



Foundations of

FAITH

The Justice of God

Lesson 4

A man once wrote to a newspaper editor, "Sir, I ploughed my field on a Sunday, planted it on Sunday, I dressed it on Sunday and reaped it on Sunday. I carted the crop home on Sunday. My neighbours went to church on Sunday. And now, Mr. Editor, what is the result. I have more bushels to the acre than any of my neighbours have this September." The editor printed the letter and then added this comment – **"God does not settle everything in September."**

The writer of the letter had no conception of the justice of God. No man can truly know God until he comprehends the divine characteristic. An understanding here will help remove many problems regarding God's dealings with man which arise in our minds.

JUSTICE DEFINED. By the justice of God we understand that universal rectitude of his nature, whereby, in his government of the world, he does all things with perfect righteousness, giving to everyone his due." (Burder) Justice may be either remunerative or punitive. In the first case God rewards our obedience. In the second case he inflicts punishment for our sin and disobedience. But regardless of the nature of his dealings with us, what he does is **always** right.

WHY GOD IS JUST. Previously we have learned that God is all-knowing and all-wise, that he is completely holy, and that he is all-powerful. These attributes make him absolutely just. His knowledge and wisdom assure us that he always **knows** what is right; his holiness guarantees his **desire** to do what is right, and his power ensures his **ability** to perform what is right.

God's justice is taught throughout the Bible. Yahweh asserts through the prophet Isaiah. "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me." (Isaiah 45:21) Moses declares that he is "a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deut. 32:4) Zephaniah states, "The just Lord is in the midst thereof; he will not do iniquity: every morning doth he bring his judgment (justice) to light, he faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame." (Zeph. 3:5)

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S JUSTICE. Many times people ask such questions as, "Why did God create man so that he could sin?" or "Would a just God condemn a person to an eternal hell?" Sometimes those who have been afflicted with some great personal tragedy are inclined to blame God for their misfortunes and they may be heard to say, "I can't see the justice in it all."

There are many things about the Bible and God's ways that we cannot completely understand. Moses exhorted Israel saying, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." (Deut. 29:29) But our failure to understand is not God's fault. The difficulty is that man is so limited in his knowledge and wisdom that he can no more comprehend all of God's ways than a five-year-old child can understand the theory of calculus. The Lord declares, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, say's the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8, 9) Paul states, "O 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 hath known the mind of the Lord or who hath been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:33, 34) The complete supremacy of the mind of God over that of man is further expressed. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men: and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (1 Cor. 1:25) This being true, it is not our place as fallible, finite human beings to question the wisdom and justice of an omniscient God. If we cannot understand the workings of God let us realise that our lack of knowledge and wisdom, not his lack of justice, is responsible.

A case in point is that of Paul who three times asked God to remove from him some kind of affliction which he calls a "thorn in the flesh." No doubt Paul felt he would be more effective as a worker for God if this were done. The answer of God was, "My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9) Paul might have argued that God was unjust to allow him to heal others while he himself possessed an affliction. Yet, when he learned that the thorn in the flesh would remain, he accepted it as the will of God and found himself able to understand the reason for his affliction, namely, that it was given him lest he "should be exalted above measure." (II Co. 12:7) We can understand much of God's justice if we will first submit ourselves to his will, but if after so doing we still are at a loss for an explanation, let us realise that God is just, even though at the moment we may not be able to see why or how.

DOES MERCY NULLIFY JUSTICE? The scriptures abundantly teach that God is merciful. They affirm that he is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) Some have difficulty, therefore, in reconciling his mercy in saving man with the scriptural teaching of hell. They ask, "How could a God of mercy consign his children to an eternal, burning hell?" The fact that the Bible teaches that there is a hell should be enough for us and we should accept it as true even though we cannot completely understand it.

However, we must realise that while God is a God of mercy, his grace does not contradict his justice. The mercy of God, as well as his love, is shown in the giving of his son to die for man. But the sacrifice of Christ also shows the justice of God. Mercy required that man be saved. Justice required that payment be made for the sins of man. Since man could not atone

for his own sins it became necessary that someone else pay the price. Therefore, we read, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) When Christ died on the cross he expressed the mercy of God in that salvation for all men was made possible, but he also showed the justice of God in paying the price required for our sinfulness. Therefore, we must conclude that the sum total of God's mercy is found in his giving Jesus Christ to atone for our sins. If we reject Christ we reject the mercy of God and the Almighty has no alternative but to punish us for disobedience. Furthermore, since he has informed us that the unrighteous will be cast in to hell, he would be unjust if he did not reward the faithful with an eternal home.

The terrible nature of hell should serve to make man turn to God and no doubt that is one reason God has made hell so terrifying. A man who had been taught that there is no eternal punishment was once heard to say, "Well, if here isn't a hell I might as well go on living a life of sin because the worst that can happen to me is that I will cease to exist." No doubt many people would make no effort to serve God if they were not aware of the awful consequences promised for a life of wilful sin.

GOD'S JUSTICE AND THE WICKED. Many a person has wondered why a just God allows the wicked to prosper, and the righteous sometimes to suffer. This was the problem of Habakkuk. The prophet asked God why he allowed evil to go unpunished. Yahweh replied that he was raising the Chaldeans to punish the Jews. Then Habakkuk asked why God would allow a terrible, evil nation like the Chaldeans to punish a country more righteous than themselves. The answer of God was that there would be a day of reckoning for all and that the Chaldeans would eventually be punished for their sins, for, as the editor expressed it, "God does not settle everything in September."

David wrestled with the same problem. He counselled, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospered in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass ... For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall not be." (Psalm 37:7, 9-10) Jesus shows in the parable of the talents that God's retribution against evil will await

the judgment (Matt. 13), and Peter assures us that ungodly men shall be brought to an accounting in that day (II Peter 3:7)

THE POTTER AND THE VESSEL. In Romans 9 Paul raises several questions relating to justice. He asks why God hardened Pharaoh's heart when Israel was led out of Egypt by Moses. In answering he compares the role of God in making man to that of a potter who makes a vessel. He shows that as the potter can make a vessel to suit himself, so God, being the creator can use us as he sees fit. It is not our place to argue with our maker. He reasons that Pharaoh was a vessel fitted for destruction, that is, that he was of bad character, and that God simply used him to demonstrate his divine power. We know that when Pharaoh was placed in a certain set of circumstances his evil nature came to the fore. God may bear patiently with an evil man to display his power, but he never will make a good man do evil.

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW MAN TO SIN? God, in placing man in the Garden of Eden, could have kept him from sinning by removing all temptation. Since death and suffering entered the world by sin, why did he not do this? The answer is found in the nature of man, God created us as free moral agents capable of

choosing our own course. We all prize our liberty and our right to make our own decisions, even though they may not always be best. Rather than make us robots, God, in his wisdom, saw fit to give us a choice that we might serve him willingly instead of by compulsion. We are made in the image of God, but if our power to choose and think for ourselves were removed, we would cease to be patterned after him.

LEAVING THE JUDGMENT TO GOD. Sometimes a person will say, "If I were baptised, I would be condemning my parents." Naturally we are bound by ties of love to our dear ones, even after they have died. But we must realise that when a person has departed, we can do nothing to alter his destiny. We know that the dead are in the hands of a just and merciful God and our primary concern should be for the souls of the living, including our own. Those who fail to obey the gospel because of a desire to justify their loved ones do not possess the honesty of the departed who might have obeyed the gospel had they known the truth. God will not have mercy upon us if we wilfully flout his will. Let us remember that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12), and let us leave the judgment of others to our heavenly Father.

TEST ON LESSON 4

Write **true** or **false** after each of the following statements:

1. The knowledge, wisdom, holiness and power of God ensure his justice.
2. Man is capable of understanding all of God's thoughts.
3. Paul accepted God's will when the thorn in his flesh was not removed after he had prayed three times.
4. Mercy and justice are contradictory.
5. God's mercy is found apart from the sacrifice of Christ.
6. The nation which God used in the days of Habakkuk to punish Israel was Egypt.
7. God always punishes evildoers immediately.
8. Pharaoh was an evil man before God hardened his heart.
9. Man was created a free moral agent.

10. A man who obeys the gospel condemns his parents if they have died without becoming Christians.

Read the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. Place an X after each statement which expresses a truth taught in this parable. Do NOT mark those statements which may be true, but which are not taught in the parable of the tares:

- 1. The one who sows tares in the world is the devil.
- 2. The children of the wicked one will be separated from the children of the Kingdom at the end of the world.
- 3. We cannot always understand God's justice.
- 4. The tares are to be rooted out as soon as they are shown.
- 5. The children of the wicked one will be burned with fire.
- 6. God is the potter and we are the vessels.
- 7. The tares are allowed to grow with the wheat until the harvest lest the wheat be rooted up with them.

Each of the following statements tells us something about the justice of God. Each of the scriptures at the right expresses one of these thoughts. Match the scriptures with the statements by writing the scripture location after the statement which is most nearly expressed in that passage. Each statement is used once:

- 1. The creature has no right to complain to his maker. Habakkuk 2:4
- 2. The ways and thoughts of God are far above those of man. Romans 9:20
- 3. The just shall live by faith. II Peter 3:9
- 4. God has sometimes borne patiently with evildoers. Romans 9:14
- 5. The transgressors shall be destroyed. Zephaniah 3:5
- 6. God is not unrighteous. Isaiah 55:8, 9
- 7. The Lord will not do iniquity. Psalms 37:38
- 8. God does not desire any to perish. Romans 9:22

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Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – T, F, T, F, F, F, F, T, T, F.

Section 2 – 1, 2, 5 and 7 should have an X after them.

Section 3 -

1. Romans 9:20
2. Isaiah 55:8
3. Habakkuk 2:4
4. Romans 9:22
5. Psalms 37:38
6. Romans 9:14
7. Zephaniah 3:5
8. II Peter 3:9

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