

JOB 8:3

DOES GOD PERVERT JUSTICE?

PRELIMS. I have tried since some years to find what is the ‘classic’ book on the biblical doctrine of justice. I still don’t know! I was amazed recently to read that ‘the latest edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica contains no article under the heading "Justice."’! Bildad the Shuhite had some understanding of what justice was – and that God dispensed justice!

There is no doubt but the Scriptures speak a lot about justice – to Israel, God described Himself as “*the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is **not partial** and takes **no bribe**. He executes **justice** for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing*” [Deu 10:17,18] It is **just** that the fatherless, widow, alien, **should** be provided for!

Elihu in replying to Job’s situation said “*the Almighty will **not pervert justice***” [Job 34:12] David said “*But the LORD sits enthroned forever; He has **established His throne for justice**, and He judges the world with **righteousness**; He judges the peoples with **uprightness***” [Psa 9:7] God’s **whole government**, on **earth**, His throne is operated in righteousness and justice.

David said “*Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever. **For the LORD loves justice**; He will not forsake His saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off*” [Psa 37:28] Its **justice** that the wicked be ‘cut off’ and the saints ‘preserved’! Isaiah said that those who “*mourn in Zion*” (for the right reason) “*shall have everlasting **joy***” Why? “***For I the Lord love justice**; I hate robbery & wrong; I will **faithfully** give them their **recompense***” [Isa 61:8] Justice certainly means giving blessings to the righteous, and giving to the wicked, their due!

Pagans have this same view: That people receive justice in this life here and now on earth “*No doubt this man is a murderer.*”

*Though he has escaped from the sea, **Justice** has not allowed him to live*”[Acts 28:4] Then we read, they changed their minds! Why? Because they saw that nothing happened to Paul!

After the exile, Israel complained about the way things were turning out for them, so that Malachi “*You have **wearied the Lord**... (by saying)... **Where is the God of justice?**”[Mal 2:17] People **expect** justice in life from God! That is because God has **revealed** Himself in Scripture to be a **just** God! **Angels** think so! Look: “*And I heard the **angel** in charge of the waters say, ‘**Just** are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments*”[Rev 16:15]*

What about the matter of **salvation**? How does God **justly** judge the person who **never** heard the **gospel**? What do **you** think is just judgment regarding those who never heard. It is reckoned that **one-sixth** of all those who have been born have never understood the gospel!

Terrance L. Tiesson states ‘God holds people accountable **only** for the revelation that He has given to them. This does **not** mean that every person who does not receive the gospel is not condemned. All of them are sinners needing God’s salvation; they **are** justly condemned for sinful refusal to acknowledge God, to thank Him and to believe what He makes known about Himself, even if it is only through the means of general revelation. The **ground** of their condemnation, however, can only be the revelation that they received; it **cannot** be the revelation that they have **not** received (else that would be unjust-DCM). **All** have received divine revelation, and all have sinned by failing to obey what **they** understand to be morally right or to believe and live according to what **they** know to be true. Paul clearly states this principle of **proportionate responsibility** in Romans 2:12 “*all who have sinned apart from the law will also **perish** apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law*”. By the

‘law’, he means the law as given by special revelation to Moses. He is not suggesting that anyone is completely without knowledge of God’s law. That would render all the unevangelised sinless. On the contrary, he asserts that the Gentiles also **have** a knowledge of God’s moral will through their **consciences**, the law of God “*written in their hearts*” [Romans 2:15] ... Those who **violate** the voice of **conscience sin** against God...

‘...The critical point being made by Paul, then, regardless of what one understands by ‘conscience’, is that God has left **no one** without moral witness, and we are obligated always to obey this eternal voice, though we must also educate it by the normative written Word of God. We are judged, however, according to the knowledge we **have**, not according to a knowledge we do **not** have. Those who do not have Scripture will not be judged according to Scripture [Rom 2:12]. On this basis we acknowledge that people who lived **before** Jesus were saved by grace through faith, though not through faith *in Jesus*. They did not know about Jesus, and so, (God being just-DCM) they were not obligated to believe in Him. When that knowledge came to them, of course, their obligation changed... In short, judgment will be according to knowledge.’

In both sermon by Paul to Gentiles, judgment is proportionate to revelation. To the ‘idolater in Lystra, Paul said “*in past generations He [God] allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet He has not left Himself without a witness in doing good- giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy*” [Acts 14:16,17]. ...His point is twofold: First, God **had** given them some revelation in the **form** of His **providential** care for them. By honouring God as God and **giving Him thanks**. And second, in Paul’s generation, they were receiving a **clearer** revelation of God’s truth and of His will so their obligation was **increasing** accordingly.’

‘To the philosophers of Athens, Paul is even more explicit about this principle. He says that “*God has overlooked the times of human ignorance*” but that “*now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead*”[Acts 17:30,31]. Clearly there is an ignorance that is not culpable. When the gospel concerning the resurrected Jesus is preached and the Spirit illumines the hearers, the ignorance is dispelled and God’s ‘overlooking’ is, therefore, no longer appropriate.’

‘In short, **no one** is without guilt, but not everyone for the same sins; and each person’s guilt is proportionate to their knowledge...’. Those who do **not know of Christ** are **not guilty** of **rejecting Him!** ‘Those who are ignorant of Jesus through no fault of their own are **not** condemned for not believing in Him, **but** they **have done** many **other sins** **consciously** and **willingly**, and for these they face they face the righteous condemnation of God.’

I believe, that to believe **otherwise** from what Tiesson is telling us here, is to make God anything but a God of **justice!**

Two Great Lessons for us! **One:** Joe Bloggs who walks past the door of Dens Road Church, whose mother is a druggie and whose father is a drunkard, in all probability has never heard of the gospel - he is **not** guilty of **Christ rejection**. He will go to hell for the sins that his own conscience condemns him for – but he **cannot be saved** - unless he hears about Jesus Christ! This leads us to the Second Lesson...

The **Church** has the **great responsibility** of spreading the gospel. Else no one can be saved and everyone goes to hell. God has given to the Church that **special authority!**