

And Justice For All

The first English words I ever learned, besides “What’s up, Doc?”, were the words to the Pledge of Allegiance. When work moved my family stateside, my parents quickly enrolled me at the local elementary school. I was both terrified and excited. While I felt like an alien among all of my classmates, I loved my teacher, Ms. McDonald, and was thrilled about our school’s mascot - the Wass Wolves! Every morning at Wass Elementary School in Troy, Michigan all the little fifth grade girls and boys would stand up next to their desks, face the American flag, place their right hand on their heart, and recite the pledge in unison. Can you still recite it today? I am certain you can:

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America,
And to the Republic for which stands,
One nation under God,
Indivisible, with liberty **and justice for all.**

Do you remember participating in this morning routine? For many children it is a formative exercise helping them to appreciate traits that are to be the foundation of community and society in general: unity, freedom, and justice. Maybe more importantly, these values are firmly established in the character of God. **The God of the Bible is eternally triune, the Rescuer of those shackled in sin, and the just Judge of all** (Ecc 3:17; see also Isa 33:22).

Now to be honest, when justice crosses my mind, it is usually from the perspective of having been wronged. I desire God to fix a wrong perpetrated against me. I often equate justice with “fairness”, in particular when I am the one holding the short end of the stick. Consequently, I selfishly and presumptuously wag my proverbial finger at God and label Him as heartless, indifferent, and unjust when His justice fails to align with my expectations of equity (Mal 2:17). Rarely do I realize that **God’s standard of justice consistently finds me as the perpetrator and breaker of His law.** The truth is, you, me, and everybody else has either been wronged or wronged someone else, because everybody sins and falls short of God’s perfect standard (Rom 3:23). We are all guilty before the Judge and awaiting our rightful sentence. The surprising twist is that God functions both as Judge and Justifier. The prophet Malachi details God’s plan of justice in the following manner:

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says

the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years." (Malachi 3:1-4)

In these verses God promises His people that justice will be served. God's plan will include a messenger who will **clear** the way for Jesus' first arrival as a sacrificial substitute (see also Jn 1:23; 1:29). Furthermore, the Messiah will **come** a second time to His Temple, fulfilling all of the Old Testament promises, and **cleanse** His people, Israel. Those who repent and believe in Jesus' substitutionary work will be declared righteous. The verse that follows (v. 5) indicates that those who reject the provided Substitute, Jesus, will ultimately be found guilty and **condemned**. In short, God's justice is satisfied through the punishment of either the Substitute or the condemnation of the sinner.

The amazing conclusion that we must come to is simple: God's justice is right and good. He will NEVER be unjust. His goal is twofold: first, it is to refine us like silver (Mal 3:3) in order that Christ's image might be reflected in our soul. Second, it is to declare us righteous in Christ and to perfectly judge His enemies. Glory to God for His compassion and abundant pardon!

Isaiah 55:6-9 (ESV) - "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; **let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."