

Psalm 143:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight
shall no man living be justified.

Analysis

And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. This plea introduces one of Scripture's most profound theological statements: universal human unrighteousness before God's perfect standard. The imperative "enter not into judgment" (al-tavo bemishpat, אַל-תָּבוֹא בְּמִשְׁפָט) begs God not to proceed with formal legal proceedings against David. Though God's servant, David knows he cannot withstand divine scrutiny.

"In thy sight" (lephanekha, לְפָנֶיךָ) means literally "before your face," in God's direct presence where nothing is hidden. The assertion "no man living be justified" (loyitsdak kol-chai, לֹא יִצְדַּק כָּל־חַי) uses tsadaq (צָדָק), the root for righteousness—to be declared righteous, vindicated, or acquitted. David declares the impossibility of self-justification before God.

This verse profoundly anticipates Romans 3:20: "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Paul quotes Psalm 143:2 to establish universal sinfulness and the necessity of justification by faith alone. What David feared—standing in judgment—Christ endured, bearing our judgment so we might receive His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Believers can therefore cry "Abba, Father" rather than fleeing judgment.

Historical Context

Psalm 143 is the last of the seven Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), used throughout church history for confession and intercession. Early Christians recited these psalms during Lent. The psalm's superscription attributes it to David but provides no specific historical context, making it applicable to any believer's experience of guilt and need for divine mercy. The theology here—human unrighteousness before God's holiness—permeates the entire Old Testament witness and finds systematic expression in Paul's Romans exposition.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that 'no man living be justified' in God's sight deepen appreciation for justification by faith?
2. What is the difference between fearing judgment as an unbeliever versus as a repentant servant of God?
3. How should this verse shape your approach to confession and prayer?

Interlinear Text

לֹא כִּי עָבֹד בָּנֶךָ אַתָּה בְּמִשְׁפָט תִּבְאַל וְאַתָּה
H408 And enter not into judgment H854 with thy servant H3588 H3808 be justified
H935 H4941 H5650 H6663

לְפָנֶיךָ יְהִי כָּל שָׁמָן לְפָנֶיךָ יְהִי
for in thy sight H3605 shall no man living
H6440 H2416

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (Righteousness): For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

Romans 3:20 (Righteousness): Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Job 25:4 (Righteousness): How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?

Job 14:3 (Judgment): And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee?

Psalms 130:3 (Parallel theme): If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

Galatians 2:16 (Righteousness): Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Job 15:14 (Righteousness): What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?

1 John 1:10 (Parallel theme): If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Job 4:17 (Righteousness): Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?

Exodus 34:7 (Parallel theme): Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

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