

The Sovereignty of God

by Richie Temple
Cary, North Carolina

One of the fundamental principles underlying the entire Bible is that God almighty – the creator of the heavens and the earth – is the ruler and judge of all the earth. Despite the fact that this world abounds with injustices, the Bible never once concludes that events or situations are beyond God’s sovereign and providential care. Since God is a just and righteous God who is faithful to his promises, believers can rest assured that justice will ultimately be accomplished according to the timetable of God’s plan. These truths are stated, implied and assumed throughout the entire Bible. The Book of Hebrews sums up the biblical perspective concerning God’s ultimate judgment of the world:

Nothing in all of creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:13 NIV).

God is the creator, ruler and judge of all the earth. Nothing can be hidden from his sight; and, it is to him that we must each, as individuals, one day give account. This is a sobering truth that should bring comfort to all that love truth and long for justice. But it should also be a truth that motivates us to live our lives in godly reverence towards God and our fellowman.

Biblically, the fundamental principle upon which justice is based is the truth that God created man in his own image and likeness in order for man to rule over the earth in a godlike manner on God’s behalf (Gen. 1:26-27). Man is, therefore, first and foremost responsible to God his creator. In addition, since each human being is made in the image of God every person is deserving of the dignity, respect and honor associated with that status. In fact, it is precisely on the basis of man being created in God’s image that the death penalty was first instituted for murder and all biblical justice follows from that same principle (Gen. 9:6). When man’s relationship with God and his fellowman breaks down chaos results and ultimately God’s final judgment is demanded in order to restore proper justice and order to God’s creation (Rom. 1:18-2:11).

Though God has ordained that there be governing authorities in this life to suppress and punish evil as well as to provide for the common good of society, it is obvious that this is a short-term and imperfect measure until the time of God’s final judgment of the world. Jesus, in fact, taught that according to the Old Testament there *must* be a future resurrection and a final judgment of the world in order for God’s promises to come true and for his justice to ultimately prevail (Luke 20:34-38). This can be seen in many OT verses such as the following:

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing, whether it is good or bad (Eccl. 12:13-14).

All of the NT writers lived their lives in the light of this great truth of the ultimate judgment and justice of God. As Paul says:

I admit that I worship the God of our Fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is written in the Prophets, and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man (Acts 24:14-16; cf. Dan. 12:2; John 5:).

Even as a Christian believer, saved by God’s grace, Paul knew that,

... we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (II Cor. 5:10).

In fact, it was plain to Paul that a Christian believer could actually live his life in a way so irresponsible that at their final judgment they would be,

saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (I Cor. 3:15).

The logic of this truth is carried a significant step further by the apostle Peter:

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And,

“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good (I Peter 4:17-19).

If even believers who have been justified by God’s grace are still subject to judgment, where then does that leave the ungodly? The answer is that God’s justice will certainly prevail at the final judgment; therefore, God’s people should commit themselves to fulfilling God’s purposes – despite sufferings - in full awareness of this truth.

Manifestly, injustices in this world abound; but Christian believers should not allow themselves to be consumed by these injustices. Instead, as citizens of God’s heavenly kingdom - which will one day come upon earth in all its glory - we should devote ourselves to proclaiming God’s saving justice in Christ to the world. For as the Bible clearly teaches, the root problem of mankind is not injustice brought about because of ethnic race, nationalism, economic in-equalities or even differing religious affiliations. Instead, the root problem of mankind is sin and injustices are the fruit of that. The only lasting solution is God’s redemptive work in Christ. On the cross, God’s saving justice has been revealed

on behalf of all mankind. As Paul states in his Letter to the Romans,

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).

Face to face with the righteous standard of God’s law we all fall short. Nevertheless, God has acted in Christ to bring about man’s redemption. For those who accept Christ, judgment still awaits; but it is not a judgment unto condemnation. In Christ, we have passed from death to life and the fear of condemnation has been extinguished (John 5:24; Rom. 5:1-11; 8:1-2)). In its place should be a supreme confidence that God’s justice will be done. For the day is surely coming when God’s kingdom will come and God’s will, will be done, “on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10).