We all have a sense that the Godhead works together to accomplish our salvation. So why do I say that my God is one of fire and brimstone? Well, that is the subject of this article. I've always known that the Father runs the show. This is His plan of salvation, and even Christ just does what the Father tells him to do. It was only recently when I was doing some writing and went to write a sentence about God's mercy that I was pulled up short and realized that God really is a God of fire and brimstone.

God's Position in the Universe

Please bear with me and suspend any disbelief until I have a chance to explain myself. When it comes to the Godhead there is a lot going on, and no one can make quick, trite comments without lots of explanation. I'm going to break our Father away from the rest of the Godhead for a moment and just look at His role.

I've already mentioned that the entire plan of salvation originates with God the Father. He is the one who presented it to us, and every part of it is being executed under His direction. Despite that fact, there are limits to what our Father can do for us in His role as the Father.

God is the great judge and ruler. His is a life of exactness and order. Let me demonstrate this with a couple of scriptures. In Alma 42:9 we read that "the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death." Death is the separation of two things. Physical death is the separation of our spirit and our body. Spiritual death is our permanent separation of us from God, our Father. This is the result of the fall of Adam and Eve.

Once Adam and Eve chose to follow one commandment at the expense of another, a minor infraction at most, they had to be expelled from the presence of God the Father. Why? Because God the Father's hallmark attribute is His justice. He cannot tolerate sin with the least degree of allowance. This is found in D&C 1:31.

This means that the Father is not in a position to offer mercy. He must uphold the laws by which all things are governed. There are no exceptions, not even for His beloved children. This is why we say that Adam and Eve fell. They fell from grace, from being allowed to live in the presence of God. And why? Because of a small transgression that was not even classifiable as a sin. But God has already stated that He has a zero tolerance policy.

Lehi said to his son Jacob in 2 Nephi 2:5 that we all know good from evil, but because we have all chosen evil at some point, we are no longer justified by the laws of God, and we all stand condemned before the Great Creator.

> And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.

Note how long our punishment is to be – forever. There is no mercy in that, only justice. We knowingly broke the laws, and we stand condemned before our God who only can administer justice. He must maintain the law, for He is the great law giver.

I used to wonder when I watched movies like Polyanna how their preacher could go on and on about the hell fire and damnation that awaited the sinners. I finally get it. All through the scriptures these are the promises made to those who willfully break commandments.

Why We Need a Savior

If our Father is not allowed to offer us mercy because He has to uphold the laws of justice, then how do we ever get forgiven for the sins we have committed? Let's read the next two verses in 2 Nephi 2:6–7.

> Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.
>
> Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.

This is the role Jesus was selected to fulfill in the great plan of salvation. Our Father knew we would all be lost, every one of us, if it wasn't for a special kind of payment that only one of His children was able to make. This payment had to satisfy, on an eternal scale, the claims the law of justice has on each and every one of us. Then, and only then, would anyone be able to offer us mercy and the opportunity to wipe away the stain of disobedience on our souls.

And it is not our Father who can directly offer us mercy, but he who made the payment, Christ. God's mercy is demonstrated in His offering us salvation through a Savior in the first place. Christ is the only one who was able to reconcile our separation with God. It is through his atoning sacrifice that he suffered the punishment for our rebellions and mistakes. If you are familiar with the term whipping boy, that is what Christ offered himself as for each of us.

For those who are not familiar with the term whipping boy, let me explain. When a young prince or nobleman's child went to school and did something naughty, the school master was not allowed to whip them like they could other children, because of their rank in society. For this reason, they would choose a person of lesser importance and beat them instead, just as long as "justice" was served for the misdeed. The term has come to refer to someone who acts as a scapegoat, someone who takes the blame for someone else, and suffers the punishment in their stead.

As unfair as this sounds, this is what Christ voluntarily did for each of us. Out of the purist of love for us he willingly bowed beneath the eternal rod of justice and received the full weight of our punishment because he knew we would not be able to bear it ourselves.

Now, because Christ has satisfied the demands of the Father's justice, he is able to offer us mercy. By stepping in and taking our punishment in our place, he has purchased the right to decide on the disposition of our souls. Because he was innocent, yet bore our burden, he now has the right to set the terms for our forgiveness.

Unity in the Godhead

Now let's tie the Godhead back together into the cohesive whole that it is. Our Father upholds the demands of justice to keep order in the universe. Christ, because of his atonement, satisfied the Father's law, and can now offer us mercy, a chance to be

forgiven if we repent and change our ways. The Holy Ghost is there to testify of truth and teach us what we need to know and do in order to recognize what is right so we can get back to our Father.

The Godhead is completely unified in all they do. They are interdependent on each others' roles. It literally takes all three of them to get us home again. I don't know about you, but when I think of the state of my soul without Christ's atonement, I shudder. I am humbled by the magnitude of his sacrifice for me and all those I love. We owe Christ everything, for without his mercy we would be subject to the law of justice, which would indeed land us forever in fire and brimstone.

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