

Introducing Our Faith: The Living God

Worksheet for Week 4

Portraits of Holy God, Part 2 – Holy God as Righteous Judge, Loving Father, Redeemer, Good Shepherd

Last week, we began looking at eight biblical portraits of God: Creator, King, Personal Revealer, Priest, Judge, Father, Redeemer, and Shepherd. These worksheets will introduce you to the material we'll talk about in class each week and provide you with a structured set of daily Bible readings related to these portraits.

Holy God as Righteous Judge

For many Christians, thinking of God as a righteous judge is the most problematic of all the portraits of God. Judges consider evidence. They find some people guilty and others innocent. They condemn the guilty to punishment and release the innocent into freedom. Nobody wants to be judged! Of course, we don't usually hesitate when we judge others and we usually like to think that, in the end, the bad guys will get their just dues! When we come to the Bible, we cannot escape notions of judgment, guilt, sin, innocence, punishment, reward, and so on. If we try to skip over this portrait of God, much of the Bible becomes incoherent nonsense.

In the Bible, "righteousness" is virtually synonymous with "justice." Saying that God is righteous is to affirm that God is the perfect standard of what is right, what is good, what is just, and what is true. God's righteousness is closely aligned with God's holiness and is demonstrated by his faithfulness to his covenant. God's righteousness is seen in his moral character and as we grow in holiness, we grow in righteousness. Whatever image of the atonement¹ we want to use, Jesus' death on the cross reconciles us to God, making us righteous in God's sight.

Much of the biblical use of "righteousness" is taken from the Hebrew Law Court and God's righteousness often refers to God being a fair and impartial judge. In ancient Israel, law courts worked differently than in our day. Rather than using public prosecutors and juries, there were three parties – a judge, the plaintiff, and the defendant. A judge was a good judge (a righteous judge) if he tried the case according to the law, if he was impartial, if he punished sin, and if he protected the weak and defenseless. Thus, as the righteous judge, God is true to his word and judges impartially, for Jew and Gentile alike. Through the faithfulness of Jesus, God has dealt with sin and vindicated the helpless. He has declared innocent ("justified/made righteous") those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Just as we can trust God to keep his promises, we can trust that God will always be just!

Though we often think of God the Judge being pretty much an Old Testament idea, we couldn't be more wrong. In one of his strongest claims to equality with God, Jesus says that the Father has given him the power of judgment, "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father" (John 5:22-23). Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 24:31-46) is about the final judgment and Jesus the judge.

Holy God as Loving Father

Understanding God as a loving father, or parent, is one of the most powerful metaphors in scripture. This portrait leads us to seeing our relationships with God and others as familial. We are a spiritual family with God at its head. Jesus is uniquely the Son, but we too are God's children. God loves us totally, completely, and without condition, just as we love our own children. God is affirming, encouraging, and supportive of his children. But as with any responsible father or parent, God instructs us, disciplines us, and holds us accountable to high standards. Salvation is new birth into this family, a family which transcends even those with whom we share DNA!

¹ Making atonement for our sins (for example, Lev 1:4) is to do what restores us to a right relationship with God. I usually remember this by thinking of the word as "*at-one*"ment, because we are, again, at one with God. Thus, on one day each year, the High Priest of Israel would enter the temple to make atonement for the sins of Israel.

Bible Readings for Week 4

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings? What do they tell us about God's nature?

<p>Day 1 Psalm 96 God will judge the world with righteousness and truth</p>	<p>Day 2 Matthew 24:31-46 Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats</p>
<p>Day 3 John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; Hebrews 12:5-6 God as Loving Father</p>	<p>Day 4 Isaiah 43:1-14; Luke 2:8-14 God as redeemer and savior</p>
<p>Day 5 John 10:1-18 Jesus , the Good Shepherd</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>