

THE JUDGE ILLUSTRATION

This is a classic illustration we use all the time to clarify substitutionary atonement. The crucial idea is that God is both just and loving. Those two attributes would seem to be in conflict when it comes to dealing with sinful people. But at the cross they each reach their fullest expression without compromise. Build and heighten the tension between his love and his justice and then show how God solves this “dilemma.”

Do you know why Jesus had to die? Let me tell you a story that might help make it clear.

Do you have a car?

Well, let's say you are driving home this weekend and you are cruising. You're going say, 105 mph. You're just flying. You get busted, the cop has you on radar and you're done. They impound your car and bring you straight to the courthouse to face the judge.

Well the good news is that the county you got busted in just happens to be the county in which your dad is the judge. So, you're thinking that you're golden. He loves you, he'll let you off, everything will be fine.

But just as you are entering the courthouse, you remember that your dad is a really good judge. He never punishes the innocent. He always punishes the guilty. He is a good and just judge.

Now you're a little nervous. Which is going to win out, his love or his justice. He's your dad and he loves you so he'll want to do good to you. But he's just, he's a good judge and therefore he'll want to follow the law and render a just verdict.

What do you think he'd do? Which would win, love or justice?

[Let them respond]

It's hard to know what he might do. Let me walk you through a scenario that shows how he might solve the dilemma.

You stand before your dad the judge and he says to you, “Son, this officer says you were going 50 mph over the speed limit. How do you plead.”

What would you say?

[Guilty]

Yeah, that's a good idea, cause you're guilty.

So, he looks at you and says, “That will be \$500 or a week in jail. Guilty as charged.” And he bangs down the gavel.

Well you don't have any money, so the bailiff comes to take you away so you can start serving your time, when your dad, the judge stands up and says, "Wait a minute, bring him back here." Then he stands up, takes off his robe and walks down from behind the bench. Then he reaches into his coat pocket, takes out his checkbook and writes the court a check for \$500, the exact amount of your fine. Then he offers it to you.

What going on here is this. He is just, so he declares you guilty, since you are. And he demands that a penalty be paid. But he loves you, and so he has determined to pay that penalty himself, on your behalf.

Now as he stands there offering you the check, what do you need to do? [Accept or reject it]

That's right. You can accept his payment on your behalf, or for whatever reason you can reject it.

Okay, now roll back the tape. That story is I think, a great picture of what God does for us. If there are two things primarily true about God they are that he is loving and he is just. He loves you, he always has. He cannot love you more and will not love you less. He loves you. And he is just. He always renders a just verdict. He always does the right thing.

Those two things put him in an interesting situation when it comes to us, because every one of us has broken his laws. We are guilty before him. So which would win out? His love, which would want to let us off, or his justice that demands a penalty be paid?

The Bible says that he declared us guilty, because we are, and demanded that a penalty be paid. Then he left heaven, came to earth, became a man, and died to pay our penalty. See, we didn't owe a \$500 penalty, so he didn't just write a check. The Bible says that sin earns us a death penalty, so he died to pay that.

Then he comes to us to offer his life on our behalf. Just like your dad with the check he stands before you and says, "I'll take the blame for every rotten thing you've ever done, and give you credit, for my perfect life. All you need to do is accept it."

Does that make sense?

Have you ever come to the point where you accepted his death on your behalf, that substitutionary payment?

Would you like to now?