

SESSION 3

GOD IS JUST



*When it comes to fighting for justice,
who is your favorite character?*

QUESTION #1

#BSFLjust

THE POINT

God is always just.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We love the idea of justice triumphing over injustice.

In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Edmond Dantés was a talented and handsome man of faith who was betrayed by three jealous and greedy men. Edmond was publicly declared dead even as his betrayers conspired to have him locked away in the terrible island dungeon called *Château d'If*. Worst of all, one of the betrayers later married Edmond's fiancé, Mercédès, as a way of offering comfort to her after Edmond's loss.

Where was the justice? Hopeless, bitter, and forgotten, Edmond nearly lost his faith. Punished for a crime he didn't commit, God seemed nowhere to be found. In the end, however, Edmond escaped. After many years, both he and the evil-doing trio received their just rewards.

In this session, we'll explore why we can have confidence that God's justice will always win out in the end.

WHAT DOES **THE BIBLE** SAY?

Ezekiel 18:21-24, 30-32 (HCSB)

21 “Now if the wicked person turns from all the sins he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is just and right, he will certainly live; he will not die.

22 None of the transgressions he has committed will be held against him. He will live because of the righteousness he has practiced.

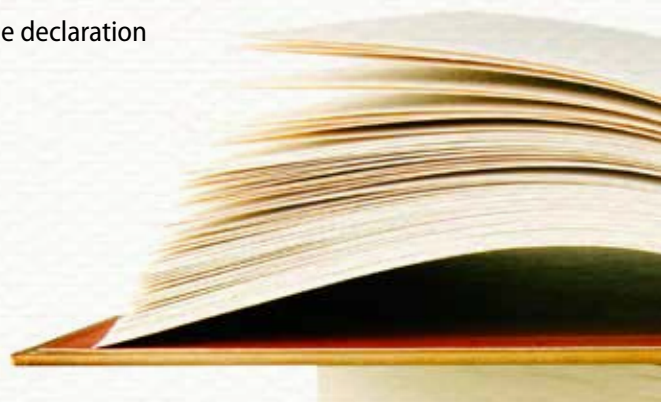
23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?” This is the declaration of the Lord GOD. “Instead, don’t I take pleasure when he turns from his ways and lives?

24 But when a righteous person turns from his righteousness and practices iniquity, committing the same detestable acts that the wicked do, will he live? None of the righteous acts he did will be remembered. He will die because of the treachery he has engaged in and the sin he has committed.

30 “Therefore, house of Israel, I will judge each one of you according to his ways.” This is the declaration of the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so they will not be a stumbling block that causes your punishment.

31 Throw off all the transgressions you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die, house of Israel?

32 For I take no pleasure in anyone’s death.” This is the declaration of the Lord GOD. “So repent and live!”



Ezekiel 18:21-23

Have you ever known someone who lived a life of excess, yet seemed to suffer no ill effects? That's the scenario that troubled the people of Judah. They saw Jerusalem lying in ruins from the Babylonian invasion. Those who survived the onslaught were forcibly taken to Babylon. The Jews cried out to God for answers.

In response, God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 18, God candidly addressed the charge that His actions against His people were unfair. To fully appreciate this passage, let's focus on two key words:

- 1. Justice.** The biblical concept of divine justice is almost perfectly captured in the statue of Lady Justice at the U.S. Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C. Blindfolded, she holds a double-edged sword in her right hand and a set of scales in her left. The blindfold signifies her impartiality. The sword illustrates the discerning character of truth (see Heb. 4:12), and the scales represent the exacting nature of justice (see Prov. 20:23). Scripture calls God the "righteous judge" (see Ps. 7:11). As such, complaints about His fairness are unfounded. God is just.
- 2. Repentance.** Repentance involves turning away from sin and committing to love and obey God. Here's the great news: any person who approaches God in this way will receive pardon. God will always act favorably and mercifully toward the one who turns to Him with a repentant heart.

God is just in how He responds to the unrighteous who repent. Let's not miss the wonderful truth about God's character in verse 23. God doesn't enjoy punishing people—not even His enemies. He delights in seeing the wicked turn from their evil ways. God desires for all to come to repentance (see 2 Pet. 3:9).



Why does it sometimes bother us when someone gets "let off the hook"?

QUESTION #2

How do these verses serve as both good news and bad news?

QUESTION #3

Ezekiel 18:24

After discussing the unrighteous who repent, God addressed the apparently righteous person who rebels. In this verse, God called out seemingly righteous individuals who become spiritually distracted and pursue a life indistinguishable from nonbelievers.

This scenario also points to the fairness and justice of God, even though it went against the common thinking of the Jews. The Jews were relying on their privileged heritage and past obedience to release them from divine punishment. They misunderstood what it meant to be God's chosen people and expected their special standing to free them from any consequences.

Christians possess eternal security in Christ, but that doesn't give us a free pass to sin. Believers and unbelievers alike will be held accountable for their actions. The only difference is that the believer's eternal home with Christ in heaven is never in jeopardy (see 1 Cor. 3:11-15). Once obtained, salvation is secure. But Christians certainly can (and do) suffer the same earthly consequences for their sins as those who don't know God.

The truth of eternal security should never result in taking a jaded or blasé attitude toward holy living. Sin is serious. While we sometimes fail to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and become disobedient to God, consistent sin should not characterize our lives.

God is just in how He responds to the seemingly righteous who rebel. God never produces a false verdict. He always knows all the facts, and He renders the right judgment. As such, God remains righteous and completely justified in whatever punishment and consequences He deals to the person He finds guilty. We can be assured that the approach God takes is always perfectly appropriate. Moreover, He always puts the offending person or party in the best possible position for repentance and restoration.

Why don't we take sin as seriously as we should?

QUESTION #4

Ezekiel 18:30-32

Ezekiel 18 helps us see two important things about God:

- 1. God always gets justice right.** While earthly courts may attempt to be fair and unbiased, God's court always renders exacting, authoritative, and sound justice.
- 2. God always wants our best.** His judgment is undergirded by a heart of compassion. God is not only our Judge, He is also our Defender and Mediator (see 1 Tim. 2:5-6).

All God requires is that we repent and turn from all our transgressions. When we confess our sin, God completely forgives us. That's amazing news for two reasons. First, when God forgives, He forgets. Jeremiah gave this declaration from God: "For I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sin" (Jer. 31:34).

Second, God relieves us of guilt. There is nothing more painful than a guilty conscience. Guilt can affect us spiritually, emotionally, physically, and relationally. Thankfully, a person who repents is not only set free from his or her sin, but also from the guilt associated with that sin (see Ps. 32:5). If you are forgiven, you can release the guilt that you—and others—hold over you.

Forgiveness doesn't remove the effects of our sin on either ourselves or victims of our behavior. What's done cannot always be undone. Therefore, a forgiven person takes full responsibility for the past, acknowledges his or her actions and any pain that was caused, and seeks to correct any damage caused by his or her actions as necessary. But that's where it stops. There is no obligation to bear false guilt for already-forgiven sins that Christ has paid for in full.

God is just. He dealt with your sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And now that your sin has been dealt with, it's over. Justice is done. Furthermore, the completed justice of God means that you won't have to carry the burden of your sin any longer. You're free to live in Christ.

God is both just and forgiving. How does that combination lead to a full life for those who follow Him?

QUESTION #5

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

Choose one of the following statements.

How would you respond in light of what you've learned about God's justice?

"I know I'm going to heaven because I've done more good than bad."

"God can't love me because He knows what I've done."

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"God acts justly from within, not in obedience to some imaginary law. He is the Author of all laws, and acts like Himself all the time!"

—A. W. TOZER

LIVE IT OUT

How will you respond to God's justice?

- ▶ **Choose freedom.** Confess a specific sin or sinful pattern to God. Receive His forgiveness and choose to move forward with the knowledge that He has set you free from that sin.
- ▶ **Seek justice in the world.** Look for situations where justice seems to be lacking. Use these situations as reminders to pray that God would carry out His justice in the world.
- ▶ **Close the gap between your reputation and character.** Ask a fellow believer to hold you accountable in areas where you struggle with sin. Commit to integrity between how others know you and how God knows you.



You may be experiencing unfair circumstances in your life, but rest in the fact that God is always just and He always delivers. Whether in this life or the next, God's righteousness will triumph.

Your Kingdom Come



I'll never forget our family's first visit to Walt Disney World. My wife, Renée, and I waited until all five of our kids were out of diapers before booking the vacation. Our youngest had turned 3, and our oldest was 16. So we bought our tickets and reserved the hotel rooms. I even picked up guidebooks on how to avoid long lines. Our first night in Orlando, Fla., we planned to visit the "Hoop-Dee-Do Musical Revue," but on the way, our 6-year-old son, Pete, was hurt. As we walked to the venue, Pete saw a playground, ran to it, tripped, and hit his face on the first step.



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My group's prayer requests

A series of 15 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

My thoughts