

# The Justice of God

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It is tremendously important that we know, that we know what God is like. This God we serve; what kind of God is He? What is He like? The answer to that question is more valuable to you and of greater importance perhaps than any other one question or answer that could be made or given. It was Tersteegen who said, O God, Thou art far other than men have dreamed or taught; unspoken in all language and unpictured in all thoughts. And Watts wrote, Earth from afar hath heard thy fame and worms have learned to list thy name, but oh, the glories of thy mind leave all our soaring thoughts behind.

Tonight, I want to talk about the justice of God. Let me read some scriptures. I just pick out a few, five or six. There are so many of them found in the Bible. Genesis 18, shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? That was Abraham. Deuteronomy 10:17, For the Lord your God is God of Gods and Lord of Lords, a great God; a mighty and a terrible which regardeth not persons nor taketh reward. Psalms 99, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous all together. Psalm 92:15, to show that the Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. Psalm 97, the Lord reigneth: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. Isaiah 28, judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet. Revelation 15:5-7, and I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art and wast and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

Now, I want to talk tonight about God's justice and tell you that if you know God, you know God who is absolutely and perfectly just. But we're going to have to define justice a little bit. What do we mean by justice? Well, I've looked this up very carefully in order that I might not preach out of my own head, but out of the Scriptures. And I find that justice is indistinguishable from righteousness in the Old Testament. It's the same word and with slight variations according to whether it's a verb or a noun or something else, but wherever judgment, justice, just and so on. They're all the same root word. It means uprightness, rectitude. And to say that God is just or that the justice of God is a fact, is to say that there is uprightness in God, that there is rectitude in God.

In Psalm 89 it says, justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne. In Psalm 97 it says, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. Justice and judgment, righteousness and judgment are said to be the habitation of God's throne, so that justice and righteousness are indistinguishable one from the other. To say that God is just is to say that God is equitable; that

He's morally equal. I don't want to sound dull, but if you go to the book of Ezekiel, the 18th chapter, you will find God sort of scolding Israel there. He says, in effect, or says pretty literally, you say the way of God is unequal. But He said, Are my ways unequal? No, O house of Israel. It is the house of Israel who has unequal ways.

Now, that word unequal there, simply of course means in equal, in equity. We talk about things being unequal, inequity. And you know that the word inequity and the word iniquity are the same word. You just change the letter, you have iniquity. It means that the iniquitous person is not morally equal. That he is not symmetrical morally; that he's unequal to himself. And then, the word judgment as we have it so often in the texts that I have read; justice and judgment, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.

And what is the judgment of God? It's the application of justice to a moral situation. I wish you might put down some of these things. I may not say them ever again. But judgment is the application of justice to a moral situation. And it may be favorable or unfavorable. When God judges a man, He brings justice to that man's life. And He applies justice to the moral situation which that man's life created. And if the man's ways are equal, then justice favors the man. If man's ways are unequal, then of course, it is on the other side, and God sentences the man.

Now, I'd like to pass this on to you and I want you to get this. And I'd like to wake up some of the somnolent cells that lie within your head and say to you that justice is not something that God has. Justice is something that God is. But some grammarian says, no, now wait a minute, just is something that God is. No, justice is something that God is. God is love and just as God is love, justice is something that God is. You sometimes hear it said, justice requires God to do this. And I don't doubt but what I will sometimes use expressions myself that are semantically improper for the reason that the human language is a tough thing. And when you talk about God, language staggers.

In an effort to describe God, the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New put such pressure on language that words groaned and squeaked under the effort to tell a story. Well, I suppose that even though I'm pointing the error of it out, I might be guilty also of sometimes using the words wrong. But, we must remember that justice is not something that is outside of God to which God must conform. We say justice requires God to do so and so.

My brethren, always remember, nothing ever requires God to do anything. If you have a God that is required to do anything, then you have a weak God who has to bow his neck to some yoke, and yield himself to pressure from the outside. But this is an error in speaking for it postulates a principle of justice that lies outside of God and to which God has to conform. Do you follow me along on that? That if I say justice requires God, justice forces God to do so and so, then I say, I think, well, justice is bigger than God. Justice lies outside of God. And God has to bow and do

beance to justice. But that is to think wrongly my friend, because that means that there is something bigger than God compelling God to do something.

If justice is a principle that required God to obey, there is no such principle in the universe as an abstract justice requiring obedience from gods and men. There is no such principle. If there is, who created it? Where did it come from? You see, there isn't anything but didn't come from God. And if it all came from God, then how can we say that there is above God a principle of justice? Who enforces that principle? Who created that principle? If there is such a principle, then that principle is superior to God for only a superior can compel obedience. If there's anything that can compel God to do anything, then that something is bigger and greater than God; and we'll have to stop saying Almighty God. We'll have to sing, not-Almighty God. We'll have to sing, almost Almighty God. We'll have to sing mighty God while angels bless thee, but we can't sing Almighty God while angels bless thee for there is nothing, there's nothing above that which compels.

Now there's nothing outside of God that can make God do anything. You'll have to shake your head I suppose to get this, but there is nothing outside of God that can make God do anything. I wish we could keep that in mind. Unless the church of Christ begins to see this again, what I'm saying to you is the common doctrine of the Puritans. It was the common teaching of the Presbyterians 150 years ago. It was the common teaching of Methodists and all of them, but it has been lost in the shuffle and God has been made into a little God not worthy of being worshipped. Remember that all God's reasons for doing anything come from within Him. They do not come from without Him. And there is no pressure group that can force God to do anything.

The newspapers are saying that the State Department and the President have had to modify their foreign, whatever they call it, because of public pressure. Well, even the President, sometimes even a king can be forced to do something by public pressure, but there isn't any pressure that can force God to do anything. If there were, I might get on my knees and worship God, but I'd have my fingers crossed. If there is a God, if our God is a God that will yield to public pressure, that has a principle lying outside of Him to which He must yield, then He cannot be the God, He cannot be God quite. He can be almost God, but not quite God.

You see, I say again, that all God's reasons for doing anything, lie inside of God. They do not lie outside of God to be brought to bear upon Him. They lie inside of God. That is, they are of what God is. God's reasons for doing what He does are, they spring out of what God is. Nothing has been added to God and from eternity. And nothing has been removed from God, from eternity. Our God is exactly what He was before there was a created atom. And He will be exactly what He is when the heavens are no more. And He has never changed in any way, because He is the unchanging God.

Now, God being perfect, is incapable of either loss or gain, and He's incapable of getting larger or being smaller. He's incapable of knowing more or knowing less. God is just God. And God acts justly from within, not in obedience to some imaginary law. He is the author of all that law and acts like Himself all the time. If we can only get this into our heads. We've been lied to and cheated and sold down the river and skinned and fleeced and betrayed and deceived so much by even those that we look up to and respect, that we have come to project our cynicism to the very throne of God. And unknown to us, we have within our minds the feeling that God is like that too.

Let me tell you that God always acts like Himself and that there is no pressure, no archangel, no 10,000 angels with swords, no cherubim or seraphim anywhere that can persuade God to act otherwise than as God. God always act as becomes Him. And He always will. And He had to redeem men within that mighty limitless framework. He could not change. If He changed, then He could not be God, for He would have to go from better to worse or from worse to better, and being God and being perfect, He would not go either direction. He had to remain God. So, the justice of God, the justice of God is sung here by the Holy saints of God. And the theologians, both Jewish and Christian, have declared that God isn't just God, and they have made the justice of God to be one of His attributes.

Now, if the attribute, one attribute of God is justice, and God will always act that way, not by compulsion from the outside, but because that's the way He is Himself; And if justice must always prevail. And if it lasts, justice will prevail, for justice, being an attribute of God, and God being the sovereign God who will prevail. If it is true that justice must prevail, and justice will prevail, then where do you and I come in? Where do we come in my friend? That's the question.

There was an old theologian by the name of Anselm. He has long been put aside, and we don't read Anselm any more. Many people can go through seminaries and never hear the name of the man at all. But Anselm was one of the great church fathers, the great theologians, the great saints, the great thinkers. He was called a second Augustine. And Anselm, asked God the question; he says, how dost Thou spare the wicked if Thou art just, supremely just? How dost Thou spare the wicked if Thou art just and supremely just?

Now, you know in this day, we have cheapened religion and cheapened salvation. We have cheapened our concept of God to a place where we expect to stumble in whistling and have God take us in. We expect that. We don't worry about it much. we expect we got a marked New Testament and a tract and we expect to stumble in and up to the pearly gates and bat on the gate and say, well God, I'm here, because we've reduced God in our thinking. My Brethren, the old serious theologian asked God the question, how dost Thou spare the wicked? How canst Thou spare a wicked man since Thou art just and supremely just? We'd better get that figured out lest we presumptuously go to the gate of heaven and be turned away.

Well, the old brother comforted himself and he said this, he said, we see where the river flows, but the spring whence it arises we see not. He knew God could, but he didn't know how He could. How canst Thou justify a wicked man and still be just he said. We see where the river flows, but whence it arises, we see not.

But, to the question itself, how canst Thou spare the wicked if Thou art just? There are two happy answers and I want to give them tonight. Those two happy answers, one of them is from the being of God as unitary. Now, there's a word you don't hear much anymore. You know, we write fiction and we sing choruses and we rock and roll on our way to glory, but brethren, we've got to answer some solid questions and we've got to know some things if we're going to be good Christians. And so, the being God, is unitary. Now what does that mean? It means that God is not composed of parts.

Now, you're not a unitary being. You're a composed spirit, soul and body. You have memory and forgetfulness. You have attributes which were given you. Some things can be taken away from you and you still can remain. There are whole sections of your brain that can be destroyed, and you can still live on. You can have members cut out by surgery, and you can still live on. You can forget, you can learn, and you can still live on. That's because you're not unitary, that is, God made you and made means composed. God put two together; God put you together. He put the torso and a head on top of the torso and legs under the torso. And He put your bloodstream, your blood, the ventricles and veins and arteries and nerves and ligaments and all the rest.

Well, we're put together like that you see, and you can take an amazing amount of a man away and he's still there. But you can't think of God like that, because the being of God is unitary. You see, the Jews always believed in a unitary God. Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God. Now Israel was not only saying that there is only one God, that Jews taught the unitary being of God. Then the church teaches so far as the church teaches anything; the church doesn't teach much of anything now. You can go to church a lifetime and not be a theologian. They ought to load your head down with good thoughts, good theological thoughts in one year. But nowadays, you can go a lifetime and not get much theology.

But saying that God, the being of God is unitary, that there is one God doesn't mean only that there is only one God, it means that God is one. Do you see the distinction there. We must not think of God as composed of parts working harmoniously, for there are no parts. We must think of God as one. And, that because God is one, God's attributes never quarrel with each other. Because man is not unitary, but made, because he's composed. The man may be frustrated, he may be a schizophreniac and part of him may war with another part of him. His justice may war, his sense of justice may war with the sense of mercy.

The judge sits on a bench many a time and is caught between mercy and justice. He doesn't know which to do. What is that famous saying of the man who said on the eve of war when he had to go out and fight for his country? He said to his fiancé that he loved and plan to marry, He said, I could not, I could not love thee so, if I love not duty more. There's a man caught between the love of a woman he wanted to stay with and the love of duty that he wanted to discharge his obligation to. Do you see, that's because man is made of parts. That's why we have psychiatrists, brothers; just try to get your parts back together. They don't do it you know. They don't do it, but they tried to do it. And so, we give them credit for trying to do it. That's why people go off on their, that's why they blow their torch, because they have the different parts aren't working harmoniously. But somebody says, ah, but God's parts are working harmoniously.

I say again, God has no parts any more than the diamond has parts. Know that God is all one God and everything that God does harmonizes with everything else that God does perfectly, because there are no parts to get out of fix and there are no attributes to face each other and fight it out; but that all God's attributes are one and together.

To think of God as the evangelist I say sometimes when I preach evangelistic sermons, I fall into the same semantic error. We think of God as presiding over a court of law and the sinner has broken the law of justice. There's justice out there somewhere outside of God, a justice. And the sinner has sinned against that external justice. And the sinner is put in handcuffs and brought before the bar of God. And God's mercy wants to forgive the sinner, but justice says, no, he's broken my laws. He must die. And so, we picture dramatically God sitting cheerfully on His throne passing a sentence of death upon the man that His mercy wants to pardon but can't because justice won't allow it.

My brethren, we might just as well be pagans and think about God the way the pagans do. That's not Christian theology. Never was and never can be. It is erroneous thus to think. For we're making a man out of God. Thou thinkest said God, that I was all together such a one as thou art; Thou thoughtest I was like thee said God. You thought because your judges sit on a throne or on a bench we call it, and because they, their hearts want to pardon, but the law won't permit them. And they're caught in the middle, and they turn ashen white when they sentence a young man.

I've been told sometimes judges turn ashen white and clutch the desk before them with a bench before them when they sentence men to die. Something in them isn't harmonizing. Their mercy isn't harmonizing with their sense of justice. And justice on the outside standing there as a law says that man shall die while mercy says, please, please spare him. But to think thus of God, my brethren, is to think wrongly of God, because everything that God is, harmonizes with everything else that God is. And everything that God does is one with everything else that God does. I said harmonize there. Really, that's not a good word, for harmony requires at least two. Harmony requires that there be two, but that they get together and for all the time be one. But there's

nothing like that in God. God just is. When you pray, say our Father which art in heaven. God just is.

Now, I say that the answer to the question, how can God being just yet acquit the wicked? The answer springs from the being of God as unitary. That God's justice and God's mercy do not quarrel with each other. The second is, from the effects of Christ's passion. I want to use that word. I want to continue to use it, the passion of Christ. Passion now means sex lust, but passion, back in the early days meant deep, terrible suffering. It meant deep, terrible suffering. They call Good Friday passion tide. And we talk about the Passion of Christ. It is the suffering Jesus did as He made His priestly offering in His own blood for us.

Now I want you to think a little bit that Jesus Christ is God and that all I've said about God, I have been describing Christ. He is unitary. He has taken on Himself the nature of man, but that nature of man is man. But the God, the Eternal Word who was before man was and who created man, is a unitary being, and there's no dividing of His substance, and so that Holy One suffered. And His suffering in His own blood for us was three things. It was infinite, and all mighty, and perfect.

Now, I'm not using words carelessly. I try not to use words carelessly, because I hate to hear them used carelessly. Infinite, and what does that mean? It means without bound and without limit, shoreless, bottomless, topless, forever and ever without any possible measure or limitation. And so, the suffering of Jesus and the atonement He made on that cross, under that darkening sky, was infinite in its power. That is, what He did there was absolutely infinite. And then, not only infinite, but almighty. It's possible for good men to almost do something, almost do something.

I was kidded and from the time I was a tiny little boy until my parents died, I was kidded for something I said when I was a child. We were walking down the winding lane on the farm back in the state of Pennsylvania one evening just at sundown. And that's the time the rabbits come out. My father had a gun and we were looking for rabbits. And I let out a little boyish yell and my father said, what's the matter? And I said, I almost saw a rabbit. And I know that I never heard the last of that. I almost saw a rabbit.

Well, to almost see something, to almost do something, to almost be something is the fix people get in because they're people. But Almighty God, never is almost anything. God is always exactly what He is. He is the Almighty One. And when He died on a cross, Isaac Watts says, God, the Mighty Maker died for man the creatures sin. And when God the Almighty Maker died, all the power there is was in that atonement.

My friend, you never can overstate the efficaciousness of the atonement. You never can exaggerate the power of the cross. And then, not only infinite and almighty, but perfect--perfect. That means

the atonement in Jesus Christ's blood is perfect. There isn't anything that can be added to it. It's spotless, it's impeccable, it's flawless. It is perfect as God is perfect.

So the question, how dost Thou spare the wicked if though art just is answered from the effective of Christ's Passion? And that Passion, that holy suffering there, and that resurrection from the dead, cancels our sins and abrogates our sentence. Now, where did we get that sentence and how did we get that sentence? We got that sentence by the application of justice to a moral situation. You see, no matter how nice and refined and lovely you think you are, you're a moral situation; you have been, you still are, you will be.

And when justice confronted you, that is when God confronted you, God's justice confronted a moral situation and found you unequal; found you not just, but unequal; found that your ways were not equal, found inequity, found iniquity. And because He found iniquity there, God sentenced you to die. Everybody in Chicago has been or is under sentence of death. I wonder how people can be so jolly under sentence of death; how so careless under sentence of death. For the soul that sinneth it shall die.

When justice confronts a moral situation, which is a man or woman or a young person, or anybody morally responsible, then either it justifies that person, if that person corresponds to the justice of God, or it condemned that person, if that person is unequal and has inequity, iniquity in him. That's how we got that sentence. And let me point out to you My friends, that when the justice of God, that is, when God in His justice, sentences the sinner to die, He does not quarrel with the mercy of God. He does not quarrel with the kindness of God. He does not quarrel with God's compassion or pity, for they're all attributes of a unitary God, and they cannot quarrel with each other. All the attributes of God concur in a man's death sentence. Remember that. And the very angels in heaven cried out and said, worthy art Thou, true and righteous art Thou, because Thou hath judged, Almighty God. True and righteous are thy judgments.

So that you'll never find in heaven a group of holy beings finding fault with the way God conducts his foreign policy. In Washington, you will find people who are not pleased with the way Eisenhower and Foster Dulles are conducting theirs. But God Almighty is conducting His world and every moral creature says true and righteous are thy judgments. For Thou art justice and justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne. So that when God sentences a man to die, mercy concurs and pity concurs and compassion concurs and wisdom concurs, and power, everything that's intelligent in God concurs in the sentence.

But oh, my brethren, through the mystery of atonement, I wonder if I've ever known myself the wonder, the wonder of it? Through the mystery of atonement, the soul that avails itself of that atonement. The soul that throws itself out on that atonement, for that soul, the moral situation has changed. God has not changed. You see, Jesus Christ did not die to change God. Jesus Christ died to



change a moral situation. When God's justice confronts an unprotected sinner, that justice sentences him to die; and all of God concurs in the sentence.

But when Christ, who is God, went on to the tree and died there in infinite agony, in a plethora of suffering, in a fullness of agony; when this great God died there, He suffered more than they are suffering in hell. He suffered all that they could suffer in hell. The agony of God for everything that God does, He does what all of God is, so that when God suffered for you, my brother, God suffered to change your moral situation. And the man who throws himself out on the mercy of God, has had the moral situation change. God doesn't wink and say, well, we'll excuse this fellow. He's made his decision; we'll forgive him. He's going into the prayer room, we'll pardon him. He's going to join the church, we'll overlook it. No, no, when God looks at an atoned for sinner, He doesn't see the same moral situation that He sees when He looks at a sinner who still loves his sin. When God looks at a sinner who still loves his sin and rejects the mystery of atonement, justice condemns him to die.

When God looks at a sinner who has accepted the blood of everlasting covenant, justice sentences him to live, and God is just in doing both things. And when God justifies a sinner, everything in God is on the sinner's side. All the attributes of God are on the sinner's side. It isn't that mercy is pleading for the sinner and justice is trying to beat him to death as we preach here sometimes make it, but all of God does all that God does. So when God looks at a sinner, I repeat, and sees him there unatoned for, at least he won't accept the atonement and doesn't apply to him the moral situation is such that justice says you must die. When God looks at the atoned for sinner who in faith knows he's atoned for and has accepted it, justice says you must live. And the unjust sinner can no more go to heaven than the justified sinner can go to hell. Oh, brethren, why are we so still? Where are we so quiet? We ought to rejoice and thank God with all our might.

Now, I have said that justice is on the side of the returning sinner and somebody wants a verse. They want me to be reasoning here: they want a verse for it. All right, I'll give it to you, 1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, say it with me, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just. Do what? And cleanses from all unrighteousness. He is faithful and what? Just! Justice is over on our side now, because the mystery of the agony of God on the Cross has changed our moral situation.

So, justice looks and sees equality, not inequity, and we're justified. That's what justification means. Do I believe in justification by faith? Oh, my brother, do I believe in it! David believed in it and wrote it into the 32nd Psalm. It was later quoted by one of the prophets. It was picked up by Paul and written into Galatians and Romans. It was lost for a while and relegated to the dustbin and then brought out again to the forefront and taught by Luther, then the Moravians and the Wesley's and the Presbyterians--justification by faith, and we stand on it today. And when we talk about it, it isn't just text you manipulate, you know.

Oh, the text manipulators, God bless them. They had better tack or knit. But, we manipulate texts. That's no way to look at it. We ought to see who God is and see why these things are true. We're justified by faith because the agony of God on a cross changed the moral situation. We're that moral situation. It didn't change God at all. The idea that the angry scowl went off of the face of God and He began grudgingly to smile. It's a pagan concept and not Christian.

So remember, that God is one. And not only is there only one God, that one God is unitary, one with Himself, indivisible. The mercy of God is simply God being merciful and the justice of God is simply God being just. And the love of God is simply God loving. The compassion of God is simply God being compassionate. It's not something that runs out of God, it is something God is; all the three persons of the Trinity are.

Well, old Anselm, my old friend. He's got a third argument. I've given you two. How God can be just and He is just and still justify a sinner? He had another argument. I'll give it to you. He said, compassion flows from goodness and goodness without justice is not goodness. He said, you couldn't be good and not be just. Is that right? And I preached last Sunday night about the goodness of God. And if God is good, He has to be just. And if God is just, then he has to be just. And he says this, when God punishes the wicked, it is a just thing to do, because it consists with the wicked man's desserts. But when God pardons a wicked man, it's a just thing to do, because it consists with God's nature.

So, we have God: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost always acting like God. Your wife may get up grouchy. Your best friend may turn a cold face on you. In the White House next election, we will have a change of course. And we may have a change to a great deal worse or better. We can get better or worse down here. The situation in the Far East, at least for seven days, we won't have war. Very good. We've called it off, for seven days. Very good. Things change, but always God is the same. As always and always and always, God acts like God. And God does always according to His attributes of love and mercy and justice.

Aren't you glad you're not going to sneak into Heaven through a cellar window? Aren't you glad that you're not going to get in like some preachers get degrees? You know, pay \$25 for them somewhere in a college degree factory. Aren't you glad that you're not going to get into heaven by God's oversight. God is so busy with His world, so busy and you sneak in. You're there a 1000 years before God sees you. Or you were a member of a church that God said, well that's a pretty good church. Just take them in. And so, you went up and went in and when the Lord came. And then later on when they begin to look around, they found the rotten spots and maybe you'll be thrown out.

There was a picture one time of a man who appeared, do you remember without a robe? And after he got in, they said, what is he doing here? And they threw him out. Bound him hand and foot and

lugged him out and threw him into outer darkness. But there will be nothing like that in God's kingdom, because God, the All-wise One, knows all that can be known and He knows everybody and knows you. And God the All-just One, will never permit the unequal man in there. Why walk ye along with two unequal legs said Elijah. That's unequal, inequal, inequity, iniquity. And the man who's iniquitous will never get in--never. All of this cheap talk about St. Peter giving us an exam, you know, to see if it's all right; it is all nonsense.

The Great God Almighty, who's always one with Himself, looks at the moral situation, and He either sees death or life; and all of God is on the side of death or life. If it's iniquity, inequity, unatoned, uncleansed, unprotected, sinner in his sin, there's only one answer and all of God says death and hell. But if he beats his breast and says, God have mercy on me a sinner and takes the benefits of the infinite agony of God on a cross, God looks on that moral situation and says life, and all of hell can't drag that man down; just as all of heaven can't pull that man up. Oh, the wonder and the mystery and the glory of the being of God.