

# THE JUSTICE OF GOD



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## Introduction

It is scarcely surprising that far less has been written upon the *justice* of God—than upon some of the other Divine perfections. We are accustomed to turn our thoughts unto those objects and subjects which afford us the most pleasure, and to avoid those which render us uneasy. But no servant of the Lord should be guilty of pandering to this tendency. Rather must he endeavor with all his might to declare "all the counsel of God" and to portray the Divine character just as it is set forth in Holy Writ. He must not conceal a single feature thereof, no matter how awe-inspiring it is, or how repellent to the fallen creature. It is impossible for us to entertain right conceptions of God, unless we have before us a full-orbed sight of His varied excellencies. To view Him only as "Love"; to refuse to contemplate Him as "Light"—will necessarily result in our

manufacturing a false god in our imaginations, a caricature of the true and living God.

God is a Being possessed of every excellence. Not one of them could be lacking without changing His character, and therefore if any one of them is either unintentionally or deliberately omitted, then the object of contemplation is not the true God—but a figment which is the outcome of our misconception. Yet while we are required to acknowledge all the Divine attributes, nevertheless they do not all produce the same effect in our heart and mind. Some are objects of pleasure—but others fill us with awe and fear. Divine *wisdom* delights us with the wonders of its production and the marvels of its contrivance. Divine *goodness* charms us with the richness and variety of its gifts. As we contemplate God as a *gracious Benefactor*, joy is awakened within us, and as we perceive Him ministering to our numerous needs we are filled with gratitude. But when we turn our thoughts unto the *immaculate holiness* of the Divine nature, and the *inflexible justice* of His moral government, a different order of sentiments is evoked.

When the human mind is focused upon the ineffable purity of God and His unchanging righteousness, it appears to fallen creatures that He no longer smiles—but frowns upon his works. That easy, peaceable disposition—so pleasing to our hearts, so soothing when we feel the stirrings of conscience—in which we contemplate God while considering His goodness alone, gives place to far sterner aspects, and we are made to tremble when He is also seen as an offended Ruler and Judge. Guilty sinners have no desire to cultivate a closer acquaintance with One who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13), and whose wrath is "revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). Such a view is terrifying, and they would readily flee to the most distant place, if they could escape His solemn presence. In the sight of holy angels, *JUSTICE* gives a firmness and consistency to the Divine character—but the criminal

dreads justice, and the *Divine* justice most of all, since it is far more formidable and inexorable than man's.

But however distasteful Divine justice may be to the fallen creature, the interests of Truth, and not the pleasing of his hearers, must be the principal aim of the preacher. If he is regulated by the Scriptures and not by maudlin sentiment, he will be preserved from one-sided and misrepresenting conceptions of Deity, and he will not hesitate to declare that God is just, as well as wise, and good—that He is not only the *Creator* and *Preserver* of the world, but also its *Governor*. And that as power and wisdom are requisite to the guidance and maintenance of inanimate nature, so justice is equally indispensable for the government of intelligent and moral agents who are the proper subjects of law, and will therefore require to be rewarded or punished. As another has rightly pointed out, "To deny God's justice is to wrest the scepter from His hand, and to expose His government to contempt and insult, by proclaiming impunity to its subjects."

Above we have stated that the *Divine* justice is far more formidable than *man's*—and that because of this it is so much dreaded by the *guilty*. The justice of God is the justice of One who is both *omniscient* and *omnipotent*, so that it is impossible we should conceal from Him our offenses, or escape from the execution of His sentence. God is possessed of both infinitely complete *knowledge* of every detail of our lives—and of the most absolute *power* to enforce His verdicts. Frightful as it is for a guilty creature to contemplate such justice—yet woe be unto the preacher who from the fear of man, or from coveting his praise, deliberately softens down the Divine justice so as to cause less alarm. Woe be to the preacher who attempts to show that God's justice is not so formidable as some harsh and gloomy minds have declared—or that it will not mark our sins with extreme strictness—or not rigidly insist upon its demands—or that when it is displeased it may easily be pacified.

Never was there a greater need for the ministers of the Gospel to proclaim the inflexible justice of God, than in the evil days in which our lot has fallen. Not only is God Himself insulted and grossly dishonored, by the perversions of His character which have been so widely promulgated during the last few decades—but multitudes of people have been fatally deceived thereby, until a generation has now arisen to whom the Deity of Holy Writ is the "unknown God." All around us are those who have so erroneous an idea of the Divine clemency, that they suppose God is as easy-going as the modern parent, and as lax as many of our judges. They suppose that only in the most extreme and exceptional cases (if indeed then) will He *punish* the crimes of any with everlasting fire. By such ungrounded assumptions do they stifle any occasional convictions of conscience, and steal their hearts against any apprehensions of danger, which may visit them, persuading themselves that God is so full of mercy, that His justice is virtually inoperative.

But if the consideration of God's justice fills the *unbeliever* with dislike and dismay—it is far otherwise with those in Christ. In very early times Abraham consoled himself with the fact that "The judge of all the earth" would assuredly "do right" (Gen. 18:25). In his wondrous song Moses declared, "I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He. " (Deut. 32:3, 4). David extolled his God as, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works" (Psalm 145:17).

Most remarkable is that word in Jeremiah where the Lord is designated "the Habitation of justice" (50:7) so that His people might take hope from and shelter in His righteousness. So, too, His Prophets found comfort therein in the dark days of Israel's declension: "the just Lord is in the midst thereof, He will do no iniquity" (Zeph. 3:5). While from Revelation 15:3 we learn that the inhabitants of Heaven exclaim, "great and marvelous are Your

works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Your ways, O King of saints."

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; faithful love and truth go before You" (Psalm 89:14). This is perhaps the most helpful passage of all in the casting of light upon the most-important, awe-inspiring, and yet glorious subject we are now seeking to study. The great Jehovah is here exhibited to our view—under the idea of Sovereign and judge—being presented to our adoring regard as upon His throne. It is the Throne of universal empire and of absolute dominion. From that throne, the Lord exercises His authority and executes His laws with omnipotent but impartial hand. Righteousness and justice are magnified as being the "foundation" of Jehovah's throne. There seems to be an allusion unto the bases or supports of an ancient monarch's throne.

## **1. The Nature of God's Justice.**

In seeking to arrive at a true conception thereof, we need to be very much on our guard against carnalizing the same, degrading the Divine majesty by drawing analogies from that which appertains to the human realm. In human affairs, *justice* is simply the giving to everyone his due. But such a rule cannot possibly be applied to the Most High God, for the simple reason that He owes His creatures nothing. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon in this day of fleshly arrogance and spiritual ignorance, that there is a vast difference between God's government over His rational creatures and that of an earthly prince over his subjects—and that consequently our notion of justice with regard to the latter cannot be lawfully applied to the former. It is failure at this very point which has resulted in the most wild and irreverent postulates in connection with the justice of God, whereby He has been brought down to the level of His creatures.

A secular ruler is set up for the good of his subjects, this being the principal end of his constitution. The people are not formed for him—but he for them, therefore the administration of justice is a common and public right, whereby he is entrusted with the supreme rule for them. The bare statement of this obvious fact is at once sufficient to show the infinite distance which separates between the King of kings and His administration—and any secular ruler and his government. God does not exist for the well-being of His creatures—but is independent and self-sufficient: for His pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:11). Consequently He owes them nothing, nor can they profit Him anything. Therefore it necessarily follows that He could not be said to wrong His creatures, had it so pleased Him to ordain an economy in which no provision was made for the infliction of punishment upon offenders according to their demerits: that was something which must be determined solely by His own sovereign pleasure.

Absolutely considered, God's justice is the universal rectitude of His nature, for antecedent to all the acts of His will respecting the government of His creatures the glorious and incomprehensible God was essentially and intrinsically righteous in Himself. Divine justice may also be considered relatively, that is, with regard to its exercise in the superintendence and government of rational creatures. It is with the latter the Scriptures are chiefly concerned, that is, with how God acts under the economy which He has instituted. Yet here and there the Sacred Pages give us a glimpse of what God was in Himself prior to His work of creation and taking upon Himself the office of Ruler and Judge. Those glimpses enable us to gain some idea of what Deity is in Himself, considered apart from all His works and workings. Here, too, yes, here particularly, we need to be doubly on our guard, lest we be guilty of "limiting the Holy One" by circumscribing His actions beyond that which Holy Writ warrants.

It is one thing to say that God cannot act contrary to His own perfections—it is quite another thing to affirm that God *must*



*exercise* those perfections. We need to use the greatest possible caution in saying what God cannot do. God cannot give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8), for to do so would be to admit a rival. God cannot look with approbation upon evil (Hab. 1:12) for to do so would sully His holiness. God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:6), for then He would be unfaithful. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), for He is without variableness or shadow of turning. But to declare that His justice obliges God to inflict punishment on sinners, and that He cannot pardon without an atonement, is to daringly assert that which Scripture nowhere teaches. That He "*will* by no means clear the guilty" (Exo. 34: 7) warrants no man in saying that He "*can* by no means clear the guilty."

It should be pointed out, that a thing may be just in a twofold sense: *negatively*, as that which justice does not disapprove of; and *positively*, as that which justice does require. And it is a question of vast importance if we are to have right conceptions of the absolute independence of God—to consider whether His will to punish sinners *antecedently* to His purpose to introduce the economy in which such now obtains—was just in the former sense only or also in the latter. Whose rights had God violated—had He willed otherwise than He did? Certainly not the creature's, for He owed them nothing. Nor His own, had He been pleased to forego them. God rules now according to the constitution which He has made—yet none can show—for Scripture contains not the slightest hint thereon—that this constitution was the *necessary* effect and was obliged by His justice.

God was pleased to place His creatures under law—law which was accompanied and enforced by sanctions, promising the reward of life to the obedient and denouncing the penalty of death upon the disobedient—and as the Administrator of that law He is morally obligated to execute its terms. But to insist that a regime wherein sin *must* be punished, or that He was *limited* to the appointing of a Substitute unto Death if the guilty were to go free—strikes this writer as little (if any) short of blasphemy. Against this it has often

been objected that the words of the Redeemer, "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me," prove that there was no other way in which His people could be saved except by His drinking that cup. We answer, the reason why it was impossible that the Savior should be spared that awful cup—was not because the hands of Omniscience were fettered—but because the veracity of God must fulfill His own declarations to that very end.

It would be just as unwarrantable and wrong for us to say that the great God could not create this world any other way than He has. Or that His nature obligated Him to make it just as He did, is to insist that no alternative was left to Him—than to place it under the system of government which He has instituted, wherein virtue is rewarded, sin is punished, His grace illustriously displayed, His holiness and justice magnified by means of the satisfaction rendered to Him by His incarnate Son. God's *wisdom* is no more limited than is His *power*, and to argue that any one of the Divine perfections—be it holiness or justice—placed a restriction upon the contrivances of God's wisdom, is presumption of the worst kind. The Divine *omniscience* is as truly regulated by God's sovereign will—as is His *omnipotence*. All we are justified in saying, is that the economy which God has appointed is the one which He deemed best and most glorifying unto Himself.

Under the economy which God *has* instituted, He has determined the manner and the extent in which His perfections shall be exercised and displayed. For example, He has determined the several offices which each Person in the Godhead shall respectively hold, and this He did freely of His own sovereign pleasure. He has determined the number of creatures He shall bring into existence, the length of their earthly life, and what shall be their eternal destiny; and in this, too, He acted without any restraint. He determined to give us a written revelation from Himself, concerning which He alone decided how much or how little of His everlasting counsels should be revealed, and in which He has made certain promises that He has pledged Himself to fulfill. Certainly He was

under no obligation to make any promises at all—but having made them—His veracity and His faithfulness require Him to make them good. Thus, the only limitations which the Almighty has placed upon Himself in His dealings with His creatures—are those which His own imperial will saw fit to impose.

Now under the constitution or economy which it has pleased God to institute in the superintendence or government of His rational creatures, His justice is known among men by different names according to the different objects which it is immediately conversant. Does the Most High, for instance, enact *laws* for His creatures? then His moral rectitude appears in these laws as equity. They are not cruel—but "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12), framed for our well-being. How thankful we should be for such a law. Has God condescended to express Himself in *promises*? then His rectitude therein is seen as fidelity, for He is immutably faithful in making good every one of them. Has He denounced punishment upon all disobedience? then in the execution of His *threats*, God's rectitude appears in His absolute veracity. Does He administer those laws both with respect to reward and punishment, with strict impartiality, so that He is no respecter of persons? then His rectitude appears as glorious righteousness.

It will thus be seen that His *absolute* justice expresses what God is in Himself, the moral rectitude of His nature; whereas His *relative* justice considers Him as standing in relation to His creatures. The one pertains to Him in His *private* character, the other in His *public* character. It is in His assumption and discharge of His office of Ruler and Judge the latter is exercised. As the Sovereign of the universe He maintains the rights of His throne and order among His subjects. Because of the moral rectitude of His nature, when He enacts *laws*—they are equitable, when He makes *declarations*—they are true, when He expresses Himself in *promises*—they are faithful, and when He declares *threats* against disobedience—they are righteous and inexorable. As the "foundation of justice" God is to be revered: as the King of kings He is to be

submitted unto. He cannot be injured by us, nor does He suffer by our disobedience—but He will assuredly avenge it and vindicate His name.

## **2. The Rule of God's Justice.**

Righteousness in creatures is according to some law, which is the rule of it, and to which it is conformed. The moral law of God, which is holy, just, and good—is our rule of righteousness or right doing. But the Most High God has no law outside Himself: He is a law to Himself. His nature and His will are the law and rule of righteousness to Him. This is an attribute common to the three Persons in the Godhead: necessarily so, since They partake of the same undivided essence. Hence we find the first Person is designated the "righteous Father" (John 17:25), the Son is called "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1), and that it is proper to the Holy Spirit is evident from the fact that He is here to convict the world "of righteousness" (John 16:8). As the present aspect of our subject is of such great importance, we must endeavor to give it our best attention.

"The will of God is the highest rule of justice, so that what He wills must be considered just: for this very reason, because He willed it. When it is enquired, therefore, *why* the Lord did so? the answer must be, Because He would. But if you further ask why He so determined, you are in search of something greater and higher than the will of God, which can never be found" (Calvin's Institutes, book 3, chapter 3, section 2). How great was the light granted to the eminent Reformer, and how clearly and boldly he expressed himself thereon. What a contrast from the obscurity which now obtains in this so-called *age of enlightenment*, with its ambiguous, hesitant and apologetic declarations. That Calvin was by no means alone in this exalted view, will appear from other quotations given below.

In answer to the question, "Why was it that Adam was permitted to fall and corrupt his whole posterity, when God could have prevented his fall?" Luther said, "God is a Being whose will acknowledges no cause: neither is it for us to prescribe rules to His sovereign pleasure—or call Him to account for what He does. He has neither superior nor equal, and His will is the rule of all things. He did not therefore will such and such things because they were right and He was bound to will them—but they are therefore equitable and right because He wills them. The will of men can indeed be influenced and moved—but God's will never can. To assert the contrary is to undeify Him" (Bondage of Man's Will). To the same effect Bucer said, "God has no other motive to what He does—than His own mere will, which will is so far from being unrighteous, it is justice itself."

God is absolute Lord, so that "All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does what He wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can hold back His hand or say to Him—What have You done?" (Dan. 4:35). And why not? Because He not only has the *might*—but also the fullest *right* to do as He pleases. None were before Him, none are above Him: nay, He has no equal to direct Him, and therefore there is none unto whom He must render an account of His matters. What God ordains for us and what He orders from us—is just and right, simply because He so wills it. Hence it was that Abraham looked upon it as a righteous act to slay his innocent son. But why did he so esteem it—because the written law of God authorized murder? No. On the contrary, both the law of God and the law of nature peremptorily forbade it; but the holy Patriarch well knew that the will of God is the only rule of justice, and that whatever He is pleased to command, is on that very account righteous.

"What is the justice of God? It is an essential property in God, whereby He is infinitely just in Himself, of Himself, for, from, and by Himself alone, and no other. What is the rule of this justice? His

own free will and nothing else—for whatever He wills is just, and because He wills it, it is just, and not because it is just therefore He wills it" (James Usher, *Body of Divinity*). In answering the objection that "it is unjust for God to inflict eternal punishment upon temporary offenses, there being no proportion between the infinite and the finite," the Puritan, *Thomas Brooks*, wisely began his reply by saying: "First, God's will is the rule of righteousness, and therefore whatever He does or shall do, must needs be righteous. He is Lord of all: He has a sovereign right, and an absolute supremacy over the creature" (Vol. 6, p. 213).

We have added one quotation after another from these renowned servants of God of the past, because the truth which we are now laboring, has been repudiated in quarters in which it was not to be expected. Even in circles which might justly be termed orthodox—where in the main the onslaughts of infidelity were steadfastly resisted and the "landmarks" of the fathers steadily maintained—the sharp edge of the Spirit's Sword, was dulled and those aspects of Truth most of all repellant to human pride toned down.

In the above paragraph, we alluded to those who have, under the guise of magnifying God's holiness, subordinated the Divine will to the Divine nature, insisting that "things are not just because God has commanded them—but He has commanded them because they are just." Our meaning is that there was a reason for them in the nature of things, and that therefore He has enforced them by His authority. In plain language they mean that the Most High was not free to frame whatever laws He pleased—but was limited by the fitness of things, that His imperial will must conform to some standard outside of itself. Before we examine this position more closely, and turn upon it the light of Holy Writ, we will give yet one or two further quotations from eminent servants of God in the past, for the purpose of showing how radically it differs from what they taught.

Thomas Manton took the position that in contemplating the Divine justice, "God must be considered under a twofold relation: as absolute Lord, and as Governor and Judge of the world. As absolute Lord, His justice is nothing but the absolute and free motion of His own will concerning the estate of His creatures. In this respect God is wholly arbitrary and has no other rule but His own will: He does not will things because they are just—but therefore they are just because He wills them. He has a right of making and framing anything as He wills in any manner as it pleases Him . . . As Governor and Judge, He gives a law to His creatures, and His governing justice consists in giving all their due according to His law" (Vol. 8, people. 438, 439).

"The will of God is so the cause of all things, as to be itself without cause, for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything: when we ascend to that, we can go no further. Hence we find every matter resolved ultimately into the mere sovereign pleasure of God, as the spring and occasion of whatever is done in Heaven and earth . . . The only reason that can be assigned why the Deity does this or that, is because it is His own free pleasure so to do" (from the pen of the author of "Rock of Ages" and other well-known hymns, in his "Observations on the Divine Attributes": 1750). Such teaching as this, alone preserves the Divine independence and presents the true God in His unrivaled freedom and supremacy, unhampered by anything within or without Himself.

But against this God-exalting teaching, it is objected that such postulates obliterate all distinction between God's sovereignty and His justice, merging the latter entirely into the former. With equal justification might we complain that the objector fails to maintain any distinction between the Divine holiness and the Divine justice, making the former to completely swallow up the latter. Should it be asked, Wherein shall we distinguish between the Divine holiness and justice? We answer, Divine *holiness* has to do more with what God *is*; Divine *justice* respects what He *does*. Or to state it in other

words, holiness pertains to the Divine *character*, justice to His *office*. Thus, "Justice and righteousness are the foundation of His throne" (Psalm 89:14), that is, they relate to His public administration, to the government of His creatures. It is as Ruler and Judge, that the Divine justice is exercised and displayed.

As to the objection that we obliterate all distinctions between the Divine sovereignty and justice, our reply is that we cannot do otherwise if our thoughts are to be formed entirely by the Scriptures. "Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own *will*" (Eph. 1:11). There is no getting around that explicit statement, and to it we must rigidly subordinate our minds and formulate our theology if we are to "think God's thoughts after Him." Observe well it is not here said that God works all things according to the exigencies of His *holiness*—or according to the dictates of His *wisdom*—but "according to the counsel of His own *will*."

True, blessedly true, that every volition of His, is both a holy and a wise one—yet God alone decided what is holy and what is wise. He is under no law, and tied by no rules—but ever acts according to His own good pleasure and that alone—and very frequently He does that which is flatly contrary to *our* ideas both of wisdom and justice.

It is this very fact which infidels and agnostics have sought to make captive out of. In the face of what confronts them both in creation and in providence, they have drawn the conclusion that either the Almighty is a capricious or cruel Tyrant—or that having brought the world into existence He has withdrawn and left it to work out its own destiny. They ask, Why are there such glaring inequalities in nature: one child being born normal—and another cripple; one enjoying health—and the other being a sufferer all its days? Why are some born under a government which gives them freedom—while others are doomed to abject slavery? Why have some men more enlarged understanding than others—and some stronger passions than their neighbors? Why is it that virtue so often passes



unrewarded—and the wicked flourish and prosper? If it be replied, All of this is the consequence of sin, then the infidel asks, Why is there untold suffering among innocent *animals*?

And what is the answer to these expressions of *unbelief*, these outbursts of *rebellion*? How shall we silence those who wickedly affirm that the works and ways of the Most High God, are stamped with injustice? Or, what is far more to the point, how are young Christians to be dealt with, who are disturbed by such troublers of their peace? The blatant enemies of the Lord we can well afford to treat with *silent contempt*, for the great Jehovah needs no efforts of ours to vindicate His character—in due time He will Himself close their mouths. But as to removing such stumbling stones from the path of our fellow pilgrims, there is but one satisfactory and sufficient way, and that is by maintaining the sovereign rights of Him with whom we have to do—by insisting that He is the *Potter*—and we but *clay* in His hands to be molded just as He pleases.

Why has God given light to the sun, grass to the fields, heat to fire, and cold to ice? Why, in short, has He done any of those things which we see He has done—when He could easily have done otherwise? There is only one adequate answer: in the varied manifestations of His attributes and in the communication of good or evil to His creatures, God has acted according to the sovereignty of His own will. Nor is it to the slightest degree unfitting that God should act thus. Sovereignty is the most godlike of all the perfections of the Divine character, for it is that on which the solemn supremacy of the great Jehovah chiefly rests. Our concept of "the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity" would not be raised but lowered, if we discovered that He was hampered in His actions. The display of His own glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords, must take precedence over everything else.

"The Lord is upright . . . there is no unrighteousness in Him" (Psalm 92:15). Yet this is patent not to *carnal* sight—but to the vision of *faith* alone. The eyes of the naturally blind, cannot discern the

light of the sun, nevertheless it is full of light. In like manner, the eyes of the spiritually blind are incapable of perceiving the equity of God's ways—yet they are all righteous. But we repeat, they are righteous not because they are conformed to some *external standard of excellence*, nor even because they are in harmony with one of the Divine attributes—but solely because they are the ways of Him who "works all things after the counsel of His own will." God's commanding Abimelech to deliver Sarah to Abraham—or else He would destroy both him and his household" (Gen. 20:7), may seem unjust in man's estimation—but has not the great God the right to do as He pleases?

Take the most extreme example of all: God's choosing one unto eternal life—and another unto eternal death. Yet none who, by grace, bow to the authority of Holy Writ, find any stumbling block therein. Though they do not profess to understand the reason for God so acting—yet they unhesitatingly acknowledge His right so to do. Distrusting their conceptions of justice and injustice, they submit to the high sovereignty of Him who is Lord over all. And it is this very submission which brings to their hearts a peace which passes all understanding. Amid the profound mysteries of life, the perplexities of their own lot, though God's judgments are a "great deep" and His ways often "past finding out," they have the unshakable assurance that the Judge of all the earth has done, is doing, and shall do, "right."

And why is it that the believer is so confident that simply because God does a thing, that it is necessarily right and good? Because he has learned this very lesson from the lips of Christ, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, because this was Your good pleasure" (Matt. 11:25, 26). Observe the character in which the Father is here viewed: "Lord of Heaven and earth," that is, as Sovereign supreme with indisputable right. Note the basis of action which the Redeemer attributes unto Him: "because this was Your good pleasure." No

other explanation is given, none other is needed—that is all-sufficient. Finally, mark well His "Yes, Father": however strange it may seem to us, that closes the door to all impious inquiry and speculation. We are not to be the judges of God's actions—but the doers of His will. His own "good pleasure" is His only rule.

Moreover, let it not be forgotten, that Christ conducted Himself in perfect consonance with His public declarations. In Gethsemane we find that He resolved His sufferings into the sovereign pleasure of the Father. How striking and how blessed to hear Him say, "May Your will be done." This is the more remarkable and most pertinent to the point before us, when we note that He immediately prefaced His acquiescence by affirming, "Abba, Father! All things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). How plainly do such words expose the error of those who contend there was an absolute necessity why God must punish sin, and why if His people were to be pardoned a Substitute must suffer in their stead. Christ knew God had willed that He should drink this dreadful cup, and He meekly submitted thereto—but He made it crystal clear that God had willed this, not because His nature demanded the same—but simply because this was the way His own good pleasure had selected.

Those words, "All things are possible for You," in such a connection, prove beyond all shadow of doubt that the Father acted freely, and without any compulsion from His holiness or justice in appointing Christ to make satisfaction for the sins of His people. Scripture nowhere says that He *can* by no means clear the guilty—but rather that He *will* by no means clear the guilty" (Exo. 34:7). In like manner the Apostle Paul was moved to write, "What if God *willing* to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience, the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Romans 9:22). It was not that any necessity of His nature demanded He should do so—but because it was the pleasure of His own imperial will so to do.

As it has been pointed out above, we must distinguish sharply between the absolute freedom possessed by God as Lord over all—and that which His perfections require from Him under the economy He was pleased to institute. His fidelity requires Him to make good His Promises, and His veracity to fulfill His threatenings—but He was under no constraint whatever to make any promises or threatenings. His justice requires Him to impartially administer the law He *has* given—but He was under no absolute necessity of framing any law at all. Sin is a disease—could He not have sovereignly healed it had He so pleased? Sins are "debts"—was He unable to cancel them had He so desired? Perish such a thought! It is argued that God is "a consuming fire" and that fire cannot but burn when it comes into contact with that which is combustible. Have such foolish objectors forgotten that fire burns only as God orders it so to do? It did not consume the bush, nor the three Hebrews in Babylon's furnace! God "works all things after the counsel of His own WILL" (Eph. 1:11).

### **3. The Manifestation of God's Justice.**

Let us make it unmistakably clear at the outset, that it is the manifestation of God's justice under the economy which He *has* instituted, which we shall here treat of. It cannot be insisted upon too strongly, that there is a vast difference between the justice of God when it be viewed absolutely, and when it be viewed relatively—a difference as real and as great as that which exists between His essential independence, and those restrictions which He has voluntarily assumed. The justice of God considered absolutely, consists of His own Divine rights to do whatever He pleases. The justice of God considered *relatively*, consists of His course of action in relation to those creatures which He has placed under a moral constitution, wherein He has pledged Himself unto a certain order of procedure.

This distinction is far more than a philosophic nicety: it is a basic fact. The great God was absolutely free to create or not create, just as He saw fit. There was no compulsion—either from within or without—for Him to bring creatures into existence. He decided to go forth into acts of creation, solely for His own glory. In like manner, God was entirely free to create whatever kind of creatures He pleased—it was solely for Him to determine whether they should be rational entities or not. So, too, it was for Him to decide whether or not evil should enter His universe and sin mar the works of His hands. Furthermore, it was entirely at His option whether He should promptly annihilate evil-doers or whether their existence should be prolonged; and if prolonged, whether their iniquities should be pardoned or punished; and if punished in what way and for how long. Alas, how ignorant this generation is of Holy Writ!

*Absolutely* considered, then, the justice of God is one with His sovereignty. That is to say, whatever God decrees and whatever He does is just—simply and solely because it issues from His own imperial will. But *relatively* considered, the justice of God consists in His administering with strict impartiality, the Law which He was pleased to frame, so that He gives to each under it, his exact due. Above, we made mention of those "restrictions" which God has voluntarily taken upon Himself: lest this be misunderstood or wrested, we hasten to define our meaning. It has pleased God to form a purpose or plan, the broad outlines of which are revealed in His Word, and He is now acting accordingly. It has pleased God to make certain promises and threats, and He has pledged Himself to fulfill the same. We shall, then, now contemplate the Divine justice as it is manifested under that economy which the Lord God *has* appointed.

**First, it is testified to, by our CONSCIENCE.** Since it pleased the Creator to constitute man a rational creature and to place him under external law, He also saw fit to afford proof within himself, that he is subject to a Government which is righteous and just. Man is not only endowed with a faculty which enables him to distinguish

between right and wrong—but with perceptions that intuitively feel that justice is worthy of approbation, and injustice of condemnation. This is a part of that "work of the law written within their hearts" (Romans 2:15) by the Maker of men. It is in consequence of this moral faculty that the wicked "knowing (within themselves) the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death" (Romans 1:32). Hence it is that from earliest times, and all through the centuries—the most benighted even of the heathen have resorted unto all manner of means and devices in seeking to placate Deity.

It is the province of our conscience, to weigh actions in the scales of God's Law (or what we apprehend to be His Law) and pass sentence according to their conformity or lack of conformity with that standard. It has rightly been termed the *deputy* or *viceregent* of God within our souls, for it performs not only the work of a monitor by reminding us of our duty and exciting us to attend unto the same—but also of a subordinate judge summoning us before its tribunal and pronouncing us innocent or guilty. Its sentences proceed on the assumption that God's Law is "holy, just and good," with the demands of which we are bound to comply. And as Romans 2 tells us, this moral faculty works as truly in those who do not receive the written Law of God—as in those who do. Thus we see how the creature bears within him—a witness to the attributes of God's justice, for the constitution of his mind is as much His work as is the balancing of the clouds.

The workings of conscience are indeed remarkable, for they often expose the vanity of our most specious pretenses, and convict us of sin at the moment when we are employing all our sophistry in seeking to justify our mad conduct. In this manner the rights of God as the Supreme Governor to place man under law and to enforce its sanctions, are manifested within him even amid his very attempts to repudiate His demands and escape from His yoke. This advocate for God's claims, accompanies us wherever we go and makes its voice heard in solitude and company alike. It upbraids those

whom *men* would never think of reproof, and speaks with such potency as makes kings to tremble upon their thrones. It checks us when we are meditating wicked devices and if unheeded, disturbs our pleasure while we are seeking to enjoy our unlawful spoils.

**Second, the dispensations of PROVIDENCE tend to confirm the dictates of conscience, and manifest the justice of Him who is Lord over all.** Providence supposes the *preservation* and the *government* of creatures, according to their respective natures. Are there, then, any indications of a moral government over men? Both experience and observation inform us, that good and evil are disbursed, and the point we now raise is—do these appear to be allotted unto men in any degree according to their *conduct*, considered as morally good or evil? Admittedly this is no question which is easy to answer to the satisfaction of many people, especially when they are in a gloomy mood; nevertheless, the Scriptures record so many examples of the justice of God in punishing sin and in rewarding righteousness, that the godly cannot doubt the reality of this principle.

Among the more conspicuous demonstrations of the retributive justice of God, we mention the not sparing of the angels that sinned, for God "cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4); the swallowing of the inhabitants of the old world by the flood; the overthrow of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; the destruction of the haughty Pharaoh and his armies at the Red Sea; and the calamities which befell the rebellious Jews, particularly their transportation to Babylon and their subsequent dispersion by the Romans. Secular history also records many striking and solemn demonstrations of God taking vengeance on those who oppressed His people. Instances of Divine intervention in the lives of nations may still be observed, and will not be overlooked by those who are attentive unto what is passing around them, and who piously believe that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without the permission of the Most High God.

The like retributive justice of God appears also in the case of *individuals*. When the Israelites caught the Canaanite Adonibezek and cut off his thumbs and his big toes, he acknowledged, "I once had seventy kings with thumbs and big toes cut off, eating scraps from under my table. Now God has paid me back for what I did to them" (Judg. 1:7). Ahab's blood was lapped up by dogs in the very place where the blood of Naboth had been shed (1 Kings 22:37, 38). Jezebel was more guilty than he: Ahab permitted—but Jezebel contrived. Ahab afterward humbled himself, and therefore received honorable burial; but Jezebel was entombed in the bellies of the dogs. Haman was executed on the very gallows which he had set up for Mordecai (Esther 7:10). Henry the Third of France was killed in the same chamber where the horrible massacre had been planned, and Charles the Ninth died flowing in his own blood in bed.

So plainly does Providence hint that the Ruler of this world is endowed with justice, that we find *heathen antiquity* uniting in acknowledging its belief in *Divine retribution upon all enormities*. Examples of this are found in the mariners who manned the ship in which Jonah was passenger, for they were convinced that the awful storm came upon them because of some evil-doer in their midst (Jonah 1:7); as also in the case of the inhabitants of Melita, for when they saw the viper settle upon the hand of Paul they exclaimed, "No doubt this man is a murderer whom, though he escaped the sea, *justice* will not permit him to live" (Acts 28:4). Indeed it will generally be found, that the heathen are far readier to consider the workings of *Divine retribution*, than are those nations which profess to be Christian, and that unbelievers today are more ready to own God's hand in justice—than most of those who claim to be believers.

This principle of Divine retribution appears also in the lives of God's own people. *Jacob* secured Isaac's blessing by a piece of deception, posing as his brother Esau—and after seven years of hard service with Laban the homely Leah was palmed off on him in the stead of



her beautiful sister Rachel. When *Joseph* was inflexible to his brethren's requests they exclaimed, "This has all happened because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his terror and anguish and heard his pleadings, but we wouldn't listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us!" (Gen. 42:21). *Asa*, who put the Prophet in stocks, afterward became diseased in his own feet. *Paul* consented to the stoning of Stephen, yes, assisted in his execution, for his murderers laid down their clothes at his feet; and therefore Paul himself was afterward stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19, 20). This is the more noteworthy because *Barnabas*, who was his companion—who had given equal offense in preaching the Gospel was not stoned.

And so it is still. Without being guilty of the presumption and uncharitableness which our Savior condemned, when speaking of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, and of the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell—yet there are times when we are constrained to acknowledge, "Truly, there is a God who judges in the earth!" (Psalm 58:11). When we see, as at times we do, the sins of men called to remembrance—by the very nature of their punishment; and when we occasionally behold the sinner smitten with the rod of anger while he is in the act of transgression, we cannot doubt that the Ruler of this world is our righteous judge.

But it may be objected, that the distribution of rewards and punishments is not regular or uniform, that upon the whole, the treatment which men receive from God's Providence, is little connected with their character and conduct—yes, that the wicked rather than the righteous are the more successful. The *prosperity of the wicked* and the *afflictions of the righteous* have in all ages presented an acute problem, and it was the observation of Job that, "The tents of robbers are safe, and those who provoke God are secure" (Job 12:6). David declared, "I myself have seen it happen—proud and evil people thriving like mighty trees" (Psalm 37:35).

Asaph lamented, "For I envied the arrogant when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. They seem to live such a painless life; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They aren't troubled like other people or plagued with problems like everyone else!" (Psalm 73:3-5). After declaring, "Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You," Jeremiah asked the Lord, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they happy—who deal very treacherously?" (12:1). Habakkuk also inquired, "Why do You tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are You silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself?" (Hab 1:13). In Malachi's days there were those who murmured, "It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His requirements and walking mournfully before the Lord Almighty? So now we consider the arrogant to be fortunate. Those who commit wickedness prosper" (3:14, 15). What answer may be given to such questions?

**First**, God's *Word* does sufficiently declare His displeasure against the wicked, and His approbation of the righteous, even though His *Providence* does not. "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Eccl. 8:11) Though the warrant is signed—yet the execution thereof may be suspended for just reasons. Sin is not the less odious to God, because He does not immediately inflict its punishment. He delays it to display His infinite patience. He bears "with much patience, the vessels of wrath." Some, like Manasseh and Saul of Tarsus, are spared, that they may become the monuments of His sovereign grace. So, too, God has wise reasons for *delaying the rewards of the righteous*: that faith may be tested, patience developed, and the sufficiency of His grace to sustain under afflictions demonstrated.

**Second**, it should be more definitely borne in mind that there are other punishments beside *outward afflictions*, and other rewards beside *material prosperity*. Alas, that we so readily forget this. *Invisible* judgments are the most fearful of all. To be

abandoned by God unto blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and terrors of conscience—is far worse than any physical loss or pain! Who can measure what Cain felt when he cried, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" Who can gauge the depths of remorse felt by Judas before he went and hanged himself! Contrariwise, the favor of God is expressed unto His own people in the spiritual blessings which He showers upon them. What though the ungodly give them the cold shoulder, if they are conscious of the smile of their heavenly Father! Which is the better, houses and lands—or the comforts of an ungrieved Spirit and a peace which passes all understanding? Assurance of Divine sonship is worth more than silver or gold!

**Third**, Providence must not be viewed piecemeal—but in its *entirety*; nor by halves—but in its whole frame and connection. We are required to possess our souls in patience on this matter, too, for in His own good time, God shall make it unmistakably plain to an assembled universe, that He is a righteous Ruler and Judge. In the meanwhile God has good reasons for not yet making a full demonstration of His justice, by openly rewarding or punishing men according to their works. This is the day of His *patience* and not of His *wrath*—it is the day when we are called upon to walk by *faith* and not by *sight*. It is our failure to view Providence as a whole, which so often makes us say with Jacob, "all these things are against me," when in reality, "all things work together for good to tlove God." But it will only be in the future, that this grand fact will be fully evidenced. "Now we see through a glass darkly—but then face to face: now I know in part—but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12), and what an immeasurable difference this will make!

**Fourth**, the solemn triumph of the justice of God, will fully appear in the Day to come. The righteous and the wicked receive but the beginnings of their reward and punishment in this life. Though the wicked are not altogether without punishment, yet these are but the *beginning* of sorrows, if we respect either God's physical or

eternal retribution. The reason for this is not hard to discover: if God should punish no sin here—then none would believe there is a God; if He should punish all sin here—none would be afraid of future judgment. "He has appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31)—that will be the grand Assize for all mankind, where the Great Judge shall appear in His royalty. At present God keeps but petty sessions—but then will be, "The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). Now God's judgment is manifested on a few here and there—but then upon all. Now much of His retribution is disbursed *secretly*—but then openly. Now the punishment is but a *temporary* one—but then eternal. So, too, with the *rewarding* of the righteous: here they have but the beginning of their salvation, the fullness thereof being reserved for the world to come; for here, too, we have to walk by faith and not by sight.

**Finally**, let us point out once more that under the dispensations of Providence, the external government of God is so exercised as to provide the world with a sufficient witness of His retributive justice, as to give plain warning of what may be expected in the world to come. The occasional instance which we behold of the Divine vengeance upon evildoers, are notices that the Ruler of this world is not unmindful of nor indifferent to the actions of His creatures. They are calculated to excite an expectation that in the future, God's justice will be more openly and fully displayed. *Divine indifference* cannot be fairly inferred from the afflictions of the righteous, since they are compensated for by those spiritual consolations which make them joyful in tribulation, and are productive of beneficial effects. Here in this present world, justice is mingled with mercy to the godly in their sufferings; and mercy is mixed with justice to the wicked in their temporal blessings. But at the last Day it will be fully demonstrated that God is a righteous Judge, keeping strictly to that Law which He has framed for the government of this world. Moreover, at that Day, even the wicked shall be sufficiently delivered from the delusions of Satan as to perceive the righteousness of their Judge in His dealings with them.

**Fourth, the justice of God is manifested in REDEMPTION.** We have seen that the justice of God in His government of this world is manifested in the *consciences* of men and in the *dispensations* of Providence. Let us now behold how it is evidenced in the work of redemption. Here it has pleased the Most High to give a signal demonstration of His righteousness according to the requirements of that law which He has framed. Nowhere are the principles of the Divine administration exhibited so plainly as here—yet nowhere, we may add, is it so imperative for us to be completely subject to the Scriptures if our thoughts thereon are to honor the Lord God. If the works of *creation* contain mysteries which are beyond our powers to solve, and if the dispensations of *Providence* are often sorely perplexing, the yet grander work of *redemption*—God's masterpiece —must fill with reverent awe those who endeavor to contemplate its method and meaning. Only as we interpret by the light of Holy Writ, the amazing anomaly of *the Just suffering for the unjust* shall we be preserved from the most horrible errors.

In connection with the work of redemption, we are confronted with the astonishing spectacle of a Person whom even His worst enemies acknowledged to be free from the slightest stain of impurity. And of whose moral conduct, Heaven itself testified an unqualified approbation, spending His days in such affliction and ending His career in such anguish that He was denominated "*the Man of Sorrows.*" If *guilt* precedes *affliction* and is the cause of it, then to behold the Holy One enduring the unabated curse of the Law presents a problem which human wisdom is utterly incapable of solving. Yes, it is at this very point, that the blasphemies of infidels have raved the loudest. But this is exactly what Scripture leads us to expect, for it plainly tells us that the preaching of Christ crucified is "unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness." Yet this same passage at once adds, "But unto those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23, 24).

The light of Divine revelation removes what is a stumbling block to those who walk in darkness. So far from the Scriptures uttering the least apology for God in His appointment of Christ unto death, they declare that believers are, "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his *justice* at the present time, so as to be *just* and the one who *justifies* those who have faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26). The Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for sin, has been exhibited for this very end—to demonstrate the *justice* of God in this greatest transaction of all time, so that He now acquits the guiltiest transgressor who trusts in the Savior—without infringing the rights of His government; yes, manifesting and magnifying His very justice in so doing!

Though personally innocent of the slightest infraction of God's Law, yes, though rendering to it a perfect and perpetual obedience—yet the Lord Jesus Christ suffered vicariously as the Substitute of His people. Nor was this fearful sacrifice forced upon Him against His own will: rather did He freely assume the office of Surety and voluntarily discharge its duties. It must ever be borne in mind—that He who presented Himself as the Sponsor of God's elect, possessed rights and prerogatives which belong to no mere creature. He was complete master of His own life. He voluntarily assumed our nature and held His life for the purpose of surrendering it as a ransom for us. He Himself made this unmistakably plain when He declared, "Therefore does My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from Me—but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17, 18). If One who was innocent voluntarily received the wages of sin, then God's hatred of sin was unmistakably manifested, the authority of His government maintained, and the requirements of His justice fully satisfied.

From earliest times this *apparent travesty of justice*—an innocent victim being slaughtered in the place of the guilty—held a prominent place in the Divine appointments for His people. The Divine institution of propitiatory sacrifices and their abundant use under the economy God framed, was solemnly enforced by that penal statute, "Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood—I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Lev. 17:10, 11). Of such frequent application, of such varied utility, and of such high importance, was the expiatory blood of sacrifices—that the Holy Spirit moved an Apostle to say, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). What striking and emphatic declarations are these!

As no blood was expiatory except that which was poured out in sacrifice to God, that which brought death on the victim, and that in which the death of a victim was vicarious—God kept constantly before His people under the typical system of worship, the fact that pardon would not be dispensed to transgressors, nor communion with Himself enjoyed—except in strict connection with a display of *punitive justice*. But though the propitiatory sacrifices were so many testimonies to Jehovah's purity, so many evidences of His righteousness—yet in their nature, application and efficacy—they did not extend to the burdened conscience, but were limited to the removal of *ceremonial* defilement; and were a typical prefiguration of the Messiah's priestly work. They were so far from fully exhibiting the governmental perfections of God, that they were merely shadows and pre-intimations of that which was to be manifested when "the fullness of time should come."

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared

for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then said I, Then I said—Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God. By that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Heb. 10:4-10). Here is the grand transition from the *shadows* to the *Substance*. The typical sacrifices were inadequate for displaying the righteousness of God, and therefore were they superceded by the all-sufficient Sacrifice. None other than the Son of God Himself, took upon Him our humanity (immaculately conceived) and came into this world to do in *reality*, what had been previously *prefigured* of Him.

In the above passage, our blessed Redeemer stands forth as a *voluntary victim*, completely *qualified* to make full expiation of sin. Confident of His own perfect qualifications to perform the arduous work, absolutely willing to undergo all the bitterness of the sufferings involved therein—he announced His readiness to discharge the greatest undertaking of all. But let us carefully note, once more, how everything is resolved unto the Divine WILL. "Here I am, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Heb. 10:9). That will which had been formulated in His "eternal purpose" (Eph. 3:11), which had been expressed in the terms of the Everlasting Covenant, which had been freely accepted by the Mediator Himself, and which had been made known in the Scriptures of Truth. That "will" involved the magnifying of God's Law and rendering it honorable (Isaiah 42:21). It involved the Son's becoming the *federal Representative* of His people, His entering into the office of *Surety*, His serving as their *Substitute*, and His making *expiation* for their sins. And by that same "will" we are saved. How clearly this confirms what we have already said.

It would take us too far afield for us now to enter into a discussion of the *nature, design, and effects* of the Atonement, rather must we confine ourselves to the relation which the *Satisfaction of Christ* had unto the demonstrating of God's governmental perfections under the economy He had instituted. The fundamental



feature of that economy is that the Lord God has placed His rational creatures under law, and that He administers this law with strict impartiality, enforcing its sanctions without respect of persons. The climactic proof of this, appears in the plan God formed for the salvation of His elect. He did not *sovereignly* pardon their iniquities without any *satisfaction* being rendered to His broken Law—but appointed His own Son to enter their stead and place—and be made a curse for them, experiencing in His own Person the unabated penalty of that Law, so that they may be righteously discharged. This it is which alone explains the unparalleled sufferings of the Savior.

What has just been pointed out, alone accounts for the agony of our Redeemer prior to the Cross. Before any human hand was laid upon Him, before any human enemy came near Him, He exclaimed, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" (Matt. 26:38). Behold Him prostrate in the *Garden*: He was in an agony of mental distress: He sweat great drops of blood: engaged in "strong crying and tears." Observe Him on the *cruel Tree*. With unmeasurable magnanimity He interceded for His crucifiers. With royal majesty and unparalleled mercy He allotted a place in Paradise to one of the malefactors dying by His side. But before He yielded up His spirit He cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!" There is only one adequate cause for such unspeakable anguish, namely, His *vicarious* Character, His bearing *imputed* sin (for He had none of His own), His undergoing the curse of the Law in the place of those who were justly condemned by it.

Scripture speaks so plainly on this momentous subject that there is no excuse for any misunderstanding of its meaning. Christ was "wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him" (Isaiah 53:5). And why so? Because God made His Son to be "sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), because "the Lord made the iniquity of us all, to meet on Him" (Isaiah 53:6), because "His own self, bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). And what was the

consequence? This—Jehovah cried, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me! declares the Lord Almighty. Strike the shepherd!" (Zech. 13:7). Under the regime God has instituted, sin must be punished wherever it is found—and no exception was made even of the spotless Lamb—when the iniquities of His people were transferred to Him. Hence we are told that the Sin-bearer was "*smitten* of God" and again, "it pleased the Lord to *bruise* Him" (Isaiah 53:4, 10).

It is, then, in the work of redemption, that we behold the clearest, the most solemn, and yet the grandest display of God's justice. Therein we learn His estimate of sin, His holy abhorrence of it, the nature and severity of His sentence upon it. Not only does the work of redemption exhibit the exceeding riches of Divine mercy in the pardon of deservedly condemned criminals—but it manifests the inexorable and awe-inspiring character of Divine justice—in the tremendous punishment of sin inflicted upon the Holy Lamb! The more we prayerfully contemplate the Father's conduct in connection with the obedience and sufferings of His dear Son—the more clearly do we behold Him vindicating the honor of His broken Law, satisfying the claims of His penal justice, furnishing incontestable proof of His equity and veracity, and thereby is He set forth as One who is infinitely worthy to superintend the universe and to govern this world.

**Finally, the justice of God will be openly manifested at the end of this world**, when the present administration terminates: then will be "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). The ends of justice, so far as they consist in retribution, would be answered by the sentence pronounced upon every individual immediately after death, for it is enough that the *state* of men in the next world conform to their *characters* and *conduct* in this world. But the Grand Assize is designed for the final manifestation of God's justice before an assembled universe, to bring it out of any obscurity and uncertainty in which it is partly veiled under the varied dispensations of

Providence, and to demonstrate once and for all—that the Ruler of Heaven and earth is no respecter of persons. Then shall the books be opened, fair trial accorded, all the evidence adduced and every man shall "receive according to his works." The wicked will then be convicted that each one has received the *due reward of his iniquities*, while the righteous will exclaim, "Lord God Almighty, *true and righteous* are Your judgments!" (Rev. 6:7).

## Application

Let us now endeavor, though very briefly, to apply this important subject in a doctrinal and practical manner.

**First, such manifestations of the Divine justice as have been before us, should indeed promote the exercise of deep humility before God in all our devotional fellowship with Him.** O fellow-Christian, if we apprehend in any measure this most solemn truth of the Divine justice, we must surely feel the propriety of that precept, "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear—for our God is a consuming fire!" (Heb. 12:28, 29). There is far more danger of real believers approaching the Father of mercies in a careless, carnal, and formal manner—than there is of them drawing near to Him under the influence of painful timidity or of a desponding temper. We should endeavor to acquire a settled habit of reminding ourselves that the Object of our worship is One who is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!" Such a view of God is adapted to arouse solemnity, excite reverence, and promote submission.

**Second, such manifestations of Divine justice as have been before us, should warm our hearts and enkindle the spirit of praise.** O what a difference it makes whether that justice is *for*—or *against* us. God's justice is now *for* the weakest and most unworthy believer, for the simple but sufficient reason—that it was

against his blessed Redeemer. God cannot twice demand payment—first at our bleeding Surety's hand, and then again at ours. Because the sword of Divine justice was sheathed in the side of the Substitute—I go free. Because He received the wages of sin in my place—my debts are fully discharged. Because He rendered to the Law a vicarious obedience which magnified and made it honorable—His perfect righteousness is reckoned to my account. Because I have put my trust in His finished work, I am justified from all things. Surely, then, I must exclaim, "my mouth shall show forth Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day!" (Psalm 71:15). O what praise and devotion are due Him. "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness!" (Isaiah 61:10).

**Third, such manifestations of Divine justice as have been before us, constitute an unspeakably solemn warning to the unsaved.** While the consideration of God's justice must fill believers with peace and joy—yet it is a fearful thing for the Christless to contemplate. It is a justice which is inflexible, inexorable, and immutable. It is a justice which is never set aside by sentimental considerations, and which cannot be bought with promises, or bribed by tears. The solemn truth of God's justice, addresses the consciences of those who are secure in their sins, saying, "O sleeper, arise, call upon your God." It speaks with the voice of thunder, maintaining the reasonableness of that obedience which the Law requires, the equity of the sanctions by which it is enforced, and the inflexibility of the Legislator to execute His threatened curse upon its transgressors. If God "spared not His own Son," most certainly He will not spare any who finally despise and reject Him. Even now His wrath is upon them (John 3:36), and unless they repent—soon shall they feel the full force of it in the Lake of Fire!

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