

A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR

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John 8: 1-11

There is in all persons a certain knowledge of good and evil; such and such things they say are good, and such and such things are evil. But perhaps no two persons fix exactly the same standard either of good or evil. What people do is to fix such a standard of good as they can come up to themselves, and such a standard of evil as shall just exclude themselves, and include others.

For instance, the drunkard thinks there is no great harm in drinking, but would consider it a great sin to steal. The covetous man, who is every day perhaps practising some cheating or deception "in the way of trade," satisfies himself by thinking "it is necessary and customary to do so in business, and at all events I do not get drunk or curse and swear as others do." The profligate person prides himself upon being generous and kind-hearted to others, or, as he says, "he does nobody any harm but himself" The upright moral man, and the domestic amiable man, satisfies himself with doing what he calls his duty, and looks round and pities the open sinners that he sees; but he never considers how many an evil thought, how many a sinful desire, he may have cherished, unknown to others, in his bosom: and that God judges the heart, though man looks only at the outward conduct.

Thus each congratulates himself upon his not having done some evil, and compares himself with some one else who has committed the sin, which he thinks he has managed to avoid. Now all this proves that men do not judge themselves by one regular fixed standard of right and wrong, but just take that which suits themselves and condemns others. But there is a standard, with which all will be compared, and according to which all will be judged, - a standard of righteousness, all who fall short of which will be eternally condemned; and that is no less than the righteousness of God. When a person begins to find that it is not by comparing himself with others that he is to judge, but by comparing himself with God, when his conscience begins to be awakened to think of sin as before God, then indeed he finds himself guilty and ruined; he will not then attempt to justify himself by trying to find out some one that is worse than himself, but he will be anxious to know whether it is possible that God, before whom he knows himself condemned, can pardon or forgive him.

Now the scribes and Pharisees, mentioned in this eighth chapter of John, were very moral and religious people, and were greatly shocked when they found this wretched woman taken in such open sin, and very indignant against her. Justice and the law of Moses, thought they, demand that she should be made an example of - it is not fit that such a sinner should live. It comforts and quiets the depraved heart of man, if he can only find a person worse than himself: he thinks the greater sin of another excuses himself; and whilst accusing and vehemently blaming another, he forgets his own evil. He thus rejoices in iniquity.

But this is not all; for not only do men thus glory and exult in the fall and ruin of another, but they cannot bear to see, or think of, God exhibiting grace. Grace - which means the full and free forgiveness of every sin, of every evil, without God demanding or expecting, any thing from the

one so forgiven - is a principle so opposed to all man's thoughts and ways, so far above man, that he dislikes it; his own heart often secretly calls it injustice. He does not himself deal in this way, and does not like to think of God doing so. It is very humbling to be obliged to own that we are dependent upon grace entirely for salvation; and that nothing we have done, and nothing we can in future do, has made us, or will make us, fit subjects even for grace; but that our misery and sin and ruin are the only claim we have upon grace. The scribes and Pharisees could not understand this; and not liking to own that they were themselves sinners, they wished to perplex Jesus; and if He acquitted the woman, then say He was unjust; or if He condemned her, then say He was not merciful. "Such should be stoned," say they; "but what sayest thou?"

True the sentence was just, the proof of the woman's guilt was undoubted, and the law was clear; but who was to execute the law? Man may easily condemn, but who has a right to execute? "He that is without sin, let him first cast a stone at her." Who could say "Without sin?" and if not one of them could say, "I am without sin;" there was not one of them but was under the same sentence as the woman - that is, death, for "the wages of sin is death." Here, then, was a strange situation, - the accused and her accusers alike involved in the same ruin—criminals all. Not now "such should be stoned," but all should be stoned. From the eldest to the last, all convicted sinners.

And have you thought of that? that you and all the world are guilty before God? It is not what your amount of sin, as respects others, is; but can you say you are "without sin" before God? If not, death, then, is your sentence. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." And in this sad condition what have you done? Perhaps the same as the scribes and Pharisees did, when they were convicted by their own conscience - left the presence of the only One who can pronounce the forgiveness. Adam in the garden had done the same before; he went and hid himself from God when he knew himself guilty; he turned away from his only friend just when he most needed His help. And so it is still. Man is afraid of the only One who is ready to pardon.

You may be able to persuade yourself that you are not so bad; you may find others manifestly worse; but are you a sinner at all? What is God's thought concerning you? Does not even your own conscience say, "I am not quite without sin." Well, then, death is the sentence. God cannot lie, it is His sentence. And if we only heard that God was just, there could be no hope. But He is "a just God and a Saviour." He has condemned, and He has also the power to execute; the only question that remains is, can He pardon?

"And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst." She was standing before One who could say, "Without sin," and who therefore could cast the stone. She was alone with One whom she owned as Lord; and what would be His sentence? The law had already condemned her; would He execute it? What a moment of intense anxiety must it have been for her! How all surrounding objects must have been as nothing in her fright! She was alone with One who had the power of life and death. Everything rested on His word. What would He say? Man had not dared to cast the stone; now what would God do? "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

Such is still the gracious message to the ruined sinner, pronounced by the very Judge Himself. But it is only to the ruined sinner, standing consciously convicted before the Judge, that it is spoken. The righteous Pharisees heard it not. They were indeed convicted; but they liked not to confess their sin, and they sought to get rid of their convictions, to bury them in some good works of their own; and they would not put themselves in the same condemnation with the wretched woman, who got this blessed word of peace. And so it is still. If you desire to have God's full and free pardon, it must be your place to stand first as the guilty sinner. To be alone with Jesus, consciously self-condemned. To have no one else to trust to, no one else to compare yourself with. Not to make resolutions of amendment, not to try to get better first, before you come to Him; but to be brought to Him by your very sins, to stand in the very place of condemnation, and before the very Person who has the power to condemn. To make your very

guilt the reason of being alone with Him.

And the Lord gave her no conditional pardon. He did not say, "Neither will I condemn you, if you will not sin any more." No, He gives her full and complete forgiveness first, and that He knew would enable her to avoid the sin in future. If you desire to have power over your sins, you must first know them all pardoned by God through Christ. But if you try to master your evil before you know the forgiveness of God, you will obtain neither the one nor the other. Through faith in Jesus you must be justified freely from all things, before you will ever be better as before God.

Now, some who really believe on Jesus do not clearly see this, and they are seeking to have peace by holiness of life, or the fruits of the Spirit, instead of first acknowledging themselves as ruined sinners fully and freely pardoned, and then letting their life and conduct be guided by the knowledge of that pardon, and the love to God which the knowledge of His mercy must necessarily create. Begin with, "Neither do I condemn thee." Let your peace come from faith in the blood of His cross, by which He has made peace. God's knowledge and estimate of your sin is much deeper than your own, but He has provided the blood of His Son. He says that blood cleanses from all sin. The more I see and know my own sin, the more I shall value that precious blood by which it is put away; and the more anxious shall I be not to grieve the heart of Him who, in His own love, has provided such a wonderful sacrifice on account of my sins. Hence, the deeper I know my own guilt, the more secure will be my peace; for the greater will be my value for the blood, through which peace has been made.

May you know the peace and joy of having all your sins forgiven through faith in the blood of Jesus, and the consequent victory over the power of those very sins by which you have been led captive.

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