

Spurgeon Room Studies ~ Knowing God ~ Fall 2018

Session 4

God's Attributes continued— Justice (Righteousness), Jealousy and Wrath

I. Justice (Righteousness); God as Judge

*He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are justice:
a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*
(Deuteronomy 32.4 KJV)

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18.25)

*If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges
decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty...*
(Deuteronomy 25.1)

I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right. (Isaiah 45.19)

- Both the Hebrew (*tsedeq*) and Greek (*dikaiousune*) word groups may be translated righteousness or justice, although they are not strictly synonymous. “In English, *right* and *righteous* tend to apply more often individuals, and *just* and *justice* to institutions, societies, and rulers, though that generalization has many exceptions.¹
- We are dealing here with the concept of what is “right,” “fair” or “equal,” as in “equal justice under the law.” The function of the judge is to declare what is right. (Isaiah 45.19)
- God is the ultimate Judge. (Genesis 18.25)
- “God’s equity² as Judge will be seen most clearly ‘in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works.’” (Romans 2.5)³
- “God’s righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.”⁴
- Justice is a communicable attribute of God which manifests his holiness.

¹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P& R Publishing, Phillipsburg, 2002, p. 447.

² *Equity—the state or quality of being equal or fair; fairness in dealing.* Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, G. & C. Merriam Co. Publishers, Springfield, 1945, p. 338.

³ D.B. Knox, *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. E.F. Harrison, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1960, p. 461.

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1994, p. 203.

- Both justice and righteousness are not abstract ideas but reflect the proper relationships that God's holy character demands of human beings.

A. Examples of God's justice/judgment in the Old Testament

1. Adam and Eve (Genesis 3)
2. The world, at the time of Noah (Genesis 6-8)
3. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)
4. Egypt, at the time of Moses (Exodus 7-12, 14)
5. Israel, at the time of the golden calf (Exodus 32)
6. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10.1-3)
7. Rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16)
8. Achan (Joshua 7)

B. Examples from the NT

1. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)
2. Herod (Acts 12)
3. The Jews, for rejecting Jesus (Matthew 21.42-44; 23.38)
4. Revelation 6-21

C. The theme of the Bible has been stated as "God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment." (James Hamilton)

D. The day of judgment (Matthew 12.36); of wrath (Zephaniah 1.15); of the LORD (Amos 5.18); cf. Malachi 3.2 ff.; I Thessalonians 5.1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1.9-10

E. God, the Judge has authority; final say (I Corinthians 4.5); we are *accountable* to Him; we are *liable* for the consequences of our sin.

1. *Accountability* means that we are subject to God's evaluation and obligated to obey His commands. (I Kings 8.39; Hebrews 4.13)
2. *Liability* indicates responsibility for the results of our actions, which can vary in degree. (Luke 12.47-48)

- F. God, the Judge is right, loves justice, hates bribes, is concerned with the rights of the poor and needy.
- G. God, the Judge is wise; can discern mitigating circumstances; has all the facts necessary for just judgment; know the motives of the hearts.
- H. God, the Judge also reproveth, convicts and executes sentence. All judicial functions coalesce in Him. He legislates, sentences and punishes.
- I. Retribution—God, the Judge perfectly metes out what is deserved because He is fair. God’s moral law is built into His creation. This is where we get our sense of fairness. We are made in his image. However, our ability to evaluate fairness is impaired due to the noetic effect of sin. (Illustration—PA Turnpike)
- J. Justice/Righteousness is a revelation of God’s moral character.
- K. Jesus is the agent of God’s judgment (John 5.22-23; 26-29; 12.44-50)
- L. Justification shields the believer from condemnation but not from evaluation for degree of reward. (I Corinthians 3.12-15; 2 Corinthians 5.9)

II. The Wrath of God

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers.

The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it.

Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness. (Nahum 1.2-8)

- “The wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.” John R.W. Stott
- Some consider the very idea as unbecoming of God. But if God is holy, it is necessary for him to hate and oppose sin. One explanation for our aversion to God’s wrath is we underestimate the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. Another reason is that we associate wrath and anger with our human emotions which are tainted with our sin. But God’s *wrath* is a holy wrath.
- “Precisely because of the other attributes we have considered, his *wrath* is not the capricious willfulness or temper tantrum of sinful human beings—or of the gods of Mount Olympus. Rather, it is the holy and wise wrath of a just judge. Thus, even God’s jealousy and wrath reveal his electing love for his people as well as for the honor of his own name.”⁵
- The wrath of God revealed. (Romans 1.18 ff.)
- “No doubt it is true that the subject of divine wrath has in the past been handled speculatively, irreverently, even malevolently. No doubt there have been some who have preached words of wrath and damnation with tearless eyes and no pain in their hearts. No doubt the sight of small sects cheerfully consigning the whole world, apart from themselves, to hell has disgusted many. Yet, if we would know God, it is vital that we face the truth concerning His wrath, however unfashionable it may be, and however strong our initial prejudices against it. Otherwise, we shall not understand the gospel of salvation from wrath, nor the propitiatory achievement of the cross, nor the wonder of the redeeming love of God. Nor shall we understand the hand of God

⁵ Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2012, p. 87.

in history, and God's present dealings with our own people; nor shall we be able to make head or tail of the book of Revelation; nor will our evangelism have the urgency enjoined by Jude—'save some, by snatching them out of the fire' (Jude 23). Neither our knowledge of God, nor our service to Him, will be in accord with His Word."⁶

III. The Jealousy of God

... for I the LORD your God am a jealous God ... (Exodus 20.5)

... (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)... (Exodus 34.14)

A. Anthropomorphic/anthropopathic language—descriptions of God in human language

1. In divine condescension, God makes himself known to us using figurative language. This is the most accurate means of description, given the limitations of human language to convey spiritual realities.
2. "Everything anthropomorphically or improperly attributed to God, as if he had arms or grief, is actually properly attributed to Christ, as the God-man.... In him we are able to affirm both his divine unchangeability and his human ability to express passions. The Son of God, as one person with two natures, is both unchangeable and changeable; he experiences infinite joy in his deity, but while on earth, he also experienced an inexpressible sorrow in his humanity."⁷

NB, some qualities, sinful for human beings, are appropriate for God, actually necessary to his being, such as vengeance. Jealousy is another.

B. Scripture views jealousy as an aspect of God's covenant love/loyalty analogous to that of a husband's concern to guard his marriage from any intruder.

⁶ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1973, p. 142.

⁷ Mark Jones, *God Is*, Crossway, Wheaton, 2017, p. 207.

- C. Mosaic references to God's jealousy are all in the context of idol worship.
- D. The correct human counterpart is zeal, as in the disciples' comment on Jesus after cleansing the Temple, "Zeal for your house will consume me."
(From Psalm 69.9)
- E. Quotation from J.C. Ryle, cited by Packer, p. 156.