

A Just God

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

When I was under conviction of sin, I had a deep and sharp sense of the justice of God. Sin, whatever it might be to other people, became to me an intolerable burden. It was not so much that I feared the wrath to come, but that I feared *sin*. I knew myself to be so horribly guilty that I remember feeling that if God did not punish me for sin, He ought to do so. I felt that the judge of all the earth ought to condemn such sin as mine. I sat on the judgment seat and I condemned myself to perish, for I confessed that, had I been God, I could have done no other than send such a guilty creature as I was down to the lowest hell. All the while, I had upon my mind a deep concern for the honor of God's name and the integrity of His moral government. I felt that it would not satisfy my conscience if it could be forgiven unjustly. The sin that I had committed must be punished. But then there was the question how God could be just—and yet justify me who had been so guilty. I asked my heart, How can He be just and yet the Justifier? (Rom 3:26). I was worried and wearied with this question; neither could I see any answer to it. Certainly I could never have invented an answer which would have satisfied my conscience.

The doctrine of the atonement¹ is to my mind one of the surest proofs of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. Who would or could have thought of the just Ruler dying for the unjust rebel? This is no teaching of human mythology or dream of poetical imagination. This method of expiation² is only known among men because it is a fact. Fiction could not have devised it. God Himself ordained it. It is not a matter which could have been imagined.

I had heard the plan of salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus from my youth up, but I did not know any more about it in my innermost soul than if I had been born a Hottentot.³ It came to me as a new revelation, as fresh as if I had never read the Scriptures, that Jesus was declared to be “the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 2:2), that God might be just.

When I was anxious about the possibility of a just God pardoning me, I understood and saw by faith that He who is the Son of God became man and, in His own blessed Person, bore my sin in His own body on the tree. I saw the chastisement of my peace was laid upon Him, and with His stripes I was healed (Isa 53:5). Have you ever seen that? Have you ever understood how God can be just to the full, not remitting penalty nor blunting the edge of the sword, and yet can be infinitely merciful and can justify the un-

¹ **atonement** – reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin; this was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the Cross.

² **expiation** – making satisfaction for offense by removing the guilt of sin.

³ **Hottentot** – the native people of southwestern Africa of the Khoi ethnic group, labeled “Hottentots” by the European settlers because of the sound of their language.

godly who turn to Him? It was because the Son of God, supremely glorious in His matchless person, undertook to vindicate the Law, by bearing the sentence due me, that therefore God is able to pass by my sin. The Law of God was more vindicated by the death of Christ than it would have been had all transgressions been punished forever. For the Son of God to suffer for sin was a more glorious establishment of the government of God than for the whole race to suffer.

“Jesus has borne the death penalty on our behalf!” Behold the wonder! There He hangs upon the Cross! This is the greatest sight you will ever see: Son of God and Son of man! There He hangs, bearing pains unutterable—“the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18). Oh, the glory of that sight! The Innocent suffering! The Holy One condemned! The Ever-blessed made a curse! The Infinitely Glorious put to a shameful death!

The more I look at the sufferings of the Son of God, the more sure I am that they must meet my case. Why did He suffer, if not to turn aside the penalty from us? If, then, He turned it aside by His death, it *is* turned aside, and those who believe in Him need not fear it. It must be so, that since expiation is made, God is able to forgive without shaking the basis of His throne or in the least degree blotting out the statute book. Conscience gets a full answer to her tremendous question.

The wrath of God against iniquity, whatever that may be, must be beyond all conception terrible. Well did Moses say, “Who knoweth the power of thine anger!” (Psa 90:11). Yet, when we hear the Lord of Glory cry, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psa 22:1) and see Him yielding up the ghost, we feel that the justice of God has received abundant vindication by obedience so perfect and death so terrible, rendered by so divine a Person. If God Himself bows before His own Law, what more can be done? There is more in the atonement by way of merit than there is in all human sin by way of demerit. The great gulf of Jesus' loving self sacrifice can swallow up the mountains of our sin, all of them.

For the sake of the infinite good of this one representative Man, the Lord may well look with favor upon other men, however unworthy they may be in and of themselves. It was a miracle of miracles that the Lord Jesus Christ should stand in our stead and “bear, that we might never bear, His Fathers righteous Ire.” But He has done so. “It is finished” (Joh 19:30). God will save the sinner because He did not spare His Son. God can pass by your transgressions because He laid those transgressions upon His only begotten Son.

What is it to believe in Him? It is not merely to say, “He is God and the Saviour,” but to trust Him wholly and entirely, and take Him for all your salvation from this time forth and forever—your Lord, your Master, your All. If you will have the Lord Jesus, He has you already. If you believe on Him, I tell you, you cannot go to hell, for that were to make the perfect sacrifice of Christ to none effect.

If the Lord Jesus Christ died in my stead, why should I die also? Every believer by faith has laid his hands on the Sacrifice, and made it his own, and therefore may rest assured that he can never perish. The Lord would not receive this offering on our behalf and then condemn us to die. The Lord cannot read our pardon written in the blood of

His own Son and then smite us. That were impossible! Oh, that you may have grace given you at once to look away to Jesus, Who is the fountainhead of mercy to guilty man! Will you come into this lifeboat just as you are? Here is safety from the wreck. Accept the sure deliverance. Leap for it just as you are, and leap now!

I will tell you this thing about myself to encourage you. My sole hope for heaven lies in the full atonement made upon Calvary's Cross for the ungodly. On that I firmly rely. I have not a shadow of hope anywhere else. You are in the same condition as I am, for we, neither of us, have anything of our own worth thinking of as a ground of trust. Let us join hands and stand together at the foot of the Cross and trust our souls once for all to Him who shed His blood for the guilty. We will be saved by the one and the same Saviour. If you perish trusting Him, I must perish too. What can I do more to prove my own confidence in the Gospel which is set before you?



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