

### *God's Justice*

*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? ([Genesis 18:25](#))*

*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. ([Deuteronomy 10:17](#))*

*The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. ([Psalm 19:9](#))*

*To show that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. ([Psalm 92:15](#))*

*Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. ([Psalm 97:2](#))*

*Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet. ([Isaiah 28:17](#))*

*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. ([Revelation 16:5-7](#))*

If you know God, you know He is absolutely and perfectly just. But we have to define this term first. What do we mean by justice?

In looking this up very carefully in the Scriptures, I find that justice is indistinguishable from righteousness in the Old Testament. It's the same root word with variations according to the part of speech used. It means *uprightness* or *rectitude*. To say that God is just or that the justice of God is a fact is to say that there is uprightness and rectitude in God. [Psalm 89:14](#) says, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." [Psalm 97:2](#) says, "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Justice and righteousness are indistinguishable from each other.

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To say that God is just is to say that God is equitable, that He is morally equal. If you go to [Ezekiel 18:25](#) you will find God scolding Israel there. He says, “Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?” That word “unequal” simply means *inequity*. Do you know that the word *inequity* and the word *iniquity* are the same word? The iniquitous person is not morally equal, not symmetrical morally, unequal to himself.

The word “judgment” as used in the texts above is the application of justice to a moral situation, favorable or unfavorable. When God judges a man He brings justice to that man's life. 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, God sentences the man.

Justice is not something that God has. Justice is something that God is. A grammarian might say it should be phrased, “Just is something that God is.” But I say, “No, *justice* is something that God is.” God is love and just as God is love, God is justice.

You sometimes hear it said, “Justice requires God to do this.” I've probably used this expression myself, though it is semantically improper. The human language staggers when we try to use it to describe God. The prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New put such pressure on language that words groan and squeak under the effort to tell the story. We must remember that justice is not something outside of God to which God must conform. Nothing ever requires God to do anything. If you have a god who 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. Then justice is bigger than God. But that is to think wrongly.

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 what God is. And God's reasons for doing what He does spring out of what God is. Nothing has been added to God from eternity. And nothing has been removed from God from eternity. Our God is exactly what He was before a single atom was

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created. He will be exactly what He is when the heavens are no more. He has never changed in any way, because He is the unchanging God.

God, being perfect, is incapable of either loss or gain. He is incapable of getting larger or being smaller. He's incapable of knowing more or knowing less. God is simply God. And God acts justly from within, not in obedience to some imaginary law; He is the Author of all laws, and acts like Himself all the time.

We've been lied to, cheated, betrayed and deceived so much by even those 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 a feeling that God is like that, too. Let me tell you that God always acts like Himself. There is no archangel, no 10,000 angels with swords, no cherubim or seraphim anywhere that can persuade God to act otherwise. God always acts as becomes Him and He always will.

He had to redeem man within that mighty limitless framework. He could not change, or He would have to go from better to worse or from worse to better. And being God and being perfect He could not go either direction. He had to remain God. So in the book of Revelation, the justice of God is sung by His holy saints.

Theologians, both Jewish and Christian, speak of justice as one of God's attributes. God is justice, and God will always act justly—not by compulsion from the outside but because that's the way He is Himself. Justice must always prevail because God is the sovereign God who will always prevail.

If this is true, then where do you and I come in?

There was an old theologian by the name of Anselm who isn't read much anymore. He 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: "How dost Thou spare the wicked if Thou art just, supremely just?"

We don't worry about this question much, because in this day we have cheapened salvation. We have cheapened our concept of God to a place where we expect to stumble up to the pearly gates and bang on the door and say, "Well, God,

I'm here!" and have God take us in. We'd better get the old theologian's question figured out lest we presumptuously go to the gate of heaven and be turned away.

Old brother Anselm comforted himself with this thought: "We see where the river flows, but the springs 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 asked. To that question there are three happy answers.

### 1. The Unity of God

One answer is that *the being of God is unitary*. What does that mean? It means that God is not composed of parts. You are not a unitary being. You are composed of 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 forget, you can learn and you can still live on—that's because you are not unitary. That is, God made you, and "made" means composed. God put you together. He put the head on top of the torso and legs under the torso and He put in your bloodstream, your blood, ventricles and auricles and veins and arteries and nerves and ligaments. We were put together like that, and you can take an amazing amount of a man away and he is still there. But you can't think of God like that, because the being of God is unitary.

The Jews always believed in the unitary God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)). Now Israel was not only saying that there is only one God. The Jews taught the unitary being of God, and the Church teaches (so far as the Church teaches anything now—you can go to church a lifetime and not get much theology) that the being of God is unitary. "There is one LORD" doesn't mean merely 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. We must think of God as one. Because God is one, God's attributes never quarrel with each other. Because man is not unitary but made, because he is composed, the man may be frustrated. He may have schizophrenia, and part of him may war with another part of him. His sense of justice may war with his sense of mercy. The judge sits on a bench many a time and is caught between mercy and justice and doesn't know which to exercise.

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There is that famous saying of the man who, on the eve of war when he had to go out and fight for his country, said to his fiancée that he loved and planned to marry, “I could not love thee so, if I loved not duty more.” There’s a man caught between the love of a woman and the love of duty. That’s because man is made of parts. That’s why we have psychiatrists—to try to get our parts back together. They don’t do it, you know, but they try; we have to give them credit for trying.

God has no parts anymore than a diamond has parts. 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 joint and no attributes to face each other and fight it out. All God’s attributes are one, and together.

Sometimes when I preach evangelistic sermons I fall into the same semantic error. We think of God as presiding over a court of law in which the sinner has broken the law of justice. We imagine that justice is out there somewhere, outside of God. The sinner has sinned against that external justice, and he is put in handcuffs and brought before the bar of God. Then we think that God’s mercy wants to forgive the sinner, but this external justice says, “No, he has broken my laws. He must die.” And so we picture dramatically God sitting tearfully on His throne passing a sentence of death upon a man that His mercy wants to pardon but can’t because justice won’t allow it. 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 to think this way, for we are making a man out of God.

“Thou thoughtest,” says God, “that I was altogether such an one as thyself” ([Psalm 50:21](#)). Our judges sit on a bench and their hearts want to pardon, but the law won’t permit them and they’re caught in the middle. I’ve been told sometimes judges turn ashen white and clutch the bench before them when they sentence men to die. Their mercy isn’t harmonizing with their sense of justice. External justice stands there as a law and says, “That man shall die,” but mercy says, “Please, please spare him!”

But to think thus of God is to think wrongly of God. Everything that God is and does harmonizes with everything else that God is and does. I probably should not even use the word “harmony,” for harmony requires at least two that get together

and for a time become one. But there is nothing like that in God; God just is! When you pray, say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." God just is!

Therefore, the first answer to the question, "How can God, being just, yet acquit the wicked?" springs from the being of God as unitary. God's justice and God's mercy do not quarrel with each other.

## 2. The Passion of Christ

The second answer is from the effect of Christ's passion. The word "passion" now means "sex lust," but back in the early days it meant deep, terrible suffering. That is why 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 with His own blood for us.

Jesus Christ is God, and all I've said about God describes Christ. He is unitary. He has taken on Himself the nature of man, but God the Eternal Word, who was before man and who created man is a unitary being and there is 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, almighty and perfect.

*Infinite* 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.

It was not only infinite but *almighty*. It's possible for good men to "almost" do something or to "almost" be something. That is the fix people get in because they are people. But Almighty God is never "almost" anything. God is always exactly what He is. He is the Almighty One. Isaac Watts said about His dying on the cross, "God the mighty Maker died for man the creature's sin." And when God the Almighty Maker died, all the power there is was in that atonement. You never can overstate the efficaciousness of the atonement. You never can exaggerate the power of the cross.

And God is not only infinite and almighty but *perfect*. The atonement in Jesus Christ's blood is perfect; there isn't anything that can be added to it. It is spotless, impeccable, flawless. It is perfect as God is perfect. So the question, "How dost

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Thou spare the wicked if Thou art just?" is answered from the effect of Christ's passion. That holy suffering there on the cross and that resurrection from the dead cancels our sins and abrogates our sentence.

Where and how did we get that sentence? We got it by the application of justice to a moral situation. No matter how nice and refined and lovely you think you are, you are a moral situation—you have been, you still are, you will be. And when God confronted you, God's justice confronted a moral situation and found you unequal, found inequity, found iniquity.

Because He found iniquity there, God sentenced you to die. Everybody has been or is under the sentence of death. I wonder how people can be so jolly under the sentence of death. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)). When justice confronts a moral situation in a man, woman, young person or anybody morally responsible, then either it justifies or condemns that person. That's how we got that sentence.

Let me point out that 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 His compassion or pity, for they are 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. The very angels in heaven cried out and said, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.... Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments" ([Revelation 16:5, 7](#)).

You'll never find in heaven a group of holy beings finding fault with the way God conducts His foreign policy. God Almighty is conducting His world, and every moral creature says, "True and righteous are thy judgments.... Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne" ([Revelation 16:7](#), [Psalm 89:14](#)). When God sends a man to die, mercy and pity and compassion and wisdom and power concur—everything that's intelligent in God concurs in the sentence.

But oh, the mystery and wonder of the atonement! The soul that avails itself of that atonement, that throws itself out on that atonement, the moral situation has changed. God has not changed! Jesus Christ did not die to change God; Jesus Christ died to change a moral situation. When God's justice confronts an

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unprotected sinner that justice sentences him to die. And all of God concurs in the sentence! But when Christ, who is God, went onto the tree and died there in infinite agony, in a plethora of suffering, this great God suffered more than they suffer in hell. He suffered all that they could suffer in hell. He suffered with the agony of God, for everything that God does, He does with all that He is. When God suffered for you, my friend, God suffered to change your moral situation.

The man who throws himself on the mercy of God has had the moral situation changed. God doesn't say, "Well, we'll excuse this fellow. He's made his decision, and we'll forgive him. He's gone into the prayer room, so we'll pardon him. He's going to join the church; we'll overlook his sin." 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 the atonement, justice condemns him to die. When God looks at a sinner who has accepted the blood of the everlasting covenant, justice sentences him to live. And God is just in doing both things.

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 preachers sometimes make it sound. All of God does all that God does. When God looks at a sinner and sees him there unatoned for (he won't accept the atonement; he thinks it doesn't apply to him), the moral situation is such that justice says he must die. And when God looks at the atoned-for sinner, who in faith knows he's atoned for and has accepted it, justice says he must live! The unjust sinner can no more go to heaven than the justified sinner can go to hell. Oh friends, why are we so still? Why are we so quiet? We ought to rejoice and thank God with all our might!

I say it again: Justice is on the side of the returning sinner. [First John 1:9](#) says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 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 are justified. That's what justification means.



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Do I believe in justification by faith? Oh, my brother, do I believe in it! David believed in it and wrote it into [Psalm 32](#). 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 awhile and relegated to the dust bin and then brought out again to the forefront and taught by Luther and the Moravians and the Wesleys and the Presbyterians. “Justification by faith”—we stand on it today.

When we talk about justification, it isn't just a text to manipulate. 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 the cross changed the moral situation. *We are that moral situation*. It didn't change God at all. The idea that the cross wiped the angry scowl off the face of God and He began grudgingly to smile is a pagan concept and not Christian.

God is one. Not only is there only one God, but that one God is unitary, one with Himself, indivisible. And 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. And the compassion of God is simply God being compassionate. It's not something that runs out of God—it's *something God is!*

### 3. The Unchanging God

How can God be just and still justify a sinner? There is a third answer. Compassion flows from goodness, and yet goodness without justice is not goodness. You couldn't be good and not be just, and if God is good He has to be just. When God punishes the wicked, it is a just thing to do, because it is consistent with the wicked man's deserts. But when God pardons a wicked man it is a just thing to do as well, because it is consistent with God's nature. So we have God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost always acting like God. Your wife may be grouchy, your best friend may be cold, foreign wars may be going on, but God is always the same. Always God acts according to His attributes of love, justice and mercy.

Always, always, always God acts like God. Aren't you glad you aren't 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 academic degrees, by paying twenty-five dollars to a diploma factory?

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Aren't you glad that you're not going to get into heaven by God's oversight? God is so busy with His world that you sneak in. You're there a thousand years before God sees you!

Aren't you glad that you're not going to get in just by being a member of a church? God says, "Well, that's a pretty good church. Let's let him in." And so you go in, but later on He finds your rotten spots and maybe you'll be thrown out!

There is the parable of the man who appeared without a wedding garment. And after he got in, they said, "What is he doing here?" and they threw him out—bound him hand and foot, lugged him out and threw him into outer darkness (see [Matthew 22:11–13](#)). There'll be nothing like that in God's kingdom, because God the All-Wise One knows all that can be known. He knows everybody—He knows you. And God the All-Just One will never permit the unequal man in there. "Why walk ye along on two unequal legs?" said Elijah ([1 Kings 18:21](#), author's paraphrase). That's unequal, iniquity. And the man who is iniquitous will never get in. Never!

All of this cheap talk about St. Peter giving us an exam to see if we're all right—it's all nonsense! The Great God Almighty, always one with Himself, looks upon a moral situation and He either sees death or life. And all of God is on the side of death or life. If there is an iniquitous, unequal, unatoned, uncleansed, unprotected sinner in his sin, there's only one answer—all of God says, "Death and hell." And all of heaven can't pull that man up.

But if he beats his breast and says, "God be merciful to me a sinner" ([Luke 18:13](#)), 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. Oh, the wonder and the mystery and the glory of the being of God!