

A Light in the Valley

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

God's Justice and Mercy

by: Kris Brewer

There seems to be a common misconception regarding the nature and characteristics of God when viewed in the Old Testament as opposed to the New Testament. Many seem to believe that the God of the Old Testament was a vengeful, punishing God, bent only on justice. They also believe that the God of the New Testament is a loving, merciful God. It is sometimes difficult to convey the message that there is only one God, and His nature and characteristics are unchanging. However, there are hints interspersed throughout the Old Testament that show that God was both a God of justice and a God of mercy.

One such example can be found in the giving of the law concerning cities of refuge.

Cities of refuge were a part of the cities that were given to the Levites upon the conquest of the Promised Land. They were to be given 48 cities total, six of which were designated as cities of refuge (Numbers 35:6). These six cities

would serve as a sanctuary for the manslayer; one who had accidentally killed another person, without malice.

The law concerning murder was very clear. There was no sanctuary for the one who used a weapon and killed another (see Numbers 35:9-34). The murderer was to be put to death!

God provided a way for the family of a person who was killed by another to exact justice from the murderer. A relative could operate as the "avenger of blood," and could take the life of the one who had slain his family member. However, if one who had slain another fled to a city of refuge, he was to be protected until he could stand trial before the congregation. If he was found guilty of murder, he would be put to death. There was no protection for the murderer! If he was found to be guilty of manslaughter (an accidental killing), then he was required to stay inside the city of refuge to which he had fled until the death of the sitting High Priest. If he left the confines of the

refuge city, then the avenger of blood was permitted to take vengeance on him. Only after the death of the sitting High Priest could the manslayer return to his home without fear of the avenger of blood.

Demonstrating God's Characteristics...

The creation of these cities of refuge demonstrated God's characteristics of both justice and mercy. Especially under the theocratic system that God instituted for Israel, there was a need for moral justice. Those who did wrong, who violated the Law, had to be punished. Those who were guilty of the vilest and most violent crimes had to be punished with death. For the sake of those wronged, there needed to be a punishment commensurate with crime committed. That is *justice*. God ensured that there was a just punishment for the one who killed another.

God's *mercy* was demonstrated when He made an exception for the one who killed another unintentionally. Taking the life of another is no less terrible just because it was not intended. This is evident by the fact that God had to put restraints on the avenger of blood, to keep him from killing the manslayer. Justice would demand that when a life was taken, the one responsible would lose his life as well. God was, however, merciful. He provided an exception which would allow for leniency in limited cases (though it would still bear some serious consequences for the guilty). Mercy is the characteristic of God that keeps Him from giving the consequence that is rightfully deserved.

God's mercy and justice were both demonstrated throughout the Old Testament. The way that God interacted with His people showed these characteristics over and over. God promised, for example, that He would deliver His people into captivity if they failed to be obedient to Him. He did not send them into captivity the moment they were disobedient. In fact, He gave them multiple opportunities to repent of their wickedness and return to faithful service. The message of the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were all tailored toward the repentance of the people. This was a manifestation of His mercy. Eventually God had to bring the punishment that He promised. His people, both in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, were taken away into captivity. This was a manifestation of God's justice.

It is clear that God was not lacking in either mercy or justice under the first covenant. He expressed both, providing every opportunity for His people to be obedient to Him. He showed both characteristics at various times.

God's Mercy And Justice in the New Testament Covenant...

The misconception many hold concerning the God of the New Testament is that He is only concerned with mercy, and His punishing justice is a thing of the past. Looking to the writings of the New Testament make it evident that this is simply not the case. The God of the New Testament is exactly the same God (with the same characteristics) as the God of the Old Testament. He provides both mercy and justice!

Nothing displays both God's mercy and justice like the institution of His plan for the salvation of mankind from the consequences of sin. Justice demands that we be punished for our sin, our disobedience.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).

But, like with the cities of refuge, God has set a plan in motion that will provide mercy. This plan, when followed, makes it possible to avoid the punishment that is just, and receive that "gift of God" that Paul referenced in the verse above.

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned..." (Mark 16:15-16).

God's mercy is made available to those who are willing to be obedient to Him. He is willing to remove the consequence for sin, but only for those who are willing to turn to Him with obedient hearts. Those who refuse to be obedient will still suffer the appropriate punishment that comes with justice. There will even be many who act like they are obedient, but are actually rejecting the instructions of the Lord. The punishment of disobedience is the same for them as for those who reject Him completely:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

God is a God of mercy. But He is also a God of justice. We cannot separate these two characteristics. If we want His mercy, we must be obedient. If we refuse to be obedient, then we will receive His justice. There is no escaping it!

The Armor of God

by: Chuck Bartlett

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). Our Father has not left us defenseless when it comes to our battles “against the wiles of the devil” (v. 11). Earlier, Paul mentioned that the brethren should be “strong in the Lord and in the power of His great might” (v. 10). Let’s take note of our armor that God has given us through Christ.

1. Having girded your waist with truth (v. 14). It is truth that can set us free (John 8:32). This gives us power over the enemy of lies, and the devil is the father of such (John 8:44). Without truth we have no defense against anything that is false. Truth is what is required for a soldier of Christ to be victorious.

2. Having put on the breastplate of righteousness (v. 14). It is this quality that the enemy abhors. Righteous actions (word or deed) causes those in opposition to be tormented further (Romans 12:20). Saints will be tempted to engage in carnal warfare (2 Corinthians 10:4), which would mean to take off our breastplate. Make sure it stays on and resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7).

3. Having feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (v. 15). Any spiritual conflict would bring certain defeat without having a firm stand. Christians have the peace, which brings assurance, through the gospel (Philippians 4:7). Having doubts is to give a foothold to the enemy. Satan’s earliest tool used to hurt man was casting doubt: “You shall not surely die” (Genesis 3:3). The gospel of peace will cast out uncertainty (2 Timothy 1:12).

4. Taking the shield of faith (v. 16). The whole purpose of being a good soldier is to please our God, and without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). The edge that children of God have is their ability to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). This enables them to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16).

5. Take the helmet of salvation (v. 17). What greater comfort is there than knowing you shall be saved? What soldier would fear a battle when he is assured victory? The salvation of the Lord is there for those who will wear it. This is trusting in God who can deliver us (Matthew 6:13, 2 Peter 2:9). It is useless to fight without seeing

the salvation of the Lord.

6. Take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God (v. 17). Knowing that the only thing we are up against is everything that is not God's word, it is only fitting that the use of God's word would be our needed weapon. Too many soldiers are trying to defend truth without God's word. We must use the word for it has the power (Romans 1:16).

As is often pointed out, notice that the armor does not prepare one who turns his back to the enemy -- he would be unprotected. This is why throughout the scriptures we are told to press straight ahead (Philippians 3:14). The narrow road doesn't have room to turn back for a rest. If you do that, you are not on the road.

Finally, our text in Ephesians 6 mentions, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (v. 18).

Are you wearing the whole armor of God?

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

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moved. They are no longer unrighteous, but made righteous by the mercy of God. They are washed, sanctified and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). One of the conditions for all of this is repentance. God does not accept them "just as they are" without any change of heart and behavior. Until people turn from their ungodly conduct, they have no right to expect the same "rights" as those who do not practice such sins against God and society.

Editor's note: This article was first published on January 7, 1993. It is clear to see that the attitude concerning this sin has only grown worse in our society since that time. The principles of this article continue to be true, as the biblical principles never change!

Does the Bible Encourage Bigotry?

by: Edward Bragwell

In the current furor over “gay rights,” there seems to be a concerted effort to brand anyone opposed to homosexual behavior as bigots still living in the Dark Ages. We are constantly bombarded with calls to wipe out bigotry and to be more tolerant of people different from us, regardless of the source or nature of that difference.

It is becoming ever more politically expedient to cater to the “gay rights” cause. Our new president-elect promises swift action to overturn the ban on homosexuals in the military. This will force all military personnel to consider all the gays to be just one of the guys. To do otherwise will be to condone bigotry.

Efforts are also underway to ban discrimination against homosexuals in housing, jobs, and other areas. The goal is to force the American public to grant to “gays” all the rights and protection that are rightfully granted to racial and ethnic minorities. The propaganda mills and the liberal news media are working overtime to depict the opposition to this movement as bigotry. Our educational system, in many instances, is conditioning our children to accept anyone regardless of his “race, color, or “sexual preference.”

Religious groups are being pressured to get in step with modern society by accepting “gays,” not only as members, but into their leadership. Any group who makes any kind of gesture in that direction is generally, and often generously, praised by the news media for being enlightened and progressive. Such efforts are considered as just another step away from the bigotry of the past.

All of this has caused me to ask, sometimes out loud, “Does the Bible condone bigotry? Were some of those we read about in the Bible bigots? Is God a bigot?” The answer is “yes” -- if opposition to “gays” and their perverse lifestyle makes one a bigot.

God destroyed Sodom, a city with the dubious distinction of having a sin named for it. The nature of her prevailing sin is learned from reading Genesis 19. On the eve of her destruction, two angels in the form of men were guests in the home of Lot, Abraham’s nephew. That night, the Bible says, “The men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, ‘Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out

to us that we may know them carnally” (vv. 4-5). To protect his guests, Lot offered the men what he considered a lesser evil -- his two virgin daughters. This did not appease this “gay” mob. In verse 9, they just told Lot to “stand back!” and accused him of keeping on acting as a judge (v. 9). I guess they thought he was some kind of bigot. But God made good his threat to destroy the city. It went up in smoke. Was God a bigot?

In giving the law of Moses, God included a ban on homosexual conduct. He said, “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them” (Lev. 20:13). Was God a bigot in commanding such? Was Moses a bigot for passing it on to Israel?

Paul wrote, “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. . . . Who, knowing the righteous judgments of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them” (Rom. 1:26,27,32).

Again he wrote, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9).

Was Paul a bigot? Paul said, “These things we (Paul and other inspired men -- eob) also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches” (1 Cor. 2:12,13). He also said that the things that he wrote were the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

Are the biblical writers, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to be charged with bigotry? Certainly not! Neither should anyone who follows their teaching on the moral issue of homosexuality.

Does God love the “gay” person? Of course, He does. He also loves the drunkard, the thief, the murderer and the heterosexual fornicator. Jesus died for them and all other sinners. If they will meet the Lord’s conditions of salvation they can be washed from their sins in the blood of Christ. When they do this, their guilt is re-

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Daily Bible Reading

August 2018

August 1	Amos 6	August 17	Micah 5:2-15
August 2	Amos 7	August 20	Micah 6
August 3	Amos 8	August 21	Micah 7
August 6	Amos 9	August 22	Nahum 1
August 7	Obadiah	August 23	Nahum 2
August 8	Jonah 1:1-9	August 24	Nahum 3
August 9	Jonah 1:10-2:10	August 27	Habakkuk 1:1-2:1
August 10	Jonah 3-4	August 28	Habakkuk 2:2-20
August 13	Micah 1	August 29	Habakkuk 3
August 14	Micah 2	August 30	Zephaniah 1
August 15	Micah 3	August 31	Zephaniah 2
August 16	Micah 4:1-5:1		

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