

## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OR JUSTICE OF GOD.

Right-  
eousness.

The Justice or Righteousness of God is the Divine holiness applied in moral government and the domain of law. As an attribute of God it is united with His holiness as being essential in His nature; it is legislative or rectoral, as He is the righteous Governor of all His creatures; and it is administrative or judicial, as He is the just Dispenser of rewards and punishments. Under these three heads may be distributed all that the Scripture teaches us on this most important subject.

I. The *Justitia Interna*, or essential righteousness of the God of holiness, need not be dwelt upon at great length.

Essential  
Righte-  
ousness.  
Internal.

1. It is His holiness regarded as subject to test; also as exhibited in His dealings with man; moreover, and lastly, it is rather the positive expression of what in holiness is negative separation from evil. All is said in that first ascription to Jehovah in the Song of Moses. *I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our 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.* The last words are עֲדִיק וְיָשָׁר הוּא, in the Septuagint δίκαιος καὶ ὁσιος, and in the Vulgate, *justus et rectus*. The Hebrew words mean nearly the same thing: straightness and rightness, when measured by the standard of perfection. Very frequently the Holy One condescends to let men apply the standard, and then the attribute of righteousness is always vindicated. After every test it is faultless, and far above human censure or rivalry: *Thy righteousness is like the great mountains: as much above man's as heaven is above earth.*

Deut.  
xxxii. 3, 4.Ps. xxxvi.  
6.

2. But it is, like the holiness of God, to be imparted to man. When we come down to the psalms and prophets, we find the righteousness of God almost taking the place of His holiness, as the attribute for the revelation of which the ages wait. When we so often read, *I bring near My righteousness; or My righteousness is near; or My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed*, we must understand more than that God's faithfulness to His covenant would be approved in the latter day. The coming of the Lord our Righteousness would bring in the everlasting

Communi-  
cated.Isa. xlv.  
13.Isa. li. 5.  
Isa. lvi. 1.Jer. xxiii.  
6.Dan ix.  
24.

- righteousness* of His saints made righteous through Him in the possession of *the righteousness of God*, the imputation and impartation of a righteous character in God's own way. Hence, as the great Atonement was to be a glorious manifestation of the Divine holiness in the expiation of sin, so also it would be a glorious manifestation of God's righteousness given in free mercy to those who were ungodly, and a *perverse and crooked generation*.
- Rom. x. 3.** .
- Deut. xxxii. 5.**  
Rectoral  
Righteousness.
- II. The Legislative or Rectoral Righteousness of God is the attribute that stamps perfectness on all the laws by which He carries on the government of the universe, whether in other worlds or in this ; and whether His laws are revealed in the constitution of man's heart, or in the written revelation of His will. What the ancient people rejoiced to remember, in their distresses, the whole world may rejoice in : *The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King : He will save us*. The entire rectoral administration of man's affairs has been conducted with reference to the great salvation gradually revealed ; and this must be remembered in every estimate of the moral administration of
- Isa. xxxiii. 22.**
- Ps. xix. 7.** Jehovah. We are required to believe that His law is *perfect* : perfect as the expression of the Divine holiness ; perfect therefore as the standard of right ; perfect in its universal adaptation ; perfect in its requirements ; perfect in its sanctions. All this is summed into one sentence by St. Paul : *The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good*. Returning back, however, to the attribute of the Lawgiver, we are bound to believe that all ordinances are righteous : first, with regard to the constitution and nature of His subjects ; and, secondly, as answering strictly to His own Divine aim, whether understood or not. To believe these two things is by anticipation to answer every objection
- Rom. vii. 12.**
- Ps. cxix. 142.** *Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth*. Because He is righteous, His law is true both to Himself and to the nature of His creatures.
- Right as to the Creature.**
1. It is necessary to believe that under a righteous Lawgiver no living creature is overburdened with obligation : in other words, whether we discern it or not, God is a righteous Lawgiver in every department where He reveals His law. Upon every rational spirit He creates He imprints the law of obedience and love perfect and supreme ; and that law is in strict harmony with

creaturely nature : it is the Creator's right and it is right to the creature. But He is pleased as the Moral Governor of the universe to ordain for each a term of probation : in His righteousness He makes dependence upon His Spirit the law of continued obedience and happiness ; and the penalty of separation from His will, or sin, is separation from His presence. And, apart from the commentary upon this which history gives, every creature must say Amen : *even so, Lord God almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.* Nothing is imposed upon creaturely duty, or demanded of the creaturely will, that is beyond the creature's capacity and obligation.

Rev. xv.

2. The righteousness of Divine laws implies also that they are conformed to His aim and purpose, and in this sense right. It is well to believe that they are equal and just in their relation to the creaturely nature. But that is not all. They must be measured by another standard : they are right in their perfect adaptation to the Divine plans. Here comes in our apology for the Divine Lawgiver : His own supreme Theodicy, or vindication of Himself. It is not given to us to understand the mysteries of the hidden rectoral administration of God. We must believe now that it is righteous ; as we shall certainly one day know that it is. *Clouds and darkness are round about Him :* unbelief forms out of these clouds, and writes upon this darkness, innumerable matters of questioning. But *righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne :* behind, all is clear, steadfast, and perfect right. This must terminate human strife with the Divine Lawgiver. This must settle all our disputes about the difference between legislation for angels and legislation for man ; the law of Paradise with its sanctions ; the gradual and slow revelation of the Divine will to the world ; the eternal enactments of Sinai and the special and limited enactment for the Theocracy, with its occasional statutes that were not good, not good, that is, for permanent application. Ten thousand difficulties are swept away, rather are obviated, if we remember that the righteousness of God's moral government is to be measured, not only by the creature's nature,—it will always bear to be thus measured,—but by the design and final end of the economy of His will.

Right by  
a Divine  
StandardPs. xcvi.  
2Ezekiel  
xx. 25.

III. The judicial administration of His own laws demands this

Judicial

**Righteousness.** attribute of righteousness in the equal bestowment of reward and punishment. This is called, in human affairs, Distributive Justice: Remunerative, on the one hand, and Punitive on the other.

**Heb. xii. 23.**  
**The Judge.**

1. The Administration of *God the Judge of all* takes up the sanctions of His law as imposed upon moral beings in probation, and cannot be separated from its relation to sin. It indeed gives the Supreme the new office of JUDGE, even as His love gives Him the new name of Saviour. It is Judicial righteousness as it assures us of the eternal rectitude of the administration: *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* This appeal of Abraham, in the beginning of history, expresses as a question the faith of all who believe in God to the end of time, and will be confirmed for ever at the close of history. Reverence accepts this necessary truth and commits to it with confidence the destinies of all that exist. But the idea of God's judicial righteousness must be analysed into some of its applications.

**Gen xviii. 25.**

**Personality.**

2. This is the attribute of a Personal Judge; and all that His personality demands must be remembered. Those who deny that the Absolute Being can think, and feel, and will, and judge, renounce the God of the Bible. Even if they take refuge in the thought that He hath committed all judgment to the Son, the very committal to the Son is a personal act. Or if they fall back upon the notion that justice in the Judge means only the law according to which sin is made its own punishment and goodness its own reward they gain nothing by this. It is a personal Judge Who ordains this connection and sees that it is not interrupted. There is but a step between this idea and that which makes God and the universe, physical and ethical, subject to the eternal law of the fitness of things. This reduces the Supreme to the position of an administrator of a law higher than Himself, after the manner of a human judge. But the very expression "Nature or Fitness of Things," betrays its own inconsistency. Admitted difficulties swell into contradictory absurdities and even blasphemies, if we forget that the Administrator of His own laws is a Judge. He does not merely watch the current that sets in for righteousness, and guide it; nor watch the current that sets in for evil, and restrain it. He is a personal Divider between good and evil: in the perfection of that principle which human nature acknowledges

in itself and never can be robbed of, that every good and every evil deserves its reward or punishment, and that justice requires every man to have his own.

3. God is the righteous Judge in His constant administration in the present world. This introduces us at once to the question: How can a personal Ruler of strict righteousness administer His holy laws and yet permit sinners to live? The answer is given by the blessed truth to which all the attributes converge, that the mediation and sacrifice of Christ secures His righteousness in the administration of mercy. He is just in the punishment of all sin; His incarnate Son was *made sin for us*; and the infinite worthiness of the sacrificial obedience unto death of *Jesus Christ the Righteous* is the *propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*, to the end of time. He is just in the pardon of sin; for the atonement of Christ belongs to everyone who makes it his by faith: *That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus; Faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*. Moreover, He is just during the present dispensation in mingling the punishment of sin with that corrective and disciplinary chastisement of offenders which still labours for their reformation, and so deters them from ruin. The intercession of the Most Holy Son of God, so precious to His Father, has its unbounded rights; and justice to them is the secret of that mingled mercy and judgment which makes up the Divine government of the present world. But the absolute righteousness of the Judge has its rights also; and those who resist and reject the Atonement perish. But these are topics which belong to a later stage.

Under an Economy of Grace.

2 Cor. v. 21.

1 John ii 2.

Rom. iii. 26.

1 John i. 9.

4. The judicial righteousness of God waits for its final manifestation until the great day, the solemn characteristic of which will be its vindication of the absolute justice of the Supreme in retribution of reward and punishment. The subject of the Future Judgment is far in advance. But we may here consider its relation to this attribute of the Judge.

Final Display

(1.) Generally, the justice of God will then, as it must now, be maintained in its awful consistency with itself. We have all along regarded it as looking with equal eye on the good and on the evil; assigning to each its right. So will it be on the great

Just Distribution.

day. The anomalies of the present dispensation will be corrected, and shown to have been only the apparent confusion which prepared for perfect harmony. Justice will be clear when it judges finally; and from its decision there will be no appeal. As an attribute of God, it will assert its reality and integrity. Two mistakes are often made on this subject. One is, to regard justice as dealing only with the sin of man. Now, it is true that one branch of the whole family of terms belonging to this attribute has been almost entirely appropriated to punishment and doom. But God is the just Judge in His rewards as well as in His displeasure. Another is, on the contrary, to merge justice in benevolence: as if the righteous displeasure of God against sin, restrained by His mercy, was limited to the reformation of the offender, the fatherly correction of his fault, the prevention of sin in others, and so forth. Up to a certain stage it is true that mercy and judgment work together so unitedly, so inseparably—both rejoicing while the gentler attribute has the richer joy—that it might appear as if God had forgotten to be angry with sin. Until the blow finally falls in this world, and not always even then, we know not if the punishment has not been only correction. But at the great day there will be no longer doubt.

**Matt. xxii.**  
13, 14

*Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.* The unclothed sinner is not cast out for reformation here. We avoid both errors when we hold fast distributive righteousness. *There is no respect of persons with God, Who will render to every man according to his deeds.*

**Rom. ii.**  
6, 11.

**Righteous  
Retribu-  
tion.**

(2.) There is a profound and awful reality in the vindictory, retributive justice of God. The specific nature of final punishment we have not now to do with: only with its righteous character. In that attribute let all who are oppressed by the dread of the prospect rejoice: let them feel its strong consolation. Be the doctrine what it may, and the language in which it is announced be clothed with whatsoever terror, still it remains that all the multitudes of the creatures whom God shall judge will fall into Righteous Hands. But theological speculation finds it hard to repose in this. It strives to take from the notion of justice what is of its essence; and would make it only goodness tempered by

wisdom. "In justitia punitiva bonitas cum sapientia administratur; notio justitiæ resolvitur in notionem sapientiæ et bonitatis." This idea has played a great part in modern theology, though its first clear expression was Origen's: "Ex quibus constat, unum eundemque esse justum et bonum legis et evangeliorum Deum, et benefacere cum justitia et cum bonitate punire." Again let it be said that prevention of sin and correction or amendment of the sinner are not of the essence of justice: this idea is imported into it by the definition. It required the awful sacrifice of the Son of God to unite justice and mercy; but no new definition of either is introduced by the Atonement. Within the range of the cross the definition may be accepted on certain terms. But the cross is not within the view of either God or man for ever. Those who project its benefit into the intermediate world have no Scriptural ground for their charity. But the whole strain of Scripture is against those who deny that there is, in the strictest sense of the term, a *Justitia Retributiva et Rependens* at the day of final and eternal judgment.

(3.) The rewards of a righteous judgment are always dispensed to those who merit them. But it is obvious that here we are on ground which must be carefully ventured on. The righteousness of the Judge in acknowledging all that is good in man is as abundantly asserted as His righteousness in the awards of punishment. But whatever of praiseworthy there can be found in human nature is of God, whether as the effect of His preventing grace or the fruit of His renewing Spirit; while the evil within him is his own. There can be no mention of merit in any case, save as the word is used in the Divine condescension. He Who only crowns the work of His own hands in glorifying the sanctified believer, nevertheless speaks of his own works of faith as matter of reward. *God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.* This term *ἀδικος* is used once more concerning God the Judge: *Is God unrighteous Who taketh vengeance (I speak as a man)? God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?* In both cases the impossibility of any injustice in God, whether as *ὁ ἐπιφέρων τὴν ὀργήν*, or as being capable *ἐπιλαθέσθαι τοῦ ἔργου ἡμῶν*, is left to the natural inference of every reason. He cannot, in the nature of things, that is in harmony with His

Righteousness in Rewards

Heb. vi.  
10.

Rom. iii  
5, 6.

own nature, be unjust in either respect. The rewards of the distributive righteousness of God are reckoned not of debt but of *grace*; and the whole tenor of Scripture proclaims that the allotments of the last day will be measured out according to the strictest rule of right: *ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ*. St. Paul calls the last day the revelation of the *righteous judgment of God*, *δικαιοκρισίας τοῦ Θεοῦ*, the only instance of this impressive word. He teaches here as elsewhere that, as the punishment of evil-doers will be the fruit of their own doings, and also the direct infliction of judgment, so likewise the reward of the blessed will be the righteous decision of judgment, as well as the harvest of their own sowing.

Truth.

THE TRUTH OR FAITHFULNESS OF GOD.

These attributes—which are really one under two aspects—are, as it were, the supporters and guarantees of the Divine Justice. It may be affirmed that they are never referred to save in connection with that supreme economy which reveals the Righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

In His  
Revela-  
tions.

1. Truth as a Divine perfection represents the absolute correspondence of all His revelations with the reality; and it may be referred to His representations of His own nature, to His revelation of the great system of grace under which He governs the world, and to His word of revelation generally whether in whole or in part.

1 John v.  
20.  
Johann x vii.  
3.

(1.) God is *the true God*, and *the only true God*. It is observable that in both these passages, which are unique, the revelation of God is connected with the Son. He is the only veritable God, in opposition to every fictitious being; and He is the God of veracity in thus revealing Himself. We have here a sublime *petitio principii*: our God is the only real God, because He Who is true declares it. But the attribute is not here objective: it is rather the subjective Divine veracity in all His revelations of Himself. As to His nature, His Triune essence, His attributes, our relations to Him and His to us, and all that concerns the essentials of our theology, we are dependent on the truth of the Creator, Who hath formed us in His image and implanted those instincts and that consciousness of