

Freddy Fritz / General

Glory: The Character of God / Justice; Righteousness / Exodus 34:6–7

In this lesson, we learn about the justice of God.

Introduction

I am currently preaching a series of sermons that I am calling, “Glory: The Character of God.” In this five-week-long series, I am exploring God’s self-revelation of himself to Moses in [Exodus 34:6-7](#).

I am concluding this series today. So far in this sermon series, we have examined the truths that God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, faithful, and forgiving. Today, I would like to examine the truth that God is just.

God’s justice may be defined as follows:

God’s fair and impartial treatment of all people. As a God of justice ([Is. 30:18](#)), He is interested in fairness as well as in what makes for right relationships. His actions and decisions are true and right ([Job 34:12](#); [Rev. 16:7](#)). His demands on individuals and nations to look after victims of oppression are just demands ([Psalm 82](#)) (Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995]).

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about justice and especially about God’s justice. Hopefully, we can set some things straight today.

Scripture

God revealed several of his attributes to Moses in [Exodus 34:6–7](#). Let’s read [Exodus 34:6-7](#), although our focus today is on the second part of verse 7:

⁶ The LORD passed before him [that is, Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving

iniquity and transgression and sin, **but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.**"

Lesson

In this lesson, we learn about the justice of God.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Reality of the Justice of God
2. The Facets of the Justice of God
3. The Escape of the Justice of God

I. The Reality of the Justice of God

First, let's begin by looking at the reality of the justice of God.

A few years ago, the Pew Research Center showed that 80% of Americans believe in some kind of God or higher power.

However, far fewer people believe in the God who is just. A majority of Americans reject the view that God looks at all people and will judge them on what they do and say.

In fact, more than two-thirds of Americans believe that people are inherently good. This view comes into sharp relief when people die, and it was especially evident in the 9/11 attack on America. One frequently heard on the news that the thousands of Americans who died all went to heaven and only the 19 terrorists who hijacked the plane ended up in hell.

I remember hearing Dr. R. C. Sproul say that our culture now believes in "justification by death" rather than "justification by faith."

"Justification by death" is the belief that a person is justified by God and granted entry into glory upon the death of that person. That is the general view of people in our culture today.

Most people believe that there is a God or, at least, some higher power. They will say something like this, “I believe in God. And I believe that God is a God of love. I believe that God accepts every one. God will forgive everyone and accept every one. Because that is who God is.”

People generally believe that God is a God of love. And they reject the notion that God is a God of justice.

The fact is that people do want justice. Suppose a drunk driver plows into your loved one’s car and kills him or her. You don’t want the judge to say to the drunk driver, “Oh dear, I am so sorry that you did that. I love you and I hope you will never do it again.” No! Nobody wants that.

One pastor shares the following story about the 1948 movie titled *All My Sons*, starring Edward G. Robinson, who plays a man called Joe Keller:

[Keller] was a man who had run this manufacturing business. During World War II, he suddenly realized he had produced a set of parts for the Air Force that was defective. He sent them anyway because he knew if he didn’t send them he would have been financially ruined....

He hoped for the best, but what happened was those parts were put into airplanes and, as a result, 21 young pilots crashed and were killed. The officials came back to the manufacturing place with policemen and with handcuffs.

[Keller] lied about his knowledge of it. He was able to get them to believe somebody else in the plant was to blame. That man went off to prison for the rest of his life. Only Joe Keller and his wife knew what he had done.

Chris Keller, Joe’s son, comes along and slowly pieces the evidence together years later that his father was guilty of killing all those people through negligence and knew what he did. He starts to confront his dad with the evidence but Joe Keller won’t listen to him.

He says, “Who are you to judge me? Who is anybody to judge me?”

Joe Keller sits down with his wife and his wife says, “Maybe you need to admit what you did was wrong.”

Joe says, “Wait a minute. Should I have let them take everything I ever worked for away from me? Would that have brought all those 21 young pilots back? Should I have told the truth under the circumstances? I did it for the family, and there’s nothing higher than that. I did it for you and my son. There’s nothing higher than that. Nobody can judge me. Who’s to say what I did was wrong? Who’s to say?”

His wife looks at him. She says, “Joe, maybe there’s something higher than the family. Maybe there’s something higher than your own heart.”

Chris Keller shows up right after that and gives his father, Joe Keller, a letter that proves his brother, Keller’s other son, had died in a crash (they always knew that) but had been victims of a scam. He died during the war, but this letter reveals he had died *because* of what his father had done.

As Joe Keller reads the letter, justice finally breaks over him. He suddenly realizes there was a right and a standard higher than his heart. By breaking the standard and trying to keep his heart intact, he had broken himself.

There was a standard higher than his family. By breaking the standard to keep his family intact, he had broken his family.

At the end of the movie, he’s just walking up the steps, thinking about all those pilots who had died, looking at the letter, and realizing what he’d done.

Do you know what he’s saying as he goes up the steps?

“They were all my sons.” (Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* [New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013]).

[Deuteronomy 32:4](#) says of 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.”

Yes, God is a God of love. But God is also a God of justice.

And despite what people may say, deep down everyone wants justice.

The reality is that there is ultimate justice in the Person of God.

II. The Facets of the Justice of God

Second, let’s notice the facets of the justice of God.

Moses said in [Exodus 34:7b](#) that God “will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

The Bible teaches us that there are several facets regarding the justice of God. Let me mention several.

A. The Justice of God Is Incomparable

First, the justice of God is incomparable.

[Job 4:17](#) states, “Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?”

I recently heard a lawyer who worked for Governor Jeb Bush when he was in office as Governor of Florida. Rocky Rodriguez was Governor Bush’s legal. She shared her perspective on the efforts undertaken in the early 2000s to save the life of Terri Schiavo. Eventually, all legal efforts were exhausted and Terri Schiavo’s feeding tube was removed a final time and she died on March 31, 2005.

Rocky Rodriguez said that she disagreed with some of the legal judgments in the case. And she went on to say something like, “No judge gets it right all the time. They do the best they can but they sometimes make mistakes.”

I think we all know that this is true of every human judge. Some are of course corrupt. But many judges do the best they can.

However, the justice of God is incomparable to human justice.

God *always* gets it right. No one will ever be able to say plausibly that God made a mistake in any judgment that he ever renders.

B. The Justice of God Is Incorruptible

Second, the justice of God is incorruptible.

The following report was filed on September 26, 2019, by CNN.com:

A former Texas judge was sentenced to five years in federal prison after he was found guilty of accepting cash bribes to issue favorable court decisions.

A federal jury in Houston convicted Rodolfo Delgado, 66, of Edinburg, of one count of conspiracy, three counts of federal program bribery, three counts of travel act bribery, and one count of obstruction of justice.

In addition to the 60 months in prison, he will get two years of supervised release.

“Rudy Delgado used his position to enrich himself. He didn’t just tip the scales of justice, he knocked it over with a wad of cash and didn’t look back,” US Attorney Ryan K. Patrick said. “Delgado’s actions unfairly tarnish all his former colleagues.”

Delgado was a judge for the 93rd district court in Texas and had jurisdiction over criminal and civil cases within Hidalgo County.

It is not difficult to do a Google search and find other judges who have taken bribes.

And what is shocking to me is that some corrupt judges have sometimes been given a slap on the wrist and then got their jobs back!

[Deuteronomy 10:17](#) states, “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.”

The justice of God is incorruptible.

C. The Justice of God Is Impartial

Third, the justice of God is impartial.

Imagine tuning in to a TV courtroom trial. You can see only what the camera shows you. You don’t hear all the testimony. You don’t get to question the witnesses. You don’t get to see all the evidence. You don’t hear the instructions to the jury. You’re not privy to the conversations between the lawyers and the judge.

When the jury comes in with its verdict and the sentence is passed by the judge, how adequately can you assess whether justice has been done?

How then can we sit in judgment on God’s justice? We don’t have all the information necessary to know how God has come to his decision (Craig Brian

Larson and Phyllis Ten Elshof, *1001 Illustrations That Connect* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008], 230).

Abraham said of God in [Genesis 18:25b](#), “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

And [Jeremiah 32:19](#) says that God is “great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.”

God’s judgment is always impartial. He does not treat certain people favorably and others unfavorably.

D. The Justice of God Is Unfailing

Fourth, the justice of God is unfailing.

Justice Horace Gray served as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court from 1882 - 1902. He once said to a man who had appeared before him in one of the lower courts and had escaped conviction by some technicality: “I know that you are guilty and you know it, and I wish you to remember that one day you will stand before a better and wiser Judge, and that there you will be dealt with according to Justice and not according to law” (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* [Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996], 694).

[Zephaniah 3:5](#) states, “The Lord within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame.”

Justice may fail in our day. But it will never fail when we stand before God.

E. The Justice of God Is Undeviating

Fifth, the justice of God is undeviating.

The story is told of Judge John A. Weeks who spotted a man sitting in the rear of his Minneapolis courtroom wearing a hat. Disturbed by this disregard for courtroom decorum, he ordered the man to leave.

Then the clerk called for the burglary case of George A. Rogde, who had been free on bond. Rogde didn't come forward.

"Your honor," said the prosecuting attorney, "that is the man you ordered from the courtroom."

Police are still looking for Rogde (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* [Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996], 131).

The judge in this case obviously made a mistake.

[Job 8:3](#) states, "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert the right?"

F. The Justice of God Is Without Respect for Persons

And sixth, the justice of God is without respect for persons.

[Romans 2:11](#) states, "For God shows no partiality."

Shortly after I got married, I needed to get Resident Alien status so that I could legally continue staying in the United States. I spoke with a friend from South Africa who had also married an American and had received a Green Card.

He had been advised to wear a suit to look like a lawyer when he went to the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offices.

We were living in Chicago at the time. So, I wore a suit and Eileen dressed up as well. We went to the office in downtown Chicago.

The reception area of the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offices must have had at least 25 people crowded around the desk. Most of them looked like they were from Asia or South America. They were dressed in laborer's work clothes, jeans, tee shirts, and so on. They were trying to get the agent to give them a number so that they could go and get a seat behind her desk.

I remember thinking that we were going to wait in line for a long time before it was our turn.

However, just then the person at the desk finished with the person being served. The service agent looked up and around and said, "You! At the back!" She pointed to Eileen and me, and said, "Come forward!"

I have often thought how Eileen and I were treated concerning our persons, simply because we were dressed in business clothes.

[1 Peter 1:17](#) states, “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.”

When we stand before God at the judgment, God is not going to judge us with respect for our persons.

III. The Escape of the Justice of God

And third, let’s examine the escape of the justice of God.

Moses said in [Exodus 34:7b](#) that God “will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

But in verse 7a, Moses said that God is a God “keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

How can God forgive iniquity and transgression and sin and still maintain his justice?

God can do so because the justice of God fell on Jesus Christ.

You see, God cannot turn a blind eye to any violation of his law. Every violation of God’s law must be punished.

If God were to turn a blind eye to my violation of his law, you would be rightly upset that I got a free pass and you did not.

But, God’s justice for my violation of his law fell on Jesus Christ instead of on me.

In the days of the pioneers in this country, when men saw that a prairie fire was coming, what would they do? Since not even the fastest of horses could outrun it, the pioneers took a match and burned the grass in a designated area around themselves. Then they would take their stand in the burned area and be safe from the threatening prairie fire. As the roar of the flames approached, they would not be afraid. Even as the ocean of fire surged around them there was no fear, because fire had already passed over the place where they stood.

When the judgment of God comes to sweep men and women into hell for eternity, there is one spot that is safe.

Nearly two thousand years ago the justice of God was poured on Calvary. There the Son of God took the justice of God that should have fallen on us. Now, if we take our stand by the cross, we are safe for time and eternity (Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching: Over 1500 Sermon Illustrations Arranged by Topic and Indexed Exhaustively*, Revised edition of: The expositor's illustration file. [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989]).

Conclusion

Because God is just, he must punish sin, and so let us be sure that we have received the mercy of God.

When I was a seminary student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, we used to have chapel services several times a week. We were blessed to have some wonderful preachers come and preach during those chapel services.

Dr. R. C. Sproul was a preacher on one occasion. He had us turn to [Leviticus 10](#), which is the account of the death of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu. Let me read for you [Leviticus 10:1-3](#):

¹ Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

Dr. Sproul talked about how God judged Nadab and Abihu because they offered "unauthorized fire before the Lord." That is, they did not worship God in the way God had prescribed. They worshiped God in the way that they thought best. And God struck them dead in judgment.

That seemed so wrong. That seemed so unfair. People want justice.

I remember Dr. Sproul literally jumping up and down on the chancel and saying, "Never, never, never ask for justice! Always plead for mercy."

Friends, God's justice demands that sin be punished.

God's mercy means that God's justice has fallen not on you but on Christ.

So, remember, God is just, and he must punish sin. Make sure that you have received the mercy of God. Amen.