

The Justice of God
Genesis 18:25, Romans 12:17-21
July 29, 2012

Whenever a conversation turns to discussing the justice of God, there are always two questions which are asked: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” and “Why do good things happen to bad people?”

Airplanes are flown into skyscrapers and thousands of innocent people die. A young woman contracts cancer and her children are left motherless. A young couple wake one morning to find their baby has succumbed to sudden infant death syndrome. Where is God when these things are happening? Why would he allow things like this to happen?

Then there is the other question. An elderly woman puts all she has into Enron stock and loses what little she has to live on. Meanwhile, a company official gets inside information and sells his stock before the corporation collapses and he skates off with a few million dollars. Why are the innocent punished and the guilty rewarded?

People who don't believe in God are stuck with their feelings. No matter how hard they try to figure these things out, there just isn't an answer. They feel sure there must be someone to blame for these injustices, but they have already decided that person doesn't exist.

Those of us who do believe in God have two problems to handle. On one hand, we must deal with our own frustrations and anger over such things. On the other hand, we are often faced with the questions others may ask about God's justice. Have you ever been asked questions like this?

- How can you believe there is a good and just God when there is so much injustice in the world?
- If life isn't fair, and God created life, how do we know God is fair?
- How can you be sure God is just and you're not going to get a raw deal from him?
- How can you believe in the wisdom of a God who lets bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?
- How can you trust God when the world he controls is so unfair?

We not only hear these questions sometimes we ask these questions. Even after years of God's faithfulness, one sour note in our lives can bring these questions to our minds, if not to our lips. To answer these questions, we must improve our understanding of God's justice.

We understand justice to be an uncompromising adherence to a specific standard. Our understanding of justice calls for an external set of rules or laws that must be followed. However, our understanding of justice doesn't work when we apply it to God. Justice isn't a standard that God follows. God is the **standard**. He is **justice**. God is not held accountable to justice because all justice flows from God. Justice is part of who God is.

When we speak of the justice of God, we are saying that everyone will get what he or she deserves. These judgments of God will be based on his clear understand of all actions and the motives behind those actions. If you have watched *Perry Mason* or *Law and Order*, you are familiar with courtroom trickery, but none of that will stand with God. God knows every intimate detail and he will judge accordingly.

To see God's justice as it is, we must develop a biblical worldview and an understanding of biblical revelation. Doing this will not only help us see God's justice more accurately it will also lead us to better worship God in a fallen world.

Let's work on our biblical worldview. Imagine a line that runs to and from infinity. This line has no beginning and no end. Further imagine that we mark out one inch on this line and this inch represents the time of mankind from Creation to Judgment Day. Just inside the line which represents Creation, we need another line to mark Genesis chapter 3. In between these two lines is the span of time from day one of Creation to Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit.

Following Satan's lead, Adam and Eve rebelled against God by doing the only thing he had told them not to do – eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In that one sin, our original parents not only condemned themselves but they also condemned all their descendants. Even nature itself was condemned because of them.

The chapter of human history that began in Genesis 3 will not end until we reach the events of Revelation 20. The time between those two lines is the time of a special relationship between God and man. The time between the lines of Genesis 3 and Revelation 20 is the story of a just and loving God working out redemption for his fallen people.

Outside the lines of Genesis 3 and Revelation 20 perfection, holiness, and justice reign. Between the lines of Genesis 3 and Revelation 20 there are many unresolved things – many unfair things – many injustices. We are living between those lines.

The world we live in is under the judgment of sin. There is not a single place on this planet that is not affected by sin. While God longs for us to see him as he truly is, our perspective is distorted by our sinful condition. Our lives are twisted and distorted by the effects of our sinful condition. While we are in this life, we will experience heartache, sorrow, and pain. That's why it's important for us to understand how a perfect, just God operates in a world corrupted by sin.

Earlier we heard these words which Abraham addressed to God, “*Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” (Gen 18:25). Several centuries before the Ten Commandments, Abraham understood the difference between right and wrong. He also knew enough about God to know and trust that God is a God of justice.

Over and over the Bible speaks of God’s justice. The psalmist writes, “*Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne*” (Ps 97:2). The reference to clouds and darkness means that we don’t understand everything about God. But there is something we can count on. We can rest assured that the very foundations of God’s kingdom are set in his righteousness and justice. And that means we can trust the judgments that come from God whether those judgments are immediate or delayed.

The justice of God always brings retribution. Quite often the word retribution is understood in the negative, but listen to the dictionary’s definition of retribution: “*Punishment for evil done or reward for good done.*” The heart of God’s justice is that everyone will get what he or she deserves. That means that no person who has ever lived will get more or less than he or she deserves – even if we don’t see that person’s retribution. God is just.

Even though we live in a broken and sinful world, we can, with the help of Scripture, find several ways in which God reminds us of his just nature.

God shows us his justice in the **natural order** of things. Have you ever heard of someone suffering the consequences of some past misdeed? And when you heard about that, did you say, “What comes around goes around.” Have you ever thought about what that means? That means there is a justice to all of life. Good begets good and bad begets bad. The religions of the east call it karma and they look for retribution in reincarnation. Western religions look for retribution in an afterlife. In either case, there is, ingrained in all people, the knowledge of a higher law of justice.

This basic law of cause and effect is as natural to us as breathing. And even though there are exceptions to the rule of good begets good and bad begets bad, no reasonable person would deny that it is the most natural outcome.

God also reminds us of his justice through the **human heart**. All people in all places, even those who have never had contact with God’s Commandments, have a natural sense of what is right. When they violate that sense of right, their conscience pings them.

When you get home, read Acts chapter 28. There you will find clear evidence of the inborn knowledge of right and wrong. Paul had been shipwrecked on an island. Paul collected wood for a fire. In the wood was a snake that jumped from the wood and bit Paul on the arm. When the natives saw what happened, they said, “*This man must be a*

murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live” (Acts 28:4).
When Paul didn't die, the natives assumed he must be a god.

The locals saw the snake bite and assumed that bad things happen to bad people. Where did they get an idea like that? When Paul lived, they assumed he was a god because only a god could be above the natural order of things.

C. S. Lewis confessed that when he was an atheist the thing that bothered him the most was mankind's natural sense of right and wrong. If there is no higher authority to dictate right and wrong, why does everyone have the same sense of right and wrong.

We are also reminded of God's justice through his role as **judge**. It's not surprising that the one who created everything, including our sense of justice, has reserved for himself the right to judge. God judges all things now and he will be the judge when the world ends. The book of Acts reminds us of this, *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31).

God promises to judge the world, but believers have nothing to fear from God's judgment. The cross is our comfort when we consider the judgment of God.

So God reminds us of his justice through the **cross**. Scripture tells us that God gave Jesus to be our atoning sacrifice to demonstrate his justice. It is important that we never begin to think of sin as anything less than a horrible insult to the holy nature of God. God never winks at sin. He never thinks sin is cute. He never turns a blind eye to sin. God is serious about sin.

God set the price for sin and that price was blood. Even though God wants no one to go to hell, his justice cannot overlook sin. Something needed to be done to satisfy God's justice. That something was Jesus on the cross. God set the price and God paid the price.

Jesus on the cross – beaten, bleeding, gasping for breath, and crying, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matt 27:46) – is just how serious the situation gets when God's justice is confronted by sin. And the fact that Jesus hung on that cross is just how serious God is about us being redeemed from our sin.

The last way God reminds us of his justice is through **eternal retribution**. Remember, retribution means a consequence that matches the deeds – whether good or bad. The day will come when all will be repaid. Add these to your reading assignment. Read chapters 13 and 25 from the Gospel of Matthew and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. Over and over, Scripture tells us the end will come and everyone will be treated fairly according to their faith and their lives.

Like all of God's other attributes, God's justice demands a response from us. If you are longing to see God as he wants to be seen, proper responses to his justice can be a big

part of that and those responses can also change your life.

Our first response to God justice is to take up **our cross** and follow **Jesus**. The Christian life is supposed to be dedicated to walking in the footsteps of our Savior. During his life on earth, Jesus demonstrated his Father's justice in all of his interactions with other people. Jesus recognized and praised the good work of his disciples. He also carried a deep disdain for everything that was unjust, immoral, or evil.

We must be no different. The justice of God is to be one of the governing factors in our interaction with the world. We are called to point out the good things in this life. We are called to lift up and support the people around us and around the world who are doing the work of the Lord. We are also called to confront and battle against the evil in this world. We are called to action when we witness man's inhumanity to man.

We also respond to God's justice when we refuse to **seek vengeance**. God's justice is to be more important than our revenge. There are many Christians living with bitterness and unresolved anger against former bosses, former spouses, rebellious children, bad parents, and people who have abused them. Those feelings exist because we try to take God's place as judge over injustices.

In today's reading, Paul tells us not to repay evil for evil. He cautions us to leave room for God's justice. Vengeance belongs to God alone. We are not called to get even with those who hurt us. On the contrary, we are called to love our enemies and to do good to those who hurt us. These are often neglected instructions among Christians.

By the way, remember I said earlier that God isn't fooled by courtroom antics? That applies to vengeance. In God's mind, thinking vengeance and doing vengeance are the same things. Don't forget that God judges your thoughts as well as your deeds.

The third way to respond to God's justice is to take **comfort** in God's justice. This is closely connected with not taking vengeance. Christians can take comfort when they encounter injustice because they know that no deed goes unrewarded. God will balance the scales.

God sees the good that everyone sees and he sees the good that goes unnoticed by other people. God sees the evil that everyone sees and he sees the evil that goes unnoticed by other people. Christians can take comfort in the fact that God's retribution is all-inclusive.

The justice of God will bring all things into balance. When human history finally reaches the events of Revelation 20, God's justice will restore all things. When God creates the new heaven and the new earth, sin will be gone, God's justice will reign in every part of creation, and we will be there to see it.