

All His Ways Are Just

God's Merciful Judgment

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The well-known 18th century English writer, Samuel Johnson, defined justice as human nature sees it. He wrote, "Justice is my being allowed to do whatever I like. Injustice is whatever prevents me from doing so."

He meant that to be humorous. This really emphasizes how human nature looks at justice. Even we, in God's church, reason this way sometimes. The justice of God is nothing like man's justice. With God, justice is the maintaining of righteousness.

The English term 'justice' has a strong legal flavor. But the concept of justice in the Bible goes beyond the law courts, to everyday life. The Bible speaks of 'doing justice,' whereas we speak of 'getting justice.' Mr. Armstrong emphasized this in what he called 'the way of get' and 'the way of give.'

Doing justice is to maintain what is right, or to set things right. Justice is done when honorable and loving relationships are maintained between husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, government and citizens, and human beings and God. Biblical justice refers to brotherliness in spirit and action.

Kings, rulers, and those in power should be instruments of justice, as exemplified by David and Josiah. The prophet Micah declared:

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

We see a couple of factors that are involved in God's justice, that of mercy and humility. God wants us to be like Him, doing justly in a merciful way. Mercy is critical in God's justice, as it should be in any justice.

The book of Isaiah describes God's suffering servant—Jesus—as one whose task as ruler will be to bring justice to the nations. The Servant of the Lord is an excellent living example of justice.

Isaiah 42:1-4 Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the

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Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.

This is a very encouraging scripture. Justice is personal, filled with mercy, love, and deliverance. It is associated with what is right, good, and holy. Integrity, truthfulness, and faithfulness are implicit in this passage, revealing the nature of God's justice.

God's rewards come to those who practice justice in all their dealings with others. In the words of the prophet Amos:

Amos 5:24 But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Justice is very important to God; not only that He issues it, but that we also emulate Him in His justice. Justice is one of the most outstanding attributes of God. Time and again, God is depicted as the herald of justice, especially in the prophets, because all of God's ways are just.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4 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.

Justice, here, literally means that which is right. The term injustice means that which is not straight or straightforward. God is faithful, upright, and straightforward in all His dealings with us. Man does have a responsibility in this justice. We have to emulate what God explains and teaches us in the very quality that He has such a wonderful justice for each and every one of us. The term justice is used in a general sense for what is right, or as it should be. Justice is not only respect for the rights of fellow human beings, as of life, property, and reputation but in the broadest sense it includes, and begins with, the proper recognition of man's duty toward God.

With respect to our relationship with our fellow man love, courtesy, and hospitality are details that are often forgotten as items of justice. Love is an obligation of righteousness. Respect for human beings is instructed in the precept 'Honor all men.' The element of justice is found in that term.

In short, man, in his relation to man, is to reflect the justice or righteousness of God.

Man, as an individual, is not to administer vengeful justice.

Justice has primarily to do with conduct in relation to others, especially with regard to the rights of others. It is applied in business, where just weights and measures are demanded. It is demanded in courts, where the rights of rich and poor, Israelite and sojourner, must be regarded equally. Neither station in life, nor bribe, nor popular protests are to influence judges and witnesses.

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. 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. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

God does not take justice, or the passing of justice by judges, lightly. In general, this justice is contrasted with wickedness. In a larger sense, justice is not only giving to others their rights, but involves the active duty of establishing their rights. So Israel waited on God's justice and cried out as recorded in Isaiah 40:27: "The justice due to me [literally, "my justice"] is passed away from my God." God will show Israel to be in the right compared with the other nations. Justice here becomes mercy. I cannot emphasize enough how important mercy is in God's justice.

Justice does not mean sinlessness or moral perfection. Job knew the sin in his heart, and yet spoke of himself as a just and righteous man. In Psalm 143:1-2, the psalmist confidently depended on the righteousness of God, though he knew that no man is righteous in God's sight. It is not a lack of humility or dependence upon God when the psalmist asked to be judged according to his righteousness.

In relation to God the just, or righteous, person is one who holds on to God and trusts in Him. This is not the Pharisaic legalism with its merit and reward, where God's justice is simply a matter of giving each person what he has earned.

The idea of justice or righteousness, and those terms are used interchangeably throughout the Bible, is a matter of character. God's own spirit is the standard. Mere give-and-take justice is not enough. We should be merciful to all. The ideal is righteousness, not rights. In the world today we hear of people wanting their rights and taking people to court for their rights. They take companies to court and they take the government to court for their rights. This is not what God's justice is.

Let us take a look at merit and reward. God's justice, or righteousness, is found in His essential nature. But, just as with human beings, it is not something that is abstract, but is seen in His relationship to the world. It is His kingship establishing and maintaining the right. It appears as vengeful justice—the reaction of His holy will, as firmly grounded in His eternal being—against evil wherever He finds it. He cannot be indifferent to either good or evil. He must rule righteously. He must rule justly according to whether something is righteous or evil. The prophets Isaiah, Micah, Amos, and Hosea, all emphasize God's demand for righteousness or God's demand for justice.

But this is not the main aspect of God's justice. The scriptures most often conceive of God's justice, or righteousness, as the action of His mercy. Just as with human beings, justice means the relief of the oppressed and the needy; so God's justice is His kingly power engaged on behalf of human beings. Justice and mercy are consistently joined together and most of the time they are inseparable.

God's justice is far more than the Son of Man rendering to everyone according to his deeds.

The idea of merit and reward is really superseded by a higher factor in the teaching of Jesus. He does speak of recompense, but it is the Father, and not the judge, that gives this.

Matthew 6:1, 4, 6, 18 Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. That your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. So that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

We see where reward and justice come from. This is not merely earthly justice, but the reward transcends all merit.

Matthew 24:46-47 Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.

God's justice is not merely gracious, but redemptive. It does not simply allocate rights,

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but it establishes righteousness in a very merciful way.

We will discuss the subject of God as our Judge and guardian of justice. God's universal judgeship is based on the fact that it was He who created the world and established equity and justice. This means He is the source and guardian of justice, because justice and righteousness are His very nature and attributes.

Psalm 97:2-6 Clouds and darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about. His lightnings light the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory.

Justice was a central theme among the Israelites. They were very concerned with social relationships, among themselves, as a people covenanted to God, and also among the nations surrounding them.

In this connection, God as Judge administered justice by punishing those whose conduct made the lives of others very difficult in the world. God had to judge the nations for their disregard of justice in their social dealings with other people. He requires the active practicing of justice and righteousness with mercy. He emphasizes to His people, throughout the Bible, that justice should be dealt out in a very merciful way.

In the Old Testament, God's justice was manifested in His retribution to all people and nations according to what they justly deserved. Those who felt unjustly treated by others in social, economic, and political relationships, summoned God to judge them. They wanted God to do them justice by saving them from their enemies or oppressors.

Psalm 7:6-11 Arise, O LORD, in Your anger; lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies; rise up for me to the judgment You have commanded! So the congregation of the peoples shall surround You; for their sakes, therefore, return on high. The LORD shall judge the peoples; Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, And according to my integrity within me. Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds. My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

Even though people may sin occasionally, like we do in God's church, compared to the

world we are righteous. Sometimes when God doles out justice, He takes into consideration what we are up against in the world and the pressures from the world. He realizes how hard it is for us to resist sin. God will grant us His mercy and justice if we are repentant, and trying to overcome. In several other passages in the book of Psalms, when the Israelites summoned God to judge them, they were calling on Him to avenge them of their enemies simply as vindication for their own uprightness.

It appears that the Israelites based God's retributive justice on the principle of judgment by ordeal. In this type of judgment the innocent, that is the righteous, would be vindicated while the wicked would be requited according to their unrighteousness.

This is best illustrated in the quarrel between the Israelites and the Ammonites. Jephthah, as judge of Israel, tried to prove the Israelites' innocence to the king of the Ammonites. When his explanation of the situation failed to convince the king of the Ammonites, Jephthah summoned God the Judge, to decide the case between the Israelites and the Ammonites. Military victory by the Israelites was construed to mean vindication for the Israelites' innocence. A decisive defeat, inflicted on the Ammonites, was seen as God's judgment and punishment for the Ammonites' unprovoked aggression.

Judges 11:27 "Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon."

The idea of innocence and guilt is sometimes determined when two sides are compared with one another. Sometimes justice depends on which side is less guilty.

Let us take a look at God's justice in relation to the poor. In several biblical passages God is portrayed as having a special concern for the poor, especially the widow, the fatherless, and the oppressed.

When the poor and oppressed summoned God to judge them they did not expect Him to reward them with material benefits beyond those they were normally entitled to in order to lead a normal and good life. When they sold their produce and services they expected a fair deal from the merchants.

Ownership of the land and property, freedom and security, constituted their inalienable human rights endowed upon them by God their Creator. For this reason passages that refer to the justice of the poor are in actual fact referring to the rights of the poor guaranteed by the Almighty God.

Therefore, justice does not solely refer to moral norm but also refers to basic human rights. When the prophet Amos refers to the poor as the righteous, he is referring to their being in the right, with respect to their dispute with the oppressors, over the infringement of their basic rights.

It was natural that the people who were oppressed by the economic, social, and political systems and others, such as the sojourners, who experienced some injustices, would appeal to God to intervene in order that their rights might be restored.

Psalm 146:7-9 Who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LOORD gives freedom to the prisoners. The LOORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LOORD raises those who are bowed down; the LOORD loves the righteous. The LOORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

God requites all people according to their just deserts. Those who felt innocent of any wrongdoing against other people, and who had not transgressed God's law, summoned God to test, try, or examine them to verify their uprightness in order that He could judge them accordingly. This is the emphasis in scripture, that they placed themselves before God for His justice, knowing that He is a merciful God.

In making this summons, God was invoked to reward the wicked according to their wickedness and the upright in heart according to their righteousness. God judges in order to restore the lost rights of the oppressed person.

Let us take a look at justice as love and grace. Divine justice involves love and grace. This implication appears in David's prayer for forgiveness of his crimes with Bathsheba.

Psalm 51:14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

But what David sought was not justification or defense because he had just acknowledged his heinous sin and his corruption from birth in Psalm 51:5. David's appeal was out of repentance and he sought for undeserved or unmerited pardon—that is grace. God's justice in this situation is redemptive. It is God's fulfilling of His own graciously promised salvation regardless of the merits of human beings. David sought mercy as part of God's justice.

Psalm 89:14-16 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face. Blessed are the people who

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know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted.

I used this scripture to close my sermon on the subject of light and I find it very interesting to see how God tends to tie these together. Here, David's counselor, Ethan, moved from a reference to God's 'righteousness and justice' to a joyful testimony.

The throne of God is founded on justice and right judgment and this is what supports it. His administration is maintained because it is right. God is right. God is righteous. Even omnipotent power could not permanently maintain a throne founded on injustice and wrong. Such an administration would sooner or later cause its own destruction.

The throne of God is also the center for mercy and truth, while being founded on love, righteousness and justice. Justice and the love of God are natural associates. Godly justice emanates from God's love.

Luke recorded a major discussion Jesus had with a Pharisee in the setting of a dinner. Jesus accepted table fellowship with the Pharisee and then offended His host, who was a proponent of ritual separation. Jesus offended him by not performing the customary ritual washing prior to eating.

Luke 11:39-42 Then the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Luke recorded a concise selection of indictments against the Pharisee. These included hypocrisy, inequality, ostentation, impossible demands, intolerance, and exclusiveness. The major difference between the justice of the Pharisee and God was mercy. The Pharisee lacked mercy, love, and righteousness.

These condemnations point out some of the most common sins that characterize unbalanced strict religious people. They follow the letter of the law without rightly understanding, or rightly applying, the principles of the spirit of the law. That is, they do not understand how to rightly and justly apply biblical principles. They may even have most of the Bible memorized, but they do not see the spiritual principles and therefore

cannot apply them in everyday life. I had several friends who had memorized all of the kings of the Bible, both Judah and Israel. They had the commandments, scriptures, and all the books of the Bible memorized. I could go on and on about what they had memorized, but they did not have a clue how to apply them. Amazingly, many of these people look down on others because in their shallowness of understanding they see themselves as superior and ritually clean, as the Pharisees did, when in reality they are whitewashed tombs.

Matthew 23:27. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

Though they avoided touching a grave for fear of ritual defilement they themselves, through their own recognized corruption, were spiritually defiling and corrupting those who they persuaded of their ideas. It did not bother the conscience of the Pharisees to not give people what was due them, nor to refuse to give God their own hearts.

The Pharisees were originally a group of laymen who sought to be separate from impure things and people and attempted to apply Mosaic Law to all parts of life. They had, for the most part—by the time of Jesus—lost the intent of God's truth. Jesus offered positive criticism that shows He did not oppose strict attention to religious duties, but rather the neglect of caring about people. They lacked mercy. When Jesus corrected them for their strict religious behavior and their judgement of others, they could not see what they were missing. What they were missing was mercy.

But the Pharisees saw merely from the religious point of view. To wash externally was, in reality, only a partial measure. The Pharisees' greed and wickedness had deprived the poor of the very food and drink that was inside their own carefully washed dishes.

Jesus illustrated godly justice performed in practical application.

Luke 6:27-36 But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him, who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even

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sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Godly justice is merciful because it is based on love! True justice is revealed by that love!

Jesus mentioned seven aspects of unconditional love. These are actions not done naturally by human nature. Since they require supernatural enabling by the Holy Spirit, they are proof of, and manifest, true justice:

- (1) Love your enemies.
- (2) Do good to those who hate you.
- (3) Bless those who curse you.
- (4) Pray for those who mistreat you.
- (5) Do not retaliate.
- (6) Give freely.
- (7) Treat others the way you want to be treated.

This kind of love marks one as distinct, and as having the same characteristics as the heavenly Father. It is on this unconditional love that God's justice is based.

In Romans 3 with the emphasis upon the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ for the satisfaction of the Father's justice, we must continue to understand justice in its traditional sense as well as in its merciful sense.

Romans 3:21-24 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that

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is in Christ Jesus.

Since all have sinned, all must be justified if we are to be saved by God's grace. If we understand that the last statement in verse 22 and all of verse 23 should be regarded as a connected thought, we see that the statement about being justified is connected to "all who believe." So we see that "all who believe" will be saved. True believers are those who repent, accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, are baptized, receive God's Spirit, and live a life of continuous overcoming and growing.

Romans 3:25 Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

Verse 25 deals with propitiation in terms of God's justice or His righteousness. In a sense, the character of God needs justification for His passing over the sins that were previously committed. His forbearance should not be thought of as sentimentality or weakness, but as an indication that meeting the demands of His righteous character would be accomplished in due time. We are guaranteed of that.

Romans 3:26 To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God declares those who have faith in Christ as righteous. This is a declaration that God is, at the same time just, and also justifying, in His activity on behalf of humanity. Absolute justice is shown in the atonement through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. God is called faithful and just to forgive our sins.

Let us take a look at justice as forgiveness.

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

Justification does not come from a person's own faithfulness but from his humble dependence upon God's justice and mercy.

Divine justice is based on what God judges to be right for us to do, as well as what it is right for him to inflict. Here we see Daniel's prayer for the people, since the people were sinful.

Daniel 9:8-9, 13-19 O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our

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princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as it is this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly! O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us. Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

This should be very encouraging to us knowing that when we have sinned God's great mercy—that justice that we receive from Him—will be based on love. The language in these verses is humble, respectful, solemn, devout, and deeply earnest. It is not vain repetition. Its force is not in the words that are used, but in the obvious fervor, earnestness, and sincerity that permeates this pleading. It is earnest intercession and supplication that God would hear and that He would forgive and be merciful.

Confessing our sins, and repenting of them, is not demonstrated by the denial of sin but by confessing and abandoning it. Daniel did not make an excuse for the peoples' sins. This action links us to God's mercy. We can confess our sins to God in confidence because God is faithful, just, righteous, and merciful.

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We have our part to play in overcoming and repenting, but God does most of what it takes to make us right with Him. Forgiveness is the cancellation of debts or the dismissal of charges. God is so merciful He is anxious to forgive. His mercy must not be

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set against His justice, because God's justice includes His mercy.

Mercy is not opposed to justice. It is by the forgiveness of sins that God establishes righteousness, and this is the main purpose of justice. Again, God is at the same time just, and the justifier, of the one who has faith in Jesus. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let us take a look at the holiness of God for a moment. Quite often in the scriptures, the terms justice and righteousness are used synonymously. The justice of God is both an essential and a relative attribute of the divine existence. It is a necessary outflow from the holiness of God. It is the holiness of God as manifested and applied in moral government.

Holiness is another one of the essential attributes of the divine nature. It is, on the one hand, entire freedom from moral evil, and on the other hand, absolute moral perfection. The scriptures lay great emphasis on this attribute of God.

Psalm 99:9 Exalt the LOORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LOORD our God is holy.

God is just, loving, and merciful. By the holiness of God, it is not implied that He is subject to some law or standard of moral excellence external to Himself. All moral law and perfection have their external and unchangeable basis in His own nature. He is the One in whom these eternal truths reside who is Himself the root and ground of them all.

I Samuel 2:2 No one is holy like the LOORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.

We know rock to be solid and immovable and that is the way God is when it comes to His love and His mercy. In Revelation 15, John records Jesus' revelation to him regarding the prelude to the seven last plagues. In mentioning the song of Moses, he emphasizes the Lord God Almighty's just and true ways in holiness.

Revelation 15:1-4 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!

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Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

In these judgments, God shows Himself to be a holy God who loves righteousness and truth, and hates sin. When it is said that He "alone" is holy, the expression is used in a comparative sense. He is so pure, that it is true to say that in comparison to Him, no one else is holy.

Moses recorded God's promise of blessing for obedience:

Deuteronomy 28:9 The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.

The holiness of God has great practical consequences for us. Here are five consequences:

(1) The holiness of God is the special ground of reverence, awe, and adoration.

Isaiah 6:3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!

(2) The holiness of God is the standard of all holiness.

I Peter 1:15-16 But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

The holiness of God implies the divine opposition to, and condemnation of, all sin.

Habakkuk 1:13 You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he?

The contemplation of the attributes of God's holiness produces an awakened or deepened consciousness of sin.

Isaiah 6:5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."

The holiness of God is revealed to us as setting before us the zenith of our aspirations, hopes, and endeavors. We see this in our race of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and **finisher of** our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Holiness of character, in the distinct ethical sense, is ascribed to God. The command, "Be holy; for I am holy" plainly implies an ethical application. People cannot resemble God in His inexpressible attributes. They can reflect His likeness only along the lines of those moral qualities of justice, righteousness and love in which true holiness consists.

The righteousness or justice of God, like His holiness, is transmissible to the elect. It is the work of divine grace to impart to human beings righteousness by renewal in righteousness and holiness of truth.

We will take a look at justice as goodness and loving kindness. Even as God, in His grace, bestows righteousness upon the unworthy, so the people of God are called upon to seek justice in the sense of pleading for the widow and judging the cause of the poor and needy. Justice has come to mean goodness mercy and loving consideration.

Matthew 1:18-19 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

Joseph, before he knew the whole situation in his passing of his justice on Mary, was willing to do it quietly, without any public embarrassment. In the ethical and moral person and work of Jesus Christ, we see the sinless life that reveals the moral will of God. This far exceeds the perverted, though seemingly lofty, justice of the scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus commanded people to be perfect. At the same time He exhibited love that has no equal, as He laid down His life for His undeserving friends. John recorded Christ's explanation of love and joy perfected.

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John 15:11-17 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

We are commanded to be just. Here justice was revealed in its ethical, redemptive, and imputed stages all united in one. Jesus came, so that God may be the Justifier of the person who believes in Jesus Christ. And so we may be found in Him, who is made our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

God's justice brings joy. It always brings joy.

Proverbs 21:15 It is a joy for the just to do justice, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity."

Psalms 67:4 Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth.

Psalms 96:10-13: 97:1-2 Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously." Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth. 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.

The coming of God to judge is a cause for joy. All nature is called on to celebrate His coming and that includes heaven and earth, sea creatures, fields and wild animals, and trees of the forest.

Shakespeare, who was very astute in many areas, said, "Though justice be thy plea, consider this, that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation." This may be

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true apart from God, but thankfully God applies justice differently than human beings.

The justice of God is clearly seen in His plan of salvation for all humanity. The first time of judgment involves God's church since Jesus Christ established it in AD 31, and will end at the time of Christ's return.

The second time of judgment is during the Millennium, the 1,000 years immediately after Christ's return to set up His Kingdom. One clear theme running throughout the Bible is that, during the Millennium, all then alive will know the truth of God and will know God's justice. This millennial period of judgment differs from the world now in that all people then alive will have an opportunity for salvation.

Those who lived and died, never having been called by God, from Adam till Jesus Christ's return and the first resurrection, will not yet have had an opportunity. Their opportunity is spoken of in Revelation 20:11, which describes the Great White Throne judgment.

This is the time of the second resurrection, when the dead from all time, small and great, will be raised to another physical existence, except this time with a difference. This time God's truth is opened to their understanding, and they live out a full life span with the opportunity to know God and the truth of His salvation.

Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

This is the time when all the humans who have not had that opportunity will be given one. God's justice will be merciful to those who repent and overcome sin.

Now God's justly righteous plan will be complete. All will have had an opportunity for salvation, a period of living during which the truth of God will be open to their minds, and they will be judged according to it—their judgment period. God's justice is manifested out of His love and it will be seen in a huge way at that time.

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For the church, that period is now. In the Millennium all those then alive will have their opportunity. Finally, during the Great White Throne judgment, all the former dead, who did not have an opportunity before, will get his or her opportunity. No one will get a "second opportunity," but all will get one full opportunity for salvation. In this, we see the justice of God graciously, mercifully, and righteously carried out on behalf of every human being who ever lives.

Isaiah 30:18 Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait [and long] for Him.

Because God loves us He will grant us His justice mercifully.