

"On Justice, as a Principle of Divine Governance"
Oxford University Sermons sermon 6
St. John Henry Newman
April 8, 1832

"They have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Jer. viii. 11.

1 THERE will ever be persons who take a favourable view of human nature, as it actually
2 is found in the world, and of the spiritual condition and the prospects of mankind. And
3 certainly the face of things is so fair, and contains so much that is interesting and lofty,
4 that the spectator may be pardoned if, on the first sight, he is disposed to believe them
5 to be as cheerful and as happy as they appear,—the evils of life as light and transitory,
6 and its issue as satisfactory. Such easy confidence is natural in youth; nay, it is even
7 commendable at a time of life in which suspicion and incredulity are unbecoming; that
8 is, it *would* be commendable, did not Scripture acquaint us from the very first (by way of
9 warning, previous to our actual experience) with the deceitfulness of the world's
10 promises and teaching; telling us of the opposition between Sight and Faith, of that
11 strait gate and that narrow way, the thought of which is to calm us in youth, that it may
12 enliven and invigorate us in old age.

13 2. Yet, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that even the information of Scripture
14 results in a cheerful view of human affairs, and condemns gloom and sadness as a sin,
15 as well as a mistake; and thus, in fact, altogether sanctions the conclusions gathered
16 from the first sight of the course of the world. But here is an instance, such as not
17 unfrequently is found, of an opinion being abstractedly true, and yet the person who
18 holds it wrong in his mode of holding it; so that while the terms in which he conveys it
19 approach indefinitely near to those in which the true view is contained, nevertheless
20 men who maintain the very reverse may be nearer the truth than he is. It often happens
21 that, in pursuing the successive stages of an investigation, the mind continually
22 reverses its judgment to and fro, according as the weight of argument passes over and
23 back again from the one alternative of the question to the other; and in such a case the
24 ultimate utility of the inquiry does not consist in the conclusion finally adopted, which
25 may be no other than that with which the inquiry was commenced; but in the position in
26 which we have learned to view it, and the circumstances with which we have associated
27 it. It is plain, too, that the man who has gone through many of these progressive
28 alternations of opinion, but has for some cause or other stopped short of the true view
29 legitimately terminating the inquiry, would be farther from it in the mere enunciation of
30 his sentiments, but in the state of his mind far nearer to it, than he who has not
31 examined the subject at all, and is right by accident. Thus it happens, men are cheerful
32 and secure from ignorance of the evils of life; and they are secure, again, from seeing
33 the remedy of the evils; and, on the other hand, they are desponding from seeing the
34 evils without the remedy: so that we must never say that an individual is right, merely on
35 the ground of his holding an opinion which happens to be true, unless he holds it in a
36 particular manner; that is, under those conditions, and with that particular association of
37 thought and feeling, which in fact is the interpretation of it.

38 3. That superficial judgment, which happens to be right without deserving to be so, is
39 condemned in the text. The error of the prophets and priests there spoken of consisted,
40 not in promising a *cure* for the wounded soul, but in healing the hurt of the daughter of
41 God's people *slightly*, saying, Peace, peace, before they had ascertained either the evil
42 or the remedy. The Gospel is in its very name a message of peace, but it must never be
43 separated from the bad tidings of our fallen nature, which it reverses; and he who
44 speaks of the state of the world in a sanguine way, may indeed be an advanced
45 Christian, but he may also be much less even than a proselyte of the gate; and if his
46 security and peace of mind be merely the calm of ignorance, surely the men whom he
47 looks down upon as narrow-minded and superstitious, whose religion consists in fear
48 not in love, shall go into the kingdom of heaven before him. We are reminded of this
49 important truth by the order of our ecclesiastical year. Easter Day, our chief Festival, is
50 preceded by the forty days of Lent, to show us that they, and they only, who sow in
51 tears, shall reap in joy.

52 4. Remarks such as these are scarcely necessary, as far as we of this place are
53 concerned, who, through God's blessing, are teachers of His truth, and "by reason of
54 use have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Yet it is impossible not to
55 observe, and it is useful to bear in mind, that mankind at large is not wiser or better than
56 heretofore; rather, that it is an especial fault of the present day, to mistake the false
57 security of the man of the world for the composure, cheerfulness, and benevolence of
58 the true Christian; while all the varying shades of character between these two, though
59 indefinitely more deserving of our respect than the former of them—I mean the
60 superstitious, the bigot, the intolerant, and the fanatic—are thrust out of the way as
61 inhuman and offensive, merely because their knowledge of themselves is more exact
62 than their apprehension of the Gospel, and their zeal for God's honour more energetic
63 than their love of mankind.

64 5. This in fact is the fault incident to times of political peace and safety, when the world
65 keeps well together, no motions stirring beneath it to disturb the continuity of its surface,
66 which for the time presents to us a consistent and finished picture. When the laws of a
67 country are upheld and obeyed, and property secure, the world appears to realize that
68 vision of constancy and permanence which it presented to our youthful imagination.
69 Human nature appears more amiable than it really is, because it is not tried with
70 disappointments; more just, because it is then its interest to respect the rights of others;
71 more benevolent, because it can be so without self-denial. The warnings contained in
72 the historical Scriptures, concerning the original baseness and corruption of the heart,
73 are, in the course of time, neglected; or, rather, these very representations are adduced
74 as a proof how much better the world now is than it was once; how much more
75 enlightened, refined, intellectual, manly; and this, not without some secret feeling of
76 disrespect towards the writers of the plain facts recorded in the Bible, as if, even were
77 the case so bad as they make it appear, it had been more judicious and humane to
78 have said nothing about it.

79 6. But, fairly as this superficial view of human nature answers in peaceful times;
80 speciously as it may argue, innocently as it may experimentalize, in the rare and short-

81 lived intervals of a nation's tranquillity; yet, let persecution or tribulation arise, and
82 forthwith its imbecility is discovered. It is but a theory; it cannot cope with difficulties; it
83 imparts no strength or loftiness of mind; it gains no influence over others. It is at once
84 shattered and crushed in the stern conflict of good and evil; disowned, or rather
85 overlooked, by the combatants on either side, and vanishing, no one knows how or
86 whither.

87 7. The opinions alluded to in the foregoing remarks, when assuming a definite doctrinal
88 basis, will be found to centre in Socinianism or Theophilanthropism, the name varying
89 according as it admits or rejects the authority of Scripture. And the spirit of this system
90 will be found to infect great numbers of men, who are unconscious of the origin and
91 tendency of their opinions. The essential dogmas of Socinianism are such as these; that
92 the rule of Divine government is one of benevolence, and nothing but benevolence; that
93 evil is but remedial and temporary; that sin is of a venial nature; that repentance is a
94 sufficient atonement for it; that the moral sense is substantially but an instinct of
95 benevolence; and that doctrinal opinions do not influence our character or prospects,
96 nor deserve our serious attention. On the other hand, sentiments of this character are
97 evidently the animating principle of the false cheerfulness, and the ill-founded hope, and
98 the blind charitableness, which I have already assigned to the man of the world.

99 8. In order to illustrate the untenableness of such propositions as have just been
100 adduced, and hence to show, by way of instance, the shallowness and feebleness of
101 the minds which maintain them, their real feebleness in all practical matters, plausibly or
102 loudly as they may speak during the hour of tranquillity in which they display
103 themselves, it may be useful to make some remarks on what appears to be the real
104 judgment of God upon human sin, as far as it is discernible by the light of nature; not as
105 if any thing new could be said on the subject, but in order to remind ourselves of truths
106 which are peculiarly important in these times.

107 9. The consideration most commonly adduced by the advocates of the absolute,
108 unmixed benevolence of the Divine Government, and of the venial nature of sin
109 according to the provisions of that Government, is an *à priori* argument, founded on an
110 appeal to a supposed instinct of our nature. It has before now been put familiarly thus:—
111 "Is there any man living who would not, if he could, accomplish the final restitution and
112 eternal happiness of every individual? and are we more benevolent than God?" Or,
113 again, the same general argument is sometimes stated more cautiously as follows; that
114 "No man can be in a perfectly right state of mind, who, if he consider general happiness
115 at all, is not ready to acknowledge that a good man must regard it as being in its own
116 nature the most desirable of *all* objects; and that any habitual disposition clearly
117 discerned to be, in its whole result, at variance with general happiness, is unworthy of
118 being cultivated, or fit to be rooted out; that accordingly, we are compelled to attribute
119 God's *whole* government to benevolence; that it is as much impossible for us to love
120 and revere a Being, to whom we ascribe a mixed or imperfect benevolence, as to
121 believe the most positive contradictions in terms; that is, as religion *consists* in love and
122 reverence, *it* cannot subsist without a belief in benevolence as the *sole* principle of
123 Divine Government."

124 10. Now first, it is surely not true that benevolence *is* the only, or the chief, principle of
125 our moral nature. To say nothing of the notion of duty to an Unseen Governor, implied in
126 the very authoritativeness with which conscience dictates to us (a notion which
127 suggests to the mind that there *is*, in truth, some object more "desirable in its own
128 nature" than "the general happiness" of mankind—viz. the approbation of our Maker),
129 not to insist on this, it may be confidently asserted, that the instincts of justice and of
130 purity are natural to us in the same sense in which benevolence is natural. If it be
131 natural to pity and wish well to men in general, without reference to their character, or
132 our personal knowledge of them, or any other attendant circumstance, it is also natural
133 to feel indignation when vice triumphs, and to be dissatisfied and uneasy till the
134 inequality is removed.

135 11. In order to meet this objection, it is maintained by the writers under consideration,
136 that the good of mankind is the ultimate end, to which even the principle of justice,
137 planted in us, tends; that the rule of reward and punishment is a chief means of making
138 men happy; and therefore that the feelings of indignation, resentment, and the like, must
139 be considered as given us, not for their own sake (granting them given us), but in order
140 to ensure the general good of mankind; in other words, that they are no evidence of the
141 existence of justice as an original and absolute principle of the moral law, but only of
142 that infinite unmixed benevolence of God, to which the feelings in question are in our
143 case really subservient. But this is nothing but an assertion, and will not stand
144 examination; for true as it is, that the instinct of justice, implanted in us, tends
145 to *general* good,—good on the whole,—it evidently does not tend to *universal* good, the
146 good of each individual; and nothing short of this can be the scope of absolute and
147 simple benevolence. Our indignation at vice tends to the actual misery of the vicious
148 (whether they be many or few)—nay, to their *final* misery, except indeed there be
149 provisions in the world's system, hitherto concealed, securing the ultimate destruction of
150 vice; for *while* it remained, it and all connected with it would ever be the natural objects
151 of our abhorrence, and this natural abhorrence evidently interferes with the hypothesis,
152 that universal good is the one end to which the present system of Divine Governance
153 tends.

154 12. On the other hand, so far from its being "impossible (as the theory under
155 consideration affirms) to love and revere a Being to whom we ascribe a mixed
156 benevolence," while undoubtedly benevolence excites our love and reverence, so does
157 a perfect justice also; we are under a natural attraction to admire and adore the great
158 sight, just as we are led on (to compare small things with great) to dwell rapturously
159 upon some exquisite work of man's designing, the beautiful and harmonious result of
160 the highest and most accomplished genius. If we do not habitually thus search out and
161 lovingly hang over the traces of God's justice, which are around us, it is because we are
162 ourselves sinners; because, having a bad conscience, we have a personal interest in
163 denying them, and a terror in having them forced upon us. In proportion as we grow in
164 habits of obedience, far from our vision of the eternal justice of God vanishing from our
165 minds, and being disowned by our feelings, as if it were but the useful misconception of
166 a less advanced virtue, doubtless it increases, as fear is cast out. The saints in heaven
167 ascribe glory to God, "for *true and righteous* are His judgments." "Great and marvellous

168 are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints."
169 [Rev. xv. 3.] If, then, the infinite benevolence of God wins our love, certainly His justice
170 commands it; and were we able, as the Saints made perfect are able, to combine the
171 notion of both in their separate perfections, as displayed in the same acts, doubtless our
172 awe and admiration of the glorious vision would be immeasurably increased.

173 13. Moreover, that justice is a primary notion in our minds, and does not admit of
174 resolution into other elements, may be argued from its connexion with that general love
175 of order, congruity, and symmetry, to which I have been referring,—that very desire of
176 arranging and adjusting, which is made use of for the purpose of denying its elementary
177 nature, and which must, in its essence, be considered, if any thing is considered, an
178 original principle of human nature.

179 14. Nay, it may be doubted whether the notion of justice be not more essential to the
180 mental constitution of free agents, than benevolence can be. For our very
181 consciousness of being free, and so responsible, includes in it the idea of an
182 unchangeable rule of justice, on which the judgment is hereafter to be conducted; or
183 rather excludes, as far as it goes, the notion of a simply benevolent Governor; a simply
184 benevolent end being relinquished (as we may speak) by the Creator, so soon as He
185 committed the destinies of man to his own hands, and made him a first cause, a
186 principle of origination, in the moral world.

187 15. But even if the general happiness of mankind could be assigned in hypothesis, as
188 the one end to which all our moral instincts tended, and though nothing could be
189 adduced in behalf of the intrinsic authority of the notion of justice, it would not be
190 allowable thence to infer the unmixed benevolence of the Divine Mind, seeing we have
191 actual evidences of His justice in the course of the world, such as cannot be explained
192 away by a mere argument from the analogy of our own nature. Should any one attempt
193 here to repeat the process of simplification, and refer in turn Divine Justice, as seen in
194 the world, to Divine Benevolence, as if reward and punishment were but means to the
195 one end of general good, let such a venturesome speculator bethink himself what he is
196 essaying, when he undertakes to simplify such attributes of the Divine Mind, as the
197 course of things happens to manifest to him. Not to insist on the presumption (as I may
198 well call it) of the attempt, let him ask himself, merely as a philosopher, whether there is
199 no difference between referring phenomena to an hypothetical law or system for
200 convenience sake (as, for instance, he is accustomed to refer the movements of the
201 physical world to gravitation), and on the other hand undertaking to assign and fix, as a
202 matter of fact, the real, primary and universal principles which guide the acts of a Mind,
203 unknown and infinite, and that, from a knowledge of merely one or two characteristics of
204 His mode of acting. After all, what is meant by affirming that God has, strictly speaking,
205 any end or design at all in what He does, external to Himself? We see the world,
206 physical and moral, as a fact; and we see the Attributes of God, as they are called,
207 displayed in it; but before we attempt to decide whether or not the happiness of His
208 creatures is the solitary all-absorbing end of His government, let us try to determine by
209 the way of Reason what was His particular view in creating us at all. What indeed
210 Revelation has told us, that we are able to speak confidently about, and it is our

211 blessedness to be able; but Revelation does not come into this question. By the use of
212 unaided Reason, we are utterly incapable of conceiving, why a Being supremely
213 blessed in Himself from eternity should ever commence the work of creation; what the
214 design of creation is, as such; whether, if there be any end in it, it is not one different in
215 kind, utterly removed from any which ear hath heard or mind conceived; and whether
216 His creation of man in the first instance, and therefore man's happiness inclusively, may
217 not be altogether subservient to further ends in the scope of His purposes. Doubtless it
218 is our wisdom, both as to the world and as to Scripture, to take things as we find them;
219 not to be wise above what is written, whether in nature or in grace; not to attempt a
220 theory where we must reason without data; much less, even could we frame one, to
221 mistake it for a fact instead of what it is, an arbitrary arrangement of our knowledge,
222 whatever that may be, and nothing more.

223 16. Considerations such as these are sufficient for the purpose for which I have
224 employed them; sufficient to act as a retort, by means of their own weapons, upon those
225 who would undermine our faith, little as they may mean to do so, nay, rather who would
226 lead us, not merely to a rejection or perversion of Christianity, but even to a denial of the
227 visible course of things as it actually exists; that is, to that unreal and unpractical view of
228 human nature which was described in the outset. And now, before concluding, let us
229 observe what the world teaches us, in matter of fact, concerning the light in which sin is
230 regarded by our great Governor and Judge.

231 17. Here it is usual to insist on the visible consequences of single sins, as furnishing
232 some foreboding of the full and final judgment of God upon all we do; and the survey of
233 such instances is very striking. A solitary act of intemperance, sensuality, or anger, a
234 single rash word, a single dishonest deed, is often the cause of incalculable misery in
235 the sequel to the person who has been betrayed into it. Our fortunes are frequently
236 shaped by the thoughtless and seemingly inconsiderable sins of our early life. The
237 quarrel of an hour, the sudden yielding to temptation, will throw a man into a
238 disadvantageous line of life, bring him into trouble, ruin his prospects; or again, into
239 circumstances unfavourable to his religious interests, which unsettle his mind, and
240 ultimately lead him to abandon his faith. All through life we may suffer the penalty of
241 past disobedience; disobedience, too, which we now can hardly enter into and realize,
242 which is most foreign to our present principles and feelings, which we can hardly
243 recognize as belonging to us, just as if no identity existed between our present and our
244 former selves.

245 18. Should it be said that this does not in all or in most cases happen, I answer, that,
246 were there but a few such cases, they would be sufficient to destroy the hypothesis,
247 already remarked upon, of the unmixed benevolence of the Divine Government. For
248 they are in many instances too definite and significant to be explained as remedial
249 measures, or as any thing short of judgments on sin; and in fact, they have been
250 acknowledged as such by the common sense of mankind in every age; and on the other
251 hand, it constantly happens that they neither effect, nor evince a tendency towards
252 effecting, the moral benefit of the individuals thus punished. But further, granting that
253 they are but isolated instances of God's judgment concerning the guilt of disobedience;

254 yet, if we believe that His Providence proceeds on any fixed plan, and that all deeds are
255 impartially recompensed according to their nature, it seems to follow, that, since some
256 sins evidently do receive an after punishment, therefore all have the prospect of the like;
257 and consequently that those who escape here, will suffer hereafter; that this is the rule,
258 and if there be any additional law counteracting it, this has to be proved. What measure
259 of punishment is reserved for us, we cannot tell; but the actual consequences which we
260 witness of apparently slight offences, make the prospect before us alarming. If any law
261 is traceable in this awful subject, it would appear to be this, that the greater the delay,
262 the greater the punishment, if it comes at length; as if a suspension of immediate
263 vengeance were an indulgence only to be compensated by an accumulated suffering
264 afterwards.

265 19. Then, as to the efficacy of repentance, which is so much insisted on,—when
266 repentance is spoken of as being a sufficient substitute in itself, by a self-evident fitness,
267 though not for the consequences of sin in this life, yet at least for the future punishment,
268 let the following remark be considered, which is a solemn one. I ask, does death, which
269 is supposed to terminate the punishment of the penitent, terminate the consequences of
270 his sins upon others? Are not these consequences continued long after his death, even
271 to the end of time? And do they not thus seem to be a sort of intimation or symbol to
272 survivors, that, in spite of his penitence, God's wrath is hot against him? A man
273 publishes an irreligious or immoral book; afterwards he repents, and dies. What does
274 Reason, arguing from the visible course of things, suggest concerning the efficacy of
275 that repentance? The sin of the penitent lives; it continues to disseminate evil; it
276 corrupts multitudes. *They* die, many of them, *without* repenting; many more receive
277 permanent, though not fatal injury to their souls, from the perusal. Surely no evidence is
278 here, in the course of Divine Government, of the efficacy of repentance. Shall he be
279 now dwelling in Abraham's bosom, who hears on the other side of the gulf the voices of
280 those who curse his memory as being the victims of his sin?

281 20. Against these fearful traces or omens of God's visitation upon sin, we are, of course,
282 at liberty to set all the gracious intimations, given us in nature, of His placability. Certain
283 as it is, that all our efforts and all our regrets are often unable to rid us of the
284 consequences of previous disobedience, yet doubtless they often alleviate these, and
285 often remove them. And this goes to show that His Governance is not one of absolute
286 unmixed justice, which, of course, (were it so) would reduce every one of us to a state
287 of despair. Nothing, however, is told us in nature of the limits of the two rules, of love
288 and of justice, or how they are to be reconciled; nothing to show that the rule of mercy,
289 as acting on moral agents, is more than the supplement, not the substitute of the
290 fundamental law of justice and holiness. And, let it be added, taking us even as we are,
291 much as each of us has to be forgiven, yet a religious man would hardly wish the rule of
292 justice obliterated. It is a something which he can depend on and recur to; it gives a
293 character and a certainty to the course of Divine Governance; and, tempered by the
294 hope of mercy, it suggests animating and consolatory thoughts to him; so that, far from
295 acquiescing in the theory of God's unmixed benevolence, he will rather protest against it
296 as the invention of those who, in their eagerness to conciliate the enemies of the Truth,
297 care little about distressing and sacrificing its friends.

298 21. Different, indeed, is his view of God and of man, of the claims of God, of man's
299 resources, of the guilt of disobedience, and of the prospect of forgiveness, from those
300 flimsy self-invented notions, which satisfy the reason of the mere man of letters, or the
301 prosperous and self-indulgent philosopher! It is easy to speak eloquently of the order
302 and beauty of the physical world, of the wise contrivances of visible nature, and of the
303 benevolence of the objects proposed in them; but none of those topics throw light upon
304 the subject which it most concerns us to understand, the character of the Moral
305 Governance under which we live; yet, is not this the way of the wise in this world, viz.
306 instead of studying that Governance as a primary subject of inquiry, to assume they
307 know it, or to conceive of it after some work of "Natural Theology," [Note] or, at best, to
308 take their notions of it from what appears on the mere surface of human society?—as if
309 men did not put on their gayest and most showy apparel when they went abroad! To
310 see truly the cost and misery of sinning, we must quit the public haunts of business and
311 pleasure, and be able, like the Angels, to see the tears shed in secret,—to witness the
312 anguish of pride and impatience, where there is no sorrow,—the stings of remorse,
313 where yet there is no repentance,—the wearing, never-ceasing struggle between
314 conscience and sin,—the misery of indecision,—the harassing, haunting fears of death,
315 and a judgment to come,—and the superstitions which these engender. Who can name
316 the overwhelming total of the world's guilt and suffering,—suffering crying for vengeance
317 on the authors of it, and guilt foreboding it!

318 22. Yet one need not shrink from appealing even to the outward face of the world, as
319 proving to us the extreme awfulness of our condition, as sinners against the law of our
320 being; for a strange fact it is, that boldly as the world talks of its own greatness and its
321 enjoyments, and easily as it deceives the mere theophilanthropist, yet, when it proceeds
322 to the thought of its Maker, it has ever professed a gloomy religion, in spite of itself. This
323 has been the case in all times and places. Barbarous and civilized nations here agree.
324 The world cannot bear up against the Truth, with all its boastings. It makes an open
325 mock at sin, yet secretly attempts to secure an interest against its possible
326 consequences in the world to come. Where has not the custom prevailed of propitiating,
327 if possible, the unseen powers of heaven?—but why, unless man were universally
328 conscious of his danger, and feared the punishment of sin, while he "hated to be
329 reformed"? Where have not sacrifices been in use, as means of appeasing the Divine
330 displeasure?—and men have anxiously sought out what it was they loved best, and
331 would miss most painfully, as if to strip themselves of it might move the compassion of
332 God. Some have gone so far as to offer their sons and their daughters as a ransom for
333 their own sin,—an abominable crime doubtless, and a sacrifice to devils, yet clearly
334 witnessing man's instinctive judgment upon his own guilt, and his foreboding of
335 punishment. How much more simple a course had it been, merely to have been sorry
336 for disobedience, and to profess repentance, were it a natural doctrine (as some
337 pretend), that repentance is an atonement for offences committed!

338 23. Nor is this all. Not only in their possessions and their offspring, but in their own
339 persons, have men mortified themselves, with the hope of expiating deeds of evil.
340 Burnt-offerings, calves of a year old, thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of
341 oil, their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul,

342 even these are insufficient to lull the sharp throbbings of a heavy-laden conscience.
343 Think of the bodily tortures to which multitudes have gloomily subjected themselves,
344 and that for years, under almost every religious system, with a view of ridding
345 themselves of their sins, and judge what man conceives of the guilt of disobedience.
346 You will say that such fierceness in self-tormenting is a mental disease, and grows on a
347 man. But this answer, granting there is truth in it, does not account for the reverence in
348 which such persons have usually been held. Have we no instinct of self-preservation?
349 Would these same persons gain the admiration of others, unless their cruelty to their
350 own flesh arose from a religious motive? Would they not be derided as madmen, unless
351 they sheltered themselves under the sanction of an awful, admitted truth, the corruption
352 and the guilt of human nature?

353 24. But it will be said, that Christians, at least, must admit that these frightful exhibitions
354 of self-torture are superstition. Here I may refer to the remarks with which I began.
355 Doubtless these desperate and dark struggles are to be called superstition, when
356 viewed by the side of true religion; and it is easy enough to speak of them as
357 superstition, when we have been informed of the gracious and joyful result in which the
358 scheme of Divine Governance issues. But it is man's truest and best religion, *before* the
359 Gospel shines on him. If our race *be* in a fallen and depraved state, what ought our
360 religion to be but anxiety and remorse, till God comforts us? Surely, to be in gloom,—to
361 view ourselves with horror,—to look about to the right hand and to the left for means of
362 safety,—to catch at every thing, yet trust in nothing,—to do all we can, and try to do
363 more than all,—and, after all, to wait in miserable suspense, naked and shivering,
364 among the trees of the garden, for the hour of His coming, and meanwhile to fancy
365 sounds of woe in every wind stirring the leaves about us,—in a word, to be
366 superstitious,—is nature's best offering, her most acceptable service, her most mature
367 and enlarged wisdom, in the presence of a holy and offended God. They who are not
368 superstitious without the Gospel, will not be religious with it: and I would that even in us,
369 who have the Gospel, there were more of superstition than there is; for much is it to be
370 feared that our security about ourselves arises from defect in self-knowledge rather than
371 in fulness of faith, and that we appropriate to ourselves promises which we cannot read.

372 25. To conclude. Thoughts concerning the Justice of God, such as those which have
373 engaged our attention, though they do not, of course, explain to us the mystery of the
374 great Christian Atonement for sin, show the use of the doctrine to us sinners. Why
375 Christ's death was requisite for our salvation, and how it has obtained it, will ever be a
376 mystery in this life. But, on the other hand, the contemplation of our guilt is so growing
377 and so overwhelming a misery, as our eyes open on our real state, that some strong act
378 (so to call it) was necessary, on God's part, to counterbalance the tokens of His wrath
379 which are around us, to calm and reassure us, and to be the ground and the medium of
380 our faith. It seems, indeed, as if, in a practical point of view, no mere promise was
381 sufficient to undo the impression left on the imagination by the facts of Natural Religion;
382 but in the death of His Son we have His *deed*—His irreversible deed—making His
383 forgiveness of sin, and His reconciliation with our race, no contingency, but an event of
384 past history. He has vouchsafed to evidence His faithfulness and sincerity towards us (if
385 we may dare so to speak) as we must show ours towards Him, not in word, but by

386 action; which becomes therefore the pledge of His mercy, and the plea on which we
387 draw near to His presence;—or, in the words of Scripture, whereas "all have sinned,
388 and come short of the glory of God," Christ Jesus is "set forth as a propitiation for the
389 remission of sins that are past," to declare and assure us, that, without departing from
390 the just rule, by which all men must, in the main, be tried, still He will pardon and justify
391 "him that believeth in Jesus."

(Preached on Sunday afternoon, April 8, 1832, by appointment of the Vice-Chancellor.)

Note

[This was an allusion to Paley. Vide "Lectures on University Subjects," No. vi., p. 252.]