

# (Hebrews - Part 43): The Justice of God on the Side of the Sinner

by A.W. Tozer

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*A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of pursuing holiness as a reflection of God's character and the transformative power of His presence in the believer's life.*

**Duration:** 23:22

**Scripture:** John 3:16, Hebrews 12:11-14

**Topics:** "Expositional"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Hebrews 12:11, which talks about the temporary pain of chastening but the ultimate fruit of righteousness that it produces. The preacher emphasizes the importance of holiness and the need to pursue it. He describes the absence of God in the lives of many Christians today and the lack of awe and reverence for His presence. The preacher calls for a revival in the church, where people are moved by the fear and wonder of God, just like Abraham, Moses, and Paul were in the Bible.

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## Transcript

Verse 11, I'll break right into it here. It's so tightly woven in its thought that you have to read it all or else break it, and I'll break it here. Verse 11, Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.

Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth a peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down in the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Now, I want to place particular emphasis upon that last verse, for here we are specifically commanded to follow after holiness. It is to be our constant ambition to be holy. According to the verses that are before and after, one way to advance in this pursuit of holiness is to accept chastisement and work with God as God works in us.

Every doctor knows how difficult it is to work for a patient if the patient will not work with him. Doctors are very kind as a rule and very patient, patient with their patients. But I can imagine how they feel when we

fight them.

I don't think a doctor ever did anything to me yet that I didn't resist. It's more or less instinctive. But here we are to work with God as he works for us.

Holiness is God-likeness, likeness to God, for only God is holy absolutely. God is holy in absolute, and all other holy beings are holy in relative degrees. It tells us of the holy angels who will come with Jesus, that even those holy angels have their holiness from another source.

It is not native to them. They reflect the glory of God, and that is their holiness. We learn also that holy men of God speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

The word holy is the same, but for the Holy Spirit it means absolute, uncreated holiness. And for the holy men who speak, it means a derived holiness which comes from God. God says, Be ye holy, for I am holy.

But I'm glad he didn't say, Be ye holy as I am holy, for this would be one of the most impossible, discouraging, disheartening commandments possible. Be ye as holy as God. He doesn't say that.

But he says, Be ye holy because I am holy. Be ye getting holy and becoming holy and relatively holy, because I am absolutely holy. Let's look for a little bit at what holiness means.

As I see it, holiness has two aspects to it. Holiness has what somebody invented the term and called it the numinous quality, and then it has the moral quality. I'll speak a little about this numinous quality of holiness.

By that we mean that God exists in himself, God being, God being is. He says, I am that I am. His nature is inconceivable.

We cannot lay hold of it with the mind at all. I think this is Bible doctrine, and I've been quite surprised because as I've been preaching here and there and have occasion to mention the incomprehensibility of God, some people have raised their hands as though I was a heretic fresh out of Rome or somewhere. Actually, the incomprehensibility of God has been taught by the theologians from Paul all down through to this hour, the deep theologians who know what they are teaching about.

Therefore, God can't be comprehended, and not being able to comprehend him, we can't speak him forth, and so he is said to be ineffable. Ineffable means you can't speak it, and if you can't know it, you can't speak it. The nature of God is unique.

God is of a substance not shared by any other being. If we can get a hold of this, I preached all this in my series on the attributes of God, but I don't know how much of it ever stuck. But God's nature is unique, that is, God is of a substance that can be shared by no other being, hence can be known only as he is revealed.

God must reveal himself because man could not know him otherwise. It takes similarities to know each other, and because man, God, is not similar to any other thing, but is unique himself alone beyond all creaturehood, therefore he has to reveal himself. God's nature is super-rational, that is, we can't get a hold of it with our minds.

It's not beyond experiencing. Even though all this is true of God, God can yet make himself known to us. He can manifest himself to people, and he did manifest himself to people in Old Testament times.

He sought Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid among the trees in their fear. And every time God thus manifested himself, they didn't try to understand God, but God manifested himself to them, and every time this incomprehensible, inconceivable, ineffable and utterly holy God made himself known to anybody, immediately their mouths were shut, or they fell down in a dead faint, or they ran and hid, or they cried, My God, I am unclean, or they otherwise expressed the reaction of undone-ness in the presence of this holy God. It brought dismay to their hearts and inspired terror and stupefied and appalled.

It seems to me that this is what is lacking in our church and what is lacking in most evangelical churches today. Everybody can predict everything, and everybody comes completely self-possessed and knows just exactly what he is going to do, and you couldn't, unless the church got on fire, bump anybody to do anything that wasn't proper. I pray that God may sometime move in on us in such a way that it will have the effect it had on Abraham when a deep sleep fell upon him and a horror of great darkness, that God will move in on us consciously felt so that it will have the effect on us that it had on Moses when he shook with exceeding fear, and on Ezekiel when he fell upon his face, and on Paul when struck blind on Damascus road, he was speechless and went without food, because he had seen the awful, wondrous, lovely God that he had heard about but that hadn't before seen.

I pray that we may have such a manifestation of God's awful, wondrous, healing presence here that it will affect us as it affected John when he saw the Lord Jesus, and he fell on his face as if dead. For the Lord picked him up and said, Don't be afraid, John, it is I. It is I, don't be afraid. He knew John couldn't help it, because John, being a sinful creature in this awful, uncreated holiness that manifested itself there, fell on John as though he had been struck with a blow with a hammer.

And the Lord didn't condemn it, he understood that. He knew that it was John's weakness reacting to his strength, John's unholiness reacting to God's awesome holiness. In the New Testament, wherever the Spirit fell, there came this strange sense of the mysterious working of the supernatural, this sense of the previously unfamiliar presence, this presence that was unearthly, this wondrous, ineffable presence.

In the Book of Paul admits, even though the Corinthian church wasn't all it should be, that yet there were those among them that were spiritual and not so. They formed a nucleus that the Holy Ghost could come upon, and men who were not Christians fell on their faces and said, God is among them of the truth. This, I say, is what we need.

What is the reaction of the cleansed heart, the loving heart? It is to find this blissful center around about which we revolve. This presence of God is the air of life eternal, it is the music of existence, it is the poetry of the Christian life, it is the beauty and wonder of being a Christian, and it is the most desirable state imaginable to live, surrounded by this sense of God's awesome presence. This is the day of the absentee God.

God is absent from his people, or we act as if he was absent, and we even act as if we were glad he was absent, because an absentee God isn't going to bother anybody much. He's going to be there if we need him, but he isn't going to bother us, interfere with our carnality. This is the hour of the absentee God, there's no question.

It's the only way all the nonsense that's being carried on in the name of the Lord can possibly be understood. It is men who have not consulted with God, but yet who feel that they are here to carry on God's work while he's away, thinking up ideas of how they can do it, that are so moronic and nonsensical,

that if God had even been on the committee, it couldn't have happened. God wasn't even on the committee that decided it.

I say to the cleansed loving heart, the presence of God is not only beautiful and desirable, but it is imperative, it must be. Then the holiness of God. I have spoken of the numinous quality, the awfulness of God, now the holiness of God, that is the moral quality.

This is a little more familiar and a little more understandable, and not quite so terrifying to the soul, more magnetic. We are drawn, we are Christians, to that which is pure. God's nature is unspeakably pure, sinless, spotless, immaculate, stainless, with an absolute fullness of purity that words can never express.

God the Holy God, you can always be sure, God's all right. That can be at the very bottom and basis of all you're thinking about God. God's all right.

God is holy, God is pure. I remember that wondrous passage in the 22nd Psalm, when our Lord Jesus hung on the cross, and his family had deserted him, his disciples had fled away, his own people had condemned him to death, the Romans had condemned him to death. He was now crucified, rejected of man, and many think rejected for a moment of God while he died, just for the unjust, that he might bring us back to God.

And in that awful hour, as he prayed that the bulls of Bashan were crowding around him and that his tongue was clinging to the roof of his mouth and his bones were out of joint and his life was poured out like water, what could he do? Could he turn atheist there on the cross? Could he begin to condemn God and say, I can't believe there is a God who would do this? No. He did this one awful, wonderful, lonely, beautiful thing there on the cross. He lifted his voice and said, But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

If they tear me to pieces, if they trample my body into the ground, if they subject me to every torture known to humanity, still, O my God, I know one thing, there is one thing I can settle on, God is all right, God is holy and can't be anything else but holy. Here, my brethren, not John 3.16, but here is the basic pillar upon which Christianity rests. It is God, and God is, and God is holy.

And everything that God does in John 3.16 springs out of that. And all other beautiful things of the New Testament spring out of the great fountain of truth. God is holy.

God's nature, I say, is unspeakably pure. And do you know how this has affected men? It drove Peter to quick confession. Depart from me, Lord, I am a man, he said, I am an unholy man and sinful.

And Isaiah cried, Lord, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips. Now, it's this kind of holiness, the moral quality, that would die rather than do wrong, that settled forever and ever that we will be right because God is right, we will be holy because God is holy. It is this that we are to pursue, to know, to entertain, to dwell in the divine.

This we must do, with lumened eyes to walk with God and be creatures that dwell in the fire, creatures out of the fire. The poor church, the poor evangelical church, the poor mental Christians, the poor young preachers are being taken into the halls of so-called learning, and their Christianity is being mingled and mixed with anthropology and psychology, both of which are being now used, though they might be innocent if understood correctly, are being now used to dilute and water down and change the whole complexion of the Christian life. And they can explain the Lord's people now, which is the insult to us.

When God has a people back again in the world that can't be explained, he'll have a people with power. Nudy went to one of the English cities, and there was a club called the Atheist Club in that town. Nudy had no education, you know.

Nudy, they said, never called Daniel anything but Daniel, and never called Samuel anything but Samuel, and everything else in proportion. He was a boy off the streets of Chicago. And he went to this town and announced that he was going to preach to the Atheists, and they thought it was a big joke.

And the President of the club and the other officers along with their members all turned up that night. Nudy took for his text a verse I don't think he understood, I don't, and I haven't met anybody that did, but he used it. "'Their rock is not as our rock, our enemies themselves being the judges.' Now, what that means I'm not sure, but he preached on it, and he made it mean this.

He made it mean, whatever rock you're resting on, it isn't like our rock, and we let you be the judge. Your little rock and your little sandstone rock that you have perched on there like a toad on a water pad, there you are, but your rock will crumble. But our rock is not like your rock.

Our rock will last, the rock of ages. Now, you be the judge,' he said. When he gave the invitation, the President of the Atheist Club not argued into it, but brought into it by the presence of the mysterious, awful God in the midst.

Went into the inquiry room, and as soon as he'd broken the ice, the others trekked in. And the whole club was converted and broke up and went out of business. Psychologists can't explain that.

The nearest ever made to it was William James, and he couldn't explain it, and reverently said he couldn't try. But I don't mean that particular incident. I don't think James referred to that incident, but I am talking about that kind of thing.

This we need, brethren, holiness. The people that are so holy that they walk on the earth as other creatures. We're always talking about creatures from other places.

They say people, invaders from other planets. We talk about creatures that come from other worlds, and we almost always have them, as bad as we are, worse. What we need is to have creatures from other worlds that were born down here.

But yet, their citizenship is in heaven, all their thoughts are in heaven, their hopes are there, their power is there, everything is there, and really and truly they're from another world, even though they were born here. But when they were born again, they became creatures from another world. It's this we need, and this will do more than all our level-eyed attempts to explain psychologically what happens when a man is converted.

If you can explain it, he hasn't been converted yet, for Christianity is a perpetuated miracle. It is a miracle that perpetuates itself. It's a continuous wonder and a mystery.

Yet we walk sanely in the midst of it, with our feet on the ground. Seek after holiness, he says. Now, if anybody rejects this, then they're none of theirs, because just as a baby born, natural baby born into the world, wants its food and will make funny little animal noises and claw after the food until it gets it, so a man born into the kingdom of God is born with an instinct after holiness.

And if he doesn't have it, he's not been born. His theological background may be such that he would be cautious about the word and so on, because his fingers may have been burnt. But the point I'm making is that if you're not longing to be holy, then I doubt whether you've been born anew.

If you've truly been born anew, then I believe you'll be saying with Wesley, Jesus, thine all-victorious love, shed in my heart abroad, then shall my feet no longer row, rooted and fixed in God. Oh, that in me the sacred fire might now begin to glow, burn up the dross of base desire and make the mountains flow. Oh, that it now from heaven might fall and all my sins consume.

Come, Holy Ghost, for thee I call, spirit of burning, come, refining fire, go through my heart, illuminate my soul, scatter thy light through every part and sanctify the whole.

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