

“Righteousness and Justice”– Genesis 18:16-21

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Genesis 18...

It's been a while since we've been in this chapter of Scripture, and we're picking things up mid-scene. Several weeks ago we examined the first half of the chapter, where the Lord and two other figures, who are identified as angels in the next chapter, appear before Abraham. Abraham invites them to dine with him, which is a pretty remarkable thought. Can you think of anyone who could say they had dined with the Lord prior to the incarnation of God the Son? In any case, on this occasion, it becomes clear that they have come, in part, for Sarah's sake. The Lord shares with Abraham that Sarah, Abraham's elderly wife, will have a baby in about a year's time. Sarah expresses her doubt through laughter, and the Lord calls her on it, reminding her that nothing is impossible for the Lord.

This baby announcement has several points of contact with the Christmas story in the New Testament, so we spend the next several weeks exploring the various birth announcements we find at the beginning of Matthew and Luke's Gospels. That seemed like a more appropriate series for the Christmas season than the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, which comes next in Genesis. But, as promised, we've come back to Genesis 18, and for the next few weeks we are going to be exploring this dark story concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It ain't pretty. But it is important for us to understand, so here we are...

As we pick things up, the three figures that have been dining with Abraham are about to part ways with the man and set out toward Sodom. I'll begin reading in verse 16. Follow along as I do. This is God's Word...

“Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. ²⁰ Then the Lord said, ‘Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.’” (Genesis 18:16-21)

The text begins with the three figures setting out from the camp. Abraham joins them until they came into view of Sodom. The next time Abraham is described in Scripture as looking in the direction of Sodom and Gomorrah would be in the wake of their destruction, when, we are told, Abraham “*looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace*” (Gen 19:28). That's where this story is going. And because that's where this story is going, these verses that introduce the story are critical for explaining what Abraham was supposed to learn from God's judgment on these twin cities.

Within these verses we find the Lord revealing a couple of things to Abraham and providing a couple of reasons why He has chosen to bring Abraham in the loop. The two things He informs Abraham about relate to the sins of the cities and what God intends to do about them. The two reasons for sharing this information with Abraham both relate to the calling of Abraham. Since this is what the text is about, this is what we will consider this morning, beginning with...

The Condition of Sodom

Notice what the Lord reveals to Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 20. There the Lord says, “*the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave*” (18:20). This should come as no surprise to the reader since already in Genesis the wickedness of these cities has been alluded to. In chapter 13, for example, we find the comment, “*Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord*” (13:13). Abraham must have suspected this since he refused the goods offered by the king of Sodom in chapter 14, saying, “*I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’*” (14:22-23). So it would seem that Abraham knew that Sodom was not on the up and up. He probably even had insider information from his nephew Lot, who at various points in the narrative of Genesis has been found in or around Sodom. In any case, the attentive reader knows that Sodom is a moral mess.

But the language used here is also interesting. “*Outcry*” suggests that people have been crying out in distress because of sins committed. Who are these people? Again, we’re not told. They could be the people within Sodom and Gomorrah themselves—perhaps the poor who have been exploited and abused or sojourners like Lot, who is elsewhere described as “righteous” (2 Pet 2:7). They could also be the people outside these cities, who have been afflicted in some way by their tyranny. Whatever the case, their cries have not fallen on deaf ears. The Lord hears them. He is no oblivious to our suffering. And He will do something about our affliction, even if His timing defies our comprehension. That’s what this text is about. The time has come for Him to judge the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah.

What did the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah entail? We are not told. The focus here is on the depth of their sins, not their precise nature. It’s commonly assumed today that the sin had something to do with homosexuality or other sinful sexual relations.¹ There is justification for this found in the very next chapter, as we shall see in a couple weeks, and so, not surprisingly, “the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah finds currency in modern culture wars over the issue of homosexuality”.² But to limit the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah to those that are sexual in nature—or even the sin of homosexual behavior in particular—is to miss the extent of their depravity.³ As Kent Hughes explains,

“The Hebrew word for ‘outcry’ is used in Scripture to describe the cries of the oppressed and brutalized. It is used for the cry of the oppressed widow or orphan (cf. Exodus 22:22, 23), the cry of the oppressed servant (cf. Deuteronomy 24:15), and the cries of the Israelites in Egypt (cf. Exodus 2:23; 3:7, 9). Jeremiah uses it to refer to the scream of terror by an individual or city when it is attacked (cf. Jeremiah 18:22; 20:16; 25:36; 48:3–5, 34; 49:21; 50:46; 51:54). Such an outcry is the miserable wail of the oppressed and brutalized.”⁴

Nahum Sarna, a prominent Jewish scholar, describes the language as connoting,

“...the anguished cry of the oppressed, the agonized plea of the victim for help in the face of some great injustice. In the Bible these terms are suffused with poignancy and pathos, with moral outrage and soul-stirring passion.... The sin of Sodom, then, is heinous moral and social corruption, an arrogant disregard of basic human rights, a cynical insensitivity to the sufferings of others.”⁵

This conclusion finds support Ezekiel 16:49, where the prophet describes the inhabitants of Sodom like this:

“...she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.” (Ezekiel 16:49).

Social injustice was the order of the day, the law of the land, in Sodom and Gomorrah. In the Gospels, Jesus compares cities that refuse hospitality to His followers to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which suggests that a lack of hospitality accounted for at least some of their guilt (Matt 10:9-15; Luke 10:8-12). This will find support in Genesis 19 as well. That said, Jude does confirm that unnatural relations were at least part of the reason for the destruction of these cities, since he writes, “*Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire*” (Jude 7; NIV). Clearly the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious and numerous. There’s no escaping it. As the Lord Himself said, “*the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave*” (Gen 18:20).

And while it’s not quite the same language in Hebrew, an analogy could be drawn to the blood of Abel “*crying*” to the Lord after his murder at the hand of Cain, his brother (Gen 4:10). That blood was crying out for justice. And the “*outcry*” language of Genesis 18 is doing the same. Indeed, many scholars have noted that this is legal or judicial language.⁶ It’s as though the “*outcry*” of the afflicted has come before God as a “legal complaint, requesting deliverance”⁷ and God is now intervening to “adjudicate the charge.”⁸ And this leads us to consider, next,...

The Corroboration of God

The Lord doesn’t just reveal to Abraham what He has heard about these cities, but also what He intends to do about it. Look at verse 21.

“I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know” (18:21).

This is ominous language. The last time the Bible spoke of the Lord “going down” to check on a city was at Babel, in Genesis 11, and we all know how that turned out (11:7; cf. 11:5). Judgment is afoot.

But this visitation is described as a verification mission. He is going “*to see whether they have done according to the outcry that has come to [Him]*.” That’s puzzling language to many of us. Doesn’t God already know? Why would He need to travel to Sodom and Gomorrah—or send a pair of angels to the cities—to investigate and confirm? Isn’t God all-knowing, or as theologians like to say, omniscient?

Some have answered, no. In fact, there is a whole group—known as “open theists”—who argue that if God has really given humans free will—genuine, libertarian, free will, undetermined and uncoerced by Him in any way—then this logically necessitates that there are things God *cannot* know until which point as human decisions are made. The future is, in this sense, “open.” God knows everything that can be known, but not everything about the future exhaustively. If God knew everything about the future absolutely, they argue, then human free will is a myth. This is why their position is sometimes called “free will theism.”

I am no “open theist.” And this is not the time and place for me to launch a full-on critique of this position, but I bring it up today because this passage in Genesis 18 is often cited as proof of their position. To be honest with you though, I have trouble understanding why this passage would be thought of as supporting open theism. Remember, open theists argue that God is ignorant about the *future*. “But,” as John Frame points out, “if God is ignorant in this passage, He is ignorant of the present, not the future, and open theists profess to believe that God is *not* ignorant about the present.”⁹

All this misses the point of the passage. God has already said he knows that “*their sin is very grave*” (18:20). He knows. He’s neither ignorant, nor indifferent. And the same is true today, as one author reminds us,

“The Lord knows full well what takes place in the wickedness of our cities and suburbs today. He sees the young woman suffering abuse at the hands of her enraged husband. He hears the cry of the old man robbed by street gangs. The Lord knows the wickedness of those making profits by selling drugs to enslave young souls. These are just a few of the sins rising up to God every day, every hour, and every minute from our increasingly wicked society. How will we escape when God comes to gather the evidence and execute the sentence of his wrath?”¹⁰

He knows. He cares. He will bring justice.¹¹ Nothing will escape His notice. And He even demonstrated His omniscience earlier in this very chapter when He informed Abraham that Sarah would have a child in a year (18:14) and shared with Sarah her hidden thoughts (18:15).¹² God *is* all-knowing.¹³ But if He knows, why send the angels on a fact-finding mission in the next chapter and why speak like this here? I think it’s for Abraham’s sake.

This is what’s sometimes called an “anthropomorphism,” which is a fifty-cent word that simply means that God is being described in human terms, with human characteristics. This happens when God condescends to our level so that we can understand something about Him. What does He want Abraham to understand? That His judgment is going to be fair. That He will base His judgment on full and accurate information, not merely hearsay. He’s gathering information not because He needs it, but because Abraham needs to know that God has acted rightly, not arbitrarily or capriciously, when He judges Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham needs to understand that God is just, and all His judgments are right. “Here we see the strictness of God’s justice in that He will not convict anyone without the evidence coming fully to light.”¹⁴ That’s the point. He’s a God of justice and righteousness. God will judge the wicked (because He is just) and His judgment will be right (because He is righteous). And this anthropomorphic description is intended to convey this.

Why would God want to communicate this information about His plans and (by way of implication) person to Abraham? Some have suggested that it was intended to stir Abraham to intercede (pray), as he does in the next paragraph.¹⁵ That may be true, but that’s not the answer the text itself gives. The text gives a two-fold answer related to God’s gracious call on Abraham’s life. And this brings us to the next point...

The Calling of Abraham

Look at how the Lord deliberates in verses 17 and following:

“The Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,’¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.’”
(Genesis 18:17-19)

Whether or not God is deliberating within Himself or speaking to His two angelic companions is not terribly important for our purposes. What is important to see is, first, that the Lord is treating Abraham as a friend (cf. James 2:23) and, second, that there are reasons that the Lord pulls back the curtain a bit to give Abraham some perspective on what is about to happen.

It’s commonly suggested that God brings Abraham in on the plan because Abraham is a prophet (cf. 20:7), and God regularly shares His plans with His prophets, especially when they relate to judgment (cf. Amos 3:7). “People must know that the judgment that has befallen the wicked is not simply a natural disaster or an accident of fate”,¹⁶ and who better to share that information with them than the Lord’s prophets. True as this is, it’s not Abraham’s prophetic role that is emphasized here *per se*, but rather his covenantal role and his familial role.

Let's start with the covenantal role. Notice, in verse 18, the appeal made to the Abrahamic covenant, where Abraham was promised that God would make him a great nation and bring blessing to all nations through him (Gen 12:2-3). And he was chosen not because he was a prominent or godly figure, but because of God's grace. And this grace is emphasized here when it speaks of God's choice of Abraham in verse 19. "*I have chosen him,*" God says. This is election language. Literally the Hebrew says, "I have *known* him." This is intimate language. And it's a good example of the overlap of the Bible's election language.

For what it's worth, this is one reason I don't find all that compelling the argument that the Bible's language of "foreknowledge" does not relate to predestination. As someone who has studied the biblical languages extensively, it's hard to deny that the language of God's knowledge of someone or something often relates to His choice of someone or something. For example, the Lord says to the people of Israel,

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2)

Is God saying that He had knowledge of Israel only, and not the rest of the nations (families) of the earth? Of course not. He's saying that He *chose* Israel from among the nations to be the recipients of His special and covenantal love. That exact same language is used in Genesis 18:19, and it means the same thing. God has chosen Abraham to be the recipient of His special and covenantal love. He's chosen to enter into covenant with him. And, accordingly, almost every English translation renders the language in terms of God's choice of Abraham, as the ESV does here ("I have chosen him").

So if Abraham was to be a conduit of blessing to the nations, then it is important for Him to understand that God deals righteously and justly with the nations. That seems to be the logic. But the Lord doesn't stop there. He also suggests that Abraham should know so that he will be equipped to "*command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him*" (Gen 18:19).¹⁷ This speaks to Abraham's familial role. He was to pass on to his posterity what he was to learn about God's dealings with Sodom and Gomorrah.

And this calling, I suppose, is shared by all believing parents, even if God's revelation to us is mediated through His written Word instead of His spoken Word. Parents are called to impart their knowledge of God to their children so that they too might "*keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.*" That's a high calling. Especially for parents like me, who are so desperately flawed. Parents who often fail to live righteously before our children or call them to do the same. Parents who do not always shepherd the hearts of their children as they ought. Parents who need grace to live out such a calling. Parents who must also remember that "God's grace is not only shown *to* weak sinners," but also "*through* weak sinners." We must never forget that "God uses very ordinary means to accomplish His extraordinary saving purposes."¹⁸ And if you are a parent, then you should assume that you are one of those means.¹⁹ Indeed, some have suggested that the "*primary* method for perpetuating God's work is for believers to raise their children to know and trust the Lord,"²⁰ which could explain why there are so many texts of Scripture that promote such discipleship. The discipleship of children is not something that was meant to take place primarily in a church building. It is something that is ideally done in the home. Parents, *you* were meant to be the disciple-makers of your family, not a children's director or a youth pastor. You. We're here to help you, not replace you. Just like Abraham, you have been called to this.

We fail in this call to disastrous effect. One of the most depressing books of the Bible, in terms of the spiritual condition of God's people, is the book of Judges. And the preface of that book tells us that "*there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel*" (Judges 2:10). How does that happen? Parents neglected their duty, that's how. D. A. Carson famously said something like, one generation *believes* the Gospel, the next often *assumes* the Gospel, and this leads to the third *forgetting* or *denying* the Gospel, which means that the church at any given time is probably only a generation or two away from outright apostasy or the complete loss of the Gospel-centrality.

Which generation are we? By and large, he surmised that the American church was probably in the second step, with some drifting toward the third. If that analysis is correct, then we would not be all that far from what we encounter in Judges, when “*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” (21:25). That’s a scary thought. And it should awaken some of us from our stupor. Could there be any higher priority for Christian parents than the discipleship of their children? “Far more important than their secular education, athletic exploits, musical accomplishments, or physical beauty and charm is their knowledge of the Lord and his saving ways.”²¹ Do you believe this? Would it be obvious that you did to the unbelieving world around you?

And I know it’s common for parents to recoil at this in our day. Some say, “Well, I just don’t want my kids to hate the church or Christianity, so I don’t really push them.” But you wouldn’t say that with other things, would you? “Well, I don’t want my kids to grow up hating school and academics, so when they don’t want to wake up for school in the morning, I just let them sleep in and skip.” No one says that. Why? Because we know school is important, even if our kids are too immature to understand that at the moment. Can you imagine a parent saying, “I don’t really want my kids to dislike healthy foods, so I just buy them whatever groceries they want”? What about this: “I don’t want to stress my kid out about driving and following the law, so I just let them figure it out on their own”? No, that’s irresponsible parenting. If we can understand that, then why would it be any different when it comes to the things of God? What’s more important, the algebra lesson they will learn in school Monday or the biblical lessons they can learn on Sunday? What’s more destructive in the long run for them, that they feast on too much dessert or that they never feast on God’s Word? You see what I’m saying? We would never be that hands-off with our kids in these other matters, so why would we be when it comes to the care of their souls?

King David was a godly man in many respects, but he was a lousy father in many respects as well. He had a son named Adonijah, who grew to be a scoundrel. And this is what 1 Kings 1:6 says about Adonijah: “*His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’*” Let the reader understand. “Godly parenting embraces discipleship and discipline, both leading by example and inspiration and assailing sin through punishment and reproof.”²² And, yes, we can do that in exasperating ways that work against the end we seek. But that’s not necessarily so. And your children are far more likely to “*to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice,*” if you make discipleship the priority of your parenting. Will that effort guarantee that they do? Of course not. And our failure will not guarantee that they don’t. Thank God for that! Can you imagine if the entire project rested on our shoulders? He can work in their hearts despite us. In fact, He must. But don’t let that reality diminish your sense of calling in the life of your children. They need you to impart the wonders of God. They need you to “*command*” them (that’s the language of Genesis 18:19) in the way of righteousness and justice, the way of the Lord. You’re not doing them any favors if you do not.

And to do so, just like Abraham, you need to know the Lord’s will. This is why Abraham was included in the Lord’s counsel in this instance. And this is why this episode has been recorded in God’s Word for your benefit. So what is the lesson that Abraham is called to pass along to his posterity according to this text? It is that God expects them to be both righteous and just in all their dealings. They are to be righteous before God, and just with their neighbor. They are to be marked by godly morals and fair dealings. As the prophet Micah put it,

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

That’s the idea. And this lesson is taught to Abraham through this exchange in two examples, one positive and one negative. The positive example is the Lord Himself. Notice that the text connects the “*righteousness and justice*” that Abraham’s progeny is to practice with “*the way of the Lord.*” In other words, they are to be righteous and just because God is righteous and just. And, as we’ve seen, that was part of the reason the Lord revealed His plan to Abraham; He wanted the patriarch to know that He judges rightly because He is both just and righteous. His people should seek to emulate the same character to effect the same outcome, the same way of life. And this is a reminder that our morality is grounded on the character of God.

Did you hear that? Morality is grounded in the nature of God. It must be. What else could it be grounded in? What other objective standard could there be? Logically speaking, the existence of objective morals requires the existence of God. “If God Himself is unjust, then the very foundation of all life’s values is pulled from under our feet.”²³ And this, again, is why God brings Abraham in on His plan. He wants Abraham to know that He is just. He wants Abraham to know that He doesn’t just judge the wicked, but that His judgments are always right (even when we don’t understand them). But the point I’m making at the moment is that what is “right” is informed by the nature of God.

We don’t have time to get too deep into this, but you can readily find out more if you search for information on the moral argument for the existence of God. Essentially, a question we should all ask is how do we account for the objective morality—the sense that this is right and that is wrong—that we all ascribe to? The Christian answer is simply that morality is a consequence of the character and nature of God. It’s grounded in Him, the God who is, and so it is objective.

Can the atheist ground his or her moral in something objective? I don’t think so. If you try to ground it naturalistic evolutionary theories, then our sense of right and wrong is just a consequence of what is advantageous for our survival or reproduction. Our morality may help us perpetuate, but that does make it intrinsically “right.” The opposite may seem “right” to us if the conditions were different. “If human beings are simply the product of naturalistic evolution, then we have no foundation for moral obligation and human dignity.”²⁴ Jeffrey Dahmer, a sexual predator and cannibal, justified his actions by saying, “If it all happens naturalistically, what’s the need for a God? Can’t I set my own rules? Who owns me? I own myself.”

Now you know that his actions were wrong. But *how* do you know they are wrong? It’s difficult to prove that they are objectively wrong through naturalistic materialism, so people tend to appeal to their feelings. But how do you know your feelings are trustworthy? And what if Adolf Hitler’s feelings tell him it’s right to commit genocide, and your feelings tell you it’s morally reprehensible? How do we know whose feelings are correct? It can’t be that most people agree with our feelings because there have been times in history where the majority of people embraced ideas that we would say were still wrong. Once upon a time most people in America believed it was moral to enslave Black Africans. Did the fact that the majority believed that make it right? Of course not. But what I’m saying is that morality seems very subjective unless you can find something objective to ground it in, and random chemical reactions, survival instincts, personal feelings, or societal consensus don’t seem very solid a basis. But the Christian has one—the character of God. So morality is fixed because God doesn’t change. None of this means that non-believers cannot do moral and good things. It simply means that if they think of them as moral and good, they have to borrow categories from the theist.

But you can see the relationship between morality and God’s nature in our text, can’t you? Look again at verse 19. Abraham’s family is to practice “*righteousness and justice*,” and in so doing they are keeping “*the way of the Lord*.” Their actions are pattern after His. That’s the way it’s always been. That’s the way it must be. The nature of God informs the believer’s ethic. That is the positive example.

But there’s a negative example too. It’s hinted at here, but brought out more clearly in the next chapter, and that’s the example of Sodom and Gomorrah. The people of these cities were unrighteous and unjust in their dealings. They are the foil for God’s people. They are an example of what God’s people are not to be. And their destruction is meant as a solemn warning. And inasmuch as Christians are rightly thought of as children of Abraham (Gal 3:29), then the warning is relevant to us as well. And so Peter wrote with sobering force,

“...if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes [God] condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; ⁷ and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked ⁸ (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment

until the day of judgment,¹⁰ and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.” (2 Peter 2:6-10)

Peter wants us to know what Abraham wanted his offspring to know, namely, that the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is instructive. It teaches us that God delivers the righteous and brings the wicked to ruin. By the end of the next chapter that lesson will be impressed up on us as we witness the devastation brought upon these cities. “There on the border of Israel, the eerie, burnt-out, sulphur-stenched remains of Sodom and Gomorrah permanently testified to what happens to a people who reject righteousness and justice.”²⁵

But this doesn’t have to be our story. God is gracious and merciful. But not at the expense of His righteousness and justice. As the Lord came down to judge arrogant assembly at Babel or the callous citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, so the Lord would come down again to pour out judgment on sin when He took on our humanity and took upon Himself a cross that we deserved. The difference, however, is that this time the blow of judgment that the Lord came to deliver was simultaneously the greatest mercy we could ever know. Why? Because the sinless Christ took upon Himself our unrighteousness and experienced the wrath of God on the cross. That’s justice. That’s what we deserve. That’s what it looks like. But that’s also what God’s love looks like because He put Himself in the place of every sinner who would believe on Christ. Paul writes,

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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.” (Romans 3:21-26)

God is both just and the justifier. Just because He doesn’t sweep aside the need for justice. And the justifier because He makes us righteous when we trust in the work of Christ for our salvation. Justice and righteousness. At the heart of the Gospel. So turn from sin and rebellion, and turn to Christ as Lord and Savior. Call upon His name to save. Renounce your own efforts and receive the fruit of His. That is how sinners are saved. That’s how every sinner is saved. By grace, through faith. And if you want to have a conversation about this after the service, meet one of the pastors at any of the exits today.

But the justice and righteousness of God are not just critical for understanding the Gospel, they also serve to ground for Abraham’s appeal in the next paragraph. Lord willing, we’ll look at that famous text next Sunday...

Pray with me...

¹ Indeed, we have modern parlance that associates such sins with Sodom (e.g., sodomy, sodomite, etc.).

² Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 247.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, PW (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 263. “That acknowledged, there are other passages that are appropriately cited to support the idea that the canon witnesses that homosexual practice is a transgression of God’s will for his human creatures. As Waltke points out, ‘homosexuality is a capital offense in the Old Testament (Lev 18:22; 20:13)’ and further, the New Testament reaffirms the Old Testament’s assertion that homosexual acts constitute sinful behavior (Rom 1:24–27; 1 Cor 6:9). In the light of that consistent scriptural teaching, one cannot help but think that the homosexual intentions of the citizens of Sodom contribute to the dark picture of that notorious city.” Longman, 248.

⁴ Hughes, 263.

⁵ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 132. Also cited in Hughes, 263.

⁶ E.g., John D. Currid, *Genesis*, EPSC (Leyland: Evangelical Press, 2003, 2015), 1:334.

⁷ J. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 91-92.

⁸ Longman, 236.

⁹ John M. Frame, *Concise Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006, 2023), 27.

¹⁰ Richard D. Phillips, *Genesis*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 631.

¹¹ “It has become popular these days to downplay or even deny the idea of God as a judge of sin. However, the New Testament’s evocation of the memory of Sodom and Gomorrah to parallel the future judgment is a reminder of what lays in store for those who reject God or who, after following God, decide to look longingly back on a life of sin. Indeed, according to Jesus, the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah will be nothing compared to those who reject his message: ‘If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town’ (Matt 10:14–15). On another occasion, according to the Gospel of Luke, we learn that on the day Jesus returns, it will be similar to the days of Lot. ‘People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed’ (Luke 17:28–30). He goes on and warns his hearers not to be like Lot’s wife who looked back and lost her life (17:33).” Longman, 254.

¹² He would not have been able to guarantee this if open theists are right, since “*this time next year*” (Gen 18:14) implies that she has not conceived yet and, it’s at least possible, that Abraham or Sarah could refuse to have intercourse in the ensuing months (or someone could sin against them in a way that resulted in the loss of either of their lives or the baby’s). This reduces the Lord’s promise to Abraham to a mere prediction.

¹³ Cf. Ps 139:1-6; 147:5.

¹⁴ Phillips, 631.

¹⁵ E.g., Ibid.

¹⁶ Duguid, 98.

¹⁷ The last clause there doesn’t mean that the promises made to Abraham were conditioned on his behavior. They were, after all, promises of grace. But the ethic that Abraham is being trained in here will eventually be codified into Law in the days of Moses, and the Israel’s experience of some of the promises of Abraham—like the promise of land—would be conditioned on their obedience to that ethic. God would not abandon His promises to Abraham, even when His people were abandoning righteousness and justice. But His people would not enjoy the same intimacy with God when they chose to live in such fashion. And eventually they would lose the land promised to Abraham because of this. That’s the point. And so Abraham was to warn them against these outcomes by modeling for his children and their children “*the way of the Lord*” (18:19).

¹⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹⁹ Cf. Exod 12:26-27; 13:8-10; Deut 4:9-10; 6:4-9, 12-25; 11:13-21; 31:9-13; Ps 78:6-7; Ecc 12:12-14.

²⁰ Phillips, 629.

²¹ Ibid., 629-630.

²² Ibid., 630.

²³ Joyce D. Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50*, BST (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1986, 2021), 57-58.

²⁴ Paul Copan, “The Moral Argument for God’s Existence,” accessed online at: <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/the-moral-argument-for-gods-existence/>.

²⁵ Hughes, 262.