

# Shall God Do Right?

By Al Felder

*“<sup>20</sup>And the Lord, said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; <sup>21</sup>I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. <sup>22</sup>And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. <sup>23</sup>And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup>Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? <sup>25</sup>That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (Genesis 18:20-25)

Throughout the Bible we find that God measures the actions of men and deals with them accordingly. He is impartial in this act for He uses the same standard for all men. Those who are righteous are blessed, while those who are wicked are condemned. It was for this very reason that Abraham could not believe that God would treat the righteous and the wicked the same way in His judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham asked, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” The word “right” means just, and it is an appeal to the righteousness of God. With this thought in mind, let’s take a broader look at scripture to consider the righteousness of God.

Before we delve too far into our main idea, I want to consider a point from the scene in Genesis 18. God is about to judge Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. He informs Abraham of His intentions, but Abraham begins to plead with Him. In his questioning, Abraham asks God if He will treat the righteous and the wicked the same.

Abraham was concerned about his nephew Lot along with his family. When God called Abraham, Lot went with him. The two dwelt together until their companies became too large. At that point, Lot went toward Sodom and Gomorrah with all his family while Abraham dwelled in Canaan. Now the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah was come up before God and He was ready to pronounce His judgement.

The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was great. When God sent His angels to the city, the men of Sodom wanted to have their way with them. We find that this is a grievous sin according to God’s word. *“<sup>26</sup>For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: <sup>27</sup>And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”* (Romans 1:26, 27) In this passage, God describes the moral decay of man. In man’s rejection of God, he turned from the natural use for which God created him, and men

began to lust after men while women began lust after women. Sodom and Gomorrah had reached this point, and God was ready to pronounce His judgment.

I want to look at this scene from a different angle for just a moment. Abraham pleaded with God that He would not treat the righteous and the wicked the same. God agreed with Abraham. At the beginning of their discussion, God stated that He would withhold His judgment if fifty righteous people lived in the cities. By the end of the discussion God had even gone as far as saying that for ten righteous people He would withhold His judgment.

Earlier, we stated that Abraham and Lot had to part ways because their companies had become too large to dwell together. Lot had well over fifty people in His company. A careful reading of the text also lets us know that Lot had more than ten people in His immediate family. Lot had two unmarried daughters as well as several married daughters with families of their own.

We often focus on the wickedness of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and their wickedness was great. The fact remains, however, that if God's people would have been what they should have been the cities would have been spared. Ten righteous people could not be found in Sodom and Gomorrah despite the fact that Lot had a large company. Only Lot and his two unmarried daughters escaped.

We live in a society that is like Sodom and Gomorrah in many ways. It mocks God and rejects His ways. In some ways I wonder if our society hasn't exceeded the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. We read of issues today that didn't seem to exist back then. Not only do men and women go against nature in their sexual desire, they also deny the very anatomy that God gave them.

It causes one to wonder, "How long before God judges America?" How many righteous souls are causing Him to hold His judgment? Better yet, "How long before God's people stop being what He would have them to be?" *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."* (2 Corinthians 6:17) God expects His people to be different. We are to be set aside unto Him, and live according to His standard. When we act like the world, look like the world, and talk like the world; God judges us like the world. How long until there are not enough righteous souls to hold back God's judgment?

Abraham's question to God in regards to His judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah strikes at the very heart of God's plan for redeeming man. It helps us understand more about the nature of God, and the cross of Christ. With these thoughts in mind, we'd like to examine the broader scope of creation as a whole as we ask, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

No one attribute of God can be taken and placed above the others as if it were more important or somehow triumphed over all of His other attributes. The Bible does, however, inform us that there are two sides to God's nature. *"Behold therefore the goodness and*

*severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.*" (Romans 11:22) In this verse, Paul refers to these two sides of God's nature as His goodness or severity. For the purpose of our discussion we are going to refer to them as God's love and holiness.

Out of all God's attributes, only His holiness is referenced by repeating it three times. *"And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."* (Isaiah 6:3) In the Hebrew language, repeating a word three times is an expression of intensity. God's holiness is great!

A simple definition for the word "holy" is pure.<sup>1</sup> God is pure and it is this pureness that separates Him from all that He created. *"There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God."* (1 Samuel 2:2) God is infinitely pure. He is holy, holy, holy.

It is from God's holiness that we learn of His wrath. *"For our God is a consuming fire."* (Hebrews 12:29) God has a burning zeal for that which is right coupled with a perfect hatred for evil. The image of fire in connection with God's wrath lets us know that it is a constant and abiding aspect of who He is. This is the severity of God, but He is also good.

When Moses asked to see God upon Mount Sinai, God caused His goodness to pass before Moses. *"And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."* (Exodus 33:19) God is good. Goodness is embedded in the very essence of the divine nature.

This goodness can also be referred to as love. *"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."* (1 John 4:8) Love is God's self-giving affection for His creation. It is His concern for their well-being, and causes Him to act on their behalf. This brings us to the difficult state of man's rebellion against God.

After God completed His work of creation, He looked upon all that He had created. *"And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."* (Genesis 1:31) Everything that God created was good. Everything was exactly as God designed it to be, but unfortunately this did not last long. Man soon sinned against God.

Sin is the transgression of God's law. *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."* (1 John 3:4) Sin is rebellion against God. It is an attack against His holiness.

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<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 113.

As violators of God's law we are subject to His wrath. There is a price that must be paid for sin. *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."* (Matthew 6:12) This is why sin is referred to as a debt. By choosing to break the commands of God we dishonor His holiness, and for that payment must be made to God. The penalty of sin is death.

While God's holiness demands payment, His love desires mercy. *"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Timothy 2:4) Through this we see the tension that exists between the two sides of God's nature. Holiness means that there is something God must do, while love means that there is something that God wants to do! This is perplexing, and it begs us to ask a question.

How can God satisfy both sides of His nature in His dealing with sinful man? If God were to universally condemn man to hell, His holiness would be upheld but not His love. If God were to universally allow sinners to have eternal life, His love would be upheld but not His holiness. How can God act in full accord with His divine nature towards man? The answer is in the question asked by Abraham long ago. *"Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"*

As we pointed out at the beginning of our lesson, the word "right" means just and is a reference to the righteousness of God. Righteousness is another attribute of God. *"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."* (Deuteronomy 32:4) A good word to describe the righteousness of God would be consistency. God's actions are perfect, and they are always consistent with His divine nature. He is always true. His word is dependable.

God's righteousness lies at the very heart of the Biblical teachings of redemption. Throughout His word He makes the state of man very clear. *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."* (Romans 1:18) Over the next couple of chapters, the case is made that both Gentile and Jew are subject to the wrath of God for all have sinned. It is a bleak and hopeless picture of man for who among can us stand before a holy God, but then we remember God's love.

The death of Christ on the cross is the embodiment of God's righteousness. *"<sup>25</sup>Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; <sup>26</sup>To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."* (Romans 3:25, 26) Through the cross of Christ, God's righteousness is made manifest. It shows His consistency by satisfying His goodness and His severity.

The severity of God required the cross, the goodness of God provided it. God's holy wrath demands payment. If God were not a God of wrath there would be no need for a propitiation. A propitiation is an offering that turns away wrath. *"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by*

*whose stripes ye were healed.*" (1 Peter 2:24) Jesus paid the price that satisfied God's wrath toward sin.

The cross of Christ enables God to save sinners. *"<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* (Romans 1:16, 17) It is literally His power for salvation. It demonstrates how God can be righteous even though He forgives sin.

The two great works of God are creation and redemption. *"(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."* (Romans 4:17) When man sinned it started a process of deterioration in God's creation. It threatened the whole purpose of God's creation. Redemption is God's plan to correct that. Through redemption God restores His original purpose for creation. The only thing comparable to resurrection is creation. Only the God who created life can recreate life and make those who are dead live again.

The cross of Christ has a drawing power. *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."* (John 12:32) Through the cross Christ satisfied the wrath of God, but He also displayed the love of God. Such a display of love wins the hearts of man. It subdues our pride, and conquers our fears. It causes us to turn from our rebellion to humble submission unto God.

The pardon purchased by Christ on the cross is offered to all, but it is only given to those who accept it through faith. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 5:1) The resurrection of Christ is the foundation for our faith that God can give life to our dead souls. *"<sup>12</sup>Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup>And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."* (Colossians 2:12, 13) Faith, in obedience of the Gospel, is trusting that the same power God used to raise Christ from the dead; is the same power He uses on us when we are buried with Christ through baptism and raised with Him. It is a work of new creation as God gives life to our dead souls.