

The Attributes of God Righteous and Just

Last week we looked at the Mercy of God and today we look at the righteousness or justice of God. Those two words, righteous and justice, are closely related when it comes to the nature and character of God.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Today is what we observe as Reformation Sunday- the Sunday that falls on or before October 31st – the date associated with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in 1517.

At the heart of that movement was the issue of righteousness and justice. In particular, the question at play was, “**How can sinful people ever be viewed as righteous before a Holy God?**”

That is the central issue of the Bible, and deep down it is the issue that keeps rearing its head in our own hearts. Right?

Whether you are a convinced believer, an agnostic, a confirmed skeptic, or simply a “whatever” type, we all know the reality of the feeling of guilt – (if not, then we’re in denial.)

SIN AND GUILT ARE WHAT WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON

Let’s just assume that we’re all in the somewhat normal range of emotional well-being. We can distinguish right from wrong, we experience temptation, we all do, say, or think things that we regret, i.e. we’re basically normal human beings.

That means that we also deal with the little inner voice that says, “I know I’ve failed to live up to even my own standards, so how do I deal with the guilt, or even the shame?”

Another way to think of it is this, “How can I be made right again with myself, or God, or the universe?”

When that question or thought pops into your head, you might dwell on it for a while, or you may try to ignore it or quickly find something else to occupy your mind.

My mother in law was a psychiatric nurse years ago at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, and she noticed that a lot of people in the psych ward were there because they were struggling with the issue of guilt and finding forgiveness.

We’re all looking for a sense of what the Bible calls “shalom” – or peace, well-being, or a sense that we’re all right with God or the “universe”. We want to be “well in our skin”.

We all have a sense that things are not the way they ought to be, and if we’re honest, we know that we’re part of the problem. You don’t have to be a Christian or even a religious person to have a sense that things are out of harmony in the realm of human relationships.

So, the question of the ages is “How do we find that sense of shalom? On a personal level the question is, “How do I have a sense that God and I are alright?”

This leads us to the attribute of God for this morning – Righteous and Just.

The primary word in the OT *tsādaq tsaw-dak'* means to *be* (causatively *make*) *right* (in a moral or forensic sense): - cleanse, clear self, (be, do) just (-ice, -ify, -ify self), (be, turn to) righteous (-ness).

The Bible teaches that there is a right order to the world – in creation and in human relationships. Even those who don’t like the terms, “right and wrong” live with the concepts. People who say they don’t believe in ultimate truth live with a set of standards that they apply to others.

EX: French college age guy who didn’t believe in “sin” or right and wrong. He even admitted that he doesn’t think Hitler did anything wrong in an ultimate sense. YET, in his daily life he lived with categories of right

and wrong. I asked his roommate “Does he ever tell you how you ought to do things? Does he ever violate his own standards?” YES AND YES

Even when we don’t want to believe in some sense of Right and wrong, we end up living with those concepts. WHERE DOES THIS COME FROM?? We live in a world created by God and He has set this in our hearts. He Himself is righteous and does what is right.

I like how Tozer puts it...

...Righteousness means that God does what is right. It is an expression of His holiness.

TOZER

“We use the phrase “justice demands or requires” such and such a response. And that is true for humans, but not so with God. There is no system or standard of justice outside of God to which He must conform. There is no “principle of justice or righteousness” that compels God to do anything, for then such a principle would be superior to God. God himself is the standard of righteousness or justice. Those attributes flow from him. The righteousness of God is God acting in accordance with his own character. He is not defined by the term righteousness as much as the term is defined by God. God is not measured by the term righteousness. He sets the standard of righteousness.”

The righteousness of God in relation to mankind is revealed in several way.

(1) God reveals His righteousness by revealing His will and His word to the world through the nation Israel.

1. 5 “See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me... the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ 7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8

God deals with men on the basis of what He has revealed to them.

(2) God reveals His righteousness by instructing men in His word.

8 Good and upright is the LORD; Therefore He instructs sinners in the way (Psalm 25:8).

(3) God promises that we will dwell in righteousness in the New heaven and New earth – 2 Pet 3:13

(4) God reveals His righteousness by judging the enemies of Israel.

13 Before the LORD, for He is coming; For He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, And the peoples in His faithfulness (Psalm 96:13).

God likewise shows Himself to be righteous when He judges the nation Israel for their sin and disobedience: (2 Chronicles 12:1-6).

(5) God reveals His righteousness in the way He rules.

6 Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom (Psalm 45:6).
Ps 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before Thee (Psalm 89:14, see also Psalm 97:2).

(6) God reveals His righteousness in His hatred and in His anger.

5 The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates (Psalm 11:5).311
God is a righteous judge; And a God who has indignation every day (Psalm 7:11).32

(7) God reveals His righteousness in His protection of the poor and the afflicted.

12 I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, And justice for the poor (Psalm 140:12; see also Psalm 12:5; 82; 116:6 below).

(8) God reveals His righteousness when He shows mercy and compassion.

5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate; 6 The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me (Psalm 116:5-6).

18 Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. The LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are those who long for Him (Isaiah 30:18).

(9) God reveals His righteousness in saving sinners.

2 The LORD has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. 3 He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God (Psalm 98:2-3).

Romans shows this salvation to be a very significant aspect of God's righteousness.

The righteous of God is revealed through the gospel in such a way that God is the just and justifier of those who trust in Christ.

God is righteous in saving sinners. So often we think God's righteousness is revealed in His judgment of sinners and His mercy by His salvation of sinners. The Scriptures teach that God's righteousness is the cause of both condemnation and justification. He is righteous in saving sinners, as well as merciful and compassionate.

All of This begs the question, "Then who can be saved?" Since this is Reformation Sunday the topic of righteousness and Justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is at the forefront.

The question of the ages is, "How can we who are sinful ever be right with God?"

The answer is, "by faith in Christ". Romans 1-3 presents the argument that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – Gentiles, Greeks, and Jews. We all need a savior, not just an example to follow.

Romans 3:21-26 shows that God is just in condemning all mankind because all have failed to reach the standard of righteousness required by God's law.

Romans 3 also shows that God is gracious in providing salvation. But he doesn't do so at the expense of his Justice or his Mercy. His righteousness is revealed through the gospel as God holds justice and mercy together through the cross.

The necessity of the death of the son of God on a cross points to the reality of something has gone terribly wrong and must be made right.

Have you ever had a relationship that was so bad that it required the death of a loved one to bring reconciliation? The relationship between God and mankind was so bad that the only way to accomplish reconciliation was for God to offer up His Son to satisfy the demands of justice.

We know the benefits of this reconciliation when we are united to Christ by faith. Being "in Christ" means that we experience the reality of a double imputation. Our sin is put on Jesus, and His righteousness is credited to us. Thus, we are justified, not on the basis of our own works, but by the full obedience of Jesus.

EX: It's like opening a joint spiritual account with JESUS.

JUSTIFIED means that in Christ God sees me "just-if-I'd never sinned" and "Just -if -I'd always obeyed".

God is just in saving sinners. As Paul puts it, He is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"
THIS IS GOOD NEWS!!

(Romans 3:26). How can this be?

EX: Remember the speeding ticket scenario?? You are guilty – you get a warning, that's Mercy.

You get a ticket, that's Justice. **HOW DO YOU GET BOTH??** The officer gives you the ticket and then HE PAYS IT for you.

That is what happens at the cross.

God is just because His righteous judgement has been satisfied. Justice was done on the cross of Calvary. God did not reduce the charges against us; He did not change the standard of righteousness. God poured out the full measure of His righteous judgement upon His Son on the cross of Calvary. In Him, justice was meted out. All of those who trust in Him by faith are justified. Their sins are forgiven because Jesus paid the full price; He suffered the full measure of God's wrath in their place. And for those who reject the goodness and mercy of God at Calvary, they must pay the penalty for their sins because they would not accept the payment Jesus made in their place.

When push comes to shove, we want a God of justice because it means that He does care, AND He is just.

United to Christ by faith we are counted as righteous before God, but NOW having a new heart, we are to hunger for and pursue this righteousness in our lives. It is only normal and right that those who have been renewed by the Holy Spirit would pursue that which is pleasing to God.

It's because God is righteous that Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" Matt 5:6 When you are hungry, you pursue food

EX: Buffet breakfast in Stockholm after a long train trip – very hungry. We pursued finding something to eat.

Matt 6:33 – Seek Ye First the kingdom of God and His righteousness...

The Pursuit of righteousness is part of the DNA of a believer. The pursuit of righteousness is not what makes us righteous; it is the FRUIT of the new life given to us by God's grace.

1 Tim 6:11 – flee these things and PURSUE Righteousness. To pursue means to go after it intently i.e. like in a hunt or oddly the same word is translated "to persecute".

Eph 4:22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, **24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**

7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Eph 5

EX: Joni E. Tada after coming to grips with her cancer and treatment began a practice of asking God, "What would please you today?"

As believers, Christ is our righteousness, but one way that we know that we are born of God is that we also pursue righteousness in our lives.

The internal reality of a new heart should be reflected in the external reality of our lives.

God revealed his Righteousness through salvation and He gave us a sacrament as a sign and seal of His work. As we come to the Table "Remember" Christ's work for us and ask God to give you a greater hunger and thirst for righteousness.

COME TO THE TABLE

As we come to the Table, I'd like to use some thoughts from the Confession of La Rochelle, one of the first Reformed Confessions 1559

We confess that the Lord's Supper is a witness of the union which we have with Christ, inasmuch as he not only died and rose again for us once, but also feeds and nourishes us truly with his flesh and blood, so that we may be one in him, and that our life may be in common.

Although he is in heaven until he come to judge all the earth, still we believe that by the secret and incomprehensible power of his Spirit he feeds and strengthens us with the substance of his body and of his blood.

We hold that this is done spiritually because the greatness of this mystery exceeds the measure of our senses and the laws of nature. In short, because it is heavenly, it can only be apprehended by faith.

So we come by faith to feed on Christ. All who know Christ and have been admitted to the Table by a believing church are invited to come.

But if you have not bowed your heart before him as your Only righteousness or if you are hiding some secret sin that you have not yet dealt with, then don't come, rather hurry and work out your relationship with the Lord Jesus first. Then come back when your heart is sincere, for I declare to everyone here: *This is the Table where you will find Him whom your soul loves.*

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (ESV)

²³For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,

²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

²⁵In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

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