



“Just are Your Ways”

What do you think it's going to be like, praising God forever in the new heavens and the new earth? Do you give much thought as to how joyous, how beautiful, how glorious that will be?

As we praise Him in eternity, we will know Him so much more intimately than we do now. Of course, our knowledge of Him will always be limited, because we will never be God. But still, unimpeded by sin, we will have a much better understanding of His characteristics, His attributes, and we will be declaring the wonder of his perfect being.

Now, before proceeding, we must make one thing clear: we always need to emphasise the oneness and simplicity of God. We can't separate his attributes from who he is, and we can't play off one attribute against another.

But that being said, if it were possible to pick out your favourite characteristic of God, if you could choose one aspect of his being that you look forward to praising him for, for all eternity, what attribute would that be?

Consider what the saints in glory right now are praising him for. Revelation 15:3 says, *“Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!”*

The church in heaven proclaims: Lord, you are great, and all that you do is great. You are marvellous, and all that you do is marvellous. You are just and true, and all your ways are just and true.

The church triumphant praises God for the fact that He is, among other things, just. When we get to heaven, we'll be praising him forever for his justness. Is that what you look forward to praising Him for?

A Just God

Philippians 4:8 instructs us to meditate on whatever things are just. To do that, we need to consider first of all the God who is the source of justice, the ultimate in just. We need to meditate on the fact that God is a just God.

Mind you, this is not a particularly popular concept. To speak of God being a just God is to draw attention to how He makes judgments.

To speak of God being a just God is to say that He has specific standards by which He judges whether something is just or not, and He makes firm decisions according to those standards.

To speak of God as a just God is to speak of how God will reward the righteous and punish the guilty.

We might very well be wondering: how is it possible that the saints in heaven would make this part of their song of praise, “You are a just God”?

Yet, they are praising the God who has revealed Himself. And He has revealed himself as a just God, a God who makes judgments. He has revealed himself as a righteous God who judges sin. And whatever he reveals about himself gives us another reason to praise Him.

There really can be no doubt that this is who God is. Deuteronomy 32:3-4 — *“For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.”*

And remember this, brothers and sisters: if we try to downplay the justice of God, if we try to downplay any aspect of God whatsoever, then we end up worshipping a false God. A God who can't be bothered to be just is a figment of our imagination, and as such he is a false God, an idol.

The Perfect Judge

So it's important to see God as a just God. Let's elaborate further on what this means.

For one thing, God shows himself to be a just God when he reveals Himself to be judge. God is the ultimate judge, far greater than any human judge. And the time is coming when everyone will be forced to acknowledge this about God.

James 5:8-9 — *“You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”*

Now, for God to be a judge, several things are necessary. For one thing, he has to have a standard to go by. He has to have a set of rules, guidelines, laws. A judge without standards to judge by is nothing but a tyrant.

God certainly has a standard to judge by. It's a standard that flows from His very being. Quite simply, it is His law.

A judge also has to have the ability to be able to discern whether or not those being judged are living up to that standard. He has to have the wisdom to be able to discern the facts of the cases before him. What good would a judge be who could not discern truth?

With God, this is not a problem. Seeing as how His knowledge and wisdom is perfect, it follows that His ability to come up with just judgements is also perfect.

His knowledge is so perfect, that He can do that which no human judge can possibly do: He can search right into our hearts. Jeremiah 17:10 — *“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”*

A just judge must also be good and fair and upright in his judgments. A judge who lets malice control his decisions is nothing more than a bully.

Thanks be to God, He is perfectly good, perfectly fair.

Also, as judge He must have the power to enforce His judgments. What good would a judge be if he were helpless to do anything about the judgments he makes?

Again, when it comes to God, this is not a problem. He is Almighty and sovereign.

Justice for the Wicked

So, God shows that He is just, simply by virtue of the fact that He is a judge. And He is unlike any other judge: He is the perfect judge. And so He is perfectly just.

Part of what this means is that he will condemn the wicked.

Ezekiel 7:8-9 — *“Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will punish you for all your abominations. And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord, who strikes.”*

In Revelation 15, where we read of the saints praising God for being just, we also read about the judgment of God about to be demonstrated against a wicked world.

Verse 1: *“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.”*

The wrath of God being poured out: hardly something we’re inclined to praise him for in this life. Yet when we are in heaven, that’s exactly what we will be praising him for. We will be praising him for his judgment, eternal judgment, on his enemies.

This is not something we like to meditate on: everlasting punishment. Oh, it’s ok to talk about the Hitlers and Stalins going to hell. Perhaps there are some so evil that they are beyond redemption.

But that this could happen to normal people, no different than you or I, well, that’s another matter. Especially when it comes to someone we know. How can I ever entertain the possibility that a good God would send someone I love to hell? And to think that I’ll be praising Him for that? Unimaginable!

This is a hard truth, but also a simple one: the good God is the just God, and everlasting condemnation demonstrates his justness.

But is that really just? Let the punishment fit the crime. How can eternal suffering possibly be a just punishment for a few sins?

Well, as we need to repeatedly emphasise, sin is not a minor matter. And when we realise just how serious sin is, as something completely contrary to who God is as the Majestic, holy God, then we will have to confess that the punishment does fit the crime. It’s a hard concept, but a necessary one to come to grips with.

Justice for the Righteous

So, a just judge shows justice in punishing the wicked. He also shows justice in rewarding the righteous. Not only must there be negative retribution, but also positive rewards.

Proverbs 13:21 — *“Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.”*

But wait a minute, there’s a problem here. As we read in Romans 3:10-12, *“There is none righteous, no, not one.”*

There is no one deserving of being rewarded with good. The problem is, no one can live up to the standard of God’s law. We all fall short. Therefore, why bother even talking about rewards for the righteous?

Well, the simple fact of the matter is, the Bible does talk about rewards. Scripture is clear: the righteous can expect a reward. 2 John 8 — *“Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”*

Here’s where we need to remember: God makes us righteous, not we ourselves. In other words, the reward the righteous receive is not because they are so great. Rather, it is a gift, given merely out of grace.

God in His mercy has determined that he would grant His people righteousness, and that’s why they are rewarded with everlasting life. We did nothing to deserve a reward. God in his mercy freely bestows that reward, simply because, in addition to being a just God, he is also a gracious God.

But wait a minute, we get a reward we don’t deserve? Where is the justice in that? If God were truly a just God, wouldn’t we get exactly what we deserve? The punishment would fit the crime, and since we’ve all done the crime of sin, then we all deserve to go to hell.

And yet, the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:9 speak loud and clear — *“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* We have been chosen to receive salvation. There can be no doubt.

Justice Satisfied

Still, doesn't justice need to be satisfied?

Yes, it does. And it has been. Justice was satisfied completely on the cross. The cross is the ultimate demonstration of the justice of God, because there the punishment for sins was endured by Christ. On the cross, Jesus experienced the infinite suffering that should have fallen on us. The punishment of the unrighteous was inflicted upon the ultimate in righteous, that by his blood we might be declared to be righteous.

You know, if you don't understand how God is a just God, if this is not something you want to meditate on, then how can you possibly understand the cross? Without meditating on that which is just, you can never meditate on the cross. Why would Christ have had to undergo such suffering, if in fact he was not meeting the requirements of God's perfect justice?

What kind of horrible God would make His Son, His only beloved Son, suffer the torments of hell on the cross, if it were not to satisfy the demands of His justice? The cross makes absolutely no sense apart from the justice of God. Those who deny the justice of God take all meaning out of the cross.

But the cross does have meaning. God had a definite purpose in mind by having Christ die on the cross. He knew exactly what it would take to satisfy His infinite justice, and He did it, perfectly.

God's righteousness and His justice define who He is. His righteousness and justice explain everything with regard to what He has done for His people in Jesus Christ. We cannot understand God as Lord, as Shepherd, as Father, unless we understand Him as just.

And we will never be able to truly praise him unless we can declare with brothers and sisters throughout the world and throughout history, including those who are now in heaven with God, we declare with them: great and marvellous are your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are your ways!

We do not worship Him because He is who we want Him to be. We worship Him because He is who He is. We praise Him for His righteousness. We praise him for his truth. Thanks be to God that He is who He is.

Thanks be to God that He is just.

Jim Klazinga

©2018
www.christianstudylibrary.org