

Grace Bible Church
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.

The Tree of Life from the week ending 12/14/08

**The Sovereignty, Righteousness, and Justice of God as it relates to the theology of God's plan.
Part 2.**

We have been noting a fantastic doctrine that is vital for all believers to understand: The Doctrine of the Theology of God's Perfect Plan. We are now noting point 2 in the doctrine which deals with understanding the essence of God. So far we have noted that God is sovereign. Sovereignty means that God is supreme in rule, and has authority over all things (Deu 4:39; 1Sa 2:6-8). Next, we saw that God is perfect righteousness (1Sa 2:2; Lev 19:2). The Bible teaches that there is no one Holy like the Lord.

How can we, who are imperfect, ever have fellowship with God who is totally perfect? The answer is that God was aware of this, and billions of years ago He made a provision to solve our problem (Act 2:22-23; Act 4:27-28). God's righteousness demands that His creatures are perfect, and therefore, because man could not meet this requirement, God did it all. This is why the apostle Paul, under the influence of the mentorship of God the Holy Spirit said, **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:24-25).**

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

"This I command you, that you [impersonally unconditionally] love one another. If the world hates you [despises you, or is jealous of you], you know that it has hated Me before {it hated} you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also." (John 15:17-20)

So, don't be shocked when you, your pastor, or your friends are living the spiritual life, and you hear lies and accusations coming from cosmic, carnal believers who have no idea what living the spiritual life is all about. Men said plenty of lies and false accusations about the Lord Jesus Christ: **"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!' (Mat 11:19).** They said that He blasphemed, **Then the high priest tore his robes, saying, "He has blasphemed!" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death!" (Mat 26:65-66).** Our Lord was accused of being insane, and demon possessed, **And when His own people heard {of this,} they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul" (Mark 3:21-22).** They said our Lord had an unclean spirit **(Mar 3:30).** He had a reputation for hanging around with sinners, **"This man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luk 15:2b).** They accused Him of being unpatriotic, **and they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar" (Luk 23:2).** In Luk 23:5 they accused Him of always stirring up trouble. In Luk 23:14 they said He causes

people to rebel. In Joh 7:12 they said He was a cult leader, and He leads multitudes astray.

Well, you get the picture and the point! However, the Lord can turn the curse of deception and the wrath of man into praise and magnify Himself:

“For the wrath of man shall praise Thee;” (Psa 76:10).

For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth. (2Co 13:8)

"No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, And their vindication is from Me," declares the Lord.

(Isa 54:17)

There have been people throughout human history that have tried to attack the people of God, and stop Bible doctrine from being taught, and all they have done is to promote doctrine even more. When the Egyptians were trying to stop the people of God through affliction we read, **"But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out" (Exo 1:12).**

The righteousness of God is not something we should shrink away from in fear and guilt, it is something that we should know is for us, and active and motivated in all that God does, including saving us. So, when we talk about the righteousness of God, though He is infinitely Holy, He still maintains a relation to fallen creatures. He does this not by ignoring the depravity of man, but by being active with His love and faithfulness doing something about man's ultimate problem of sin and evil. You see, the righteousness of God alive in us is not manifested by forsaking sin, or cleaning up our act like so many people try to make us do. God's righteousness in us is manifested by our love, our faithfulness, our character, and integrity toward one another, including towards ourselves. It's impossible to reveal God's perfect righteousness in you without having love and compassion for others. Believer's who operate in the righteousness of God are very relaxed, and they are in a wonderful state as well as wonderful people to be around. When we understand God's righteousness, and are not intimidated by it, then, and only then, can we begin to live in the righteousness of God.

How do we live in the righteousness of God? It is so simple, it's right before our eyes: **But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. (2Co 11:3)**

Righteous art Thou, O Lord, And upright are Thy judgments. (Psa 119:137).

Many times things happen in life that we do not understand. They seem to be unfair, but in the end, you will find out that God was just in dealing with the situation the way that He did. His righteousness was working on our behalf, toward us and for us. **As for God, His way is blameless; The word of the Lord is tested; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him (2Sa 22:31).** This means that as believers we can rely fully on the knowledge that whatever God does in our lives is consistent with His righteous attitudes and actions. God's righteousness is not a self-righteousness that accuses, or condemns others, but rather a righteousness that desires to help others know His grace and mercy.

As an individual, you have authority over your own soul. When that soul is filled with God's word you actually have the working material for the very righteousness of God working through you. After all, you're going to be with Him for all of eternity, you might as well get a little taste of it now. How do we know that?

"I shall give thanks to Thee with uprightness of heart, When I learn Thy righteous judgments." (Psa 119:7)

"At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to Thee Because of Thy righteous ordinances." (Psa 119:62)

"My eyes fail {with longing} for Thy salvation, And for Thy righteous word." (Psa 119:123)

"Thy testimonies are righteous forever; Give me understanding that I may live." (Psa 119:144)

So, we have seen God's sovereignty, and righteousness. The third characteristic of the essence of God is the fact that God is also just. God's holiness includes His justice as well as His righteousness. As a part of God's justice, God is always fair, in fact, it is impossible for God to be unfair. **"Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe" (2Ch 19:7).** The justice of God always administers what righteousness demands, and righteousness demands perfection. This is why in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord made some very challenging statements and commands (Mat 5:38-47). Notice what our Lord says in Mat 5:48, **"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.** That's sounds impossible, in fact it is impossible. However, notice that, **"The things impossible with men are possible with God" (Luk 18:27).** So, divine righteousness demands perfection. Therefore, in the immeasurable genius of God, the justice of God imputes Adam's original sin to every member of the human race condemning them at birth (Psa 51:5; Psa 58:3). The righteousness of God demands perfection so that the justice of God could condemn man to qualify mankind for a Savior, because condemnation must precede salvation. Let me break it down for you.

- Sovereignty willed to create. **Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:26-28).**

- Righteousness demands perfection; because it is written, **"You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1Pe 1:16).**

- Omniscience produces the plan, **For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Eph 2:8).** For we are **His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10).**

- Omnipotence creates mankind, **Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Gen 2:7).**

- Justice condemns mankind, **For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Rom 5:19).** This is to qualify mankind for a Savior because condemnation must precede salvation.

- Love provides salvation, **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (Joh 3:16).** When mankind responds to the Gospel then:

- Eternal Life is given (Joh 3:36), Omnipresence is with you always (Mat 28:20), Immutability is faithful (2Ti 2:13), Veracity sets you free (Joh 8:32; Joh 8:36).

Before we go on we need to understand the relationship of righteousness and justice to the essence of God. First of all, justice guards the divine essence. God never has the slightest trouble keeping His attributes straight. One never compromises another. Even when He deals with imperfect, sinful, fallen mankind, especially when He blesses us, He is not lowering Himself to our imperfect level thus destroying His own perfection. The reason He can bless us is that one of His attributes stands guard, as it were, over all the rest. The justice of God, the function of His integrity, is the guardian of God's essence in all that He does toward imperfect creatures. In other words, He doesn't operate toward us just as a father, but really as a judge which is even more edifying for us.

The justice of God is the origin of everything we receive from Him, both blessing and cursing. This is true of unbeliever and believer alike; God functions toward all mankind from His justice, both now and forever. The reversionistic believer's discipline comes from divine justice, so does the mature believer's blessing. Both the unbeliever's eternal agony in the Lake of Fire, and the believer's ultimate sanctification and reward in heaven come from the same Source, the justice of God being first. Everything God does toward us from any of His attributes goes through His justice.

Justice is the final source of all divine action related to mankind. Whatever comes from God to man can come only through justice. God's justice is also our point of contact with Him; therefore, when we come to God, His absolute fairness is the attribute to which we must adjust. This explains why Rom 1:16-17 dogmatically state that God's ability to save man is not His love, not His sovereignty, not His omnipotence, not any divine attribute but justice.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." (Rom 1:16-17)

If God's point of contact with us were His sovereignty, He would choose who would go to heaven; He would program us to mechanically decree every detail of our lives on earth. We would all be robots; human freedom would not exist; the angelic conflict could not be won. This is the position of Hyper-Calvinism which distorts the sovereignty of God.

If God's point of contact with us were His omnipotence, He would be a tyrant. It would be impossible for us to fulfill the will of God because He would do everything Himself by direct decree. He would force people to believe in Christ. Again, there would be no freedom, no volition, no divine establishment; human history could not be permitted to run its course as part of the angelic conflict.

As perfect as these attributes are, they are not the basic frame of reference in God's relationship with us. If God's point of contact with us was His love, human sentimentality, instability, compromise, and emotionalism would develop from this false assumption. Therefore, of all the attributes of God, justice is the only one that protects His entire essence. For this reason, and for other reasons that we shall see, God's justice is our point of reference with Him. The second attribute of God that goes along with this is the one we already noted, the other half of divine integrity which is the righteousness of God also guards divine justice.

Justice serves as a guardian toward man while righteousness serves as a guardian toward justice. In the exercise of His justice, God is never arbitrary, impulsive, subjective or eccentric. His justice has a guardian of its own, the righteousness of God. Divine justice can never be corrupted because it always functions according to the standard of fairness found in God's perfect righteousness. **And He will judge the world [there's His justice] in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity or fairness (Psa 9:8).** In the same way that justice is the watchdog over God's entire essence, righteousness is the watchdog over His justice. Whereas justice is the function of divine integrity, righteousness is the principle of divine integrity. What righteousness demands, justice executes. Absolute righteousness is the key to the

character of God; all else depends on it. Perfect unblemished impeccable righteousness is at the very core of His Being. This is why justice and righteousness are mentioned together in the word of God more than any other attributes of His divine essence. God cannot tolerate less than His own perfection.

What the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God must perform. If righteousness rejects something, justice condemns it; if righteousness approves, justice blesses. Righteousness rejects sin; therefore, justice condemns sin. Righteousness also rejects our human good because it falls short of the absolute standard of divine good. Therefore, justice condemns all our legalism, religiosity, human works, and self-righteousness. Righteousness likewise rejects evil; justice totally condemns it.

God's righteousness approves of the perfect God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Righteousness approves of His perfect work on the Cross in payment for our sins. Therefore, justice blesses anyone who believes in Christ. Justice, not love, accomplishes this. It is the fairness of God that bestows upon every believer the amazing blessings that we call eternal salvation. Grace is the policy of the justice of God for blessing mankind.

Isa 30:18 Therefore, the Lord longs to be gracious to you [God constantly desires to bless believers], **and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice** [all the blessings He waits to give come through His justice]. **How blessed are those who long for Him** [daily PMA] **(Isa 30:18)**