

God's Right to Judge

Justice is a common desire. When someone has committed a terrible act against another, we want to see justice done. We know there is something wrong about someone getting away with a criminal offense. Consequently, societies have systems in place in order to try to bring about justice for the offended. Since they involve humans and human governments, these systems are imperfect. We don't always get the resolution that we desire, and sometimes we err. Yet we continue trying because it is the right thing to do.

If we, as human beings, desire justice, then how much more shall we think that God desires justice? God was certainly concerned about justice under the Law (cf. Exod 23:2, 6; Deut 10:18; 16:19; 24:17; Isa 1:17, and... so much in the prophets!). His desire is, always, that His people "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Unlike mere human beings, however, God knows the way of perfect justice. He knows the beginning from the end and knows the hearts of all. He sees what we cannot see, knows what we cannot know, and has the perfect wisdom and understanding to carry out judgment and justice without the finite flaws of imperfect societies. Consequently, when God brings judgment, it will be right. We may not always be able to understand or see why God judged a nation at a particular time, but those calls are His right to make. Our lack of knowledge and understanding hardly constitutes reason to call God into question over His judgments. God owns life and death (Deut 32:39). He is the Creator, the Potter, the King, and the Judge.

Abraham understood that God had the right to judge the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. He pled with God, to be sure, hoping that God might spare the cities if only only ten righteous people could be found. "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25) He was calling upon God's just nature, hoping to spare his own family from what was about to happen. The ten could not be found. Yes, the Judge of all the earth will do what is just. He will make no mistakes in carrying out justice so it should not surprise us when God finally brings down the gavel.

Why would God bring such judgment? When human beings are violated, we rightly want justice. Again, how much more ought God to desire justice, especially when He has been violated? This is the nature of sin, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Sin violates the nature and glory of God. Just as crime against other humans violates human rights, God has "divine rights," and these are violated when we sin. In detailing the sins of God's people, Isaiah said that they were being judged "because their speech and their actions are against the Lord, to rebel against His glorious presence" (Isa 3:8, NASB).

Shall we, then, think it right that we would “get away” with crimes against the Almighty Creator? Shall we think to remove His divine right to judge? Should we think that He is out of place for bringing justice and doing so perfectly with complete wisdom, knowledge, and understanding? He could do it with the nations and He can do it with us. One day, there is, indeed, a final day of judgment coming. As Paul told the people of Athens, God “commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30-31; cf. 2 Cor 5:10)

This can be rather frightening, especially when we realize that our crimes against the Divine Glory, when met with justice, means suffering “the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thess 1:9).

Yet here is where the Gospel becomes so powerful. God Himself stepped in, took on human flesh (John 1:14), and suffered as a sacrifice on our behalf so that He would be both “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). By doing this, He does not give up being just while forgiving the sins of those who turn to Him. His justice stands. His holiness stands. His glory stands. His grace is magnified. To God be the glory!

God’s right to judge is established by the fact that is the Creator. Just as human beings expect justice when human rights are violated, so God brings about justice due to His divine rights beings violated. He does this with perfect knowledge, wisdom, and power. Will the Judge of all the earth do what is just?

He already has, and He always will.

Doy Moyer

Be Thankful for God’s Authority

God is Creator. Because of Who He is, He has the inherent right to command and expect obedience. He has the right to tell us what to do, how to think, how to live, how to talk, and how to dress. Name it. God has the power to back it up. We, as His creatures have no right to kick back or demand answers from Him. Like it or not, we are under His authority. But now, why wouldn’t we like it?

Rather than looking at this as some sort of drudgery, why not be thankful for God's authority? After all, if we wish to glorify God, we can only do so by recognizing the power that only belongs to Him.

“Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.
Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
He also is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before Him,
Strength and joy are in His place.” (1 Chron. 16:23-27)

If we “seek the Lord and His strength” (vs. 11), then we are necessarily seeking Him in all His authority and power. Shall we love the Lord and despise His authority as if it is a burden to us? May it never be!

Here, then, are some reasons we can be thankful for God's authority:

1. Because God's authority means He is the Judge, not me, or you, or anyone else.

I don't have to worry about untangling all the sticky questions about eternity. I don't need to worry about pleasing other people, especially those in the world. I just need to concern myself with pleasing and glorifying Him based on what He has revealed (2 Cor. 5:8-9; John 12:48).

Consequently, we may say with Paul, “to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:3-4). In the final analysis, each of us as individuals will stand before God. What others think at that point will be irrelevant.

2. Because God's authority is what gives power to grace. Grace means nothing unless it comes from one who has the power to give it. Sometimes grace is pitted against a stress on authority, but the two go together. It is true that authority can exist without grace, but it is not possible for real grace to exist without authority. Recall Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Mark 2. When he saw the man's faith, Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven. The people reacted by saying that only God could forgive sins, to which Jesus responded, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, get up, pick up your

pallet and go home.’” (Mark 2:8-11) Without the authority inherent in Jesus, the man’s sins would have remained. God’s authority means that He can provide the grace needed to forgive sins. Without His authority, our sins would remain.

3. Because God’s authority means He has the power to fulfill His promises. People sometimes promise what they cannot give. Think of the empty promises given by fallible people who strive for political power, or the disappointment we feel when someone promised something without the ability to deliver. This will never happen with God. Because He has all authority, He has complete control over the promises that He has given, and He will not disappoint. Therefore, we may have the same faith as Paul when promised that the ship he was on would not lose anyone: “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told” (Acts 27:25). Paul began his epistle to Titus with these reassuring words: “Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago” (Titus 1:1-2). Our trust in God’s promises is the reason we have hope as an anchor of our soul (Heb. 6:13-20). All of this is possible because of the authority of God.

God’s authority should never be seen as a burden. Rather, we have every reason to be thankful for who God is and the authority He possesses and shows. “O Lord God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds You” (Psa. 89:8).

Doy Moyer

On the Seriousness of Turning from God

We are aware (or ought to be) of the passages teaching that those who were enlightened and then turn away from the Lord are worse off than before. For example, see Luke 14:25-33 and 2 Peter 2:20-22. Or think about what the writer of Hebrews had to say in Hebrews 6:4-6:

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them

again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”

Many passages warn against the dangers of turning back once we have started down the path of serving the Lord. But I want to think briefly about another angle.

When we become Christians, we are committing ourselves to the Lord. This is a lifetime commitment, not a “let’s see how it goes and then we’ll decide later” type of commitment. Our commitment to the Lord is likened to marriage (cf. Eph 5:22-33). We serve the Lord, knowing full well that our yes means yes (Matt 5:37; Jas 5:12). When we decide to serve God, we enter into a covenant; we have made a vow, a commitment, and we have given our word, knowing we are to pay what we vow. The Preacher wrote this in Ecclesiastes 5:4-6:

“When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?”

Do you think of your commitment to the Lord as a vow? Did you commit yourself to serve Him through life? Has that commitment changed? Are you as committed to this relationship now as you were when you first submitted to the Lord? Has it grown stronger?

We cannot downplay turning from the Lord to make it sound innocent. This is not merely a lifestyle change. When we who have made such a commitment turn away from the Lord, then we lose our integrity with it. We are no longer people of our word. Our “yes” is no longer a “yes.” We have essentially lied to the Lord, and if we will go back on the most significant commitment we ever make, then what keeps us true to other commitments? What else might we be willing to downplay as important? What other vows and commitments are we willing to break?

Does that sound a little harsh? Perhaps so, but I want us to get the truth of this set firmly in our minds. Turning away from God after having become a Christian means that the most serious of all vows and commitments has been cast aside. How else can we see it? We have renounced sainthood for becoming unbelievers who can only expect judgment. Recall the Israelites who perished in the wilderness: “And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief” (Heb 3:18-19). Recall, also, that we are trampling underfoot the Son of God, profaning the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified, and insulting the Spirit of grace (Heb 10:28). We should thus understand, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (v. 31).

I'm not talking about sinning while still striving to be true to God, as per 1 John 1:7-9 and 2:1-2. I'm talking about throwing it all away and casting aside our confidence (Heb 10:35). The inspired writers do not whitewash this matter at all. Peter said it was like a dog returning to its own vomit (2 Pet 2:22). This is not something we can afford to think is harmless.

When we are tempted to give up completely, think about this. If we take covenant seriously; if we mean what we say; if our vows are worth anything ... then we need to return once again to our Lord and seek His face. If we are people of our word, we will not quit. We may stumble, crawl, scratch, and claw through difficulties, but by the help and grace of God, we will not quit! Ever.

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.... But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul” (Heb 10:36, 39).

Doy Moyer