

Attributes of God 5 – Just

Reading: Psalm 7:11 “...*God is a just judge*¹...”

Introduction:

This is the fifth lesson in the series where we are looking at the attributes of God.

In the previous lesson, where we looked at God’s love, we touched on the topic of sin. We noted from both the scriptures (**Romans 6:23a**), and from life itself, that justice demands a penalty be paid for wrong-doing. We were also reminded that all of us have sinned, even as Christians (**Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8**).

Whether we have obeyed the gospel or not, the scriptures clearly say that each and every one of us will have to stand before God in judgement at the end of time (**2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10b-12; Matthew 25:31-32**). So what sort of judge is God? Is He the “harsh” and “all vengeful” judge that some make Him out to be? Or is He at the other extreme, being “all loving” and “all forgiving” who will simply overlook the sins of everybody? Or is He something different again?

The aim of this lesson is to investigate from the scriptures what type of judge God actually is.

LESSON

1) God is just

Psalm 7:11 says that; “*God is a just judge*”, or “*a righteous (or “good”) judge*”, depending on your translation². In **Revelation 15:3** we read of the angels and the redeemed in heaven describing God as “... *just and true are your ways* ...”.

When we talk about someone being “*just*”, what do we mean? The Greek word “*dikaios*” as used in **Revelation 15:3** means “*to be holy*”, “*righteous*”³. Modern dictionaries describe the word as;

- guided by truth, reason, justice, and fairness.
- done or made according to principle; equitable; proper.
- based on right; rightful; lawful.

You will notice from the above description that justice uses a standard – *i.e.* truth, it considers all the facts of the issue (*i.e.* reasons), and comes to an equitable, logical conclusion. It makes a distinction between what is “right” and what is “wrong” - it rewards the “right” and punishes the “wrong”.

The above description of the word “*just*” reflects the judgement of God. He will use a standard on Judgement Day – the Truth; His word (**John 12:48; 17:17b**). His judgements won’t be tainted by any favouritism, because He shows no partiality (**Acts 10:34**). And it will be equitable and proper, because God is holy (**1 Peter 1:16**, and Lesson 3). Consider what the apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 2:5b-11**. To put the reading in context, Paul is rebuking his audience for making hypocritical judgements about each other. He reminds them about the righteous judgement of God;

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

² The King James Version Bible states this verse as; “*God judgeth the righteous* ...”. Most other translations state the verse along the lines of “*God is a just/good/fair/etc judge*”.

³ Strong’s Concordance of the Bible, Greek word 1342.

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⁵” *the righteous judgement of God,*
⁶ *who will render to each one according to his deeds.*
⁷ *eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing*
good seek for glory, honour, and immortality;
⁸ *But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth,*
but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath,
⁹ *tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil,*
of the Jew first and also of the Greek;
¹⁰ *For there is no partiality with God.”*

We can believe the above simply on the basis that it was written by an inspired apostle of Jesus (**2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:1:20-21**). But in addition to that, Bible history shows God to be a righteous judge.

2) Historic biblical examples of God’s justice

There are various occasions throughout Bible history where we read about God executing judgement on people. But in this lesson, I want us to look at just three of them to show that God is indeed a righteous judge.

a) Sodom and Lot

In **Genesis 13:11-13**, we read about Abraham’s nephew, Lot⁴, going to live near Sodom, an exceedingly wicked city. In **Genesis 19:4-9**, which is several years later, we get a glimpse of the moral and sexual depravity that existed there. For this reason, God was going to execute judgement on both Sodom and the equally corrupt Gomorrah (**Genesis 18:20; 19:14, 24**).

However, in **Genesis 19:1-2**, we see that Lot is now actually a citizen of Sodom, having his own house there. Lot may have made some un-wise decisions in his life, but he was still considered a righteous man in the eyes of God (**2 Peter 2:7-8**). Was he also going to be destroyed along with everybody else in Sodom? No. Lot may have been the only righteous person living in that city full of evil-doers, but God knew of him – he was not forgotten or over-looked. When God’s judgement came, Lot and those with him were spared, while everyone else was destroyed (**Genesis 19:24-25, 29; 2 Peter 2:6-7**). God did not condemn the righteous along with the wicked.

“..... the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgement,” (2 Peter 2:9)

b) Nineveh

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. We don’t know what instructions or teachings they had received from God with regard to sin and righteousness⁵. However, we do see from the account of Jonah that they were still accountable to God for their sins. Their wickedness was known to God (**Jonah 1:2**) and therefore they faced His wrath (**Jonah 3:4**).

Jonah was sent to Nineveh with a message from God - unless they repented, they would be overthrown in 40 days (**Jonah 3:2, 4**).

⁴ Lot was the son of Abram/Abraham’s brother Haran - **Genesis 11:27**.

⁵ Perhaps they came under the category shown in **Romans 2:12-15**.

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Jonah preached the message, and the people, from the king down, proclaimed a fast, put on sackcloth, and repented of their sins (**Jonah 3:5-6**). When God saw that they had changed from their evil ways, He relented from the disaster that He said He would bring on them (**Jonah 3:10**).

God's justice at Nineveh was in keeping with a principal that He has stated in various ways and at various times throughout the scriptures. For example;

²⁰*“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.*

²¹*But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”* **Ezekiel 18:20-21**

God's judgement was true to His word.

c) The nation of Israel/Judah

Just before the Hebrews entered the promised land, Moses re-read the Law to them. A part of that reading included what we call “the blessings and the curses” that are found in **Deuteronomy 28**. God promised Israel that if they diligently obeyed Him, then they would prosper (verses **1-14**). However, if they did not obey Him, then He would curse them, scatter them, and destroy them (verses **15-68**).

When we read the history of the Israelites, we find again that God kept His word. When they were faithful to God, then He looked after them. But when they turned away from Him, then they faced His wrath. And when they repented and turned back to Him, He took care of them again – e.g. **Judges 2:7-15; 10:6-9; 2 Chronicles 12:1-7; 15:1-15**.

God was just in His dealings with them. He was true to His word in that He punished them when they did wrong, and blessed them when they did right. Sometimes, when His people were rebelling against Him, He showed extraordinary patience towards them, giving them plenty of time to change their ways. But His patience was not endless. When the people stubbornly refused to repent, there came a time when He basically said, “*Enough is enough*”, and punished them – e.g. **2 Kings 17:7-18; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21**.

3) Application

Knowing that God is a just God, what are the practical lessons for us? Let me just make two points;

a) We know how God will judge us on the last day.

For God to be a just God, He has to stand by and be true to His word. And we can see from bible history that God is trustworthy and does indeed keep His word. Therefore, when He says in **John 5:29** that He will punish the wicked and reward the righteous, we can believe Him. When He says in **Revelation 2:10** that those who have been faithful unto death will receive the crown of life, we can believe Him.

Make no mistake about it, there is a day coming when we shall all stand before God in judgement (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). The standard that God will use will be His word (**John 12:48**). What we have done during our lives

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here on earth will be measured against what we have been commanded to do or not to do (**Matthew 7:21-23**)⁶. The result will be that;

- for those who have obeyed the gospel and have remained faithful to the Lord, there will be no condemnation (**Romans 8:1; 1 John 1:7, 9**). This is not to say that faithful Christians haven't sinned, for they have sinned (**1 John 1:8, 10**). But their sins have been forgiven (**Colossians 1:14**). Justice has still been served, because a penalty has been paid for their sins. Jesus took the penalty on Himself, and His blood continues to cleanse them so that they stand before God holy and blameless (**Colossians 1:21-23a; 1 Thessalonians 5:9**).
- but for those who have not obeyed the Lord, they will stand before Him still in their sins, and will have to bear His wrath (**2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10; Matthew 25:41-46a**).

Knowing the righteous judgement of the Lord, we need to use our time wisely to prepare for it (**Ephesians 5:15-16; 2 Corinthians 5:9, 11a**).

b) We are to be like God (Matthew 5:48), therefore, we are to be just in our dealings with people because God is just.

Not only is God just, He requires us to be just also. In the Old Testament, we read of His instructions to those in positions of authority. They were to judge righteously and not show partiality.

“You shall do no injustice in judgement. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour”
Leviticus 19:15

“You shall not show partiality in judgement; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgement is God's.”
Deuteronomy 1:17⁷

The same principle applies to us today. We may not be formal judges, but we do have inter-action with other people. Sometimes our dealings and judgements are tainted by our attitude or relationship to them. For example;

- we may excuse the faults of our friends while at the same time nit-pick and highlight the faults of those who we don't like.
- or, we may go the second mile to help someone important, but do the bare minimum for the less fortunate.

When we do this, we are showing partiality, and the lesson from **James 2:1-9** is that showing partiality is sin. Therefore, we are to view people and treat them the way God does – justly. We are to treat them honestly, fairly and ethically, not taking advantage of anyone should the opportunity arise.

We can be thankful that God is a just God. It is one of the reasons why we can have confidence in Him. If we are to reflect the glory of God (**Matthew 5:16**), then we must be just too.

⁶ Note that God's justice is not limited to external actions. It includes the thoughts and intents of the heart as well (**Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28; 15:19; Acts 8:21-22; Hebrews 4:11-13**).

⁷ See also **Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Proverbs 21:3 and Micah 6:8**.