

CHAPTER 18

GOD

IS JUST

Do you ever wonder what happened to justice? Why is it becoming increasingly elusive? What has gone wrong with the manmade judicial system?

In one of the worst travesties in American justice, four young men from Chicago with no history of violence were convicted of kidnapping, rape, and double murder. The bullet-riddled bodies of a young couple were found on May 12, 1978. Acting on an anonymous telephone tip, the police arrested Dennis Williams, Verneal Jimerson, Kenny Adams, and Willie Rainge. News reports declared that the crime had been solved. The men were soon convicted, and two were sentenced to death row. Appeals failed; all looked hopeless.

In September 1981, a tattered envelope with a return address of the “Condemned Unit,” Menard, Illinois, arrived at the offices of the *Chicago Lawyer* magazine. That letter led Rob Warden, editor and publisher of the *Chicago Lawyer*, and Dennis Protes, professor at Northwestern Medill School of Journalism, to investigate the case. They uncovered substantial evidence that exonerated the four convicts, including the first use of DNA to prove that multiple defendants were excluded as suspects in a rape case.

On July 2, 1996, more than eighteen years after the murders took place, Judge Thomas Fitzgerald ended the defendants' fight against an unjust sentence by reading,

“All the convictions are vacated.”¹ The four prisoners were free! The next day, the state attorney's office charged the real killers, Ira Johnson, Arthur Robinson, and Juan Rodriguez.

Justice is a pillar of any society. It vindicates the innocent and punishes the guilty. All too often though, this standard is compromised for personal gain. Corrupt judges sometimes tilt the scales of justice; unscrupulous lawyers manipulate laws and juries; witnesses lie. Truth is often distorted to benefit the rich, famous, and powerful.

Today, people are becoming less concerned about doing what is right. Instead they look for ways to cover their tracks, believing they will never get caught. If their transgression is discovered, they assume they will never be convicted. If they are found guilty, they can always appeal. If the appeal is denied, they will likely serve only a fraction of their sentence anyway.

Since our justice system can often be manipulated, many people mistakenly believe they can manipulate God's system of justice. They think that their excuses and alibis fool God. But oh how wrong they are! God told Jeremiah, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according

to what his deeds deserve.”² You can always count on God being just. He will always act according to what is morally upright or good.

GOD IS A PERFECT JUDGE

The Supreme Court is the highest court in our country. If we could expect justice anywhere, it should be when a case comes before these esteemed justices. Yet they are just human. Their caseload is so overwhelming that the solicitor general of the Justice Department chooses from thousands of potential cases to be brought before the court. The Supreme Court Justices are ten times more likely to hear a case if the solicitor general files it.

The staff of the solicitor general has mushroomed in recent years. They file briefs and make appearances in about 150 to 175 cases a year. But think of how many petitions are denied! There is so much paperwork in the Supreme Court system that detailed rules are applied to the way documents are filed, from the precise wording

that must appear on the cover to the length of the brief.³

With all these constraints, most cases do not make it to the bench. Perfect justice is therefore not being rendered. It is humanly impossible.

But God does not need a brief to examine a case. He does not run out of time to consider the evidence. No research or investigation is needed in His court—He already knows it all. He knows the motives, thoughts, actions, and purpose for everything done. Our only option is to confess before a holy, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, just God.

Justice is not an external system to which God tries to adhere. He did not have to go to law school to learn how to apply the law. His justice comes out of His inner being and is based on His holiness, truthfulness, and righteousness. Moses observed, “Everything He does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just

and upright He is!”⁴ God cannot be bribed or corrupted because His judgments are grounded in integrity. Because He has all the facts at His disposal, He cannot be fooled. His decisions are always based upon absolute truth. And when God pronounces judgment, He has the power to carry out the punishment.

God’s standard is the benchmark by which all human behavior is measured. God “always acts in a way consistent with the requirements of His character as revealed in His law. He rules His creation with honesty. He keeps His word. He renders to all His creatures their due.”⁵

God’s attributes assure us of justice. If He were not all-knowing, how could He know whether we sinned wittingly or manipulated the facts to serve our purposes? If He were not present everywhere at once, how could He know all the circumstances surrounding the issue before Him? If He were not all-wise, how could He carry out the judgment in a totally just way?

When Abraham learned that God planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham argued that God could not destroy the righteous with the unrighteous. He pleads his case by saying: “Far be it from You to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from

You! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”⁶ In the New Testament, James writes, “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and

destroy.”⁷ To get a clearer picture of God’s role as Perfect Judge, let us look at a few characteristics of an effective judge.

A judge must have authority.

Our government endows judges with authority through the oath they take to execute justice. The law enforcement and prison systems back up the judge's authority. The robe that he wears and having everyone in the courtroom stand as he enters help to emphasize that authority. His gavel and his elevated seat in the courtroom show that he commands the proceedings.

We learned that God, as Creator, has the authority to do whatever He deems best with His creation. He is the potter; we are the clay. His throne is high above us in the heavens. His pronouncements are final. There is no higher authority than God.

God will judge every wrong act ever committed, every sinful motive, every evil word. The sentence for these crimes is eternal separation from God and His holiness.

But there are those who will live in safety with God. These are the ones who have accepted Christ's payment for our sin when He died on the cross. Our loving Savior, Jesus Christ, paid the sentence pronounced by the Perfect Judge. God sees these "sinners saved by grace" as righteous in His courtroom. Therefore, they will live eternally in the love, peace, and joy of God's presence.

A judge must have the power to execute his authority.

Can you imagine what would happen if judges had no authority to carry out sentences? Our prisons would be empty. No criminals would be deterred for fear of what the courts would do. Murderers, rapists, robbers, and child molesters could walk the streets terrorizing law-abiding citizens.

Since God is omnipotent, whatever He decides to do, He can carry out. He does not have to ask anyone's permission; He does not need a police force to back Him up. In His courtroom, His authority is the last word. No one can appeal His decisions. That is why He is pictured in heaven on a throne. As Sovereign of the universe, His authority is total and complete.

A judge must understand and know the law.

Many times, a higher court will throw out the ruling of a judge in a lower court. Why does this happen? Sometimes it is because the judge in the lower court, such as a municipal court, did not have the authority to apply the overarching laws of the state. The defendant can appeal his case to the State Supreme Court, which has greater power and can overturn the verdict.

God also follows laws—which He established. We find them in His Word as commands and rules. There is no higher law than God's laws. Not only is He the judge, He is also the lawmaker. Since God's laws are perfect, His justice is also

without flaw.

A judge needs high moral qualities to judge fairly.

Without high morals, a judge will fail miserably. Our court system would fall apart, for our trials are only as good as the judges who preside over them. Judge Robert Bork tells the story of Judge Martin Manton, a Court of Appeals judge who was almost nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court:

When it became known that Manton took bribes from parties appearing before him, he claimed innocence on the interesting ground that he took bribes from both sides, decided the case on its merits, and then returned the money to the losing party. That defense caused Judge Learned Hand, perhaps the most distinguished

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court of appeals judge in our history, to call Manton a moral moron.

Would you like to bring your case before a judge like Manton? Corrupt judges lead to injustice and unfairness. Victims do not receive proper consideration. The wronged are helpless; the wicked hold the power. If the judge is not truthful, honest, and wise in presiding over the courtroom, justice cannot be served.

A JUST GOD HATES SIN

As the holy and righteous sovereign of the universe, God cannot ignore or overlook any act of sin. David writes, “God is a judge who is perfectly fair. He is angry with the

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wicked every day.”

God’s anger over sin should never be underestimated: “You spread out our sins before You—our secret sins—and You see them all. We live our lives beneath Your wrath...Who can comprehend the power of Your anger? Your wrath is as awesome as

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the fear You deserve.”

I urge you to live in reverential fear of God, continually searching God’s Word and examining your heart for sins that you need to confess to Him. One of the greatest truths I have discovered in over 50 years of walking with the Lord is a concept called *Spiritual Breathing*. This process is similar to physical breathing. As we become

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aware of our sins, we exhale by confessing our sin. Then we inhale to appropriate

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the power of the Holy Spirit, based on God’s command to be filled with the Spirit.

We can know that God will fill, enable, and equip us because He promised to hear and answer our prayers in accordance with His perfect will.¹³ This spiritual principle has allowed me to walk in fellowship with God and help others come to know and serve Him. This is the privilege of every believer.

GOD WILL EVENTUALLY PUNISH ALL SIN

The Bible tells us, “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”¹⁴ Yet, I am sure there have been times when you have asked, “Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy?”¹⁵ There may be several reasons why someone appears to be getting away with wrongdoing without being punished.

- God delays His judgment because He patiently provides an opportunity for repentance. But while God is waiting for repentance, the severity of future punishment is mounting.
- Sometimes we do not recognize God’s judgment because it occurs in a way that we did not expect. Paul explains, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”¹⁶ The more seeds of sin a person sows, the more harm will be caused. Sin is like an addictive poison. If you drink a little poison you may only get sick. But if you keep on drinking poison, it will eventually kill you.

The final judgment will occur at the end of time. Are you spiritually ready for that day of judgment? We will look at what is going to happen during that awesome time later in this chapter.

GOD BUILT NATURAL CONSEQUENCES INTO SIN

God does not wait until judgment day to settle sin accounts. He also built natural consequences into sin as a deterrent for our disobedient behavior.

I am reminded of a friend who was one of the most remarkable preachers and pulpit personalities I know. He was a pastor of a thriving church. Then one day, a prostitute came to his office seeking his counsel. He felt sorry for her and asked his wife if this prostitute could live in their home so they could rehabilitate her.

After living with them for three weeks, the prostitute told his wife that she wanted

her husband. The wife just laughed in disbelief. They had a happy home and several children. He was one of the pillars in the Christian community. Yet to everyone's shock, he eventually left his family to live with this prostitute.

Many people from the Christian community pleaded with him to repent from his sinful lifestyle, but he persisted. This former pastor had several illegitimate children, and in time the prostitute deserted him for another man.

Finally, this former pastor did come back to the Lord, but he had been brought so low that despite his giftedness he could not hold a job. The last time I saw him, he was a haggard man weeping over his illegitimate children, wishing they would come to know the Lord. Finally, he went to his grave prematurely—a broken man, his life in shambles, and his family devastated.

We cannot thumb our noses at God's righteous principles and not expect to experience the just consequences of our actions. A reverential fear of God will help us avoid doing anything to hinder our relationship with Him. I live daily in reverential fear of God because when we disobey Him, we open the door to greater temptations. Sin grows until it totally engulfs us in destruction.

GOD WILL EXERCISE THE FINAL JUDGMENT

We need mention only two of God's judgments in the Old Testament—the flood in Noah's time and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah during Abraham's time—to recognize that many sinners receive God's judgments here on earth. For example, have you ever stopped to consider how many vicious dictators like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Ceausescu have met terrible ends?

God predicts judgment for the ungodly: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon

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them." Yet many live as though they will never be judged. They scoff at the idea of an eternal hell.

The final judgment has, however, been part of the biblical message for thousands of years. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this ominous warning:

Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, He will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth

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and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Those are hard words from a holy, just God. In Revelation, we have a visual description of that final Judgment Day of wrath:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written

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in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

I never want to face that judgment seat! Thankfully, those of us who have trusted Christ will not appear before the Great White Throne judgment of sinners. But all believers will appear before Christ's judgment seat. This is a not a judgment of sin, but of how faithfully we have served our Savior with the opportunities and talents He gave us. Then, we will receive rewards for what we have done for Christ. In our next chapter, we will learn more about how God's justice works on the behalf of believers.

LIFE APPLICATION

EXALT YOUR GOD—Praise our just God with the words of Moses:

“Listen, O heavens, and I will speak! Hear, O earth, the words that I say! My teaching will fall on you like rain; my speech will settle like dew. My words will fall like rain on tender grass, like gentle showers on young plants.

I will proclaim the name of the LORD; how glorious is our God! He is the Rock; His work is perfect. Everything He does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright He is!” (Deuteronomy 32:1–4)

REFLECT HIS IMAGE—The Lord spoke through Isaiah, saying, “I, the LORD, love justice” (Isaiah 61:8). God wants His children to mirror His nature through the power of His Holy Spirit. Search your heart by answering the following questions:

- Do you love justice?
- Does seeing injustice make you angry and/or sad?
- Do your actions line up with what you believe? What proof from your life experiences can you give to show that you truly love justice?
- Could those around you say that everything you do is just and fair? What recent actions can you recall that show how you will sacrifice convenience or something else to do what God deems just and fair?

SHARE HIS MAJESTY—Does a friend or family member need to be told that God is a God of justice? Think of someone who has been wronged and give them the comforting news that God is the perfect Judge. Lovingly warn someone who has not acted justly that God judges those who do wrong.

CHAPTER 19

GOD'S JUSTICE

WORKS FOR

OUR GOOD

Do you remember your years in junior high and high school? Every class seemed to have a student who was a prankster who deliberately violated school policy. When the teacher became aware of students' possessions disappearing, no one would confess or expose the guilty party. Then the teacher would announce, "No one is leaving this room until I find out who did this." Although you were an honest student, you sat with the rest of the class, twiddling your thumbs, and wondering, *Why can't I be excused? I've done nothing wrong and the teacher knows it. The teacher is not being fair!*

At every age, we recognize that many situations in life are not fair or just. If you have watched preschoolers play, you will soon hear, "That's not fair. I had it first." A high school student is killed in an accident caused by a drunk driver and the parents question, "Where's the justice? The drunk driver has barely a scratch, and our child is dead!" A pastor faithfully serving the Lord watches his wife, the mother of their three children, die of cancer. In his despair he wonders aloud about the justice of it all.

Yet the Bible is very clear in announcing that God is just. After leading the people of Israel for forty years in the wilderness, Moses publicly sang this song: "The Rock!

His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice.”¹

There is, however, not always a clear relationship between what we have done and what happens to us. Because questions about the justice of God plague us, let us consider practical implications of the statement, “Our God is just.”

GOD’S PATIENCE TOWARD SINNERS

Justice delayed is often justice denied. If a defense lawyer can keep postponing a murder case, for example, evidence that is available in a speedy trial becomes useless. Witnesses may die or move away. The defense can challenge the validity of a witness’s memory. Police departments misplace evidence.

What about justice for Christians? Sometimes they are unjustly targeted because of their faith. Nina Shea writes in *In the Lion’s Den*, “Christians are the chief victims of

this religious persecution around the world today.”² Today 480 Christians will die or suffer brutality because of what they believe.

In Morocco, Rachid Cohen, a Jewish man who had received Christ as his Savior, was arrested and tortured for ten hours a day. He was burned with cigarettes, shocked in a low-voltage chair, and forced to sit in his own excrement. In China, persecutors beat, starve, and shock believers with electric probes. Thousands of stories of injustice toward believers have been documented.

Consider how God felt about the evil people living during the time of Noah. They all deserved the maximum punishment. If you had been God, how quickly would you have followed through on your threat to destroy the wicked? Would you have waited a week? A month? A year? More than five years?

Although the violation of God’s justice had been described in detail, God did not act immediately. He invited Noah to build an ark to save himself, his family, and representatives of every animal group. Without modern tools, it took Noah 120 years to build that ark. Did the sin of the people decrease at all during that period of divine patience? No. Even after 120 years, only Noah and his family qualified to be rescued from the destructive flood.

So why did God not act immediately after declaring that He would destroy all humans except Noah and his family? Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (NIV).

All believers are saved because God delays His justice. At what age did you discover God's love and forgiveness? At 15 or 30 or 70? Whatever age you and I received God's promise of eternal life was more than enough time for God to have caused His wrath to fall on us. How many evil deeds had we committed before that day? How many people had we hurt? How many sins had we excused? None of us deserve even one day of life because of our sinful, depraved nature, so we must be grateful for a just God who delays punishment.

I am sure you have your own story of a friend or relative who received Christ late in life after years of self-centered living. One example is the famous skeptic Dr. Cyril E. M. Joad, who for years was head of the Philosophy Department at the University of London. Dr. Joad and his colleagues, Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell, H. G. Wells, and Bernard Shaw, have probably done more to undermine the faith of the collegiate world of recent generations than any other group. Dr. Joad believed and taught that God was an impersonal part of the cosmos and that there is no such thing as sin.

Did God strike him dead? Did He send a crippling disease? No, but before he died, Dr. Joad became convinced that the only explanation for sin was found in the Word of God—and the only solution for sin was the cross of Jesus Christ. He became a zealous follower of the Lord Jesus. No doubt many of his followers turned to faith in God through his testimony and writings. God's long-suffering and incredible patience brought this skeptic to his knees at the cross. Truly, God's delayed justice is an opportunity for His mercy to be shown to many.

GOD IS AWARE OF INJUSTICE

In 1960, Raleigh Washington joined the army. He was quickly promoted from captain to major and then lieutenant colonel. He was well on his way to becoming a general when a group of white officers falsely accused Raleigh, who is black, of conduct unbecoming an officer.

Although none of the accusations were proven, he was given the choice of retirement in lieu of being discharged. But to get his retirement benefits, he had to admit that he was guilty. He refused. He was discharged one day short of twenty years of service, and therefore was disqualified from all of his retirement benefits. At the time, his wife was pregnant with their fifth child.

How would you have reacted? Since he had become a Christian two years earlier, Raleigh decided not to be bitter against the whites who had mistreated him. Instead, he applied to Trinity Divinity School to study to become a pastor. As a student, his income dropped by 90 percent. How he could have used that retirement income! But the Lord provided for the family's finances in exciting ways. When he graduated, the

Evangelical Free Church recruited him to plant churches. Although he was their only black pastor, the white church members enthusiastically supported his church-planting efforts.

While he was planting his church, he met a Jewish lawyer named Jeff Strange, who learned about his military case. For the next nine years, Jeff worked to reverse the decision the army had made. Raleigh says, “Finally, I was reinstated for one day, so that I might retire. My retirement was made retroactive to 1980, and I received the accrued retirement benefits. In addition, they cleared my record and every document against me was destroyed. My military record was made immaculate.

“God uniquely sustained me and my wife and protected me from becoming bitter when falsely accused. Because I did not get bitter, God used whites to embrace my ministry, to support me, to befriend me. God used that time after my dismissal from

the Army to teach my wife and me to walk by faith.”³

We may encounter injustice in any place at any time. But God has His own way of righting wrongs. Even if someone deals with us unfairly, God is still in control. If you are the only Christian on a police force, in a fire station, or on a school faculty, you may be experiencing ribbing, even harassment for your faith. In fact, you may even be passed over for promotion because of your unwillingness to become part of the sinful activities of your culture. At one point the coach of the Toronto Maple Leaf hockey team made it very clear that he wanted no Christians on his team. He called them sissies. He traded the one Christian he had on the team, even though he was an excellent player. Where was the justice for this Christian player? Why did God not act?

That is a question only God can answer, but we do know that He is aware of every injustice. Within the scope of eternity, He makes everything right.

Through the prophets the Lord demonstrated His concern for those who were being mistreated, receiving abuse, and being denied opportunities to participate fully in the life of the community. For example, foreign armies oppressed the people of Israel and Judah. Instead of seeing rich and fertile fields, choice vineyards and pleasant gardens, God saw crops of injustice, bloodshed and oppression. He saw how the greedy landowners oppressed the poor. He saw the injustice in the courts, where the bribes of the affluent deprived the poor of justice. He knew of the murder of

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innocent people.

Jesus told a story about a judge who was approached by a widow pleading, “Grant

me justice against my adversary.”⁵ For some time this judge refused to respond to the widow. Finally she became so persistent that he said, “I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!”⁶ Jesus relates this story to the suffering of the ones He loves: “Will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and quickly.”⁷

Sometimes we will see almost instant justice. On other occasions, we must wait. And at times we will not receive justice until after we join our heavenly Father in His home in heaven. But we can be assured that God sees it all—and that He cares about the mistreated even more than we do.

BLESSINGS AND JUDGMENT

When the Supreme Court was formed in the late 1700s, the first order of business was to fill in the details of the judiciary. After the lower federal courts were established and the new justices appointed, it was time to hear cases. The initial Court session began on February 1, 1790, in the Royal Exchange Building in the heart of what is now New York City’s financial district. Robert Wagman writes, “When it became apparent that the five justices would have absolutely nothing to do, the session was

adjourned after ten days.”⁸ On August 2, they met again, but once more they had nothing to do, so they adjourned for the year. It was not until February 1793 that the Court heard its first case.

Although the Supreme Court’s jurisdiction was more narrow back then, can you imagine if today’s Supreme Court adjourned early for a lack of cases to hear? Because of the tremendous number of cases presented to the Supreme Court today, it must limit itself to four cases per day. Each side gets one hour to present its arguments. The Justices hear cases two weeks, then recess for two weeks to allow them to write their opinions on these cases. The docket is always packed. Obviously, much has changed in two hundred years!

America has been greatly blessed because our ancestors acknowledged God’s supreme sovereignty and their complete dependence on Him. They believed Psalm 33:12, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (NIV). Christian values were cherished and laws were established that reflected biblical morality.

As we prospered we began to feel self-sufficient and to see our greatness as the product of our own abilities rather than the result of God's blessing. Abraham Lincoln said in 1863:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of

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redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

For the past several decades, our nation has taken drastic steps to divorce itself from God's standards of righteousness. What has been the result? Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores have dropped dramatically. Pregnancies, rapes, aggravated assaults, and murders have increased at an alarmingly epidemic rate among our teenagers. Suicide has become the second leading cause of death among adolescents. Gangs have turned many urban schools into war zones. The U.S. now leads the world in illegal drug use, exporting of pornography, divorce rates, abortion, and violent crime, and we lead the Western world in teenage pregnancies and illiteracy.

Thomas Jefferson wrote about the foolishness of abandoning God:

God who gave us life gave us liberty. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis—a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with His wrath? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that

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God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever.

We are in danger of reaping God's judgment. If our country is lost, it is only because we as Christians have not obeyed our Lord's command to be salt and light to the people around us. You may be asking, "What can I do to help turn the tide of godlessness and immorality?" In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God's conditional promise begins with your willingness to humbly come before Him to admit your disobedience and indifference and seek His forgiveness. Then ask God to cleanse your heart from all wrongdoing. Pray that He will rekindle your first love for Him and once again send revival to your heart, your church and community, our nation, and our world.

CHRIST WILL JUDGE BELIEVERS

Our just God is not primarily concerned with punishing disobedience, but with rewarding right behavior. Yet God will reward only those who accept Christ's penalty for sin because His payment for our sins opened the way for God to reward us for what we do for Him.

Christ will evaluate each believer's life to determine rewards for faithful obedience and service or loss for disobedience. Paul explains, "We must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have

done in our bodies."¹¹ Jesus will consider several factors when we appear before His judgment seat.

- He will judge the words we have spoken.¹²
- He will judge the deeds we have done.

- He will judge our motives.¹³

- He will judge our faithfulness.¹⁴

God will also reward those who bring others to faith in Christ. God told Daniel:

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.¹⁵

Every believer should desire to hear Jesus say these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Hebrews assures us, "God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue

to help them."¹⁶

Are you living for the glory of God or for self-satisfaction? There is an incredible reward awaiting the person who seeks to glorify God. Paul is so sure of this reward that he writes:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a

reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Do you trust God's perfect justice? It is undergirded by His holiness, truth, and righteousness and perfectly administered through His omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. He is the Perfect Judge.

So far we have seen God's work as Creator and His position as Perfect Judge. But God also has another side to His character—gracious Savior. Think of holiness, truth, and righteousness as one side of a coin. What is on the other side? Love, mercy, and faithfulness. That does not mean that these qualities are the opposite of the former ones, but that one side of the coin needs the other to be complete. As we go on to the next section, "Our Gracious Savior," we will find more reasons to enjoy a lifelong, intimate relationship with our Creator and Perfect Judge.

LIFE APPLICATION

WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART—Memorize the following statement and verses. Then as you encounter situations during this week where you need to be reminded of God’s justice, claim these promises by faith.

- Because God is just, I can be sure He will always treat me fairly.
- Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV)—“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NIV)—“God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”

COUNT ON GOD—Have you been wronged? Jeremiah 51:56 states, “The LORD is a God of retribution; He will repay in full” (NIV). Trust our perfect God of justice to judge your situations. Confide in Him about your anger and frustration regarding unfair treatment you’ve received. Then wait for Him to deal with the one who wronged you. No matter what happens, be fair and just to those around you.

OBEY GOD—The Word of God states in Galatians 6:7, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (NIV). Are you sowing seeds of destruction, or seeds of mercy, justice, and goodness? Examine your motivations in the way you deal with difficult people. Which category do they fall into: destruction or mercy? Whatever you are sowing, you will reap. If you want to reap God’s favor and blessings, obey His command to extend mercy.