

THE HOLINESS OF GOD BY R C SPROUL

CHAPTER 6: HOLY JUSTICE

References (Black book, White book, Kindle)

I. Introduction

“Whoever reads the Old Testament must struggle with the apparent brutality of God’s judgment found there.”

A. Options

1. Reject Christianity altogether
2. Turn the Old Testament into a myth
3. Argue that the OT God is different than the NT God

II. Nadab and Abihu (119, 97, 989)

A. Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, offered “strange fire” to God and were immediately executed

B. Human explanation: Experimental oil that exploded and killed them

C. God’s explanation

1. The Bible makes it clear that their death was not an accident but a judgment
2. Aaron ran to Moses to plead the case of his sons
3. Moses gave God’s answer that Nadab and Abihu had “committed a sin of arrogance, an act of treason against God: They profaned a most holy place.”

D. Punitive justice

1. Definition: the justice by which God punishes the guilty
2. “Built into our concept of justice is the idea that the punishment must fit the crime. If the punishment is more severe than the crime, then an injustice has been committed.”
3. Nadab and Abihu couldn’t plead ignorance but wasn’t their punishment a little harsh?
4. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25) – God’s judgments are always righteous and just

III. Uzzah (125, 102, 1054)

A. The ark

1. The ark was a rallying point for the nation, the throne of God
2. Could be transported by poles so that no one could touch it
3. When Uzzah reached out to steady the ark, he died immediately
4. David (a man after God’s own heart) was angry at God

B. Human explanation

1. Some say Uzzah respected the ark so much that he died from fright after he touched it
2. “People reach for such explanations not only because our culture has an incurable allergy to all things supernatural but also because the story so offends our sense of justice.”

3. “Surely Uzzah’s reaction was instinctive. He did what any pious Jew would do to keep the ark from falling into the mud.”
4. It was a reflex, “not a premeditated act of defiance toward God”

C. God’s explanation

1. Uzzah was likely a Kohathite, a special family branch of the Levites who were trained to take care of the sacred articles of the tabernacle
2. He knew that “they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die” (Numbers 4:15)
3. But Uzzah touched the ark anyway – “an act of arrogance, a sin of presumption. Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth.”
4. Uzzah was not innocent or punished unjustly

IV. Biblical Concepts (131, 108, 1092)

A. We are offended/angered by these stories because we don’t understand the biblical concepts of holiness, justice, sin, and grace

B. These stories are examples of divine justice, not divine mercy

C. Divine justice

1. Justice = conformity to a rule or a norm
2. “God plays by the rules. The ultimate norm of justice is His own holy character.”
3. “To function as the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth, God ought to be just.”
4. God shows no corruption, partiality, favoritism, or ignorance
5. God would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah for one righteous person

D. Divine mercy

1. “Injustice violates righteousness. Mercy manifests kindness and grace and does no violence to righteousness. We may see *nonjustice* in God, which is *mercy*, but we never see *injustice* in God.”

V. OT Capital Offences (137, 113, 1120)

“Old Testament seems to show God as being more harsh than the New Testament does?”

A. “What we fail to remember is that the Old Testament list (of capital offenses) represents a massive reduction in capital crimes from the original list... The Old Testament Law is one of astonishing grace.”

1. “In creation all sin is deemed worthy of death. Every sin is a capital offense.”
2. “The penalty for sin was not only death, but instant death.”
3. The death penalty for sin is perfectly just
4. “The slightest sin is an act of defiance against cosmic authority.”
5. Hans Kung “says that the most mysterious aspect of the mystery of sin is not that the sinner deserves to die, but rather that the sinner in the average situation continues to exist.”
6. “God is so slow to anger that when His anger does erupt, we are shocked and offended by it.”

B. “Far from being a history of a harsh God, the Old Testament is the record of a God who is patient in the extreme.”

VI. The Conquest of Canaan (142, 117, 2234)

A. Human explanations

1. The Hebrews were just trying to justify their ruthless politics
2. But there is historical precedence in the Flood when God destroyed almost the entire population of the world
3. We assume the people of Canaan were innocent but they were not
4. "To the Canaanites God poured out justice. To the Jews God poured out mercy."

B. God was punishing the Canaanites' insult to His holiness while at the same time preparing a land/nation for the holy purpose of the coming Messiah

VII. Christ's Crucifixion (147, x,1232)

A. Read from "The false conflict..." to "...too astonishing to fathom"

VIII. Conclusion (147, x, 1242)

A. Taking grace for granted

1. "God's usual course of action is one of grace. Grace no longer amazes us. We have grown used to it; we take it for granted."
2. Example: when a tower fell on eighteen Galileans and killed them, Jesus put the focus on the living, saying "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." It was grace that the tower hadn't fallen on *them*.
3. Example: "unfair" grading when the grade that was given was exactly what the professor had said he would give... the students were simply used to more leniency

B. "We have come to expect God to be merciful. From there the next step is easy: We demand it."

1. We may suffer injustice from other people but we never suffer it from God
2. "We think we deserve more grace" but "grace by definition is undeserved."
3. "God is never obliged to treat all people equally."
4. If 10 people do wrong and God punishes 5, He is not being unjust to the 5 but merciful to the other 5
5. "We experience the grace of an infinite God, but grace is not infinite."