

Do you ever speculate what you would do if you could meet God? Ask Him a question? Fall down in reverence and fear? Sing a doxology? Run away? Punch Him?

The last option is the one the official of the high priest chose. In a zealous attempt to defend the honor of the high priest, the one who exists to mediate between God and men, this official struck the Son of God, fist to face. And who can blame him? Sinners hate God, whose holiness is lethal to those who are unholy and unclean.

And yet, in the person of Jesus, God has flesh for this very purpose, to be struck. But not by men. He has flesh—cheekbones that can take a punch, lungs that the wind can be knocked out of, skin that can bruise and bleed—so that He can be struck by God the Father. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And what happens to all the lambs, offered by all the high priests since Aaron, who have the sins of the people confessed onto them? They get their throats slit, their bodies sliced, their blood poured out, and their flesh burned.

Here is the paradox of the incarnation: only a God you can punch can be a God who can forgive punches.

You need a God you can punch. You really do. You might not think so. You probably think you're more pious than that. But that's not how you envision God. You think you need a God who can hold your hand as He walks with you and talks with you in some ethereal garden. You think you need Him to hoist you onto His shoulders as you're walking along the beach together, leaving some footprints in the sand. You need a God, you suppose, like the statues that show Him playing soccer with little kids or towering over the little kids on the basketball court. But you don't. You need a God whose lip you can fatten with a well-placed right cross.

This is the human predicament. Since Adam's rebellion in the garden, since he fearfully fled and hid himself at the sound of God walking in the garden, mankind has been alienated from God. Nothing had changed in God, of course. But everything changed in man. He sought to be his own god, and in so doing, he turned away from his Creator and the source of his life. Only a dying Adam would flee from a perfectly good Creator.

Since then, rebellion has been fallen man's plight. Enmity with a holy God is all that sinners have. Sinners despise God. He is holy. They are not. His Law is an affront to their do-it-yourself divinity schemes. He calls His people to be holy just as He is holy. Jesus demanded perfect righteousness, just as the heavenly Father is righteous. No matter what you score on the righteousness self-assessment you take in your head every morning, you simply are not good. The Law is absolute. The Commandments allow no room for deviation, not for even a moment, not from even the least part of the Law. So Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, alienated from God, on their own.

It's little wonder that people prefer a god of their own creation, a Jesus of their own imaginations, to the Holy God of Scripture, who demands that your holiness perfectly match His. A good-teacher Jesus, or a life-coach Jesus, or a model-CEO Jesus, or a moral-example Jesus, or a nice-guy Jesus, or a guru Jesus is not an affront to your sinful nature. And He wouldn't have gotten struck in the face, verbally and physically bludgeoned, nailed to a cross, and killed.

But that God can't save you. He's fake. Adam doesn't need a god who encourages him to do better next time. He doesn't need a mulligan. He has eaten. He has rebelled. He is wholly other from a Holy God. He needs a God who can plead his case, who will take up his cause, who will bear his flesh and do in Adam's place what Adam failed to do. He needs a holy God who will impart His holiness as a gift. He needs a God with human flesh who keeps the Law perfectly. He needs a God with a face he can punch.

Unless He can bear your hatred, this God can't save you. Unless He can receive your blows, this God can't bear your sins. So behold the man. God has become man. Jesus is a God you can punch. He has drawn near, not in wrath, but in mercy. Behold the man who comes to allow Himself to be struck by the sinners He seeks to redeem. Behold the man, the God you can punch, who can bear your striking, smiting, scourging, hating. Behold the servant who will suffer in your place. Behold the One despised and rejected by men, despised, whom no one esteemed. Behold, this One who can be struck in the face has borne your griefs and carried your sorrows. Behold the man who in your place is stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. Behold Him pierced for your transgressions, crushed for your iniquities. Behold the man upon whom is the chastisement, the punishment that has brought you peace. Behold the wounds by which you are healed.

In His flesh, Jesus bears all of mankind's sinful, rebellious hatred of God. He receives the blows you would have lined up behind the official to be next in line to deliver. All this He gladly suffers. For you.

His holiness is a gift He gives, not to those who deserve it, but to those least deserving. He has borne all of man's hatred of God, and worse, all the Father's punishment for man's rebellion, and He has answered for them with His life, with His face, with His cheek that bore striking in this kangaroo court.

The solution to your hatred of God, to your desire to punch Him in the face, is not to clench your fists, bite your tongue, and abstain. The solution is to confess, to speak in unison with the Law what you know to be true. Your flesh is sinful. It does not desire God. And then, though you would have raised a hand against Him, Jesus sends His officials, His pastors, His men with His word of Absolution. And when you confess your sin, He is faithful and just, merciful and compassionate. The pastor raises a hand, not to strike, but to soothe. He places his hand upon your head and pronounces the verdict of a Holy God: In the stead and by the command of the God-man who bore these and all your sins, I forgive you.

Jesus turns the other cheek. God turns from wrath to mercy. Behold the man who would rather endure shameful abuse at the hands of sinners than allow sinners to have to answer for their own sins. In Him, you are made holy and whole, a new man. Behold the man.