together in mutual interdependence in God’s calling for their community and their individual lives.

Does the justice described in the above New Testament examples fit any of the modern liberal concepts of justice? What we have seen is a justice that is rooted in the being and actions of God in history and especially in the incarnate Jesus. It is a justice that is never separated from mercy or love, a justice that is especially focused on the weak, marginalized, oppressed, excluded members of society. Such may by God’s grace and righteousness be delivered, forgiven, made whole, and restored to full participation in God’s community as well as in the broader society—a community where the individual is important, but not absolute; the community’s flourishing is directly related to the individual being restored as a full, valued, honor member.

Finally, gender justice is not optional in the Christian home and church, or in the wider non-Christian social context—not if Jesus’ prayer that he taught us is to be fulfilled: “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Notes


3. Snaith, 76, argues that God’s righteousness, tsedeq, and God’s justice, mishpat, are virtually synonymous, the former being the standard of God’s revealed will, the latter the effecting of this will in human affairs often in the law courts.


7. Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Change, 64.


9. I think an email note to me by my colleague and esteemed Christian philosopher, Arthur Holmes, is significant: “In Plato’s Republic, books IV and V, justice is identified as the virtue that coordinates the other 3 virtues associated respectively with appetites (self control), spiritedness (courage), and intellect (wisdom). It therefore amounts to the ordered unity of the self, or of the corresponding elements of a society. So how do women fit into society? He declares they can be and do whatever they are able, education and occupation, just as men do. Aristotle in Book V of his Nichomachean Ethics speaks of justice as fairness, equality, a proper balance, and distinguishes several types: distributive, remedial, commercial, and commutative. In his “Politics” (book 1, I think) he asserts that, like individuals, the state rules those who cannot rule themselves, don’t have the rational control life requires, and there are three such groups: young children, those who by their nature are slaves, and women. In effect the ancient Greeks are a mixed bag on women. The Roman stoics seem similar, at least Cicero’s De Republica stresses the
rule of reason and the natural ordering of life. But Augustine, for all his
dependence on Plato and the Stoics, seems more complex and changes
his estimate of women and marriage along the way. Check his Confessions,
book 1 and then book 9, for the episode with his mother” (note
dated 19 March 2008).

10. TNIV here and following.
15. Ilan, Jewish Women, 105.
18. I have heard Tony relate the story himself in graphic detail, but
you can read his full and colorful account in The Kingdom of God Is a Party: God’s Radical Plan for His Family (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990) 3–8.