



# “Getting to Know God”

## Section 2: What Can We Know About What God Is Like?



### Unit 2.7: Total Justice with Tender Mercy

#### I) Realities of God’s Righteousness

- Now approaching our third set of shared attributes that reflect the moral perfections of God’s character, we will have a chance in this unit to see more closely just how inseparable these attributes are. We have discussed how God is *loving* and *holy*, and how He expresses that love and holiness in *grace* and *truth*. Now, we must consider how those aspects of God’s character work in unison with His *justice* and *mercy*. These aspects of God’s goodness show us yet another dimension of His unwavering righteousness, along with His unmerited tenderness toward those who fall short of His perfection.

#### II) Reinforcing His Righteous Standards

- Deuteronomy 32:4** declares, “*The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.*” **Revelation 15:3** also proclaims, “*Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!*” These passages give us detail about God’s ways as just and true, and they speak to His *divine justice*. Since God is a holy Creator, and He is also the author and judge of perfect truth, He has a righteous moral character that is free from all sin. Therefore, *justice* is how God reinforces His righteous standards by responding to His fallen and sinful creation in moral perfection. Since God is just, He must respond in every situation with perfect equity to punish all sin and reward all righteousness. God’s justice is something that is progressively revealed throughout the Bible in His creation of the world, His providential care of His creation, His provision and offer of salvation, and His temporal and eternal judgment of all human beings. His temporal judgments are seen in several historical accounts of Scripture in the following three ways:
  - (1) Individual judgements:** Adam and Eve were ejected from the Garden of Eden because of the original sin of rejecting God’s command and sovereign rule by eating the forbidden fruit.
  - (2) Universal judgements:** The earth was flooded during the time of Noah’s because of universal sin and immorality that was exponentially increasing throughout the world.
  - (3) National judgments:** Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of continual national sin. National judgments were also made regarding His covenant people, as the Northern Kingdom of Israel was sent away into exile in Assyria, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah was banished because of disobedience into a 70-year exile in Babylon.

#### III) Facing His Final Justice

- Since sin dominates our fallen and broken world, we cry out for justice every day and wonder *how* and *when* God will bring judgment to the world. First, the Bible clearly teaches that since God is just, it is His responsibility to seek vengeance for all evil and not human beings (**Deuteronomy 32:35, Psalm 94:1-2, Hebrews 10:30, Romans 12:19, 1 Peter 2:23**). Second, we must not measure the justice of God through immediate circumstances because He always has the eternal view in mind. Finally, we should be slow to cry out for God’s justice, because if He has to judge all evil, that means He will have to judge our evil too. The Bible clearly reveals several key aspects of God’s final justice that will take place in the end of time (**Ecclesiastes 12:14, Acts 17:30-31**). Here is a closer look at the final judgments mentioned in Scripture that will take place before God’s consummates His eternal kingdom:
  - A Judgment of Nations (Matthew 25:31-36)**
  - A Judgment of Salvation – The Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15)**
  - A Judgment of Works – The Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10)**

#### IV) Finding Mercy for Our Misery

- When we feel the eternal weight of God's *justice*, we cry out for His grace. But, when we feel the temporal pain of our sin, we cry out for His *mercy*. As **Deuteronomy 4:31** states, "*For the Lord your God is a merciful God.*" The mercy of God is how He expresses His goodness to a fallen and sinful creation by offering compassion, pity, and relief to us in our distress. Basically, the difference between grace and mercy is that grace pays the penalty that sin has cost us, but mercy relieves the pain that sin has caused us. Also, grace is receiving what we *do not* deserve, while mercy is not receiving what we *do* deserve. Finally, Scripture reveals that God offers His creation two distinct types of mercy:
  - General mercy:** This is God's general benevolence and compassion on all the creatures of the world. **Psalm 104:27-28** says, "*These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.*"
  - Special mercy:** This is God's special mercy on His covenant people throughout Scripture. **Psalm 103:13-14** states, "<sup>13</sup>*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.*<sup>14</sup>*For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*"

#### V) Endless Mercies Every Morning

- As God's covenant children through faith in Jesus Christ, we can rejoice that God is merciful and His mercies are limitless like all His other attributes. **Lamentations 3:22-23** reveals, "<sup>22</sup>*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* <sup>23</sup>*they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*" Therefore, we need understand God's justice and mercy in the following ways:
  - His justice is being delayed because our suffering is producing righteousness:** In other words, He allows us to experience pain because as Paul states in **2 Corinthians 4:17**, "*...this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.*"
  - His mercies are inexhaustible and new with every rising of the sun:** Therefore, as we suffer, we can call on God and receive His overflowing and abundant mercy to continue in our daily walk with Christ.

#### VI) Daily Prayers & Practices of Mercy

- Since God is merciful, we have a responsibility to seek His mercy in prayer, and practice sharing that mercy with others. Here are examples of this call to the daily prayers and practices of mercy:
  - Receiving God's Daily Mercy:** "The Jesus Prayer," inspired by the tax collector in **Luke 18:13**, is a daily petition when we offer the words: "*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.*"
  - Sharing God's Daily Mercy:** We also must share all mercy God shares with us. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** states, "*...the Father of mercies and God of all comfort...comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those...with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*"
  - Remembering God's Daily Mercy:** Finally, we also must remember the capacity we have to receive mercy is in direct proportion to the mercy we offer to others. **Matthew 5:7** says, <sup>7</sup>*"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."*

#### VII) The Destiny of Despising Mercy

- So, if God is merciful, why doesn't mercy win the day and all of the earth receive abundant mercy for all of eternity? The answer is that His other attribute of justice keeps the universe in balance. As A.W. Tozer states in *Knowledge of the Holy*, "**He has always dealt in mercy with mankind and will always deal in justice when His mercy is despised**" (p. 91). God offers us eternal redemption and relief on His terms, and they include *repentance* and *faith*. When we refuse to repent in humility, the justice of God will lead Him to deal with our sin in moral perfection as a *holy judge* instead of a *merciful Father*.

#### VIII) The Justice & Mercy of Jesus

- Finally, we find the most complete form of God's justice and mercy in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As theologian Mark Jones explains in his devotional book, *God Is*, "**As a just God, everything he ordains is just. He never gives his creatures less than they deserve, though he can, because of his grace, give us more than we deserve. We might rightly ask, how can a just God give us more than we deserve, since we are sinners? Simply, the satisfaction of Christ on the cross shows God to be both just and merciful**" (p. 187-188).