

God IS Justly Righteous

Holiness filters through every aspect of God's being with no part of His character being untouched by absolute purity and perfection. Consequently, every area of His governance reveals equity in His administration over human affairs. We read of this in many of the Psalms which contain elaborate declarations of the Lord's character. They reveal to us His worthiness of our worship.

"The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

³ *Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he!*

⁴ *The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.* ⁵ *Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!" (Psalm 99:2-5).*

However, this cannot be said of fallen mankind. History records many human abuses of authority, where people's sense of justice is back to front. When this happens, God's people should realise that "*he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord*" (Proverbs 17:15, cf. Pro 24:23-25).

These terrible inconsistencies grow out of sin motivated hearts that desire inappropriate power, self-gain, and self-glory. When corruption weighs the moral scales in favour of wickedness and unrighteousness, a gross disconnection exists between human and heavenly authority. But NO such accusation can ever be made against the Lord.

In Deuteronomy 32:3-4, Moses proclaimed to the assembly of Israel, *"I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God!⁴ "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."* God never violates His law, He never administers corrupt rulings, He never mistakenly acquits the guilty or wrongly punishes the innocent. Holy God is not capable of such violations in His righteousness.

The Old Testament Hebrew language uses 3 main words for “righteous or righteousness.”

Saddiq = just, innocent, in the right, devout.

Sdaqa = honesty, justice.

Sedeq = accuracy, what is right and correct, right thing, what is honest, equity.

The New Testament Greek language uses a main root word for righteous, *dikaios*, which means equitable, innocent, holy, and just. And an English dictionary would describe “righteous” as morally right, honourable, virtuous, and justifiable. All 3 languages have similar meanings with variations to help us understand what Scripture means when it declares God is righteous.

It is important for us to understand that **because** God IS righteous, He DOES righteous things. Yahweh’s righteous character always leads His righteous behaviour. Put another way, the Lord’s righteous decisions are always because of His righteous nature. Therefore, we observe in Scripture that God is just in everything He does. He is upright in all His interactions with others. He is honest in all His communications. He consistently acts and reacts in the right and appropriate way for every situation. God is NOT able to think or do anything that is not righteous. God’s Holiness dictates and compels His righteousness.

The righteousness of the Lord expresses His holiness by dealing justly with people of all kinds. Both the obedient and the wicked equally come under the justice of Righteous God. The obedient to blessed reward, and the wicked to

damning judgement. God's every evaluation of mankind is based upon truth with the highest accuracy. In God's courtroom, no one shall ever be misrepresented. There shall never be inaccurate, or misinformation presented. No false witness shall ever appear because God's perfect memory is the only witness needed. Neither shall anyone ever challenge the rightness of God's verdicts as judge.

God is righteously kind and rewarding

"The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works" (Psalm 145:17). The Lord never forgets or fails to reward the righteous deeds of His obedient children. Some of those rewards are administered now, but most are being stored up in heaven ready to be administered upon our arrival there. Therefore, Jesus instructed, *"lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal"* (Matthew 6:20).

Even in those times when the world's cruelty lashes out at the righteous, heavenly justice records it and assigns heavenly reward to the suffering believer. Again, Jesus explains in Matthew 5:11-12, *"blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil*

against you falsely on my account. ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven...*" This is because "God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do" (Hebrews 6:10). By faith we understand that every believer shall accurately and fully receive eternal reward for the righteous fruit of Christlikeness during their earthly lives.

While reward is NOT the believer's primary motive for obedience, God shall never be indebted to His children for their righteous living. The apostle Paul, who suffered for Christ more than most, said, "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*" (Romans 8:18). Heaven shall uncover the eternal richness of God's glory to be shared with all those who are in Christ.

On the day of believer's heavenly evaluation, God shall "*test the quality of each person's work.* ¹⁴ *If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.* ¹⁵ *If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames*" (1 Corinthians 3:13-15 NIV). Here we see equity in God's

judgment. Each person is judged by the same standard, and rewards shall be administered appropriately. Even those who shall suffer loss for works done with wrong motives, they shall still receive the blessedness of eternal life with the righteousness of Christ credited to them. *"The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe"* (Romans 3:22). Belief in Christ qualifies the sinner for the eternal status of being *righteous in Christ*.

God is righteous in discipline

One of Scriptures' most gracious, yet bizarre examples of Yahweh's discipline is seen in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet Daniel had the job of delivering the interpretation of a dream that foretold the king of his upcoming discipline. You can read the full story in Daniel chapter 4.

The just reason requiring discipline was Nebuchadnezzar's idolatrous pride. It's explained in Daniel 3:1, *"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits (28m) and its breadth six cubits (2.7m)..."* King Nebuchadnezzar was so arrogant that he had a huge golden image of himself made (Dan 2:38) and placed it *"on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon."* As if that was not

bad enough, he then gathered the nation's leaders and announced the following. "*You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,*⁵ *that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.*⁶ *And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace*" (Daniel 3:4-6). The king's ego demanded unqualified worship from the people. In God's grace, Nebuchadnezzar was not instantly destroyed. God spared him for a higher purpose. This Gentile king would become an object lesson of gracious sovereign justice, plus he would also become a Gentile king praising Yahweh.

The Lord even called Nebuchadnezzar to repent before the correction took place, thus sparing himself. Daniel 4:27 records God's invitation to Nebuchadnezzar to "*break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity.*" But no, this king thought he knew more than Yahweh. He thought he could somehow circumvent sovereign correction – WRONG!

Instead of killing Nebuchadnezzar, Yahweh chose to place His righteous mercy on display for all to witness through the life and discipline of wicked Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 4:17 details God's purpose for the upcoming discipline. *"The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men."* The world needed correction of it's understanding of who the real ruler of the earth is – YAHWEH. And the world needed to comprehend that *the Most High rules* over all kingdoms, including over Nebuchadnezzar. This truth was not negotiable, and it was unchangeable. The goodness of Righteous God was now going to deliver the lesson.

The inescapable righteous humiliation happened. Daniel 4:29-33 explains, *"at the end of twelve months Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,³⁰ and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you..."*³³

Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws."

It took 7 years of living like a wild animal for the discipline of Nebuchadnezzar to have its full effect, such was the depth of his arrogance. At the end of 7 years the Lord restored Nebuchadnezzars' sanity and set him back as ruler over Babylon.

Daniel 4:34-35 tells of the kings' changed attitude. "*I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;*³⁵ *all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"*" The righteous and just discipline which graciously preserved the Kings life had grown true worship in the man's heart. "*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are*

right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” (Daniel 4:37).

Nebuchadnezzar knew that he was the recipient of righteous and compassionate discipline. To receive correction is better than judgement, and Nebuchadnezzar now understood this. So it is in the lives of all God’s children. God’s discipline may come through chastisement for the purpose of correction, as it was with Nebuchadnezzar. Or it may simply be for the purpose of training greater holiness into human flesh.

Righteous training through sanctification is an essential part of every believer’s life on the path to Christlikeness.

Hebrews 12:10-11 tells us that our loving Heavenly Father “disciplines us for our good, *that we may share his holiness.*

¹¹ *For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* God’s children are to worship with gratitude because we have not been abandoned, we are not neglected, and we are not left unaided in developing righteous character. Our Heavenly Father sometimes implements His just righteousness through very difficult training as He grows Christlikeness in

us. In this way the Holy Spirit's lordship in our lives grows glory for our Saviour Jesus Christ (2Co 3:18).

God is the righteous Judge

God alone stands as the final Judge of all who dwell within all spheres of His kingdom. As surely as "*the heavens declare his righteousness*" so "*God himself is judge!*" (Psalm 50:6). There is coming an inescapable day when "*He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness*" (Psalm 96:13), and "*He will judge ...the peoples with equity*" (Psalm 98:9). Holy accuracy shall echo throughout the heaven's Courtroom as the Almighty Judge recounts the sins of those who chose to disbelieve in Him or his Son.

In the coming day when Yahweh unleashes His fury upon the wicked and rebellious, justice will be inescapable and irreversible. "*The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth...*" (1 Samuel 2:10). Every verdict shall be delivered with perfect fairness, with perfect equity, and in accordance with the life lived against their Creator.

What's more, the administration of God's justice has been delegated to God's Son, Jesus Christ. As "*the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,*"²³ *that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father..."* (John 5:22-23). When sinners reject Jesus Christ, they are rejecting the Judge of their souls. The Judge, who could be their Saviour, calls them to receive forgiveness and eternal life, but only while they have breath in their lungs. All that changes once we leave this world and enter eternity. Therefore, Jesus is to be honoured with the same deep reverence as the Father is to be honoured, because "*all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to*" Him (Matthew 28:18).

The gospel includes warnings of the judgement which every human must face. Those who face the Judge without faith in Him as Saviour will receive no more opportunities of grace. "*For the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death*" (Revelation 21:8). This shall be perfect justice, final justice, and irreversible justice. This emphasises the urgency of the gospel which Peter preached at Pentecost; "*Repent and be baptized*

every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

But for those sinners who by faith “*are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith*” (Romans 3:24-25), “*there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*² *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death*” (Romans 8:1-2). The just righteousness of Christ is a beautiful part of His nature for the believer, but a fearful part of His nature for those who reject Him as Lord and Saviour.

As always, the greatest manifestation of Yahweh’s just righteousness is seen at the Cross of Calvary in His Son Jesus Christ. Likewise, the greatest human experience of Yahweh’s just righteousness is discovered through placing faith in what Christ accomplished on the Cross as the propitiation for our sins. At the Cross, the Father showed the fullest extent of His righteousness “*so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:26).

When we introduce a sinner to Christ who was crucified on the Cross, we should point out that it is their sin that is in Christ who is hanging there in their place. The *just* God who must inflict death upon sin (Rom 6:23) is also the *justifier* who declares the sinner to be innocent, if only that sinner will believe that Jesus was their substitute on that Cross. We are to introduce each sinner in the gospel to themselves hanging dead on the Cross in Christ. It's as if we were laid over Christ, and those nails went through us, through Christ, and embedded into that Cross (1Pe 2:24).

There is indeed urgency in the gospel, there is desperation on behalf of the unforgiven sinner, for the Justly Righteous God of all will require the life of every sinner. Only those found to be in Christ shall walk out of God's courtroom declared innocent and carrying the righteousness of Christ their Saviour.

Conclusion

"The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory" (Psalm 97:6). Identifying and understanding the Lord's righteousness magnifies His glory with dazzling intensity. *"Righteousness and justice are the*

foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you” (Psalm 89:14).

God IS Justly Righteous, and these qualities cannot be separated from the rest of His nature. His goodness is seen with spectacular radiance through His justice and His righteousness. Luke 19:10, “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*” John 1:12-13, “*to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* ¹³ *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*”

Application:

- ~ Worship!
- ~ Evangelise!