

**Our Just God**  
Romans 3:25-31  
Rev. Brian Bill  
July 28-29, 2018

I came across an article in the Huffington Post a week ago. Brent Gehring from Nebraska was returning home after having dinner with his daughter Emma. While he was carrying her in his arms, a man yelled at him, *“What the \_\_\_\_\_? Make her walk. That’s what’s wrong with kids today!”*

Rather than seething silently, Brent Gehring decided he had a choice to make: *“Can I make myself feel better by screaming at him or can I teach him something about life? I won’t lie to you and tell you that it was an easy choice but I got inches from his face, with my daughter in my arms, and quietly asked him if he was referring to my daughter.”* The man said, *“\_\_\_\_\_ yes.”*

Listen to how this dad replied: *“My daughter has been carrying my faith and my strength for the past 5 years since she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She can’t walk but I am happy to carry her because of all the amazing things she has taught me through the years. So I would advise you not address my daughter in any way other than respectful.”*

Emma was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor when she was just seven months old. It started behind her right eye and spread to the right side of her brain. She will soon start her seventh round of chemotherapy.

Gehring said the encounter ended with *“two grown men with tears rolling down their faces. One that needed to have his eyes opened to what...real love is and one that is always needing a reminder that good can come from any situation.”*

He said he shared this story not because he wants people’s pity, but because he wants it to serve as a reminder *not to judge others, as you don’t always know the full story.*

While we so readily set ourselves up as judge and jury, we’re going to learn today that God alone is qualified to be the judge because He is always just and knows everything.

As we continue in our series called, “Behold Your God,” our focus today is on “Our Just God.” Justice is not an external system to which God tries to adhere.

Justice is that perfection of His nature whereby He is infinitely righteous in Himself and in all He does. His justice comes out of His inner being and is based on His holiness and faithfulness. Moses put it this way in Deuteronomy 32:4: ***“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.”***

A.W. Tozer points out that, *“Justice is indistinguishable from righteousness in the Old Testament...it means uprightness or rectitude...justice is not something God has. Justice is something that God is.”*

Chip Ingram builds off this definition by adding, *“Justice is not a standard God follows; He is the standard. He is not accountable to justice because justice flows from Him. It’s part of who He is...justice means that people are going to get what they deserve based on God’s clear and full understanding of what they did and why they did it.”*

God always acts in a way consistent with the requirements of His character as revealed in His Word and He renders to everyone their due because He knows all things.

Let me say that this attribute, along with the related doctrine of God’s wrath, is not very politically correct today. We’d rather hear about heaven while living as if hell is not real. I fear that we’ve turned God into an idol of our own making, where we latch onto His love and focus on his forgiveness while dismissing His holiness and justice. Billy Graham said it like this: *“Modern man does not like to think of God in terms of wrath, anger and judgment. He likes to make God according to his own ideas and give God characteristics he wants Him to possess.”*

## **Biblical Survey**

Let’s soak up some Scripture that deals with God’s justice:

Psalm 75:7: ***“But it is God who executes judgment.”***

Psalm 97:2: ***“Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.”***

Proverbs 29:26: ***“Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the LORD that a man gets justice.”***

Isaiah 30:18: “*For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.*”

Zephaniah 3:5: “*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.*”

Revelation 16:7: “*Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!*”

Let’s allow the question Abraham asked God in Genesis 18:25 to frame our study: “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*”

God *will* judge the world; God *must* judge the world. This means that he must judge *you* and he must judge *me*. The Judge of all the earth will do what is just. While most of us claim to want justice, it’s not always the case.

R.C. Sproul recounts an experience he had teaching a freshman Old Testament course to 250 students. On the first day he went over the assignments very carefully, explaining the requirement of three short papers. He made it clear that the first one was due by noon on the last day of September – no extensions would be given. If a student turned the paper in late, he or she would receive an F.

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 225 students turned in their papers, while 25 others stood quaking in terror, full of remorse. As they cried out for mercy, Dr. Sproul decided to give them a break: “*Remember, the next assignment is due the last day of October.*” The students promised to have their next assignment in on time.

On the last day of October, 200 students turned in their papers, while 50 came empty-handed. They were nervous, but not in a panic. They told the professor, “*We’re sorry. Please give us one more chance. We promise it will never happen again.*”

The professor relented but said, “*This is the last time. If you are late for the next paper, it will be an F. No excuses and no whining. Is that clear?*” They all nodded their heads in agreement.

What do you think happened on the last day of November? Right. Only 150 students came with their papers. The other 100 strolled into class utterly unconcerned. Dr. Sproul shouted out, “*Where are your term papers?*” One

student replied, *“Oh, don’t worry, Prof, we’re working on them. We’ll have them in a couple days.”*

The professor then picked up his lethal black grade book and began shouting out names. *“Johnson! Do you have your paper?”* *“No sir,”* came the reply. *“F,”* the professor said as he wrote the grade in the book. The students reacted with unmitigated fury. They howled in protest, screaming, *“That’s not fair.”*

Sproul then looked at one of the complaining students and asked, *“Do you think this is unfair?”* The student courageously responded, *“Yes, it’s totally unfair!”*

The teacher then said, *“I see. It’s justice you want? I seem to recall that you were late with your paper the last time. If you insist upon justice you will certainly get it. I’ll not only give you an F for this assignment, but I’ll change your last grade to the F you so richly deserved.”*

The student was stunned. He had no more arguments to make. He apologized for being so hasty and was suddenly happy to settle for one F instead of two.

In God’s court, you and I have a flimsy defense. There’s no possibility of a plea bargain or of God grading on a curve. Because God is a just God, He must judge everyone who does not meet His standards for perfection. That means you. That means me. God’s justice requires that there be payment for the penalty of sin. Hebrews 9:27: ***“...It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”***

### **Why God Did What He Did**

I’d like us to dive into what is the deepest part of the Book of Romans. Please turn to Romans 3.

Romans 3:23 describes our problem: ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Everyone has sinned and fallen way short of God’s standards. Our story is that we can’t measure up to God’s glory.

I read about a burglar from Belgium who was surprised while he was robbing a house. When he heard the homeowners returning, he fled out the back door, climbed over a 9-foot wall, dropped down on the other side, and found himself in the city prison! It is impossible to run from God because you’ll eventually be imprisoned by your own sins.

Verse 24 and the first half of verse 25 describe *what* God did for us by providing a solution for our sinfulness: “...***and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...***”

The next section explains *why* God did what He did. Look at the second half of verse 25 and verse 26: “...***This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.***”

The word “***show***” means, “*pointing out,*” as with a finger. It’s as if God is pointing His finger at the cross and saying, “*There’s the proof of my justice and my mercy.*” Notice this is said twice, once in verse 25 and again in verse 26. God showed his righteousness in the past and He demonstrates it in the present.

There are at least two results that flow from Him showing His righteousness.

**1. His mercy mitigates sins (25).** Before God’s wrath was fully unleashed on the cross of Christ, in His forbearance, He held back His fury. While God certainly judged some sin in the Old Testament, and people experienced the consequences of their sinful behavior during the Flood and when He vaporized Sodom and Gomorrah, He chose not to fully compensate every person for their unrighteousness. For centuries God had been doing what Psalm 103:10 says: “***He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.***”

But God couldn’t keep postponing divine punishment because it would communicate that His glory and His righteousness are cheap and worthless. Acts 17:30-31 adds, “***The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.***”

**2. His justice justifies sinners (26).** We see in verse 26, that God, who is just, is also the one who justifies jerks like us. This is the substance of the gospel message. We could translate it like this: “*so as to be just and [yet] the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*” It makes sense that He would be righteous

in judging sin, but how does He maintain, and even point to, His righteousness in justifying the sinner (declaring us righteous)?

This dilemma is solved through the substitutionary sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. God did not abandon His justice because His righteous wrath was poured out on Christ; and He accepted the sacrifice of His Son as full payment for sins. As a result He can forgive the fallen sinner and yet maintain His righteousness. That's the glory of the good news of the gospel. What God's justice demanded, Jesus provided. With His justice satisfied and His love unleashed, sinners are declared righteous when they put their faith in Jesus.

I've been helped by a pastor's statement: *"God saw His glory being despised by sinners—He saw His worth belittled and His name dishonored by our sins—and rather than vindicating the worth of His glory by slaying His people, He vindicated His glory by slaying His Son."*

Because God is a just God, He must judge everyone who does not meet His standards for perfection. That means you and me because sin has to be paid for. God's justice requires there be payment for the penalty of sin.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, *"Ah, sinner, if God punish not thy sin, he has ceased to be what He has always been—the severely just, the inflexibly righteous...is it possible, then, that the sinner cannot be saved? This is the great riddle of the law, and the grand discovery of the gospel. Wonder ye heavens! Be astonished O earth! That very justice which stood in the sinner's way and prevented his being pardoned, has been by the gospel of Christ appeased; by the rich atonement offered upon Calvary, justice is satisfied, has sheathed its sword, and has no not a word to say against the pardon of the penitent."*

There really is no tension between God's love and God's justice because Jesus is the fusion of divine love and divine justice. There is dissonance only if your view of love requires that God forgive sin without any payment being made.

Actually, the offer of Jesus as our sin substitute shows a greater love on God's part than simply releasing us from the consequences of sin without payment being made. To fulfill His justice, God's love was so great that He gave His Son for us. Love and justice are not two separate attributes competing with one another. God is both righteous and loving, and has given what He Himself demands. In His wisdom He showed He could be righteous *and* merciful at the same time by

punishing Jesus in our place, thereby justifying the guilty without compromising His justice.

The cross was at once the most horrible *and* the most beautiful example of God's wrath. It was the most just *and* the most gracious act in history. With the concentrated load of sin that Jesus carried to the cross, God poured out His righteous wrath on Jesus. It was with this act that God's holy justice was completely satisfied. Only by understanding what Jesus did on the cross can we solve the mystery of how God can be both just and the justifier. God is merciful toward hell-bound sinners and saves them in such a way that His justice is not compromised and He does so at the expense of His Son.

Note that this plan is only activated in one's life when faith is expressed. Look at the middle part of verse 25: ***“to be received by faith”*** and the last phrase of verse 26: ***“...and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”***

One writer captures this well: *“The God of Christianity never claims to be fair. He goes beyond fair. The Bible teaches that He decided not to give us what we deserve – that’s mercy. In addition, God decided to give us exactly what we don’t deserve – we call that grace.”*

Sometimes I hear people say that it's not fair that innocent people go to Hell. I agree. Actually, no good person has ever gone to Hell because the Bible says no one is innocent and everyone is guilty! We all deserve damnation. We mistakenly think that we have to do really bad things to go to Hell. The truth is that if you do nothing, that's where you'll end up. Listen. God is far more holy than we realize and we are far more sinful than we recognize.

Related to God's justice is the doctrine of God's wrath. Are you aware there are more references in Scripture to God's anger, wrath and fury than there are for love? Listen to how the New Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines divine wrath: *“The personal manifestation of God’s holy, moral character in judgment against sin. Wrath is neither an impersonal process nor irrational and fitful like anger. It is in no way vindictive or malicious. It is holy indignation—God’s anger directed against sin. God’s wrath is an expression of His holy love. If God is not a God of wrath, His love is no more than frail, worthless sentimentality; the concept of mercy is meaningless; and the Cross was a cruel and unnecessary experience for His Son.”*

Ephesians 2:3 declares that all people are ***“by nature children of wrath.”*** Romans 1:18 says, ***“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”*** And Romans 2:5 is very unsettling: ***“But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”*** God’s wrath is being stored up like a reservoir that will one day burst its banks with His righteous judgment.

Revelation 14:19-20 uses vivid imagery to describe the reality of God’s wrath: ***“So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.”*** Imagine blood as high as a horse’s head extending for about 180 miles, which is about the distance from the Quad Cities to Chicago. That’s a lot of blood!

This is where the words from the Battle Hymn of the Republic come from: ***“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword.”***

### **Closing Challenge**

I want to close by talking to two groups of people. First, I want to speak to those of you who are in great danger of falling into the hands of a just and righteous God

In light of God’s justice and wrath, along with the reality of the never-ending fires of Hell, let me ask you a very blunt question: How are you going to pay for your sins? You have 2 choices:

- Either you choose to pay for your sins in Hell -- and justice will prevail.
- Or, you repent and receive Christ as your sin substitute so you can be saved - and justice will prevail.

We use the word “saved” a lot...and we should because it’s a biblical word. But have you ever wondered what a person is saved *from*? We must be saved from our sins, from guilt, from His righteous judgment, and from Hell. In addition, Romans 5:9 says that we must be ***“saved by him from the wrath of God.”***

John 3:36 says that if you don't believe and receive Jesus, the wrath of God is already on you – ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”***

I can't even imagine the agony and horror of those who proclaim in Revelation 6:16-17: ***“Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”***

Some of you are ready to be saved right now. You want Jesus to cancel your sin debt. You're ready to surrender yourself to His leadership in your life. If you are, then there's no better time than now to do it.

Have you heard there are an increasing number of cars stolen in the QCA? According to the Quad Cities Times, there were over 600 stolen in 2017! Tens of thousands of cars are stolen every year in California, but several years ago one car theft made all the local papers and was the lead story on the evening news. The police issued an all-points bulletin to find the missing car and tried to make contact with the person who stole it.

Why all the effort? Because the owner of the car had informed police that on the front seat was a box of crackers laced with a deadly poison. The car owner had planned to use the crackers as rat bait. So the police were desperately trying to find the thief – not to punish him, but to save his life. They were afraid he would eat one of the crackers and die.

In the same way, our just God pursues us – not because He wants to punish us but because He wants to save us. You may be running away from Him because – like the car thief – you are a sinner. You have broken God's law. But what you may not realize is that God wants to convert you, not condemn you. John 3:17-18: ***“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”***

And listen to John 5:24: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”***

If you're ready to be saved so that you don't come into judgment, please pray this prayer with me right now. When we're done, I'm going to ask you to raise your hand if you prayed this prayer from your heart.

*Lord, I admit I am a sinner and deserve your just judgment. I repent from how I've been living and turn to you. I believe Jesus died in my place on the cross and rose again on the third day and now I receive Him into my life. Please save me from my sins and from your righteous wrath. I want to be born again so I place all my trust in you and you alone. If there's anything in my life that you don't like, please get rid of it. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Would you have the courage to raise your hand if you prayed that prayer from your heart?

## **Action Steps**

And now here are a few ways we can all apply this message.

**1. Refuse to seek vengeance.** Instead of judging and criticizing and trying to even the score with everyone who's ever done you wrong, let God be the judge.

***Romans 12:19-21: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*** What enemy do you need to start serving? Like the man I mentioned at the beginning, maybe you need to allow some tears to stream down your face because you don't always know the whole story.

**2. Stand against injustice.** Because God is a just God, He calls His people to stand up for those who are mistreated. ***Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*** In what ways can you stand up when you see racial or social injustice? How does God want you to respond related to injustice on the unborn, or toward orphans or refugees? How are you treating the little, the least and the lost?

**3. Step up your giving and serving.** We've not only been saved *from* our sins; we have been saved *to* serve. Has it been awhile since you've done an inventory of the giving of your time, talents and treasures? Are you focused on things that will

last or are your works just going to burn up? I've always found 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 to be extremely challenging: ***“Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw – each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”***

2 Corinthians 5:10 is written to believers and is good for us to keep in mind, ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”*** In what ways does God want you to step it up?

**4. Go with the gospel.** Make sure you've settled the fact that those who are not saved will experience God's wrath in the never-ending fires of Hell. Don't be a closet universalist, thinking that everyone except the really bad will end up in Heaven. We have the message that saves. Romans 10:14-15 says: ***“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”***

We've been sending Go Teams out all summer and the team from Puerto Rico returned Friday night. I want us to hear from them as we wrap up today.

1. What did you do?
2. What did you see God do? Share a story.
3. How has your life changed?

Saturday - Steve Peterson John Langworthy

Sunday at 8 - Tracy Waterman, Sayde Mitchell and Gabe Rogers

Sunday at 10:45 - Cheryl and Randy Bivens and Arturo Villagomez