

Nature and Character of God

What Is God Like?

September 22, 2019

I. God is Just and the Justifier

A. Today we are going to look at the nature and character of God as seen through His justice and His justification of sinners.

1. To prepare us for seeing God's nature and character in this way, I am going to read **Romans 3:19-26**.
2. **Romans 3:19-26** . . . Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; [20] because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in [God's] sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. [21] But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [22] even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; [23] **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, [24] **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; [25] whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate [God's] righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; [26] for the demonstration, I say, of [God's] righteousness at the present time, so that He would be **just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus.

B. Pray

II. God is both Just and the Justifier of those who trust in Jesus

A. What does it mean when the Bible says God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Let's define the terms.

1. **To be just** is to submit to the rule of law, to conform to the written law, to live according to unwritten though culturally understood laws, and to practice the principles of righteousness in your daily life.
 - a. To be just includes performing your moral obligations and maintaining integrity in your dealings with others.
 - b. To be just means conforming to truth and reality in forming opinions, drawing conclusions, and in rewarding or punishing.

- c. To be just includes making honest and fair representations of the facts surrounding a particular situation or regarding a particular person or group of people. And it means being impartial when judging a person or group of people.
 - d. To be just is to render to each one what is due or right based on a full assessment and understanding of the person's behavior, motives, position, history, intelligence, and ability. (*Webster's 1913 Unabridged English Dictionary*.)
- 2. An important truth about justice is that it is intricately involved in administering the law and dealing with law-breakers.
 - a. And this an important truth because whether it is God's laws, or a nation's laws, or workplace rules, or the rules of a family, or common cultural practices, the proper intent of the law is to make life safe, secure, and equitable for everyone.
 - b. Therefore, to be just is to be involved in very practical ways with the fair and equitable administration of the law, and the fair and equitable judgment and punishment of law-breakers so that everyone's well-being is ensured and protected at all times.
- 3. **To justify** is to free a convicted law-breaker from the legally due consequences of their law-breaking, to pronounce them free of guilt, and to treat them as if they had not sinned – but rather had always been righteous and just.
 - a. In other words, to justify is to absolve all guilt, to exonerate so the sinner is seen as having never sinned, and to acquit so the sinner is forever free of any liability or debt that may be due as a result of his sin.

B. Now, if as the Bible says, God is **just**, how can He also be the **justifier** of willful sinners who knowingly break the Law? Because we have been schooled in NT theology, answering this question seems easy. But for the Jews, this was a difficult concept to comprehend and accept.

- 1. It was difficult because under the Law, it took only two or three witnesses to condemn a Jew who knowingly and willfully sinned. And once condemned, the common punishment was either to be cut off from one's people or to be put to death.
- 2. We get a clear picture of this OT reality in **Hebrews 10:26-31**, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, [27] but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. [28] Anyone who has set aside (*knowingly*

and willfully sins) the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (*And the writer continues on by asking what we NT believers should deserve if we go on sinning willfully. After all, we have an expanded knowledge of God's will, a redeemer in Jesus Christ, and a salvation that saves us from the penalty of sin.*) [29] How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who (*knowingly and willfully sins, and in so doing*) tramples under foot the Son of God, and regards as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and insults the Spirit of grace? [30] For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' [31] It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

- a. John adds further clarity to this warning by pointing out that it is the willful practice of known sin – that is, an ongoing, unrepentant, and willful committing of the same sin or a similar sin that cuts us off from God's people and results in eternal death.
 - b. We read about this in **1 John 3:7-9**, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."
 3. Now, if these two portions of scripture are true, and I believe they are, how can God be just – on the one hand, and on the other be so forgiving and so merciful as to justify sinners? In other words, how can God be just, yet treat sinners as if they have never knowingly and willfully sinned?
- C. When the Bible says that God is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus, it means God, himself, has paid the price and born the ultimate consequences for your sin and my sin.
1. And though we know well this part of the story, let us consider it again in the hope that we will find in it a renewed or deeper sense of awe and appreciation for what God has done for us.
 2. We read in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, that God made His only son, Jesus Christ – who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

- a. God's concern for everyone's well-being produced the law.
 - b. As our loving Father, God provides the necessary help and motivational rewards to those who choose to live according to the law, and He disciplines and punishes those who break the law.
 - c. Though we have turned away from God to go our own way, and though such turning away from God means we owe the penalty for sin, His desire for an eternal, mutually loving, intimate relationship with us motivated Him to pay the penalty for us.
 - d. Therefore, having protected justice by graciously paying the debt we owe, God justifies every sinner who forsakes his rebellion against God, repents of his sin, trusts in Jesus for redemption and eternal salvation, and then proceeds to live accordingly.
3. Do you see what this means about God's nature and character?
- a. Out of love for all mankind, God created the law – for it is the law that sets the boundaries and guidelines for justice, and it is justice that protects the well-being of everyone living within the boundaries and guidelines of the law.
 - b. Out of love, God makes the sure the law is applied and practiced in a just and equitable way.
 - c. Where the law is ignored and willingly broken, God justly punishes all who remain unrepentant and willful in sinning – be it in this life or in the life to come.
 - d. And God remains perfectly just when He graciously justifies repentant sinners who trust in Jesus and live accordingly – for He justifies no one without having paid the price or penalty for their sin – Himself.

D. ONCE UPON A TIME

1. A successful business man built a lavish home on the side of a mountain. The side of his home which overlooked the beautiful valley below was mostly glass. The cost of insuring the glass against breakage was so great, he decided not to insure it. A few years later, a high school senior – on a dare from several of his friends – took a slingshot and broke five panes of glass. Through good investigative work, the county sheriff was able to arrest the young man who did this destructive deed.
2. When the case came to court it was revealed that this was not the first time this young man had destroyed other people's property.

The townspeople wanted him put in jail to teach the young man a lesson, and to protect their property from further damage. The home owner wanted the young man to pay for the damage since he had no insurance to cover the cost of replacing it.

3. The judge knew he had to protect the townspeople from further acts of destruction and he had to get the broken windows replaced. Any judgment which did less would be unfair. Yet he felt compassion for the young man because he knew his decision would effect the young man for years to come. If he jailed the young man, he would not only have a prison record, he would be placed amongst older criminals who might influence this young man to do worse things. If he made him pay for the damage, the necessity of immediate employment might mean the hope of college and a better future would be gone forever.
4. Feeling the same love for this young man that he had for his own children, the judge wanted to forgive him, and through some form of training, and accountability, set him on the path to maturity and responsibility. Yet forgiving the young man would not guarantee future protection for the townspeople nor pay for the broken windows. He could not expect the townspeople to suffer more damage to their property just to give the young man another chance to straighten out. Nor could he expect the home owner to pay for the broken windows just so the young man could get on with college and a better future.
5. So the judge did some investigating between the end of the trial and the date of sentencing. He discovered the arrest and possible jail time had shaken the young man into seeing the foolishness of his ways. Before the case came to trial the young man had begun to make serious and personally costly changes. He changed his friendships so that he was spending time with young people who were encouraging him to do good things. He found a job and was already saving money to pay for the damage he caused.
6. The judge checked with the young man's teachers, his parents, the parents of his friends, and any other sensible adult who had observed the young man's attitude and behavior since his arrest. All pointed to a significant and sustained change of mind and behavior. This gave the judge the confidence he needed to act with justice, and with mercy – which meant no jail time for the young offender.
7. However, there was still the matter of the broken windows. In order to be just, the judge not only had to protect the townspeople, he had

to make sure the windows were paid for. Only partial justice would be served by the young man changing his ways. Full justice required changed behavior plus paying the debt for damage done. To completely forgive the young man so that he would have no jail time and no expense that would deter his college education, the judge, himself, paid the cost of replacing the broken windows.

8. Therefore, the judge was not only just, but the justifier of the one who did wrong and owed a great debt because of his wrongdoing.
 9. The love and sacrificial generosity of the judge coupled with the repentance of the young man made forgiveness reasonable, rational, and sensible. We see the truth of this in the fact that forgiveness accomplished its purpose.
 10. For example, forgiveness opened the way for reconciliation between the young man and everyone else involved. Reconciliation made it possible for the restoration of relationships to levels of love and trust. Restored relationships resulted in lasting friendships between the young man and many others in the community. And the lasting friendships became the best protection from further destructive behavior by the young man. Thus justice was served, a guilty sinner was forgiven, and the good of all promoted and protected.
- E. When the Bible says that God is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus, it means 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 understand that it is the Protestant way to see God as a god of individuals. Yet we see in both the OT and the NT, that is, with Israel and the church, that God has shown himself to be a god of community.
 - a. And as I pointed out already today, the law exists for the good of the community, and then for the well-being of the individuals in the community.
 - b. I believe we can say the same about the family, the nation, and the church. Each of these communities creates laws for the good of the community itself, and for the good of the individuals within those community.
 2. Therefore, justice and community are naturally linked, for it is through justice that the good of the community is promoted and protected, and it is through justice that the well-being of the individuals within the community are promoted and protected.

- a. In other words, communities are made safe and each individual within the community is provided for and protected when everyone in the community lives according to the law.
 - b. This is nothing more than love in action. Love, by its nature, is just. Therefore, love deals justly and equitably with everyone.
- 3. At this point I want to remind you that flagrant injustice is not the only form of injustice.
 - a. Failing to stand against injustice or doing what we can to correct injustice is also an act of injustice.
 - b. We affirm this truth when we condemn God or the boss or the government for *what appears to us* as a failure to stop injustice.
- 4. And though individuals, communities, and governments may fail to stand against injustice, God is never passive or unresponsive in the face of injustice. He may not act immediately or as quickly as we would like, and His punishment may not be as quick as we think it should be, but He always acts against injustice wherever it is found.

III. Conclusion

- A. I want to close by making several short statements about justice.
 - 1. **First**, God is the most practical model of justice and love combined, which is why we should model our behavior after His.
 - 2. **Second**, like love, justice is also the standard for behavior in all situations.
 - 3. **Third**, justice is the standard by which we discern and measure all injustice and decide the punishment for those who will not repent.
 - 4. **Fourth**, all sin is an injustice in that it unnecessarily harms others.
 - 5. And **finally**, justice is love in action – which is why Paul said, “God is **just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus.”