

#### 4. Mercy and Justice in Psalms and Proverbs (3Q 2019—The Least of These)

**Biblical material:** Ps. 9:7–9, 13–20; Psalm 82; Psalm 101; Psalm 146; Prov. 10:4; Prov. 13:23, 25; 30:7–9.

##### Quotes

- All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope. *Winston Churchill*
- God's mercy and grace give me hope - for myself, and for our world. *Billy Graham*
- Satan tries to counterfeit the work of God, and by doing this, he may deceive many. To make us lose hope, feel miserable like himself, and believe that we are beyond forgiveness, Satan might even misuse words from the scriptures that emphasize the justice of God in order to imply that there is no mercy. *Dieter F. Uchtdorf*
- There is no crueler tyranny than that which is perpetuated under the shield of law and in the name of justice. *Montesquieu*
- Until the great mass of the people shall be filled with the sense of responsibility for each other's welfare, social justice can never be attained. *Helen Keller*
- Ethics and equity and the principles of justice do not change with the calendar. *D. H. Lawrence*

##### Questions

Why do we turn to Psalms and Proverbs for ideas regarding mercy and justice? We know this is a sinful world, so why should we work for justice? How do we demonstrate mercy in our dealings with others? What do such concepts have to do with the way we live and the way we organize society? What about the great controversy?

##### Bible summary

God judges with justice and protects the oppressed (Ps. 9:7–9; 13–20). “God stands in the midst of his great assembly to judge those who judge.” (Ps. 82:1 FBV). “I will sing of your faithful love and good judgment. I will sing praises to you, Lord. I will make sure my life is blameless. When will you come and help me? My life will be one of integrity even in private.” (Ps. 101:1, 2 FBV). “He makes sure the oppressed receive justice. He gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free.” (Ps. 146:7 FBV). The land of the poor could produce a lot of food, but it’s stolen through injustice (see Prov. 13:23). However the Lord blesses those who do good (Prov. 13:25). In Prov. 30:7–9 is the plea to be neither rich nor poor, to avoid the temptations either way.

##### Comment

Proverbs seem to indicate (see for example Prov. 11:31) that there is always a positive result for those who live right. However Job and others have experienced the negative, while David asked why the wicked prospered...

The blessings of the righteous really come down to one thing: trust in the gracious character of God. For in the end we may not have all we want, we may experience

terrible disasters, we may not even have things restored to us as did Job. Our lives may not have what we would call a happy ending. But God's grace is sufficient...

It is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance; it is by his grace that we are saved by our trust in him. We don't claim any righteousness of our own; we simply place our confidence in God. That's not to say there are no benefits to a Christian life. We have peace, hope, assurance, forgiveness, mercy etc., etc. Most of all we are friends of a friendly God, and we can be totally sure of his best intentions. So we must not be blind to the delights of living in harmony with God.

But in an ironic sense, the chief blessing of the righteous is they know they are not righteous! If we think ourselves righteous, we do not look for change, we do not seek God's transforming power. In the first Ellen White comment below we see the truth. When we recognize we cannot possibly save ourselves nor do anything righteous—only then do we really appreciate Christ's help. That is the true blessing!

Psalms and Proverbs invite us to look again at what we think we see. They argue for justice and wise decisions in all areas of life. Justice in these Scriptures relates primarily to good judgment and discernment—values often lacking in today's world. They consistently appeal for those in charge to make sure justice is really just!

Over and over again Psalms and Proverbs call for us to be wise. We are not to follow the human value-system, rather follow the values of God. Reject intolerance, spiritual pretense, material concerns. A radical approach to the Truth—for the One who is Truth Incarnate in Reality stands among us.

### **Ellen White Comments**

The shortness of time is urged as an incentive for us to seek righteousness and to make Christ our friend. This is not the great motive. It savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God be held before us to compel us through fear to right action? This ought not to be. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He proposes to be our friend, to walk with us through all the rough pathways of life. {RH, August 2, 1881 par. 6}

Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in Heaven, infinite wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of his creatures must rest upon a conviction of his justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of Heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear, rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. Evil must be permitted to come to maturity. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages, Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of his law might forever be placed beyond all question. {GC88 498-9}

Through the plan of salvation the justice and mercy of God are fully vindicated, and to all eternity rebellion will never again arise, affliction never again touch the universe of God. {TA 296}