

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## THE GRACIOUS JUSTICE OF GOD

by Lee Moses

The Biblical statements about God's grace find no peer among all the religions of the world (cf. Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 2; Titus 3:4-7). Holy Scripture portrays a God of grace, who desires the salvation of every soul, who has done and will do His part to make that salvation available to all (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Yet Scripture also portrays a God of swift and severe justice, a “*consuming fire*” who will “*devour the adversaries*” (Hebrews 12:29; 10:27). The full impact of such justice will only be truly seen “*when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). Many sincere people have difficulty harmonizing the grace of God with the justice of God. They read, “*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God*” (Romans 11:22), and find what they believe to be irreconcilable attributes.

The justice of God troubles people. Some hear the Gospel's warnings about judgment to come, and assert that such violates their sense of what is right. Some make such statements as “I refuse to believe in a God that would condemn people to an eternity of hell.” Some even go so far as to aver, “If any of my loved ones are going to be in hell, I want to be there

too.” They claim that the justice of God is too strict and too severe to be righteous.

Justice is defined as “the giving to every person that - and all of that, and only that - to which he is entitled, whether good or bad, and that without partiality or favor.”<sup>1</sup> In clear distinction to the modern “justice” (or failure to achieve thereof) often displayed by the American court system, God's justice matches this definition. It is a self-contradiction to say that God's justice is not righteous - even the Biblical words translated “judgment” and “justice” can also be translated “righteousness.” God will vindicate those worthy of vindication. As Solomon observed, “*also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes (“the noble,” American Standard Version) for equity*” (Proverbs 17:26). God cannot punish the guiltless, for He is infinitely good (cf. Matthew 19:17). Contrary to the blasphemous doctrine of “original sin,” and its subsequent “total hereditary depravity,” God will hold no one guilty for sins that person has not committed himself (cf. Ezekiel 18:20). But there are times when punishment **must** be administered. It is then, and only then, that God punishes - and He will never fail to do so at such times. This is regardless of one's social status, influence in government, or stockpiles of riches. God's impartiality in justice is certainly

praiseworthy; whether seen in his verdict of guilty or innocent, whether seen in His administration of punishment or reward. God is described as, “*Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty*” (Exodus 34:7).

In the courts of this country, the accused or accuser in a trial is occasionally able to “pull the wool over the eyes” of judge and jury. The defendant and his attorney may be able to persuade the judge that the defendant is truly penitent, and that he does not require the punishment that meets his crime. They may be able to convince the jury that the defendant is not guilty of something that he actually did. Conversely, an accuser is sometimes able to convince a jury that the defendant is guilty of a crime that he did not commit. Such lies make a mockery out of a court system designed for the welfare of society. But such mockery will not be made of God's justice: “*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting*” (Galatians 6:7-8).

Notice from the aforementioned passage that God has the responsibility of pronouncing **eternal** sentences. This is because sin is an eternal offense. Once sin has been committed, one cannot wish or wash it away of his own doing. Since sin separates man from

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**APPRECIATION TO TED J. CLARKE**

For the past thirteen years, the Fulton County Gospel News and its readership have been blessed to have brother Ted J. Clarke as editor. During his tenure, the FCGN has continued to stand firm in the truth, providing timely articles to guide the erring into the truth and to edify the saints in the truth. Its impact has been seen throughout the brotherhood, as its circulation has increased to nearly 11,000. Brother Clarke has recently begun work as an instructor with the Bible Institute of Missouri. At last report, he still lacked some of the financial support necessary to carry forth with this work. Please pray for him and his family; and if you have the ability, please consider financially

helping him and his work of training men to preach the Gospel. We will miss brother Clarke's editorial abilities at FCGN, but anticipate much good coming from his new work. Of course, he is not expected to become a complete stranger to FCGN – this editor plans to consult with brother Clarke's wisdom on a regular basis, and to see to it that he contributes articles as he has opportunity.

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God (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2; Habakkuk 1:13), one who enters eternity having a soul fouled with sin must be punished by eternal separation from God (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9). This means eternal separation from all things that are good, for *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). Where God has removed His presence, there can be nothing good. And as *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23), the sentence for entering eternity with sin can only be an eternal punishment of death.

It can be difficult to see the grace of God's justice when His potential punishment involves oneself or one's loved ones. When a convicted criminal is put to death or sentenced to life in prison, that criminal and his family members are not usually among the ardent supporters of the punishment being carried out; the

criminal's deservedness for the punishment notwithstanding. But as much as some might wish for God to lay aside His law on the day of judgment, God can only do right (cf. Psalm 92:15; Jeremiah 9:24; Romans 9:14). One who is honest can see the righteousness of God's punishment, whether administered to one's own self or to another. The *“angel of the water”* said of the severe judgment of the Lord, *“Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus”* (Revelation 16:5). The psalmist realized, *“I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right; and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me”* (Psalm 119:75). Perhaps only on the day of judgment will we fully appreciate God's justice and the necessity of the punishment of the sinful.

But as certain as is the punishment of the sinful, so is the reward of the righteous. God does not have uncertain nebulous law, which can be interpreted one way by one judge and completely differently by

another. In spite of the horrendous atrocity that sin is, God has provided through Jesus Christ the means of forgiveness for all mankind from sin (cf. Rom. 3:23-24; Acts 2:38). There need be no doubt for the faithful Christian that he will receive the reward: *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:8).

It is by the wonderful grace of God that every man and woman can enter judgment knowing that he will be judged by the righteous Judge. None has to be in doubt as to what his sentence will be. Each person will *“receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10). No one will be punished more than what he deserves; and each person who has availed himself of God's grace while on earth shall reap life everlasting. May God be praised for His gracious justice!

<sup>1</sup> Rex A. Turner, Sr., *Systematic Theology* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1989), p. 50

## MY CHURCH???

by Tracy Dugger

Being involved in prison work, we thus have the privilege to teach many inmates through the avenues of preaching, Bible correspondence courses, audio tapes, and books. We often receive various questions from inmates. One of the most recent letters stated the following: "I really like your interpretation of the Scriptures and would like to become a member of your church through correspondence if possible." Upon reading this I immediately thought to myself, "My church?" I wondered if I had said something to cause him to misunderstand the nature of the church of which I had spoken. Members of the church of Christ ought to intensely emphasize that the church we are members of is no man-made institution, but one of divine establishment. Perhaps this inmate meant nothing by his statement. However, I saw this a great opportunity to stress to him the importance of the Lord's church. I responded to this man with great detail about the identity of the church of the New Testament, unity in the religious world, and denominationalism. A portion of my correspondence with him is as follows:

Your desire for spiritual things is a commendable endeavor. Regarding your request to become a member of my church, let me clear up some things. I never refer to the church which I am a member as "my" church - it's the Lord's church. The way one becomes a member of the church of which I am a member is the same way one became a member of that church in the first century. We learn in Acts 2, after Peter preached the gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem, they asked a very

important question in verse 37: "*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" They wanted to know what to do to be saved. Peter explained in verse 38: "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" To receive remission of past sins (salvation), Peter instructed them by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to repent and be baptized. This they did in verse 41. At this point they were saved. Then, notice a very interesting statement in the last verse of Acts 2: "*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (verse 47). Here is

recorded how one becomes a member of the church you read about in the New Testament - when one is baptized, the Lord adds that saved individual to the church. The idea of being "voted" into the church or "joining" a church is foreign to the Bible. The Lord adds the saved to the church. Baptism puts one into the church (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Let us be clear to those whom we try to teach--the church we are members of is no man-made church; nor is it of human ownership. We must emphasize that a loving God has allowed us to enter into His church in which salvation is to be found (Ephesians 2:16; 1:22-23). If we choose to meet the conditions of entrance then can we say we are members of the church purchased and is headed by Jesus Christ our Savior. **It is the Lord's church!**

## "KNOW THE LORD"

by Gary McDade

Do you know God? Those who would enjoy the benefits of the new covenant, including remission of sins, must first "know the Lord." The Hebrews' writer said, "*And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sin and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away*" (Hebrews 8:11-13). Knowing God is of greater glory to a person than wisdom or might or riches as desirable as those three qualities are to some. Jeremiah wrote, "*Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man*

*glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.*" (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Yet, how many people truly "know the Lord?" The atheist does not believe God even exists. He does not "know the Lord." The agnostic does not know whether or not God exists. He does not "know the Lord." The person who does not study his Bible, which is the inspired Word of God through which God has chosen to reveal himself and his will to man, has difficulty saying with any degree of confidence, "I 'know the Lord'." The truth from Jeremiah 9:23-24 is that God does indeed exist, his will is certainly knowable, and even precise

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details of his nature can be identified, studied, appreciated, and within imposed limits imitated. A real interest in the things that delight the Lord will emerge in one's life, that is, by so truly admiring the Lord we tend to become more like him. Jeremiah said the Lord "exercises" lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness.

What do you know of lovingkindness? *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. . ."* (John 3:16). And *"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* (Ephesians 4:32). *"Love the brotherhood"* (1 Peter 2:17). What do you know of judgement? *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24). *"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgement without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment"* (James 2:12-13). *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone"* (Matthew 23:23). What do you know of righteousness? *"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous"* (I John 3:7). *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"* (Matthew 13:43). *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6).

In what do you glory? Is it in the things you have, your riches? Is it in

your physical strength or power you exercise over others, your might? Is it your intellectual prowess, your wisdom? The higher calling of God urges us to understand and "know the Lord" and to delight in him.



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**GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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