

God of Justice

Rod Reynolds

Scripture prophesies that Jesus Christ, who is God, is coming soon as this age draws to a close to administer his government over the entire world.

Note the following prophecy concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15).

And in the book of Daniel: "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

Among the qualities of that government to rule all nations, we are assured, is justice.

A prophetic psalm proclaims: "The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad! Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Psalms 97:1-2).

"... the Lord is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him" (Isaiah 30:18).

Let's examine what the Bible tells us about God as the "God of Justice."

God indicts the nations descended from the ancient Israelites, and the other nations of the world, for their lack of justice. "Hear now, O heads of Jacob, And you rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice? You who **hate good and love evil**; Who strip the skin from My people, And the flesh from their bones; Who also eat the flesh of My people, Flay their skin from them, Break their bones, And chop them in pieces Like meat for the pot, Like flesh in the caldron. Then they will cry to the Lord, But He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, Because **they have been evil in their deeds**" (Micah 3:1-4).

God asks: "How long will you **judge unjustly**, And show partiality to the wicked?" (Psalms 82:2).

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But **your iniquities have separated you from your God**; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity. **No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.** They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web; He who eats of their eggs dies, And from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Their webs will not become garments, Nor will they cover themselves with their works;

Their works are works of iniquity, And the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, And **there is no justice in their ways**; They have made themselves crooked paths; Whoever takes that way shall not know peace. Therefore **justice is far from us**, Nor does righteousness overtake us; We look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness! We grope for the wall like the blind, And we grope as if we had no eyes; We stumble at noonday as at twilight; We are as dead men in desolate places. We all growl like bears, And moan sadly like doves; **We look for justice, but there is none**; For salvation, but it is far from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before You, And our sins testify against us; For our transgressions are with us, And as for our iniquities, we know them: In transgressing and lying against the Lord, And departing from our God, Speaking oppression and revolt, Conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. Justice is turned back, And righteousness stands afar off; For truth is fallen in the street, And equity cannot enter. So truth fails, And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him **That there was no justice**" (Isaiah 59:1-15).

When we speak of "justice," exactly what is it we are referring to? What is justice?

The following definitions of "justice" are from the 1913 *Webster* Dictionary:

1. The quality of being just; conformity to the principles of righteousness and rectitude in all things; strict performance of moral obligations; practical conformity to human or divine law; integrity in the dealings of men with each other; rectitude; equity; uprightness.
2. Conformity to truth and reality in expressing opinions and in conduct; fair representation of facts respecting merit or demerit; honesty; fidelity; impartiality; as, the justice of a description or of a judgment; historical justice.
3. The rendering to every one his due or right; just treatment; requital of desert; merited reward or punishment; that which is due to one's conduct or motives.
4. Agreeableness to right; equity; justness; as, the justice of a claim.

So we could summarize by saying justice is doing what is right, acting with integrity, honesty, impartiality. One could add, obeying the law, perhaps. But, it may depend on which law. Are all laws just?

Webster Dictionary goes on to comment:

"Justice and equity are the same; but human laws, though designed to secure justice, are of necessity imperfect, and hence what is strictly legal is at times far from being equitable or just." And further: "It would be an unfortunate use of language which should lead any one to imagine he might have justice on his side while practicing iniquity."

The fact is, while some laws of men may be designed with true justice in mind, many of man's laws are unjust, and simply "legalize" unjust conduct, or iniquity.

The Bible speaks of the "unjust judge" (Luke 18:6). Jesus was convicted by a legal process that included judges with malevolent motives seeking false testimony to condemn the innocent (Matthew 26:59-66; cf. Acts 6:13-14).

The apostles were commanded by the Sanhedrin, the highest court among the Jews at the time, not to teach the doctrines of Jesus Christ. "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29).

The Bible speaks of how iniquity can be "framed" in unjust laws.

"Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, Have fellowship with You? They gather together against the life of the righteous, And condemn innocent blood" (Psalms 94:20-21).

Or, as it is in the King James Version: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law? They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood" (Psalms 94:20-21).

"The Nuremberg Laws [decreed on September 15, 1935] made official the Nazi persecution of the Jews, but the '**legal**' attack on the Jews actually began two years earlier.

"After the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, they became increasingly engaged in activities involving the persecution of the Jewish and other minority populations. They did it under the **color of law, using official decrees as a weapon against the Jews.**

"In 1933 Jews were denied the right to hold public office or civil service positions; Jewish immigrants were denaturalized; Jews were denied employment by the press and radio; and Jews were excluded from farming. The following year, Jews were excluded from stock exchanges and stock brokerage" ("The Nuremberg Laws," *Prologue Magazine*, Winter, 2010, archives.gov).

In 325 A.D. Constantine, Emperor of the Roman Empire, convoked an assembly of bishops to bring the professing Christian Church into harmony on the Passover-Easter controversy, and other matters. The council decreed that Easter Sunday should be kept in place of Passover among all professing Christians, everywhere. Following the council, Constantine issued edicts, or laws, forbidding "heretics" to assemble and authorizing confiscation of their property. Following over the centuries was severe persecution and murder of Christians who sought to keep the Biblical Passover and other Biblical doctrines, along with others deemed "heretics" by the Catholic Church, numbering in the millions.

These are just a few examples of the unjust laws of men, who steal, plunder, persecute, oppress and murder in the name of "justice."

So how is God different? What makes God, the God of the Bible, "the God of justice"?

There are several things which may be enumerated.

1) God has perfect understanding of right and wrong. I discussed this point in a sermon recently titled "Right and Wrong: Who Decides?"

When Solomon became king over Israel God appeared to him and told Solomon to ask what he would have God give to him. Solomon answered: "Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?" And God said to Solomon: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king—wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like" (II Chronicles 1:10-12).

So God gave Solomon wisdom. "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice" (I Kings 3:28).

In Proverbs 8 wisdom is personified and is speaking, and says, "By me [wisdom] kings reign, And rulers decree justice" (Proverbs 8:15).

God's wisdom far exceeds that of any man or combination of men.

The depth and power of God's wisdom and understanding are beyond human ability to fully measure or comprehend. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" (Romans 11:33-35).

God's wisdom is incorporated into his word, his law. And it is on that basis that God judges.

Moses told the people of Israel: "Surely I have taught you **statutes and judgments**, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for **this is your wisdom and your understanding** in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

When men reject God's laws, his word, they have no wisdom. "The wise men are ashamed, They are dismayed and taken. Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord; So what wisdom do they have?" (Jeremiah 8:9).

God instructed Moses before his death to write down a Song of warning as a witness to future generations (Deuteronomy 31:19): "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As raindrops on the tender herb, And as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He. They have corrupted themselves; They are not His children, Because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation" (Deuteronomy 32:1-5; cf. Deuteronomy 9:24; 31:16-30; Judges 2:7-15; Psalms 78:8; Isaiah 1:4; Matthew 16:4; II Timothy 3:1-5).

2) God holds men accountable for their actions.

Elihu spoke words inspired by God to Job and his friends: "Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to commit iniquity. For **He repays man according to his work, And makes man to find a reward according to his way.** Surely God will never do wickedly, **Nor will the Almighty pervert justice**" (Job 34:10-12).

"Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, For **they shall eat the fruit of their doings.** Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, For **the reward of his hands shall be given him**" (Isaiah 3:10-11).

"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then **He will reward each according to his works**" (Matthew 16:27).

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who **"will render to each one according to his deeds"**: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:4-11).

As we see in these Scriptures, God punishes the wicked in accordance with his transgressions, and rewards the just. We need to understand and view God's justice, however, from a long term perspective. In this age God often allows injustice to flourish, for a time. But in the end God's judgment will prevail, and all will answer to God for their deeds, whether good or evil.

3) God is impartial. He does not judge on the basis of wealth or poverty, or appearance, but on the basis of his law and what is in the heart.

Some of the laws displaying God's sense of impartial justice are as follows:

"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute. If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:1-9).

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:15).

"You shall **do no injustice in judgment**, in measurement of length, weight, or volume" (Leviticus 19:35).

"For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

"You shall not pervert justice; **you shall not show partiality**, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. (Deuteronomy 16:19).

"You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing" (Deuteronomy 24:17-22).

God's law takes into account the needs of the poor, the orphans, widows and foreigners. Those who are less able to fend for themselves. But while God takes care of them, he does not pervert justice in their favor, nor in favor of the rich.

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God. You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I

I am the Lord. You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord. **You shall do no injustice in judgment.** You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:9-18).

When Moses appointed Judges to help settle disputes among the Israelites, as he recounted later: "So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. **You shall not show partiality in judgment;** you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it'" (Deuteronomy 1:15-17).

4) God is merciful, and tempers justice with mercy.

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face" (Psalms 89:14).

"Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's Son. He will judge Your people with righteousness, And Your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people, And the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, And will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, Throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, Like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more" (Psalms 72:1-7).

He guides and teaches the humble. "Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear, To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, That the man of the earth may oppress no more" (Psalms 10:17-18).

"Good and upright is the Lord; Therefore He teaches sinners in the way. The humble He guides in justice, And the humble He teaches His way" (Psalms 25:8-9).

"The Lord executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our

iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, **So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him**; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more. **But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them.** The Lord has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all” (Psalms 103:6-19).

In a Messianic psalm we find reflected both mercy and justice: “The Lord reigns; Let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved! The Lord is great in Zion, And He is high above all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name-- He is holy. The King's strength also **loves justice**; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His footstool—He is holy. Moses and Aaron were among His priests, And Samuel was among those who called upon His name; They called upon the Lord, and He answered them. He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them. You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them **God-Who-Forgives**, Though You took vengeance on their deeds. Exalt the Lord our God, And worship at His holy hill; For the Lord our God is holy” (Psalms 99:1-9).

God forgave Moses, Aaron, and other faithful men and women, but sometimes punished them for their sins, to teach important lessons. He punished Moses and Aaron, for example, when they failed to hallow God in the wilderness of Zin when the people contended with them because of a lack of water. God gave them water out of a rock. God had said to Moses:

”Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.’ So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:8-12).

“And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: ‘Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor” (Numbers 20:23-25).

“Now the Lord said to Moses: ‘Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of

the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.' (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)" (Numbers 27:12-14).

Keil and Delitzsch (on Numbers 20:12): "...*therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*' The want of belief or firm confidence in the Lord, through which both of them had sinned, was not actual unbelief or distrust in the omnipotence and grace of God, as if God could not relieve the want of water or extend His help to the murmuring people; for the Lord had promised His help to Moses, and Moses did what the Lord had commanded him. It was simply the want of full believing confidence, a momentary wavering of that immovable assurance, which the two heads of the nation ought to have shown to the congregation, but did not show. Moses did even more than God had commanded him. Instead of speaking to the rock with the rod of God in his hand, as God directed him, he spoke to the congregation, and in these inconsiderate words, 'Shall we fetch you water out of the rock?' words which, if they did not express any doubt in the help of the Lord, were certainly fitted to strengthen the people in their unbelief, and are therefore described in Psa 106:33 as prating (speaking unadvisedly) [or rashly NKJV] with the lips (cf. Lev 5:4). He then struck the rock twice with the rod, 'as if it depended upon human exertion, and not upon the power of God alone,' or as if the promise of God 'would not have been fulfilled without all the smiting on his part' (*Knobel*). In the ill-will expressed in these words the weakness of faith was manifested, by which the faithful servant of God, worn out with the numerous temptations, allowed himself to be overcome, so that he stumbled, and did not sanctify the Lord before the eyes of the people, as he ought to have done. Aaron also wavered along with Moses, inasmuch as he did nothing to prevent Moses' fall. But their sin became a grievous one, from the fact that they acted unworthily of their office. God punished them, therefore, by withdrawing their office from them before they had finished the work entrusted to them. They were not to conduct the congregation into the promised land, and therefore were not to enter in themselves (cf. Num 27:12-13; Deu 32:48.)."

If we would be judged mercifully, we must remember mercy in how we judge others. "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

We ought to be very thankful that the God who rules the universe for eternity is merciful, and yet a God of justice.

We are admonished and encouraged by the Psalmist who wrote: "Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore. For the Lord loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever. The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart; None of his steps shall slide" (Psalms 37:27-31).

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