

## THEOLOGY PROPER (62)

### Communicable Attribute #5- Justice.

In broad terms, this attribute means that God always conforms Himself to His own righteous, holy standards in who He is and in what He does. God will always declare what is right, will always do what is right, will always judge what is right and will always treat beings in the way that is right and perfect. God cannot ever do anything unjust. Everything He does is always right and fair. This attribute negates the possibility of God sanctioning any injustice or misuse of justice.

Chafer points out that this attribute "is a legal term and refers to the essential character of the divine government." He also states that, "Divine justice is exhibited in the fact that righteous laws are given to men, that these laws are sustained by proper sanctions, and that these laws are given an impartial execution. No favoritism is ever indulged, though infinite favor is extended to those who come under the righteous provisions for salvation made possible through Christ's sacrifice for sin." (Vol.1, p.203)

Henry Thiessen observes that God's justice is that judicial phase of God's holiness which is particularly involved in the treatment of His created beings. The justice of God both condemns and saves, it both rewards and punishes (Thiessen, p.130) The Bible is filled with several passages which speak of the justice of God or give us insight into His just character which in turn demands this attribute of justice:

- 1) II Chron.19:7 - The text is clear to point out that God shows no partiality in judicial decisions and judgments. By observing the context of verses 5-6, we can see that this attribute is most definitely communicable.
- 2) Ps.19:9 - All judgments of God are true and righteous, meaning God is a just God.
- 3) Ps.145:17 - God is righteous in all His ways, indicating that everything God is and does will be just.
- 4) Is.45:21 - God is a righteous God, certainly implying God is always a just God.
- 5) Lev.19:36 - god's law demands just judgment because He, Himself, is a just God and a just judge.
- 6) Deut.16:18-20 - Justice is a key part of God's law and just and righteous judgments are to be made.
- 7) Ps.89:14 - There is a close proximity between righteousness and justice and both attributes of God are essential to the Holy Throne of God and critical to any being able to dwell near God's throne.
- 8) Zech.9:9 - When Israel's King comes, He is identified as being just.
- 9) John 5:30 - Jesus Christ clearly lays claim to this attribute and clearly connects it to God the Father in the context of judgment.
- 10) Rom.3:26 - God is a just God and is able to judicially declare that one meets His standard of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. This judicial decree is because of Christ's righteousness and not our righteousness (I Pet.3:18).

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As we have stated, justice specifically demands righteous judgment and treatment of all. When it comes to God's justice, as it pertains to men, there are two categories:

**(Justice Category #1)- Remunerative Justice.**

This side of God's justice means that God will reward believers for their faithfulness. Because of justice, He has structured a payment plan of remuneration for those who faithfully obey Him, live for Him and serve Him. **Remunerative justice is that which provides rewards for faithful work.** There are several passages that refer to this category of God's Justice:

1) Rom.14:10-12 - The "Judgment Seat of God", which is called in II Corinthians 5:10 the

"Judgment seat of Christ", indicating Jesus is God, is a judgment of believers. No unbeliever faces this judgment. All unbelievers face "The Great White Throne Judgment" (Rev.20:11-15) The Judgment seat of Christ Judgment is for the purpose of giving remuneration and rewards to believers for faithfulness. Notice carefully Paul's just of pronouns "we" shall all stand (14:10); "each one of us shall give account of himself" (14:12). Paul was referring to the Believer, including himself.

2) I Cor.3:11-15 - From this text we learn that once one has Christ in his life, he begins to build a life that will either cause rewards to be earned (3:14) or burned (3:15). A believer may gain rewards or lose rewards. The issue here is clear **not** a loss of salvation, but a loss of remuneration.

3) I Cor.9:24-25 - It is clear that Paul kept himself highly disciplined so that he would not be disqualified from receiving any reward. Paul wanted a full paycheck, he was after full remuneration.

4) II Cor.5:9-10 - Every believer will be adequately and accurately compensated. This will mean great remuneration for good work, it will mean loss of remuneration for bad work.

God's Justice is that which provides remuneration or loss of it. The judgment seat of Christ will be a judgment of the believer that will be impartial, actual, adequate and accurate.

**One question that has often been raised by serious students of the Bible is whether or not God's remunerative justice is accumulative or aggregate?** In other words, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, does Jesus Christ judge on the basis of the completed whole (aggregate) or does He judge on the basis of every individual work (accumulative)? For example, if a person once was faithful to God and worked faithfully for the Lord and then became unfaithful, would he still receive some rewards for his faithfulness period (accumulative) or would he lose all rewards because in the final analysis, he did not remain faithful (aggregate)? **From the pen of the Apostle Paul, it appears as though he takes an aggregate position.** For example, when he wrote I Corinthians, he had about twenty years of faithful ministry behind him, yet he believed that it was possible for even him to be disqualified (I Cor.9:27). He seems to place great emphasis on what remains (I Cor.3:14), which would lend itself to an aggregate philosophy of remuneration. In fact, in Paul's last letter, he specifically connects his reward to the fact that he "finished the course" and "kept the faith" (II Tim.4:7-8)

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Based upon this information, **we may conclude that it is possible to have accumulated things that would have earned rewards at one time but lose them through a lack of completing the course.** Receiving great remuneration is contingent upon facing Jesus Christ with confidence and not shame (I John 2:28), which means facing Christ, having been faithful to the end. The Bible teaches rewards may accumulate, but receiving them is determined by the aggregate whole analysis of the believer's life which depends upon how one finished life.

**(Justice Category #2)- Retributive Justice.**

This side of God's Justice means that God will reward unbelievers with eternal punishment. Dr. Berkhof says remunerative justice "manifests itself in the distribution of rewards to both men and angels" and retributive justice "relates to the infliction of penalties as an expression of divine wrath." (Berkhof, p.75) Berkhof makes some profound observations concerning retributive justice. When he states that retributive justice plays a prominent necessary role in a world filled with sin, He says, "It should be noted that, while man does not merit the reward which he receives, he does merit the punishment which is meted out to him. Divine justice is originally and necessarily obliged to punish evil, but not to reward good." (Ibid., p.75)

All rewards which God gives to the believer are based on Grace. All punishment which God gives to the unbeliever is based on what is earned. Once one is saved, he can earn rewards because of God's grace, before one is saved he earns eternal punishment because of his own works.

There are many texts of Scripture that speak of the retributive justice of God;

- 1) Mt.23:13-14 - This text clearly implies that religious leaders who keep people from the truth will receive a greater level of condemnatory judgment. The implication here is clearly one of different degrees of condemnatory judgment.
- 2) Lk.12:47-48 - This text states that all who do not respond to God's truth will receive punishment, however the one who knew the truth and did not respond will receive the greater punishment. Clearly, retributive justice is at various levels and degrees.
- 3) Rom.2:5 - This text states that the unbeliever actually stores up for himself retributive wrath. God keeps a record of every sin and failure and on the day the unbeliever is judged, the unbeliever will receive all the wrath which has been stored. Along duration of time between sin and judgment does not mean judgment will not come (Rev.17:1,5).
- 4) II Pet.2:19-21 - This Scripture has to do with false prophets and false teachers who knew the truth and rejected it (2:1). These are proud, arrogant leaders who give themselves over to sensual pleasures (2:10,13-15), The promise is when they face the judgment of God, it would have been better for these false teachers never to have been exposed the truth rather than reject it. This implies different levels of condemnation.
- 5) Rev.20:12 - Retributive Justice is determined by works. There apparently will be various levels of damnable punishment in the "lake of fire." (20:13-15)

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The justice of God is meaningful to us in several ways:

- 1) It should cause us to humbly bow before God recognizing that in His grace, He reaches out to sinners He can legitimately condemn.
- 2) It should cause us to realize that God's justice demands righteous judgment which will be accurate and true, both remuneration and retribution.
- 3) It should cause us to make our judgments accurate and true, without showing any partiality or favoritism.
- 4) It should promote a godly life of service, knowing God's justice demands judgment.

### **Communicable Attribute #6- Knowledge.**

Many theologians place this attribute under and/or with the attribute of God's Omniscience. The attribute of omniscience, however, emphasizes the unique level of God's "all-knowing" knowledge, whereas this attribute emphasizes the communicable potential of man gaining some of God's knowledge. Solomon wrote: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov.1:7). He also wrote: "Then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God" (Prov.2:5). Clearly, we see from this that in Solomon's mind, it was certainly possible for man to gain some level of knowledge from God. When we turn to the N.T., we discover that the Apostle Peter wrote: "But grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Pet.3:18). Clearly the assumption is made that it is possible to gain a measure of God's knowledge. Based on these Biblical realities, it is perfectly legitimate to classify "knowledge" as a communicable attribute.

**The main distinction between God and man, when it comes to knowledge, is that God already knows everything, whereas man is continually seeking to know something.**

Having knowledge may be defined as being in a state of knowing something. Obviously, God is in a continual state of knowing everything about everything, God knows all things actual, possible, universal and individual. He actually knows the thoughts and intents of every persons mind and heart. He knows everything about everything.

When it comes to this attribute relating to man- it is the ability to accurately know something in a form of the manner that God knows something. Knowledge is an ability to perceive or understand something in a manner as God perceives and understands. The highest level of knowledge that one can have in this universe is not one that moves in a direction of the knowledge level of other sinful, finite men, but one that moves in a direction of the infinite holy God. God, Himself, says: "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom, I am understanding, power is mine" (Prov.8:14), The potential of a human tapping into God's knowledge is an exciting possibility. It is more valuable than the "choicest gold" (Prov.8:10). It makes one a strong and powerful individual and one who increases in knowledge is one who will increase in power (Prov.24:5). It is imperative to living a blameless life (Phil.1:9-10) and a worthy life (Col. 1:9-10).