

11. What More Could I Have Done? (1Q 2025 God's Love and Justice)

Biblical material: John 18:37, Rom. 3:23–26, Rom. 5:8, Isa. 5:1–4, Matt. 21:33–39, Isa. 53:4, Rom. 3:1–4.

Quotes

- Parents want the very best for our children. We raise them, love them, nurture them, guide them, pray for them, and pray for them and then pray for them again! But many a broken-hearted parent has considered the path of a wayward son or daughter and wondered, 'What more could I have done?' It might surprise us though to find that the greatest of all parents, our heavenly Father, sometimes asks the very same question. In Isaiah chapter 5, the prophet composed a beautiful song about God and the loving way He cares for Israel, a vineyard He'd planted. Isaiah's not alone in imagining Israel as a vineyard, but he alone weaves this theme into a beautiful, emotional song. *Gene Giguere*
- The Lord speaks to His ancient people, comparing them to a vineyard, showing all that He has done for them, and asking 'What more could I have done?'. The answer is 'nothing'. Their response was rebellion and rejection. What of us? What more could the Lord have done for us? Nothing. What is our response to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, the fullness of the purpose of God in the nation of Israel? *Jonathan Hunt*
- Your first small step must be followed by another, and another, until you realize that *God has indeed made a way for you to know him personally.* *Henry Cloud.*
- If God isn't indebted to me -- but I am indebted to God -- then isn't everything an astonishing gift? *Ann Voskamp*

Questions

Why is it important to think that God has done everything he could? How is this demonstrated in Scripture? Is it God's intention that we feel indebted to him? Why did God express his regret about Israel's response, calling them "sour grapes"? What does all this say about the nature and character of God, especially as the great controversy plays out?

Bible summary

John 18:37 records Pilate asking Jesus if he is a king. Surely one of the most significant Scriptural passages is : "We have all sinned, and we fall far short of God's glorious ideal. Yet through the free gift of his grace, God makes us right through Christ Jesus who sets us free. God openly presented Jesus as the gift that brings peace to those trusting in him, the one who shed his blood. God did this to demonstrate he is truly good and right, for previously he would hold back and pass over sins, but now at this present time God proves he is fair and does what is right, and that he makes right those who trust in Jesus." Romans 3:23–26. Rom. 5:8 tells us that God shows his love for us since Christ died for us while we were still sinner. Isaiah 5:1–4 is the theme text that expressed God's regret over his "vineyard," Israel. Matthew 21:33–39 is Jesus' take on vineyard imagery, describing the evil tenant farmers who insult the owner, and even kill his son. Isaiah 53:4 is often misunderstood, but it is clearly talking about our mistaken assumptions about God. God always tells the truth and will be proved right (Romans 3:1–4).

Comment

The lesson title comes from God statement about his people. He states he couldn't have done more for them. So how does this fit into our quarter's theme of God's love and justice?

Many would state that the highest demonstration of God's love and justice was on the Cross. We can understand the love that draws all to him as he is "lifted up." But what about the justice element? In what way does that illustrate the concept of "What more could I have done"?

If we see God's justice as "demanding satisfaction," that executing his Son appeased him fulfilled the demands of justice, doesn't this militate against the very basis of who he is as the God of love?

In his life Christ "met" the requirements of the law. He also demonstrated that the law was not arbitrary, that it was not an impossible requirement. He experienced the penalty of "becoming sin" for us—death. God is proved right in all he is—just, if you prefer. Once again, a useful parable. But extended beyond Scripture, it can become a wholly mechanical concept—a ceremonial adjustment of our legal status, a form of heavenly accounting.

Is it, as some have said, that God is like some heavenly Darius, who has made a law he cannot change, and finds himself caught in a technical legal muddle that needs sorting out? Is the death of Christ just a way of "avoiding" the legal penalty imposed by God's rigid retributive concept of justice? Legal compensation, the provision of satisfaction for offense or infraction—these are ideas drawn not primarily from Scripture but from human legal systems. Added to this is the disquieting question of what system of justice would permit the death of an innocent being to be offered in place of the guilty. Is it ethical for individual guilt to be transferred in this way? Is God to be viewed as some harsh tyrant who cares not who suffers as long as his concept of justice is appeased? It is easy to see how some concepts of satisfaction come very close to pagan appeasement of the wrath of some angry god.

When it comes to God being just, this is simply another way of saying that God always does what is right. In fact the word in the Greek that is variously translated righteousness and justice is the same. Ideas from human "justice" that may include some degree of retaliation or even revenge have no place when applied to God. So it makes no sense to try and set his righteousness and justice in opposition, for God always and invariable does what is true, fair, and right. So recognizing that the word translated justice is the same as righteousness, and that to justify means to make right, what does God need to do to make things right? In the context of Joel this means challenging those who have abandoned their covenant relationship with God, and appealing to them to change and come back to him. The prophetic role that is so evident as we look at the various minor prophets is just that: God's message of warning, pleading for their repentance. While God certainly uses discipline, this is because he does not want us to go our own way into oblivion which is what will happen if we do not turn to him and accept his healing salvation.

Additionally, the "making right" that comes from this just God is not only about us. Remember that the rebellion began in heaven, and was not primarily about keeping the law but concerned God's trustworthiness and goodness in his government. Recall Satan's charges. If God is going to fix all that, then we need to see the cross as the clearest demonstration of what God needs to be doing, and this is much more than making our salvation possible.

As God is seen as holy and just, trustworthy and right by the whole universe there be an end to the rebellion. It is not the imposition of obedience, or the demand for submission from a dictatorial divine tyrant, but the demonstration that only by the operation of self-sacrificing love can the universe exist. God has placed himself under scrutiny to show he is not the kind of person the Devil has made him out to be. Only through his self-revelation, his own actions, can God show the truth.

Ellen White Comments

God's love has been expressed in His justice no less than in His mercy. Justice is the foundation of His throne, and the fruit of His love. It had been Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice. He sought to prove that the righteousness of God's law is an enemy to peace. But Christ shows that in God's plan they are indissolubly joined together; the one cannot exist without the other. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Psalm 85:10. {DA 762}

Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him. {MB 18}