

SEEING GOD AS HE IS

LESSON – 8: THE JUSTICE OF GOD

I. A Biblical understanding of justice:

A. Biblical words:

1. Hebrew/ OT:

a. *tsedakah* (*tzedakah*) or *tzedek* – means both “righteousness” and “justice”; it is usually used to describe *primary* justice - to engage in righteous acts and do the just or right action

b. *mishpat* - translated most often as “justice” or even “equality”; essentially it means to judge, but to treat others equitably in doing so; this word is usually used to describe *secondary* justice (also termed corrective or rectifying justice). It essentially means correcting what went wrong when primary justice was not done; doing what is right or just in response to violations of primary justice. It can refer to caring for the victims of unjust treatment and sometimes even includes the concept of discipline of wrongdoers.

2. Greek/ NT: *dikaioyne* – translated as justice, righteousness, and fulfillment of the law

B. What is justice, really?

1. Justice is a primary quality of God; as grace, love, and mercy are attributes of God, justice is also a positive and healing characteristic of our Lord – it does not exist simply for punishment and retribution (as we are inclined to think), and it is not an unthinking and impersonal trait designed only to separate the guilty from the innocent

2. Justice, in its broadest sense, is acting in a manner that is equitable and fair. Justice means each person gets what his/ her actions *deserve*. With wrongdoing, It means acquitting or

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punishing every person on the merits of the case. Anyone who does the same wrong should be given the same penalty.

However, it means much more than just the punishment of wrongdoing. It also means giving people their rights. *Mishpat* and *tsedaqah* and *dikaiousune* involve giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection, correction or care. In the OT, it is much more commonly used in a **positive** sense to righteously care for those who are downtrodden, than as a threat of punishment. As an example, Proverbs 21:3 tells us that “*to do what is right (tsedaqah) and just (mishpat) is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.*” Also, we read in Psalm 106:3 : “*Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!*”

3. Righteousness is the underlying principle of justice.

Without righteousness, there can be no justice. **Justice is actually the application of righteousness.** In God’s kingdom, righteousness and justice are always found side by side.

Psalm 89:14 says righteousness and justice come from God’s throne. One can never choose righteousness or justice alone - they always must walk side by side, hand in hand.

4. For us, the application of justice inevitably involves righteously judging the truth, judging ourselves, and judging others – we have been given the ability by God to discern what is morally true, and thus we are required to make judgments according to that standard. Justice should best appeal to the human sense of *fairness* and equity in relationships and situations. Given that we are created in His image, we have a duty to exercise this form of righteousness in our daily lives in every situation and every relationship.

5. It is also important to distinguish justice from vengeance – vengeance is a separate act of administering punishment to

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the guilty, and is primarily reserved for God (Heb. 10:30; Rom. 12:19)

II. Important scriptures to understand:

***Ecclesiastes 3:17**

I said to myself, “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.”

***Hebrews 10:30**

For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”

***Hosea 12:6**

But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

***Romans 12:19**

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

***Isaiah 30:18-19**

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.

***Micah 6:8**

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

***Isaiah 1:17**

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

***Psalms 106:3**

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Blessed are those who act justly, who always do what is right.

***Zechariah 7:9**

“This is what the LORD Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.

***Leviticus 19:15**

‘Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

***Psalms 33:5**

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

***Isaiah 30:18**

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

***Amos 5:24**

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

***Psalms 106:3**

Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!

***Matthew 23:23**

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

***Isaiah 56:1**

Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed.

***Luke 6:37**

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

***Psalms 103:6**

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppresse

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***Isaiah 51:4-5**

“Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait.

***Matthew 12:18**

“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

***Isaiah 9:7**

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

***Isaiah 61:8-9**

For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.

***Deuteronomy 10:18**

He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

***Zechariah 7:9-10**

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

***James 1:27**

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

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***Jeremiah 9:23-24**

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

***1 Peter 1:17**

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...

***Luke 4:18-19**

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

***Isaiah 42:1-9**

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ...

III. Righteousness and justice in our world

A. God's justice versus man's justice

1. As understood by man:

- a. Righteousness and holiness are not the basic motivations**

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- b.** Based on the craving for human “fairness”, which is highly variable
 - c.** Uses human standards - human truth, human evidence and human emotions – all of which can quickly change
 - d.** Looks at justice from a legal and not spiritual perspective
 - e.** Focuses on the punishment for wrongdoing
 - f.** Healing and restoration are often low priorities
 - g.** Often motivated by a desire for vengeance
 - 2.** As shown by God
 - a.** Based on righteousness and truth, the source of both being God
 - b.** Focuses on correction of the underlying problem, rather than punishment of wrongdoing
 - c.** Always works toward healing and restoration
 - d.** Always is administered with love and mercy
 - e.** Always focuses on the spiritual perspective, never on the legal (unless human legal administration is being used to work God’s purpose)
 - f.** Vengeance is God’s *last* resort for unrepentant evil
- B.** What does God’s justice mean for us?
- 1.** Exhibiting justice should be the mission of the man or woman of righteousness
 - 2.** It is a source of comfort and joy for the Christian – it relieves our anxiety/worries and suffering, knowing God is always watching His children
 - 3.** It is a source of strength for believers – God plus the believer is always stronger than the entire world
 - 4.** It is the reason for our confidence in Christ – fear and doubt no longer need to consume us
 - 5.** It provides a reminder to believers that God is *serious*

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about sin

- a. It shows that God hates sin and cannot tolerate it in His presence
 - b. It serves to prove to us and remind us that God will punish evil and reward the righteous
 - c. It helps restrain us from considering seeking vengeance on others
 - d. It frees us from worrying about retribution when we are hurt by others
- 6.** It should encourage us to seek forgiveness, forgive others, and always remain faithful
- 7.** Whereas we are preoccupied with *fairness* in our society, God is the only judge capable and qualified to judge the thoughts and intentions of the human heart and thus provide true fairness in life; we need to stop trying to balance the ledger and focus on living a righteous life
- 8.** It encourages us to imitate our Lord by seeking to correct human injustice whenever we see it
- 9.** It encourages us to increase holiness in our lives and the lives of our brethren