

Nature and Character of God

What Is God Like?

September 29, 2019

I. God is the judge

- A. Today, we are continuing our study of God's nature and character by considering what He is like as the Judge of the earth and all mankind, from Adam to the end of time.
 - 1. From Genesis to Revelation, there are at least 58 portions of scripture that speak about God as the Judge of all the earth, His reasons for judging, His methods of judging, and the basis upon which He judges.
 - 2. For the sake of time, however, I will read just two of those 58 portions of scripture, and they are both found in the OT.
 - a. **Deuteronomy 10:17-18**, "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. [18] He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing."
 - b. **Psalms 98:7-9**, "Let the sea roar and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. [8] Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy [9] before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity."
- B. As you know, many commend God's love while criticizing His justice. What they don't take into account is that God's love is inseparable from His justice just as His justice is inseparable from His love.
 - 1. And it is even broader than this, for God's justice is inseparable from all the other qualities or aspects of His nature and character that we have looked at over these past eight weeks.
 - 2. In other words, His holiness, His righteousness, His compassion and grace, His slowness to anger, His loving-kindness and truth, His forgiveness, His punishment of the wicked, His provision of safety and security as seen in **Psalms 18:1-2**, His fatherhood, His love, and His being a justifier of those who have faith in Jesus are all involved in His being the Judge of all.
 - 3. And it is this complexity that is often overlooked when deciding if God is a good judge or a bad judge, and if His justice is fair.

C. Pray

II. God is a judge

- A. Last Sunday, I pointed out that God cares as much about the overall health of the community as He does about the well-being of each individual in the community.
 - 1. I went on to point out that for the good of all mankind, God created the law, and He did so because it is the law that sets the boundaries and guidelines for promoting and protecting the good of those around us.
 - a. However, God is not only the creator of the law, He is the Judge who judges nations, governments, world leaders, businessmen, factory workers, farmers, teachers, pastors, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children and teenagers, philosophers and artists, policemen and criminals, lawyers and judges, the educated and the uneducated, and everyone else not covered by this list.
 - b. And as the Judge, God is committed to making sure the law is applied and practiced in just and equitable ways – which includes judging all who break the law and punishing all who remain unrepentant and therefore willfully go on sinning.
 - 2. Now it is true that God's discipline and punishments are not always immediate. And sometimes the full force of His punishment is not felt until a person dies and enters eternity.
 - a. And I know that many in our world use this fact to discredit God's handling of selfishness, dishonest business practices, mistreatment, discrimination, cruelty, physical and sexual abuse, a government's or dictator's misuse of power, and every other form of injustice.
 - b. And yet, who of us has discredited God or complained about His being compassionate and patient, gracious and long-suffering in His dealings with our own selfishness and sinfulness? And is it not true that most of us expect God to deal quickly with the misbehavior of others while forgiving or overlooking our own?
 - c. This kind of thinking is a double-standard, and if this kind of double-standard is so strongly imbedded in our thinking, how are we to gain a reasonably accurate understanding of God as the Judge of all the earth?
- B. When you consider the complexity of God's nature and character along with our double-standards regarding justice, it becomes clearer why so many misunderstand God as the Judge of all the earth. Nevertheless,

it is my goal to attempt to present you with a reasonably accurate understanding of God's justice and of God as the Judge of all the earth. And I will begin with an example of complexity from my own life.

1. Barb and I have three sons. Without question, we judged them, disciplined them, and on occasion punished them. And though we quickly admit we did not do this perfectly or even close to perfect, it was our goal to do this in a way that looked out for their best interests, and the good of everyone they were effecting and would effect by their choices and behavior.
2. To achieve our goal, we took a multi-pronged approach. For example, we wanted them to learn to submit to authority, to be respectful toward those over them, to do good work, to treat their siblings and the people around them with kindness, to look at the world and the people in the world and see both the good and the bad – in individuals as well as in families, schools, communities, churches, and governments.
3. We wanted them to grow up to be good, contributing adults who are community minded, who care about the good of the community and the well-being of each individual in the community, who willingly and thoughtfully do their part as members of a community, who will love their spouse and their children – so that they treat them well.
4. We wanted them to be able to go places, such as other people's homes, summer camp, other churches – and not only behave well, but discern the rules of the home or place they are in and behave accordingly.
5. We wanted them to get an education, to be responsible, to make an honest effort at whatever they do, to be serious thinkers who think critically about life and people and God, and to seek employment that enables them to contribute to the good in the world.
6. Though we wanted them to speak respectfully, we also wanted them to speak freely and honestly – to us and about us, and we wanted them to do the same with others. We wanted them to tell us the truth – whatever the truth may be, and we wanted them to learn to deal with the truth – whatever that may require of them and us.
7. We wanted them to learn about God, the ways of God, and the word of God. And we wanted them to become Christians – but we did not want to push them into becoming Christians because it is our belief that this is a decision they needed to make on their own and for themselves, rather than for us or because they thought it was what we did as a family.

8. As they approached their teen years, we progressively switched from a reward and punishment system of parenting to a reason and natural or logical consequences system of parenting. We did this because we wanted them to develop their own value system so that when they were away from home they had an anchor to hold them fast against following the crowd. Of course, we preferred they take on our value system, but that was not a requirement because we believe that for a value system to be immovable, it must be owned.
9. We wanted to have an ongoing, meaningful, open and honest relationship with them into their adult years. This required walking the fine line of being an understanding parent, telling them the truth, stating expectations, being a disciplinarian, a judge, and the enforcer of consequences for bad choices and foolish behavior.
10. Finally, we choose to try and deal with each one according to his age, personality, knowledge, strengths, weaknesses, fears, and hopes – without being unjust or unloving to our other two sons.
11. My purpose for telling this story is to give you a human example of all the things God wants to take into account when promoting and protecting justice in our world.
 - a. Now I can assure you the boys didn't always see the justice in our dealings with them, or our dealings with their brothers. And to some degree that is fair since we were imperfect in accomplishing our goals.
 - b. However, just as the boys didn't or couldn't see all that Barb and I were trying to do as parents and judges – because of the complexities involved – so it is hard for most of us to see all that God is trying to do as our righteous Judge. And it is this limited view that so easily leads to thinking God is not as just as He claims to be.

C. Therefore, as we continue looking at God, the Judge, open up your thinking to include all of God's nature and character so that you are able to see Him and His justice from this more complete perspective. In other words, try to keep in mind all that He is doing when considering what He is like as the Judge of all mankind.

1. For example, as the righteous Judge, God is diligently working for justice, while at the very same time He is willingly applying the price required – which He himself paid – to justify guilty sinners who deserve eternal damnation, but who have repented, put their faith in Jesus Christ, and proceeded to live accordingly.

2. As our Judge, God is committed to protecting the weakest among us, and yet He is completely impartial in all His judgments.
3. As the Judge, God is strict and sometimes harsh in enforcing the law, and yet He is compassionate and merciful when dealing with individual sinners.
4. As a righteous Judge, He is committed to protecting freewill and yet He condemns us for using our freewill to make choices and behave in ways that are contrary to the law, love, and righteousness.
5. As the Judge, God is willing to send unrepentant sinners to hell, and yet He doesn't want any to perish but all to come to repentance.
6. As the Judge of all the earth, God knows that justice should be swift and yet He is not only patient, but also long-suffering in working with us and waiting for us to come to our senses in the hopes that we will own the lessons learned and value the well-being of everyone enough to want to live according to the law.
7. And as a Judge who is also our Father, God wants a mutually meaningful, mutually loving, and eternal relationship with everyone – even though many of us don't want that with Him, and even though He will send many of us to eternal hell.
8. And though these are just some of the things God our Judge takes into consideration when judging nations, governments, and individuals like you and me, it gives us a clue as to why it is so easy to misunderstand Him and accuse Him of failing to act fast enough or harsh enough in judging those who hurt us or hurt those we love or who are unrepentantly cruel and evil.
9. However, we cannot come to a reasonably accurate understanding of God's administration of justice without taking all these things into account.
10. Therefore, keep in mind this list of things that God is working to accomplish as we look at specific portions of God's word to see what it has to say about God's justice and God as our judge.

D. It is my guess that many of us think God's judgment of Moses **seemed harsh** (*he couldn't go into the Promised Land*), and God's judgment of the prophet who did not go straight home after doing the job God sent him to do **seemed harsh** (*he was killed by a lion*) (**1 Kings 13:23-24**), and God's judgment of Jonah **seemed harsh** (*swallowed by a big fish*). However, God's word makes it clear that His judgment of pastors and teachers will be harsher or stricter than His judgment of those who are taught or under the leadership of a pastor or teacher (**James 3:1**).

1. So why does God judge some harsher than others? Jesus gives us an answer in **Luke 12:47-48**, when He said that the “slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, [48] but the one who did not know it, yet committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”
 2. In other words, God will judge us according to the knowledge we have of right and wrong, and according to the ability we have to take that knowledge and put it to practical use in our lives.
 3. Therefore, those who know more (*such as teachers, preachers, critics, and the critical*), and those who are more capable of doing what they know will be judged harsher than those who know less or are less capable of living up to what they know. This is why James warns us that God will judge those who teach more harshly than those who are taught, and why Jesus warns us that God will judge each of us according to the standard we use in judging others.
- E. Six times the word of God tells us that God will judge us according to our deeds (**Psalm 62:11-12, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Jeremiah 17:9-10, Matthew 16:24-27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 2:20-23**). For example, we read in **2 Corinthians 5:10**, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”
1. However, we learn from **Jeremiah 17:10** and **Hebrews 4:12-13** that when judging our deeds, God takes into account our thoughts and the intentions of our heart.
 - a. In considering our thoughts, I suspect God is looking at what we think about, the way we think, why we think that way, and how disciplined we are in being rational and sensible in our thinking.
 - b. In considering the intentions of our heart, I suspect God is looking at where we are headed in life, the rationale for heading that way, what we hope to gain by heading in that direction, and how disciplined we are maintaining our course.
 - c. In other words, God does not judge us on a strict observation of our deeds, but on our deeds as seen through the reasons we did those deeds.
 2. So why does God judge us according to our deeds? Because our deeds are the clearest and most undeniable manifestation of what

we believe, what we value, what we fear, and the principles upon which we build our choices and behavior. Jesus affirmed this when He said, “You will know them (*what they truly believe and value*) by their fruits (*or deeds*)” (**Matthew 7:16**).

3. One of the important lesson here is that we can avoid self-deception or living in denial by examining our deeds. In other words, by listening to what we say and how we say it, and by looking at what we do and then working backwards, we can figure out the beliefs, values, fears, and principles that promote such behavior.
4. The reason this is so helpful is because the more we change for the better in this life, the more we will improve our experience as we stand before our Judge.

F. The last truth I want to point out today is that God is impartial in His judging sinners and rewarding the righteous.

1. For example, we read in **Romans 2:6-11** that God will render to each person according to his deeds: [7] to those who seek for glory and honor and immortality by persevering in doing good, [God will render] eternal life; [8] but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, [God will render] wrath and indignation. [9] There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the believer first and also of the unbeliever, [10] but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the believer first and also to the unbeliever. [11] For there is **no partiality with God**.
2. This is an important truth because justice is perverted or even denied where there is partiality on the part of the Judge.
3. Thankfully, the Judge of all mankind, is completely impartial – which is why Peter reminds us that God’s judgment begins with those of His household.
4. Therefore, even though God’s grace and our faith in Jesus Christ protects us from eternal damnation in the fires of hell, they will not protect us from God’s judgments in relation to reaping what we sow or from taking communion in an unworthy manner. Why? Because God is impartial.

III. Conclusion

- A. There is more that ought to be considered concerning God as our judge, and if possible, we will give consideration to some of that next Sunday.