

God is Just
 God is... (Part 8)
 Exodus 34:5-7
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Exodus 34:5-7

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."¹

Review + Context of Exodus 34

- *Exodus 34:5-7*, the clearest description of God in the Old Testament
 - What you think about when you think about God is very important. It's the most important thing about you.
 - A. W. Tozer - "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."²
 - "Our opinions about God will not change God, but they can change us."³
 - John Mark Comer - "This is ground zero for a theology of God."⁴
 - Evertt Huffard - "the most descriptive self-description of God in the Old Testament"
- Describe the context leading up to God disclosing His character to Moses in *Exodus 34:5-7*.
- Characteristics of God we've discussed so far:
 - *Compassion* - a feeling word, a word used to describe the feeling a mother has towards her nursing baby
 - *Grace* - God's favor towards His people, people who do not deserve God's favor and can never repay Him for His favor
 - *Slow to anger* - literally translated as "long of nostrils." God is patient, but eventually, He will get angry because of the evil and suffering in the world.
 - *Love* - God is love.
 - *Faithful* - God is trustworthy, reliable, dependable. He will do what He says He will do. God keeps His promises.

¹ All biblical references in this document are taken from the New International Version (NIV). *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

² John Mark Comer, *God Has a Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 23.

³ Austin Fischer, *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed: Black Holes, Love, and a Journey In and Out of Calvinism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), back cover.

⁴ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 32.

- *Forgiving* - God forgives. It's a part of His character. We all sin/miss the mark. He lifts up and carries away our mistakes and sin.

The Just God

- The elephant in the room of this who passage is the subject of God's justice. Perhaps this is the passage you're least comfortable with. Or it's the one you're most looking forward to diving into. Or it's the one you're most curious about. Or you just wish this passage wasn't in the Bible at all. If I'm honest, this has been the passage that I was initially dreading. But after studying this passage more, I am really excited about diving into it.
- Tough passages in the Bible
 - This is an example of a tough passage of scripture.
 - What do you do when you come to a difficult passage, a passage that is either hard to wrap your mind around, or a passage you disagree with?
 - Will you...?
 - Ignore it
 - Disagree with it
 - Submit to it
 - We take Scripture seriously. We need to work hard to understand God's intent, be honest with God, and be faithful to Him.
 - We don't get to choose what God is like. We have to be very careful. If God never disagrees with you, you might have just made a god in your image rather than you trying to reflect His image.
 - When we see God clearest, I think we will eventually love what we find. God may not be what we expect, but He will be even better.
- What God doesn't mean in *Exodus 34:7*: God does not punish innocent children and grandchildren for their parents' sin.
 - Moses later makes the point that parents will not be punished for the sins of their kids and kids will not be punished for the sins of their fathers.
 - *Deuteronomy 24:16* - Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.
- What God does mean: There are consequences of sin.
 - Even though people are forgiven of their sin, they still endure the consequences of their sin. God doesn't let evil off the hook.
 - Someone who stole money, even though forgiven, will likely never be a treasurer of a non-profit organization.
 - Someone who abuses children, even if they repent and are forgiven, will likely never be a babysitter or Sunday school teacher.
 - We need to take seriously the weight of sin.
 - God forgives, but there are consequences for sin.

- “God isn’t saying he’ll bring his wrath upon totally innocent children for their parents’ actions. God is warning his people that each generation will be held accountable *if they repeat* the sins of the previous generation.”⁵
- “‘Third and fourth’ is a Hebrew idiom that means ‘for whatever number it takes.’”⁶
- *Jeremiah 32:16b-19* - I prayed to the Lord: “Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the parents’ sins into the laps of their children after them. Great and mighty God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to the ways of all mankind; you reward each person according to their conduct and as their deeds deserve.”
 - It is clear here that God holds everyone accountable for their own actions, but often, habits and sinful behavior are passed from one generation to the next.
- Parents’ sin has consequences for their childrens’ future.⁷
 - Divioce affects kids.
 - Parents going to prison affects kids.
 - Parents abusing their kids causes harm for years to come
- Sin often runs in the family.⁸
 - “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”
 - “Like father like son”
- Because God is just, God will punish sin in each generation until sin is completely gone.⁹
- We want a just God.
 - “God’s end goal is a world with no evil. Yahweh’s justice isn’t about retribution or payback or some kind of God-sized vendetta--it’s about the healing and renewal of the world.”¹⁰
 - God is not indifferent towards injustice.
 - Love demands justice.
 - If an actual judge never held an abuser accountable, you can not call that justice.
- To thousands to third and fourth
 - There is no Hebrew word for *generation*.
 - This is a good translation into English because this is what the author’s intent is, but there is no Hebrew word for *generation*.

⁵ “The Sins of Our Fathers,” *Bible Project*, June 30, 2020, <https://bibleproject.com/blog/the-sins-of-our-fathers/>.

⁶ “The Sins of Our Fathers,” <https://bibleproject.com/blog/the-sins-of-our-fathers/>.

⁷ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 230.

⁸ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 230-231.

⁹ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 231-232.

¹⁰ Comer, *God Has a Name*, 226.

- The idea of the text is God's judgement is for three or four generations and steadfast love is for thousands of generations.
- God will one day bring the world to rights.
 - *Revelation 21:1-4* - Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
- The point is this: God's love and mercy outweighs His justice.
 - *James 2:13* - "Mercy triumphs over judgement."

How does Jesus exemplify justice?

- We've pointed this out every week of this study on the characteristics of God: Jesus is the clearest picture of God we've got. "[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (*Colossians 1:15, 19*). God is like Jesus. Jesus is like God. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. This means that if God is a God of justice, Jesus perfectly exemplifies the justice of God.
- Jesus and Zacchaeus - When Zacchaeus, the tax collector, sought and met Jesus, his life totally changed. He gave to the poor and reimbursed x4 those whom he defrauded.
 - *Luke 19:1-10* - Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. **2** A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. **3** He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. **4** So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. **5** When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." **6** So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. **7** All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." **8** But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." **9** Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- Zacchaeus didn't just ask for forgiveness for his mistakes. He sought to make them right.
- What are some other examples of Jesus doing justice in the Bible?

Our Response to the Just God

- We've pointed this out each week in this study on the characteristics of God: God created us in His image (*Genesis 1:27*). This means we are to be like Him. This means we're to strive to be just [do justice] like Him.
- Rest in God's justice.
 - *Exodus 33:13-14* - [Moses speaking] "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."
 - When Moses asks to understand more about God (*Exodus 34:5-7*), God responds to Moses and says He will give Moses rest.
 - When we see God for who He really is, we receive rest.
 - We rest in His justice.
 - If you've been victimized, God will bring justice to you and on your abuser.
 - The sins of every person that has ever wronged you will be dealt with in one of two ways: Their sins were taken care of by Jesus on the cross or God will judge them and will be held accountable.
 - God does not cause harm, but he redeems harm.
- Break generational patterns of sin.
 - You do not have to continue in the sins of your family.
 - Racism, sexism, addiction
- Do justice.
 - *Micah 6:8* - He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.
 - God requires you to "do justice/act justly."
 - This is not passive. We're to actively seek justice.
 - Stand up for the vulnerable.
 - Stand up to people who harm.
 - Examine the organizations and systems you're a part of. Are they just? Can they be more just?