

# How Can God Be Both Just and Loving?

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[ 0 : 00 ] If someone asked you, what do you believe about God? What would you tell them?

How would you describe God's nature? How would you describe His character? Think about it for a moment. Somebody's asking you what you believe about God.

What would you say? Would your description be based on what you think about God?

Or would it be based on what the Bible says about God? Would you describe a God of your own making?

Or would you describe God as He has revealed Himself in His Word? Tim Keller says that Jonah's main problem was that he wanted a God of his own making.

[ 1 : 07 ] Look at it. Jonah wants a God of his own making. A God who simply smites the bad people, for instance, the wicked Ninevites, and blesses the good people, for instance.

Jonah and his countrymen. When the real God, not Jonah's counterfeit, keeps showing up, Jonah is thrown into fury or despair.

Now, if you're here for the first time or the first time in a long time, I'm bringing up Jonah because we spent the summer going through the Old Testament book of Jonah.

While Jonah was a prophet of God, for sure, he had a hard time accepting, dealing with how God graciously deals with people, specifically in his situation, people who were known to be evil and brutal.

Tim Keller goes on to explain this. Jonah finds the real God to be mysterious because he cannot reconcile the mercy of God with His justice.

[ 2 : 18 ] How, Jonah asks, can God be merciful and forgiving to people who have done such violence and evil? How can God be both merciful and just?

Most people in here, you were, went through the book of Jonah with me, we did it together. You know that the book of Jonah ends with him never understanding how God could be both just and loving.

Now, in a way, that's really understandable. It's not excusable, but it's understandable. Because the clearest answer to the question is not given until Jesus comes into this world.

The clearest answer to the question, how can God be both just and loving or gracious or merciful? It was not answered until Jesus came and lived a sinless life.

Died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. And then arose from the grave triumphantly. This morning, I want us to think together in preparation for observing the Lord's Supper, how God's justice and love come together in the cross of Jesus Christ, in the work that He accomplished on the cross.

[ 3 : 44 ] Let's think first, our Heavenly Father is a just God. You know, it's just a part of God's nature to be just or to do what's right.

The word justice means, look, to give to everyone what they are due. If we receive justice, we get exactly what we deserve.

No more, no less. Deep down, all of us in this room, deep down, we know that justice is right.

It's good. It's the way things ought to be. Three years ago, there was a judge in California who handed down a mere six-month jail sentence for a Stanford University swimmer who was convicted of sexually assaulting an unconscious woman behind a campus trash bin.

Well, that lenient sentence, when it was announced, it sparked national outrage. It was obvious to everyone justice had not been served, not by a long shot.

[ 5 : 05 ] Well, two years later, that justice was removed from the bench because he was determined not to be a just judge.

The good news for us this morning is that God can never be accused of being an unjust judge. The Bible clearly shows that God is just.

He does what is right always. And he always does what's right in dealing with us. He's just in the way he deals with all people. Look at this from 2 Thessalonians chapter 1.

God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. He was trying to comfort those Thessalonian Christians who were experiencing persecution, who were being treated unjustly. He was assuring them, you can count on God to settle the score, to make things right, because God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you.

[ 6 : 07 ] God takes care of his children. But Paul goes on here to talk in a more general way. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

What Paul is basically saying is that all sin must be punished without exception. The Christian writer Jerry Bridges says, contrary to popular opinion, with God there's no such thing as mere forgiveness.

God never says, ah, don't worry about it. Not that bad, not that big. Ah, just go on. No. Our Heavenly Father always does what's right, what's just, what is truly fair.

But we're talking about God's justice, and it is essential that we understand that God is just. He determines and enforces that which is right.

But that's not a full picture of God. God is also a loving God. And that's what I want us to look at next. Our Heavenly Father is a loving God. Some of you are thinking, yes, that's how I think of God.

[ 7 : 33 ] Well, if you don't think of him as both just and loving, you think of him incorrectly. You've conjured up some God of your own making if he is not both just, holy, and loving, merciful.

While God's justice requires that the penalty for sin be paid, God's love desires that sinful people be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with him.

In his infinite wisdom, God devised a plan before the foundation of the world to both punish sin and forgive people who are guilty of sin.

That plan was fulfilled by God's Son, Jesus Christ. Think about it. God's justice requires that the penalty for sin be paid.

It cannot be let go. But God's love provides for that penalty to be paid by Jesus when he died on the cross.

[ 8 : 45 ] The Apostle John explains it like this. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. That word, propitiation, I'm sure anybody here would, you know, that's a real familiar word, isn't it?

I never hear it. If I hadn't studied it, I wouldn't know what it was. So, we need to think, what does it mean? A propitiation is a sacrifice that bears the wrath of God fully and turns God's wrath to favor. Some people have a problem with the idea of God being wrathful, having righteous anger. If God is good, that which is not good, God hates.

God must, if he's a God of justice and love, he must punish that which is not good. What we need to understand is God unleashed his wrath, his holy hatred of sin on Jesus as he hung on the cross as our substitute.

[ 10 : 18 ] He was bearing our sin. He absorbed the full wrath of God so that we, so that you and I could experience the grace of God to turn God's wrath to favor.

Jesus suffered God's wrath for all who will believe in him. God demonstrated his great love, his uncompromising justice by sending Jesus into this world to actually die for us and pay the penalty for our sins.

God now invites all who will confess their sin, turn from it, to put their faith in Jesus and receive him as their Savior and Lord. Look at this verse that I'm sure is very familiar to the majority in here.

For God so loves the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. But to all who received him, John says in chapter one, but to all who received him, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

If you don't know Christ as your Lord and Savior this morning, I want to encourage you to trust him now. Confess your sin, turn from it, change your mind about it, and put your trust in Jesus as your Savior.

[ 11 : 43 ] Surrender your life to him as the Lord of your life. I know that the majority of people in this room are Christians. What we need to do is thank God for the way he has demonstrated his love to us by sending Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins so that we don't have to, so that we can just experience God's mercy and forgiveness instead of his justice.

As we partake of the Lord's Supper this morning, we need to let it sink in that the bread and the cup that you're going to hold in your hand symbolizes the death of Jesus on the cross.

His body was broken. His blood was shed. When we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are actually united to him by faith.

We're one with him. Paul often describes our relationship with Jesus as being in Christ. We're one with him. That means his death for our sin is credited to us.

The penalty is paid. And also, his righteous, perfect life that he lived in this world before he was crucified. That is also credited as our righteousness. So I want to encourage you.

[ 13 : 02 ] We're going to have a prayer. Instrumentalists are going to play through a little short piece of a song. This is a time for us to thank God.

Respond to whatever God's calling us to do right now. This is a time for us to express our love, gratitude, and commitment to Jesus for what he has done for us through his death on the cross. Would you pray with me? Father, help us to see now how we need to respond to what Christ has done for us in taking the penalty for our sins, experiencing the justice that our sins deserve, that we deserve.

Father, I pray if there's anyone in this room who is not a Christian that you will so work in them to open their eyes to see their need for Jesus and give them the ability to believe now.

Father, if there are Christians here who have just sort of lost sight of your great grace and the sacrifice and love that Jesus has shown, help them, Father, to be humbled by that, reminded by that.

[ 14 : 26 ] Help them, dear God, to renew their commitment. And Lord, we pray that as we observe the Lord's Supper, that you will enable us to think deeply and that it will be a true time of communion with our Lord.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.