

Old Testament: Genesis 6:5-8
New Testament: Matthew 15:10-20

Please join me in prayer. And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In everything, discourse, athletic endeavors, the machinations of politics, there seems to be a proverbial pendulum that is ever swinging back and forth, back and forth, as it seeks to, but never seems to, find balance. Instead, most everything swings between one extreme or the other and never seems to settle into a state of balance. You've likely experienced this kind of fluctuation and inconsistency. Perhaps you've struggled with dieting or exercising or finding a good work flow. Perhaps you've even experienced such fluctuation within your own journey of faith. On the one end of the pendulum swing we have Jonathan Edwards and his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and worship songs entitled "God of Wrath". On the other end of the pendulum swing we have Rob Bell and his book "Love Wins" in which he is accused of universalism and not adhering to the faith of the fathers; of being outside the bounds of orthodoxy.

I too have fallen into this trap. You've heard me speak of God's love and God's judgment being two different sides of the same coin attempting to hold some semblance of balance while emphasizing God's love and God's calling upon each one of us to reflect the love of God to others. What if the middle ground, what if the way we could finally bring the pendulum to a balanced stand still, was *not* the pursuit of God's wrath *nor* the pursuit of God's love, but the pursuit of God's justice? What if God's justice is the perfect balance between God's judgment upon a continually rebellious and sinful creation and God's steadfast, never ending love for that same creation?

Our reading from Genesis indicates that the wickedness of humanity was great and that *every* intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The perfect love of God cannot co-exist with such thorough evil. Evil such as is being described in those few verses from Genesis 6 cannot exist in the same space as God. Further, as God is the Maker and Sustainer of all things including the evil humans being described in our reading, it is just that God would seek to correct their behaviors and their hearts. It was never God's intention that the thoughts of humanity's hearts were "only evil continually". As such, it is incumbent upon God to exercise justice.

Now this justice that I am speaking of is not the same as the justice that so many of us are familiar with. In the United States judicial system the underpinning is that justice is

blind. As such, the vast majority of us observe or encounter justice to be equal even if it is not equitable. This is not the kind of justice that God is interested in. I've spoken before about God really has little interest in equality but God has every intention of pursuing equity in everything. And this is because, for God, justice is not blind. Justice *only* functions within the larger framework of un-ending love. And so, it's not that the flood is a function of blind justice nor is it a function of God's wrath. Verse 6 tells us explicitly that YHWH regretted that he had made humanity on the earth and not that the making of humanity itself grieved him to his heart, but that YHWH's own regret grieved him to his heart. And so God resolved to start again with a remnant. God didn't completely start from scratch. That would have been blind justice like we're accustomed to. Justice within the context of love looks like God practicing grace and mercy on the whole of humanity through Noah and his family.

This heretofore lack of nuance is mine and my colleagues' error throughout time and history. We too have fallen prey to the pendulum swings. We either invoke God's wrath like Jonathan Edwards or we lean too heavily into the love of God without holding space for justice. While I love my children endlessly, to the moon and back, there are consequences as I seek to pursue justice in my parenting. And this is the benefit of God's justice. While mine is imperfect and inconsistent, just ask my children they'll tell you, God's is not. God's justice is perfect within the broader context of God's love. And if that means that there is the occasional flood or pruning, like Jesus speaks of, then that is what justice looks like within the broader context of love. Consequences and accountability, within the context of love, are part of what it is to be created beings under the care of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.