

“DIVINE JUSTICE” e LUKE 18:9-14 e TRINITY 11

INI

Scripture describes God as just,

Meaning God is fair and upholds morality.

Psalms 89:14 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.”

Unrighteousness can't cozy up to a just God,

Because as a just God, He punishes unrighteousness –

“He is the Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He” – Deuteronomy 32:4

Punishing evil and rewarding good is God's act of divine justice to humanity.

Now, justice seems to be all the rage of the day.

As Christians, we should seek justice for each other – rewarding good and punishing evil.

Part of that is to help those who are oppressed and being treated as criminals though no crime was broken.

Or conversely, seeking justice where it's owed.

But divine justice is much more serious, and less forgiving.

There's no paying a small fine for a speeding ticket, just a jailhouse.

It's more demanding, allows no slip-ups. It requires total perfection.

Our creator demands perfection from us.

“Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” – Matthew 5:48

“It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” – Romans 2:13

“Take to heart all the words (or teachings) by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land.” – Deuteronomy 32:46-47

The Gospel parable's Pharisee seems to be 'acing' his morality exam – At least close to a perfect score.

His righteousness is apparent –
He doesn't blackmail people out of their money,
He fights for justice for the oppressed,
He doesn't sleep around with others,
He fasts twice a week, though Jewish law requires it only once annually.
He trims 10 percent off the top of his paycheck as soon as he gets it, and
gives it to God.

The Pharisee checks a lot of the boxes!
In a sense, he's what a model Christian should be!

Especially when compared to the tax collector in the parable.
Tax Collectors were notorious for collecting more money than what the
Roman government required of individuals,
And then pocketing the difference.
The community knew this was happening,
but couldn't do anything about it.

The tax collector stole, lied, coveted his neighbors money,
disobeyed the government,
and was riddled with greed as he furthered oppression of the poor
Jerusalem citizens.
He didn't live as if God mattered most, but as if he mattered most.
He idolized himself over the God of the universe.
And God demands punishment for this unrighteousness.

Since God is just and righteous,
God will judge and punish the tax collector's unrighteousness.
If God didn't punish unrighteousness,
then God would be inconsistent in his character.
If God demanded holiness and righteousness,
To turn around and scoot certain sins under the rug,
Acting as if they never happened,
Then God wouldn't be just.
He would be cruel – oppressing some but not others.
There would be inconsistency in how God deals with us.

But God can't be this way, because **"He is the same yesterday, today, and forever."** (Hebrews 13:8)

God works to bring justice to the world now
and with finality on judgment day -

When His judgments are for eternity

"But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another." - Psalm 75:7

"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." 2 Corinthians 5:10

We aren't exempt.

Our unrighteousness deserves punishment too.

We disregard the 10 commandments in our lives to God and each other
every day -

Using God's name for sin instead of praise,

Not coming to church regularly because we actually despise preaching and
His Word,

Not honoring government, police, parents, and other authorities God has
given over us,

Disregarding the needs of our neighbor at the expense of our greed of our
time and money,

Lusting over the flesh of another person God hasn't given us in marital
union,

Having a "hands off" approach to improving and protecting our
neighbor's possession and income,

Gossiping and slandering people's reputations for the sake of political,
economic, or self-righteous gain,

And wishing we had material things which our Lord hasn't given us.

The things we do don't honor and please God -

And its so easy to overlook our evil and fixate on the good things we do.

"Well, I gave 20 bucks to that beggar last week."

Or we'll say, "I go to church when I can" but never "I need to go to church
more."

Or, "I was tempted to lust over another person, but I was strong enough to resist."

Or, "I honor my government, police and all my authorities because I was raised better."

But the minute we start doing that – fixating on our good – we turn into the Pharisee.

And that's not good.

We begin to give thanks for our works, while neglecting to notice what we are.

That we're beggars with open hands at the feet of our just and merciful God.

It's not good to have the Pharisee's attitude because the tax collector went home justified, not the Pharisee!

The Pharisee gives thanks to God for himself, not for the gifts which God has given him.

He believes he has perfect righteousness because of the things he does and doesn't do.

So, the Pharisee doesn't believe he needs help from God.

He doesn't believe he needs his mercy.

But through the Pharisee's prayer,

we learn the true indications of his heart –

That he breaks the fifth commandment by pointing out his neighbor's sins without helping him,

That he breaks the eighth commandment by speaking to God in prayer about the wicked deeds of his neighbor

instead of praying for God to be merciful to both him and his neighbor.

Finally, he's broken the first commandment,

because his prayer gives thanks for himself, not for God.

On the other hand, the tax collector recognizes his unworthiness, beats his chest, and cries out into the heavens, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

And who went home justified?

The tax collector.

The sinner.
The repentant.

What does it even mean to be justified?

Well, it's to be declared righteous.

To be declared perfect according to the law.

So, how is the tax collector the one declared perfect,
even though he's the furthest one away from living it perfectly?

He's declared perfect because he had faith – evidenced in His prayer

The Pharisee's prayer revealed he had faith in his works, not the works of
God.

But the tax collector had faith in God's mercy.

But if God is just,

won't the unrighteousness of the tax collector need its due justice and
punishment?

Yes, which is why He sent His Son Jesus Christ,

Born in the flesh to the Virgin Mary.

Jesus lived a life of perfection on this earth.

He fulfilled all the requirements of the Divine law in our place.

Yet, *HE* suffered under Pontius Pilate.

He was judged and punished unjustly as a criminal and blasphemer,
Even though those charges were false.

But through this self-sacrificial act on the cross,

The innocent lamb of God took on himself the sin of all humanity,

And died in our place and rose from the grave for our justification.

That's what's called the great exchange –

When all our sin and unrighteousness is placed on Christ,

And Christ places his innocence, righteousness, and perfection on us.

When God's wrath on sin is satisfied in the death of His Son,

And God's favor rests upon us.

This righteousness comes from outside ourselves,

Because true righteousness has its origin in God,

and He freely gives it to us.

This gift of righteousness and perfection can only be received by faith-
“For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for
faith, as it is written, The righteous shall live by faith.” - Romans 1:17
“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but
through faith in Jesus Christ” - Galatians 2:16

So, when God judges us, what does he look for?
Certainly he looks for requirement of the divine law.
But when God judges the Pharisee, he didn't go home justified,
Because the entirety of the law wasn't kept by him.
When God judges the tax collector, he did go home justified!
Because the law was entirely kept -
Not by the tax collector, but by God's Son Jesus Christ,
Who was received by the faith of the tax collector in His cry for mercy -
In his cry for something outside of Himself to cover his unrighteousness.

The same goes for us -
Righteousness comes only by the grace of God,
As it's revealed by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
Our injustices to God and one another are placed upon the body of the one
killed unjustly.
And by His wounds and resurrection from the dead,
Our debts are paid.

So even though we have a just God,
Punishing wickedness and evil,
We also have a merciful God moved by our desperation and cry for help,
Gifting righteousness and salvation to those who have faith and trust in
Him,
Through His Son Jesus Christ.

God be merciful to us sinners, and atone for our sins in the blood of the
Lamb.