

## Psalm 119:121-128 (AIN)

### Doing Judgment and Justice

*I have done judgment and justice... v. 121*

James in his epistle exhorts his readers to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Those that are hearers, that verse tells us, but are not doers deceive themselves (James 1:22). The gospel, you see, conveys the power to believers to be doers. The failure to be a doer amounts to a denial of the power. So we find Paul making mention in his epistle to Titus of *those that profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

I raise this issue just now because the opening verse in this section of Psalm 119 reveals to us that the Psalmist was not simply a hearer of the word – he was a hearer and a doer. Note his confession when he says *I have done judgment and justice. I have done them* he says – not *I know about them but I have done and am a doer of them.* The words *judgment* and *justice* are similar. They mean justice and righteousness. Another version translates it *I have done what is just and right* (ESV).

When you look at this statement of the Psalmist and compare it with the petition that follows, it leads you to an important element of gospel truth. Look at what the entire verse says: *I have done judgment and justice:* That's the Psalmist's confession – now note the petition that immediately follows his testimony: *leave me not to mine oppressors.* The unregenerate man who lives in sin and who lives for sin thinks that the ways of judgment and justice are the ways of oppression. He sees God as the oppressor and deceives himself into thinking that freedom means to escape from what is just and right according to God.

The believer, on the other hand, sees his freedom in what is just and right and pleasing to God. He views his oppressors as anyone or anything that would hinder him from doing what is just and right. *Ye shall know the truth* Christ says in Jn. 8:32 *and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free,* Christ says a few verses later (v. 36) *ye shall be free indeed.* And so it is from the perspective of such freedom that the Psalmist in our text can testify that he has done what is just and right.

And doesn't such a statement indicate to us that when the Bible comes to your heart with power the whole man is effected. The word of God effects the way you think – it effects the way you speak – it has an impact on your mind and on your will and on your affections as well as on your actions. *I have done judgment and justice.*

Would you notice the emphasis in this section of the Psalm on righteousness. In addition to the opening verse that mentions judgment and justice or more literally justice and righteousness, we then read in v. 123 *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.* And in v. 128 *Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

The power of the gospel, then, is the power that leads us to do judgment and justice. Paul states this plainly in Rom. 6:16-18 *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants*

*to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.*

It's interesting to note in this passage in Romans that each one of us is a servant of some kind. That idea smacks hard against the pride of the sinner who likes to think that he isn't a servant to anyone. The mark of a fallen man is that he despises any authority outside of himself. The fact is, however, that you are either a servant of sin or a servant of righteousness. The question is not whether or not you are a servant – the question, rather, is what or who do you serve? Those who are servants of righteousness will be able to confess at least to some degree with the Psalmist *I have done judgment and justice*. The Psalmist is not suggesting that he's done judgment and justice perfectly. Indeed – in the very last verse of this Psalm he acknowledges *I have gone astray like a lost sheep*.

And even in the section of the Psalm we're studying today there is a statement in v. 123 that indicates that doing judgment and justice is a struggle and it's a struggle in which too often we suffer setbacks. Note again the words of v. 123 *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness*. Doesn't such a statement indicate a sense of dependence on God in which there is a recognition that in order to do judgment and justice we need a power beyond ourselves? Failing eyes, you see, are weeping eyes and we weep because too often we cave to the sins that easily beset us and we lament our powerlessness to do judgment and justice.

We have done judgment and justice to a very slight degree. We certainly long to do judgment and justice more fully and with greater consistency – so much so that our eyes fail for the power of God's salvation, the very power that enables us to do judgment and justice. This morning I want to focus on this theme of doing judgment and justice and how we can more effectively and more fully make the Psalmist's confession our own confession:

## I Have Done Judgment and Justice

### I. Doing Judgment and Justice Must Spring from Right Affections

At the end of the day our actions demonstrate our desires or our affections. If our affections, therefore, are right affections they will lead to right desires which in turn will lead to right actions. We see throughout the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm this theme being expressed again and again of the Psalmist's love for God's word.

And so note the last two verses of this section – vv. 127,128 *Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.*

He loves God's commandments and he esteems God's precepts. And let's note it again the love/hate contrast that we see coming up again and again. His love for God's ways

leads him to hate every false way. It's interesting and instructive to see these verses in connection with the verse that precedes them. Verse 126 is really a sermon of its own and I have preached on it more than once in prayer meeting. Note the Psalmist's petition in that verse and ask yourself whether or not this is a petition we can utilize with confidence in our day. *It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.* If we were to interpret this verse according to some notions that are all too common in dispensationalism especially we would have to alter the petition to read *it's too late for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.* Praise the Lord that the verse instead indicates that ungodly days and sinful days in which the ways of ungodly men and sinful forces seem to have full sway becomes arguments for pleading that the Lord will move with power and might again. The power of sin doesn't tell us that it's too late for God to work they tell us, rather, that it is high time for God to work in order to turn back the flood tide of sin.

But what I want you to see, now, from these final 3 verses of this section of the Psalm is that the sinfulness of the times in which he lived did not hold sway over the Psalmist. If men have made void the law of God the Psalmist is resolved that he will love God's commandments nevertheless – indeed he'll place higher value on them than he does on anything the world affords him. This idea of resolution comes out with the word *Therefore.* To understand the force of this word you have to view it in connection with the petition. So the Psalmist is saying in effect – they have made void thy law – therefore I love thy commandments above gold, yea above fine gold. They have made void thy law, therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right.

It's as if the Psalmist is saying that he's not going to go with the flow of sin. He will instead swim against the current. And the more the world chooses sin the stronger will his resoluteness be to love and follow the ways of God. As a Christian, you should find great encouragement in such statements. You can follow the Lord even in a world that makes void his law. As parents you should find great encouragement in these verses with regard to your children. They can follow the ways of the Lord even when peer pressure and all the forces of the world would sway them to go the way of the world.

What we find in the Psalmist's affections, you see, is the same thing that is manifested in that beatitude found in the sermon on the mount – Mt. 5:6 *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* You may recall that when we went through the beatitudes a couple of years ago we noted the spiritual progression of those beatitudes. The mark of a man who has become a subject of the kingdom of heaven is that he is poor in spirit – he sees his own spiritual barrenness and his complete dependence on God. He knows that he is helpless and hopeless and destitute of anything that would commend him to God. He thus finds himself compelled to mourn – *blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.* He mourns over his sin. He comes to perceive what sin has done to him and how sin is an offence to the God who created him.

There follows in his heart a willingness to surrender to God and whatever terms God would set forth for him to be reconciled to God. That's the meaning of *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.* And then comes *Blessed are they which do hunger*

*and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.* Isn't this what we find the Psalmist doing in this section of the Psalm? He's hungering and thirsting for righteousness when he says in v. 123 *Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness.* He's hungering and thirsting for righteousness when he laments the fact that the forces of sin and ungodliness have made void the law of God. He's hungering and thirsting for righteousness when he finds himself resolved to love God's commandments and esteem God's precepts even in a time when men despise God's commandments and precepts and strive to void them.

The promise of that beatitude in Mt. 5 is that those that so hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, or to use the words of this section of the Psalm whose eyes fail for salvation and for the word of God's righteousness – they will be filled and they are indeed blessed. They are the ones, in other words, to gain true happiness and lasting joy. Their blessing consists in the filling of their hearts with Christ's love and Christ's provision for them through the gospel. And that statement holds out to us today the very real prospect of being blessed and being satisfied.

Isn't this what is so sadly lacking all around us today? The making void of God's law may bring immediate pleasure to the flesh but it also brings the increasingly heavy burden of guilt and misery to the soul. And we live in a day that finds men and women and even boys and girls steeped in the misery and guilt of sin. And they drown themselves in their vices of drugs and drink and immorality because they find life so hard to cope with.

But let's face it here this morning. I want to be as real as I can be – and the reality of our day is that in many cases Christians are the ones who are miserable and Christians are the ones who bear heavy burdens and Christians are the ones who manage to turn religion into a form of misery that would lead others to say within their hearts – Christianity is the thing from which I need to escape if I would escape heavy burdens and misery.

Can that really be? And if so – how does that which promises so much appear to deliver so little? I would suggest to you that the problem doesn't lie with Christ and the problem doesn't lie in the gospel – the problem lies rather in the wrong kind of striving. There is a desire to do judgment and justice and that's a good thing but even a good thing can become a terrible thing if the striving to meet the good and right desire becomes twisted and perverted. That was the case with the Galatian Christians. They had right desires but were striving for those desires in ways that were contrary to the gospel.

This leads to my next point. Doing judgment and justice must not only spring from right affections but:

## II. Doing Judgment and Justice Must be Based on Proper Assurance

Would you note the Psalmist's petition in v. 124 *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.* Such a petition hardly seems compatible with the Psalmist's confession in v. 121 *I have done judgment and justice.* The two things are perfectly compatible, however, if you take into account the Psalmist's knowledge of his

own shortcomings. He strives for judgment and justice but still finds himself in need of mercy which indicates to us, then, that he realizes that for all his striving he still comes short of the standards of judgment and justice. I referenced the beatitudes a moment ago. Isn't it interesting that following the beatitude about hungering and thirsting for righteousness comes the beatitude *Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy* (Mt. 5:7).

You see where the power of the gospel has been manifested there will always follow humility. It's a wonderful thing and it's evidence of grace to confess that you do judgment and justice but it's the epitome of arrogance and hypocrisy to flatter yourself into thinking that you've done judgment and justice in such a way that you've somehow merited God's favor.

The very opposite is what takes place – the more you strive for judgment and justice the more you come to realize how far short you fall of God's standard of judgment and justice and this should lead to a continual cry to God for mercy. The blessing of God, you see, doesn't come to those who reach an acceptable level of judgment and justice, it comes, rather, to those that manage to keep low before God.

I've come to see the importance of humility more and more as an essential ingredient (so to speak) in our own walk with the Lord and in our parenting. Oh that our children would see us as those that strive to do judgment and justice but that they might be shielded from seeing any vestige of self righteousness in us but may instead see humility manifested in our lives – the kind of humility that would lead us to cry to God *Deal with thy servant according unto thy mercy, and teach me thy statutes.*

I take it that you, as a Christian, see your constant need for grace and mercy. You need grace to restrain your sins and you need grace for the forgiveness of your sins and you need grace to enable you to overcome your sins. The need for grace is so great that we cannot for a moment be without it. And what this means, then, is that you dare not conduct yourself in such a way that you run the risk of suppressing the free flow of grace to your soul.

And the thing that can suppress the flow of grace is pride. James and Peter both draw from a text in the Old Testament, probably Prov. 3:34 when they write *God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble.* I like what accompanies Peter's quote. Listen to the words of 1Pet. 5:5 *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all [of you] be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

Doing judgment and justice, therefore, must be based on the proper assurance. There's a negative and a positive side to the proper assurance. The negative side is what we've just considered – I could summarize it like this – be assured that for all your striving for judgment and justice you still come short of the glory of God and you still find yourself in need of mercy and should devote yourself, therefore, to continual applications to God for that mercy.

The positive side to this assurance is found in the petition of v. 122 *Be surety for thy servant for good*. Here is where the Psalmist can be found looking to an outside source for his righteousness. There is, you see, only one man who can truly confess that he's done judgment and justice to the full extent of God's standard. I like to hear in the words of our text in v. 121 not so much the confession of the Psalmist, or not so much as my own personal confession so much as I like to hear them as the confession of Christ himself.

Christ can say and has said by his perfect life and atoning death that he has done judgment and justice. He has accomplished judgment by being the propitiation for our sins. He has fulfilled the law for us in his life and in his death. And because he has fulfilled righteousness on our behalf we, like the Psalmist can call upon him to be our surety for good. A surety, you see, is a guarantor. He's one who can give a guarantee and can stand behind such a guarantee to back it up. And the guarantee we gain from Christ is the guarantee of his righteousness being imputed to us.

Isa 61:10 *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh [himself] with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth [herself] with her jewels.*

This robe of righteousness that covers us is what guarantees our acceptance with God. It provides for us that righteousness that is greater than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It guarantees that life will be our portion and heaven will be our home and Christ will be ours forever. This is a robe that was woven by the perfect life of Christ and was purchased by the atoning death of Christ.

This becomes, then, the positive basis of my striving for judgment and justice. Christ is my surety. Christ, in other words, has taken to himself the responsibility to bring his people safely to heaven and he's become the guarantor for every blessing that that we need in this life for our good and for our walk with the Lord. He will give us strength above our own. He will give us the proper motivation by teaching us the statutes of the gospel. He will, thus, enable us to walk not in the pride of self-righteousness but in the humility of knowing that he has provided freely all that we have lacked.

*I have done judgment and justice* the Psalmist says. This can and should be our confession too. But it needs to be a confession that arises from the right affections and it needs to be a confession that is grounded in the right assurance. Would you consider finally:

### III. Doing Judgment and Justice Requires Effective Spiritual Warfare

The first two verses in this section make reference to oppression. *Leave me not to mine oppressors* – v. 121; *Let not the proud oppress me* – v. 122.

Both words come from a root which means *to press upon*. And this is the experience and the warfare of the Christian. There will be those spiritual forces within and without that will press upon him and strive to lure him away from doing judgment and justice.

Opressors are those that defraud or literally deceive the ones they oppress. And you can be sure that it will ever be the devil's aim to deceive you and to lure you away from the truth and liberty of the gospel. I referenced the Galatians in an earlier study. The devil took advantage of their desire to do judgment and justice and lured them away from doing judgment and justice.

They thought they were going forward with God when in fact they were being lured away from God and away from the truth of the gospel. You can be sure, therefore, that it will be the devil's aim to lure you away and his most effective tool for accomplishing this is to lead the Christian into wrong thinking. He will try to make you a legalist or he'll try to make you lawless. I don't think he cares which one you become because both draw away from Christ and draw away from the truth of the gospel.

The legalistic mentality caters to pride and leads you to think that you've actually done judgment and justice in such a way as to gain God's favor. The antinomian leads you to carelessness and endeavors to convince you that you're not obligated to even strive to do judgment and justice.

The solution to both and indeed the solution to all the devil's devices is to be firmly grounded in the truth of the gospel. This is why we have need to utilize every one of the petitions in this 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm that call on the Lord to teach us – *teach me thy statutes* – v. 124; *Give me understanding* – v. 125.

We must make this a constant aim in our praying not only for the right rational understanding of God's truth but for the right heart understanding of it as well. You could say that Paul's prayer for the saints at Ephesus is very much along the same lines as the many petitions in the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Paul's prayer was for spiritual illumination for the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ to be given, the eyes of the understanding being opened that you might know the hope of your calling.

His prayer is also for the Ephesians (in chp. 3) that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith and that they might be rooted and grounded in love able to comprehend all the vast dimensions of the love of Christ. So long as we're seeking the Lord that way and studying the Scriptures with that aim then we will fortify ourselves against all those that would oppress us and seek to lead us astray.

*I have done judgment and justice* the Psalmist confesses. I trust that this is your confession also. It's the mark of a Christian – but it can also be the mark of a proud hypocrite if it's not rightly understood. It must be a confession that springs from genuine desires to strive for what's just and right. It must be a confession that is grounded in the right kind of assurance both negatively and positively. We do not assert that we have kept judgment and justice in such a way as to earn the favor of God. We assert, rather, that we strive for judgment and justice because we have freely received righteousness from our God and Christ has borne the judgment of our sin.

It's a confession that can only be made from a right understanding of the gospel and that understanding will enable us to prevail over our all our oppressors.