

The Attributes of God: Justice and Mercy

Passages: As listed in the lesson.

Memory Verse

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

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
True justice and mercy come from God.	1. God is just. 2. God is merciful.	Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Justice
- B. Mercy
- C. How Do God’s Justice and Mercy Work in Salvation?

Life Application

- 1. What Does the Lord Require of You?
- 2. Respond with the Word of God

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Our just and merciful God has shown us exactly what it means to be just and merciful. Thus, as children of God, we must strive to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him in our daily actions.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

Today, we are going to learn about God’s justice and mercy. These two ideas may seem like opposites, but they are actually two sides of the same coin. On one side, we have God’s justice and on the other side, His mercy. Just as we cannot separate one side of this coin from the other, we cannot separate God’s justice and mercy from each other. God’s justice and mercy work side by side, and today we will be learning more about these two attributes of God.

A. Justice

Dictionaries define “justice” as the process or result of using laws to fairly judge and punish crimes and criminals, the key word being “fairly.” Why? We believe justice ensures that everyone receives the same treatment for the same wrongdoing. For example, at home, parents might scold their first child for neglecting to clean up, but simply clean up for their second child when they forget. In the classroom, a teacher might favor one student over another, and even our treatment of pets might differ. This is the type of justice we see in the world, and it is very different from the justice that we see in the Bible.

1. The justice of God

Let us begin by reading Genesis 18:16–33.

After visiting Abraham, God and the two angels departed for Sodom to judge it for its wickedness. While the angels went on ahead, God remained. Standing before God, Abraham asked if He would not spare the people if there were fifty righteous people. God responded by saying that He would. Abraham then lowered the number to forty-five, and God responded as before. Each time Abraham lowered the number, from forty, to thirty, to twenty, to ten, God said that He would spare the city. Once God had finished speaking with Abraham, He left, and Abraham returned to his place. Let us continue with Genesis 19:24–29.

The morning after God rescued Abraham’s nephew Lot from the evil cities, He rained brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah! In an instant, the cities were burned to the ground. Abraham went out early in the morning to the same place where he had spoken with God and looked towards the cities—the rising smoke was like smoke from a furnace. God had administered His justice.

From the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we are able to see the justice God deals towards wickedness and sin. Let us discover more about God’s justice.

2. How is God just?

The Bible testifies to God’s character and illustrates very clearly that He is a just God. We can see this especially in His laws and His judgments.

God is just in His laws (Rom 7:12)

The laws of God are just because they testify to God’s righteousness. When we learn about the laws of God and what He has commanded us, we are able to see sin more clearly. One example of the laws we must keep today is the Ten Commandments. Let’s review the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:3–17). *(Have students recite the Ten Commandments in order.)*

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image.

3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

God gave us the Ten Commandments, His laws, to help us know what is holy, just, and good from His perspective. Without them, we would not have a true standard of justice.

God is just in His judgments (Ps 119:75)

God's judgments are just and always right. God judges all people for their actions, whether right or wrong! Psalm 89:14 records: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of [God's] throne." So, God's judgments are based on these two concepts: His righteousness, which is what is right in His eyes, and His justice, that is, His fairness. God will always give a righteous judgment according to our deeds, and on the day of judgment, God will punish those who are wicked and reward those who are righteous. For example, on the day of judgment, the Lord will judge all the words that we have spoken, whether cursing or praising (Mt 12:36–37).

While God's justice is to be feared, He exercises His justice and mercy together. When we look at the interaction between Abraham and God, we can see that God was willing to spare the city if there were ten righteous people in the city. When giving judgment, God seeks justice, but also bestows mercy based on what He sees in the hearts of men. God wants to save people so that they will not perish. The key is that they must be willing to repent. However, we must also understand that even though God wants us to return to Him, there will be a day when our time to turn back is over. On that day, God's judgment will come upon those who are unwilling to repent, and they will be judged according to His justice and righteousness.

B. Mercy

Mercy is the "kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly." The justice and mercy of God are not opposites; rather, they go hand in hand. We have already discussed the example of God's justice towards a city that was wicked, but now, let us look at an example of God's mercy towards another city that was wicked. Let us turn to Jonah 3:1–10.

1. The mercy of God

God sent the prophet Jonah to the city of Nineveh to proclaim a message of destruction from God. After hearing the message, the people repented. The king of Nineveh even sent out a proclamation for all people and animals to fast, be covered in sackcloth, and cry out to the Lord! From the greatest to the least, they all fasted and cried out to the Lord. When God saw what they did, He relented from bringing disaster upon the city. God had seen the hearts of the people of Nineveh. They were willing to truly repent, so He did not destroy the city as originally intended.

2. How is God merciful?

God is merciful because He does not punish us according to what we deserve. Just like the people of Nineveh, sometimes we sin against God. We see that when the city was willing to

repent, God was willing to relent from bringing destruction. Today, we also receive mercy from God in this manner. In recognizing our weaknesses and bringing them to the Lord, we are able to receive God's mercy. God loves us all, and He finds no pleasure in our deaths, even of the wicked. He wants all people to return to Him and receive salvation. However, our hearts are often so hardened that we are unwilling to return to Him. In Isaiah 30:15, God has promised that in returning to Him, we will be saved. Through returning to God, we will be able to experience His unfailing mercy.

C. How Do God's Mercy and Justice Work Together in Salvation?

The Bible reveals God's mercy, as well as His just nature. One day, He will judge the whole world according to His righteousness. He has offered us a salvation plan, but He is not ignoring justice in favor of mercy. Rather, He is displaying justice through mercy. When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, His suffering and eventual death were the penalties paid for sin, and a requirement of God's justice. This act of sacrifice from Jesus Christ fulfilled God's justice, and in turn, God's mercy was given to us so that we are no longer condemned but saved.

As those who have received the mercy of God, we are greatly blessed. As Paul wrote, "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off" (Rom 11:22). Now that we have learned about God's justice and mercy, let us strive to show the same justice and mercy of God in our own lives.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What is justice?** Justice is the process or result of using laws to fairly judge and punish crimes and criminals.
- 2. Give an example of God's justice in the Bible.** God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- 3. In what ways is God just?**
 - a. God's laws are just
 - b. God's judgments are just
- 4. What is mercy?** Mercy is the kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly.
- 5. Give an example of God's mercy in the Bible.** God's willingness to relent from destroying Nineveh.
- 6. How do God's justice and mercy work together in salvation?** Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross for the justice of God, and through His crucifixion, we receive the mercy of God to receive eternal life!

Life Application

1. What Does the Lord Require of You?

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8)

God wants us to be just and merciful, just as He is, but how do we do that? What ultimately motivates us to become just and merciful is our love. The story of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) illustrates how our love can cross cultural barriers and support the needs of others. Micah 6:8 teaches us to "do justly," "love mercy," and "walk humbly with [our] God." God wants us to have these three characteristics, but to "do," "love," and "walk" are active verbs – God wants us to take action. Love motivates us to see the needs of others, and Micah 6:8 teaches us how to respond and act upon them according to the word of God.

Consider each and ask: what does this look like in your personal life?

a. To do justly

(Example: To do justly means to do what is right in God's eyes and not my own. Knowing this, I will make sure that I do not cheat or copy the work of other students, because by cheating, I am lying to my teacher. I will do what is right and just according to God's commandments.)

b. To love mercy

(Example: To love mercy is to make sure that I do not have any hatred or hold grudges against anyone in my heart. Even though there may be people in my life that I may get into a conflict with, I will pray for God to give me a merciful heart filled with His love, so that I am able to forgive and let go of any hatred or dislike in my heart.)

c. To walk humbly with your God

(Example: To walk humbly with God in my life means humbly asking God to walk with me, avoiding a prideful heart, and being aware of my dependence on Him moment by moment. It also means praising and giving thanks to Him for the good grades I receive in school, because He is the one who has given me the wisdom and grace to do well! It means cultivating a relationship with Him and choosing to follow His commands over the expectations of the world around me.)

These are three behaviors that God requires from us. He wants us to do these things in our daily life, so let's make it a goal to put one of these into action this week!

2. Respond with the Word of God

(Teachers: Below are different scenarios related to doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly. Students must identify which behavior from Micah 6:8 the scenario requires. Next, students must select a verse that would be suitable to use as an encouragement for each scenario and explain why they chose that verse.)

Let's read a few scenarios together. For each, pick which behavior from Micah 6:8 applies to it. Then try thinking of another verse that could help the person in each scenario.

Scenario 1

Jack always dreaded going to history class. There were so many names, dates, and places to remember that it made his head spin. After his history teacher had finished taking roll, she announced that they were having a pop quiz! Jack started to panic until he saw a piece of paper on the ground by his desk. When he took a closer look, he realized that it was a pop quiz someone had left from the previous class. *Which verse would you use to encourage Jack? Why did you pick that verse?*

- To do justly. Possible verse: James 4:17

Scenario 2

Rebecca thought her younger sister Ann was a real pain! Ann wanted to do everything with her, especially when Rebecca's friends were over. Ann would annoy her sister by following her around and demanding a turn in everything Rebecca did. She would even interrupt Rebecca as she talked with her friends! One day, Rebecca decided that she had had enough of this!

Which verse would you use to encourage Rebecca? Why did you pick that verse?

- To love mercy. Possible verse: Proverbs 17:17

Scenario 3

Lex was doing well in school. He was the captain of the soccer team and had many great friends. It seemed like everything in life was going so well that he started to think to himself, "What a great life I have! I bet there are guys in school who wish they were me!"

Which verse would you use to encourage Lex? Why did you pick that verse?

- To walk humbly with your God. Possible verse: Job 1:21

Scenario 4

Janet was walking to class with her friends when she saw several bills fall out of the pocket of the student walking in front of her. As she stooped down to pick them up, her friends whispered to her, "You should keep the money! She won't even notice."

Which verse would you use to encourage Janet? Why did you pick that verse?

- To do justly. Possible verse: Proverbs 19:1

Memory Verse

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Meaning

1. To do justly means to do the right thing in all aspects of our life according to the commandments of God.
2. To love mercy means to show mercy and forgiveness to others. Instead of complaining about the behavior of others, we first look at ourselves and think about what we can do for them.
3. To walk humbly with God means that we need to remember at all times that God is the one who blesses us with what we have in our life. There is nothing that we have that God has not given to us. Therefore, we have to glorify Him in all that we do.

Conclusion

God desires for us to show mercy and justice to others in the same way He has shown them to us. But how can this be achieved? We must learn to love others the way God has taught us to. Love truly motivates us to respond to the needs we see. The story of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) illustrates how love crosses cultural barriers and deals with real needs. Love motivates us, but the characteristics in Micah 6:8 teach us how to respond according to the word of God. As children of God, we must strive to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God in our daily actions.

Lesson 3 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. Pick one of the characteristics in the memory verse. Briefly explain what it means.
See Memory Verse section.
2. How did God show justice to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? Why did He show justice to them?
He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire because of their wickedness.
3. In what two ways is God just?
God is just in His laws and in His judgments. His laws help us to know what is holy, just, and good, and His judgments are always right.
4. How did God show mercy to the city of Nineveh? Why did He show mercy?
He relented from destroying the city, because they were truly willing to repent.
5. How did Jesus Christ's death on the cross fulfill God's justice and allow God to show His mercy to us?
Jesus' suffering and death were the penalties paid for our sin, and a demonstration of God's justice. This act of sacrifice fulfilled God's justice and, in turn, led to our salvation out of God's mercy.
6. Describe how you have done justly, loved mercy, or walked humbly with your God this week.
Personal answers.