

# The Essence of God, Part 2

We concluded our last session with a discussion of God's righteousness and established that His righteousness is perfect. He has no sin and cannot sin. For him to compromise His righteousness in any way would destroy it and render Him unfit as God. His righteousness is only one-half of His holiness or integrity.

## Justice

The other half of God's holiness is His justice. The righteousness of God and the justice of God work together; each supports the other. Collectively, they are called God's holiness or integrity. These two interdependent attributes form the core of God's personal and perfect moral code, as well as the application of that code in all situations. While God's righteousness can stand alone as a perfect moral code, it requires the justice of God to be enacted. Similarly, the justice of God can stand alone, but it depends on the righteousness of God as a standard for its action.

Let's compare it to our modern legal system. In our analogy, the righteousness of God is like the set of laws that govern society. It says we must stop at red lights and that we cannot commit robbery or murder.

On the other hand, God's justice is like both the police and the courts that enforce laws. It is the police officer who gives you a ticket for running a red light and arrests you if you try to rob a store or commit murder. It is also the judge who fines you for the ticket and sentences you to prison for the robbery or murder.

As part of His justice, God is fair; it is impossible for Him to be unfair: "...for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or partiality or taking bribes" (2 Chronicles 19:7b). God's judgments are perfect. Unlike a human judge who can make an error in judgment when applying the law, or sometimes even be bribed to bend the law, God cannot make such errors or accept bribes. His judgments are perfect and fairly applied.

God can't be bribed. Do not think for a moment that you can promise God something in exchange for some action on His part. His justice will not allow it. Blessing is based on capacity or need, not on promises of action from man. I laugh when I hear of people in difficult situations trying to bribe

God. “Get me out of this, and I will go back to church.” Of course, they believe that because they were delivered from the disaster, God agreed to the bribe. He did not. God is a perfect judge who cannot be bribed.

**Deuteronomy 32:4** The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.

God’s justice functions in the realm of punishment, and He shows no favoritism (Romans 2:11). In other words, God does not judge based on your economic status or external appearance; He looks inward to the soul. God has two ways to express His justice to believers. To mature believers, God grants blessings because they have the capacity for them. To carnal or backsliding believers, God’s justice enacts divine discipline (Hebrews 12:6).

**Key phrase:** Justice administers what righteousness demands.

If a violation of God’s righteousness occurs, God’s righteousness demands that His justice to respond accordingly. This principle cannot be broken without compromising one or both of these qualities because doing so would mean that trait is no longer perfect, and God would no longer be worthy of our worship. God will not and cannot compromise His own attributes.

This means that in vindicating any believer as part of the angelic conflict, God cannot compromise His attributes (Romans 5). He can have nothing to do with sin except to judge it. He cannot simply overlook the sin issue and wish it away. He cannot just wave His hand and dismiss sin. Even though the Bible uses the term “forgiven” in the context of man’s sins, He cannot, even in His majesty, simply say sin is forgiven. That would compromise His integrity. Sin must be judged. His righteousness and justice demand it.

If it were not for the ministry of Jesus Christ on the Cross, God would have to compromise His integrity to save us. Man is imperfect, and in this fallen state, man cannot meet God’s perfect righteous standard through his own efforts. Human righteousness, -R, cannot have fellowship with +R, God’s perfect righteousness. But God found a way to handle the issue of sin without compromising His integrity. That way was, of course, through the

vicarious, efficacious, spiritual death on the Cross of the perfect substitute for sinful mankind. While Christ was being judged for our sins, He was physically alive but spiritually dead.

**Matthew 27:4** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Because He could have nothing to do with sin except to judge it, God the Father had to spiritually separate Himself from the Son while the sins of the world were imputed to Him. Fully separated from God and without the indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, the man, faced all that horror alone.

“He bore the guilt of the sinner upon Himself” (Romans 5:12; 6:23). The penalty for sin is death, which includes spiritual death through separation from God and physical death. Since no human could meet the standard, God had to find a substitute to satisfy His own perfect righteousness. This was accomplished through the spiritual and physical death of the only One qualified in His perfection to go to the Cross and take man’s punishment. Christ’s death on the Cross and the judgment of man’s sins upheld the integrity of the Father. Because His righteousness is satisfied, God is now able to pardon and justify the sinner who accepts His free gift of saving grace.

**Romans 3:21** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

God provided a way to impute His perfect righteousness to us through Christ's work on the Cross.

**2 Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This righteousness is received by man solely through faith (Romans 3:21-22; 4:5-6; 13; 9:30; Philemon 3:9). With God's own righteousness in us, imputed at salvation, God's righteousness is satisfied. +R can have fellowship with +R. And He is justified in saving the believer. God's justice executes what righteousness demands – salvation.

**John 3:17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.  
<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

The unbeliever who fails to take advantage of the benefits of the Cross also faces God's justice. If God's righteousness (+R) is absent in the individual, God's perfect righteousness must condemn man's relative righteousness (–R). God's justice executes what righteousness demands – condemnation.

The work of Christ not only released the justice of the Father for total expression but also made it possible for the Father's justice to remain intact. Unfortunately, many churches today do not grasp this simple principle. Instead, they focus on God's love. They cannot conceive of God as anything but a God of love, so they cannot understand how He could condemn anyone. Without understanding God's perfect righteousness and justice, and how these cannot be compromised, their only point of contact becomes God's love. However, God's love is not the primary point of contact with mankind; it is His justice.

## Love

As previously mentioned, God's holiness (or integrity) is not listed as an attribute because it fundamentally consists of two other attributes: God's righteousness and justice. God demonstrates His holiness through His righteousness by showing His abhorrence of sin and evil. He also reveals

His holiness through His justice, which is expressed in His judgment upon sin, using the perfect standard of His own righteousness. Additionally, He exhibits His holiness through His deliverance, which involves His righteousness condemning sin and His justice providing the blessing of eternal life to those who believe, while administering eternal condemnation to those who reject Christ.

The holiness of God encompasses His complete perfection, particularly His perfect righteousness and justice. God's perfect justice combines with His perfect righteousness to judge and uphold that pure standard. What God's righteousness condemns, His justice disciplines; and what His righteousness approves, His justice blesses. Therefore, any discipline or blessing for the believer is always based on God's perfect righteousness.

God expresses His holiness to humanity through His love. We say that God is love.

**1 John 4:8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Experiencing the personal, unchanging love of God is a profound experience. That love is manifested in both discipline and blessing. As parents, we discipline our children when they misbehave because we love them and want them to learn and practice good moral behavior. In Scripture, the Greek word for "chastise" has the connotation of training or learning. God uses chastisement to teach us, just as we do with our children. Out of the discipline is supposed to flow blessing. And that is exactly what Hebrews 12:11 tells us.

**Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

What the righteousness of God approves, the justice of God blesses, but His justice also disciplines what His righteousness disapproves. Similar to human parents, both blessings and discipline are acts of love. God's discipline seeks to motivate us to enjoy "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." It aims to encourage the wayward believer to return to a state of righteous behavior, or what we call elsewhere "inside his area of operations," and to be filled with the Spirit.

The point of contact with God is His justice, but His justice is administered in His love.

The word “love” is used quite casually by people, especially when used as a verb. Man’s idea of love is very different from God’s love. There is a significant difference between human love and God’s love. In human love, there is usually something about the object of our love that makes the object lovable. Human love relies on an emotional response to the object of love. With human love, the merit lies in the object of love.

However, with God’s love, the merit is not in the object but in the subject—the Person doing the loving, God Himself. Unlike human love, there is no emotion in God’s love. God’s love depends entirely on *His* character, not on how cute, sweet, and lovable we are.

In human love, the object of that love has all the merit; something about them attracts us, and we respond emotionally to that. We love them because of who and/or what THEY are. But we humans are fallen and depraved, and there is little in us that God, in His perfect righteousness, can find to love. Yet God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son... (John 3:16). How can God love the world?

He certainly cannot love a man on the basis of a man’s merit. Nothing that a person is or does can ever measure up to God’s perfect standard. God loves “the world” because of His own personal integrity, in other words, His perfect righteousness and perfect justice.

God’s perfect righteousness requires that He deal fairly and properly with humans, and His righteousness itself can never be compromised. God’s justice executes what His righteousness demands. Through His righteousness and by the means of His justice, God is free to show His love for His creation.

Since human love depends on the merit of the object, man cannot express this kind of love on his own. Instead, divine love is manifested in the human heart by the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 5:5** ... God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

“Poured into” comes from the Greek word *ekcheo*, meaning to “pour out” or “shed forth.” The love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit as a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) in those who walk by means of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). There is no suggestion that divine love is a human product, but rather it is produced by the Holy Spirit. It is God’s love produced in and out through the believer by the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit produces this divine love in you, and you express it outward toward others. THIS is how we love others. It is loving not with a sappy and fallible human love but with the most powerful and beautiful love in the world—God’s own love. I call this “inflow/outflow.” God’s love flows *into* us from the Spirit and then flows *out* from us to others.

**John 17:24** Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Such a feeling cannot be created or effectively mimicked by human effort because this love is directed toward objects of divine affection rather than objects of human desire. A human heart cannot generate divine love, but it can experience it. In the words of Louis Sperry Chafer, “To have a heart that feels the compassion of God is to drink the wine of heaven.”

The love of God is not experienced by those who are not saved. Jesus said, “**But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.**” (John 5:42).

The love of God extends to the entire world (John 3:16). “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). This divine love is formed in the human heart by the Holy Spirit when there is a proper relationship with the Spirit of God.

The love of God hates the world system:

**1 John 2:15** Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

The love of God is especially directed toward His born-again children. “Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). He loves His own even when they wander away, as shown in the story of the “prodigal son” (Luke 15:11-32).

**1 John 4:12** ... if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

The Greek word translated as “perfected” is *teleioo*, which means to make perfect or complete. Sound familiar? On the Cross, Jesus said, “It is finished,” meaning that salvation was complete – same root word. With God’s love in the believer, he is made complete or brought to perfection as an expression of the life of Christ in him.

**John 13:34** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Such love is a test of our brotherhood:

**1 John 3:16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup> But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?

The love of God is eternal: “...having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

The love of God is directed toward Israel, “...I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3).

The love of God is sacrificial.



**2 Corinthians 8:9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

God's love is sacrificial in regard to life itself.

**1 John 3:16** Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

God's love is unique in all the universe. It relies solely on God's integrity, not on any worthiness of the object of that love. Human love is merely a faint shadow of divine love.

We have defined God's holiness or integrity as comprising two of His attributes: righteousness and justice. We also consider God's love a part of His holiness, only in the sense that God shows His holiness through His divine love. The blessings or discipline God gives to man are done because He loves us despite our failings and wants only what is best for us. "God works all things together for good" (Romans 8:28).

Therefore, God's point of reference with man is not His love; it is His justice. What the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God executes. God's perfect righteousness demands that He condemn sin. It leaves no room for alternatives because acting otherwise would compromise His perfection. If His righteousness were ever compromised, He would cease to be perfect. Thus, God can never simply "look the other way" or "wink" at sinfulness. He may delay judgment because of His patience and mercy, but ultimately, God is compelled to judge and condemn sin.

Some who have little understanding of God often ask, "How can a loving God condemn His own creation?" The answer is, He has no choice. Adam and Eve were created in God's image, perfect. There was no flaw in them. But you and I were not created by God in the same sense as Adam and Eve. We are the products of human generation. And because Adam and Eve fell from grace, that is, they went from perfection to imperfection through their disobedience, we are children of the devil.

**1 John 3:8** Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God

appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

(Also: John 8:44)

This passage explains that there are two possible states in which we can find ourselves. We are either children of the devil or children of God. The way someone becomes a child of God is through regeneration, being born again by trusting in what Jesus Christ did on the Cross instead of relying on our own works (Titus 3:5; Galatians 2:16). We are born as children of the devil, condemned from birth through our physical connection to our fleshly father, Adam.

**1 Corinthians 15:21** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

(Also: Romans 5:12-18)

Adam was created without a sin nature, but he gained one when he sinned. We are born with a sin nature (John 3:6; Romans 8:5, 7; 3:23; 2 Peter 1:4; Ephesians 2:3; Galatians 5:19-21). God had no choice but to condemn Adam and Eve for their disobedience, and He has no choice but to condemn us as Adam's descendants born with a sin nature. What the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God executes.

But God, in His mercy and love, has a solution for mankind to regain what was lost in the Garden. He sent a mediator, someone uniquely qualified to pay the price for sin. That mediator had to meet God's perfect standard to be qualified. For Israel, He was pictured in the Levitical offerings, where the bulls, sheep, and goats offered were required to be perfect and innocent. However, the offerings of bulls and goats did not satisfy God's perfect righteousness. They were merely a "shadow" or "type" of what would come, Jesus Christ as the perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 10:1-10). Through faith in Christ, we shed our old self as children of the devil and become children of God.

**Romans 8:16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

(Also: Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16; 5:24; 6:47: 20:31; 1 John 5:11-13)

God's perfect righteousness compelled Him to condemn Adam and Eve. All are descended from Adam because of Adam's original sin and our inherited sin nature. We are born condemned already.

**1 Corinthians 15:21** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

We should understand that we are, in effect, self-condemning by refusing the free gift of salvation. The justice of God executes what the righteousness of God demands. God offers redemption to everyone who believes, and believing is all that is required. What could be simpler?

But what about when infants die or those without the mental capacity to make that decision for Christ? Condemnation must precede salvation. You can't be saved from something unless you are first condemned to it. That should make perfect sense, right? In the case of those who lack the ability to make a free will decision to trust in Christ, God is free *and justified* to save them because they are already condemned, and they didn't have the opportunity to choose Christ. In this situation, God's righteousness is fulfilled, and He can show mercy. This principle is illustrated in the story of King David and the death of his son born of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:15-24).

If condemnation must precede salvation, and a free will decision is required for salvation, then infant baptism does not remove the original sin.

## **Two Kinds of Divine Love**

We should also recognize that God demonstrates two types of love toward mankind. We have seen God's love as expressed in John 3:16, which we described as a higher form of divine love that depends on God's integrity rather than on how lovable the objects of that love are. The lost are not

very lovable. This is very different from human love, which responds to something in the object of love. With divine love, the merit lies in the one doing the loving, God. But with human love, the merit is in the object of love.

But God does demonstrate a form of divine love that, in some respects, resembles human love. It is similar to human love in that God loves certain people because they have some merit in them. We call the love based on God's integrity His "impersonal love." God shows impersonal love to all of humanity because Christ died for us (John 3:16). This second type of love, which is based on merit in the one loved, is known as God's "personal love." It is directed toward a specific group of individuals.

Confused? I just spent a lot of time explaining that man has no merit to earn God's love, so what gives here? There is indeed no merit in fallen man for God to love, but there is merit in man after he is born again. What is the merit in the born-again man that God loves? God loves the righteousness of God imputed to the believer at salvation.

The believer at the moment of salvation has his account in heaven credited with God's perfect righteousness. Don't believe me? See Romans 4:1-22; 9:30; 2 Corinthians 5:20; and Philippians 3:9. This word, translated as "imputed," "counted," or "credited," depending on the translation, is actually an accounting term that means to credit to one's account.

That means fallen man, who only has his own imperfect and unacceptable righteousness that does not meet God's perfect standard, is credited with God's perfect righteousness at the moment of salvation. This accomplishes two things: First, such a man, whom we call a believer, is saved because he has God's perfect righteousness through faith, and with such becomes acceptable to God.

The second benefit the believer receives from the imputation of God's perfect righteousness is personal love from God. God loves His own righteousness, and that righteousness is present in the believer through imputation because of faith in the work of Christ on the Cross. God's own righteousness is the merit that God recognizes in the believer, enabling Him to demonstrate personal love toward the believer.

The entire human race experiences God's impersonal love, which is rooted in His own personal integrity. However, born-again believers who possess God's perfect righteousness also become recipients of His *personal* love. Pretty powerful stuff!