

What Is Justice?

Read Psalm 145

In the Old Testament, justice is “conformity to an ethical or moral standard”. The word is sometimes translated “righteousness”...or “rightness” might make the meaning clearer. The root of the word is perhaps “to be straight”.

But “straight” according to what measurement? Who decides what is just? How do we know what is right? In local times and places, laws and officials set the standard. But in the big picture, what is justice? What is the standard by which justice is measured?

God is the standard. God’s character, God’s actions are our standard for justice.

But is there a standard of justice by which God Himself is measured? Is there a set of understandings by which we decide what is just and fair, even for God? After all, we observe that “God is just”. What do we mean by that? By whose standard are we measuring Him and calling Him “just”?

God is the Creator and source of all. There is no higher standard or outside measurement by which we judge that He is fair. He Himself is the standard for justice. We say He is just because He is consistent with Himself. His actions are always consistent with His perfect wisdom and perfect love.

*His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;
A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He. (Deuteronomy 32:4, NASB)*

God is not judged. He judges, for only He is able to see and know and love perfectly, without being swayed by ignorance or selfishness.

Human justice is inevitably imperfect. Human justice does not always align with God’s justice. A person can be innocent under God’s law yet guilty under human law. The reverse can also be true: one might be guilty under God’s law, even though innocent under human law.

God’s justice never changes, for He Himself is the standard, and He never changes:

*You founded the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
Even they will perish, but You endure...
You are the same,
And Your years will not come to an end. (Psalm 102:25-27, NASB)*

God is justice. To be just is to be like Him.