

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD: *RIGHTEOUSNESS & JUSTICE*

I. INTRODUCTION

- a. God's righteousness and justice flow out of His Holy nature
- b. Hebrew (tsedeqah) and Greek (dikaiosyne) are translated either righteousness or justice
- c. Righteousness and Justice appear together in many Scripture passages:
 - i. Psalm 89:14a (LSB): "*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your Throne.*"
 - ii. Amos 5:24; Psalm 98:8-9; Psalm 99:4; Psalm 103:6; Psalm 106:3; Psalm 119:7, 39b-40, 62, 75, 106, 121a, 137, 160; Romans 2:5
- d. Communicable vs. Incommunicable
 - i. Communicable in Its Application to Human Affairs
 - ii. Uniquely Communicable in Redemption through Imputation and Sanctification

II. DEFINING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

- a. Working towards a definition: the righteousness of God refers to His moral perfection,¹ and Hebrew and Greek words carry a strong sense of conformity to a standard.²
- b. **Definition: God's righteousness refers to "[i] his perfect, absolute justice in and toward Himself; [ii] his prevention of any violation of the justice of his character; and [iii] his revelation of himself in acts of justice."**²
 - i. God possesses His perfections within His own nature; not external. God always acts in perfect harmony with all of His other attributes.
 - ii. God cannot act against His own nature, nor violate His own intrinsic justice (Gen 18:25b)
 - iii. Justice flows forth as the outworking of His righteous nature (Amos 5:24; Ps 111:3b,7a)

III. CATEGORIES OF JUSTICE: The Outworking of God's Righteousness

- a. Legislative (or Rectoral) Justice. This is God's righteousness on display as the Moral Ruler, Lawgiver, and Judge, "*imposing law with promises of reward and punishment.*"²
 - i. Deut 4:8, Romans 1:32, Isaiah 33:22, Luke 1:6, Romans 8:4a, James 4:12
- b. Distributive Justice: God's exactness and rightness in the execution of His law in distributing reward (*i.e. Remunerative*) and punishment (*i.e. Retributive*).
 - i. Deut 7:9-10; Rom 2:6; Gal 6:7; 1 Kings 8:32; Job 34:11-12; Isa 3:10-11; 2 Cor 5:10
 - ii. Retributive Justice speaks of the penalty / punishment of the unrighteous
 - 1. Ezra 9:15; Neh 9:26-30; 2 Thess 1:7-9; Gal 6:8; Rev 16:5-7
 - 2. Wrath: Romans 1:18 (ESV): "*...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*" Also, Romans 3:5-6, Deut 32:41b
 - 3. A.W. Pink defines the wrath of God as "*...His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness.*"³ Continuing, Pink writes: "*Now the wrath of God is as much a*

¹ Brad Klassen, Men of the Word, *No One Like Him: Righteousness*

² MacArthur, *Essential Christian Doctrine*, 105

*Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy...How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom 9:12) toward it? ...The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite as Heaven is."*³

4. Romans 3:5-6, Deut 32:41b
5. God's Wrath is Holy, Righteous, Just, and Good. God's wrath is NOT out of control, malicious, malignant, spiteful, or capricious.
6. God's wrath is displayed in the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross.
- iii. Remunerative Justice speaks of the reward given by God to the righteous for righteous deeds (Deut 7:9; Rom 2:7; 2 Tim 4:7-8; Gal 6:8-9; Heb 6:10).
 1. God is not held to any obligation to give rewards, except by His own gracious choice (Job 41:11; Luke 17:10).
- c. Redemptive Justice: the glorious high point of God's justice, displayed in the forgiveness of sin and imputation of Christ's righteousness to us!
 - i. We see God's *Legislative Justice* in the gospel (Rom 3:20b). Christ alone has perfectly kept and fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law (Matt 5:17)
 - ii. We see God's *Distributive Justice* in the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:21)
 - iii. We see God's Mercy demonstrated alongside His Justice (1 John 1:9, Romans 11:32; Romans 3:21-26)
 1. *"This of course is the beauty of the gospel. God has not surrendered his just demands. Rather, he 'sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1Jn 4:10; cf. Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1Jn 2:2). In the Lord Jesus we have all that God's righteousness requires of us. He the sinless one, standing in the place of sinners, offered himself in sacrifice and endured the righteous curse against sin."*⁴

IV. APPLICATION

- a. Be thankful that God cares about justice and has given us righteous standards for government in law, penalty, and reward (Rom 13:3-4).
- b. Remember that no sin goes unpunished, and let that lead us into the fear of God. We can also find comfort in knowing that all evils will meet God's justice (Psalm 73:17-19).
- c. Rest in trusting that God's justice is perfect, and also trust that God never unjustly afflicts us, but our trials are designed to purify us and make us into the image of Christ. *"God's justice should be a source of great comfort to His people. There are many things we do not understand in this life because we are not God, yet in those times, God's justice reassures us."*⁵
- d. Be ever more thankful for God's redemptive justice. He has forever satisfied His eternal justice so that our own sins can never be justly charged against us (John 3:16; Romans 8:33-34)!
- e. Grow in understanding the utter worthlessness of our own self-righteousness, and grow in valuing the priceless, everlasting righteousness of God that is counted to us by faith in Christ (Php 3:7-9).

³A.W. Pink, *The Wrath of God*

⁴Fred Zaspel, *The Righteousness of God*

⁵Mark Jones, *God Is*, p. 190