

"That's mean!" declared one of our little boys in a roar of indignation as his beloved stuffed animal was temporarily taken away in punishment for wrongdoing.

"Whose choice was it?" my husband and I asked, so wanting our little one to understand.

After a moment, he murmurs, "Mine," voice meeker, eyes downcast, realizing his own actions led to the undesired consequence.

It's because we love him that we punish him. We want for him to love what is right and good and flee from that which is not.

Oftentimes we hear an agnostic or atheist explaining that they read some Old Testament passage and couldn't believe that a loving God would allow or enable such terrible retributions. Yet, this passage in Ezekiel explains *who* actually chose these punishments. The charges God tells Ezekiel to "confront" Israel with are plentiful and deplorable, and by these she "brings on herself doom" (22:3). The people of Israel sinned in many ways (and had been lovingly warned by God about these since Exodus!), not the least of which is "shedding blood", a charge mentioned at least 7 times (22:3,4,6,9,12,13,27). To make matters worse, the people who are supposed to be godly, (i.e., prophets) "whitewash the deeds for them by false visions..." (22:28). Even the "good" have gone bad. Which is why God says that He looked for someone to "stand...in the gap" (22:30)—but there was no one. Punishment was inevitable, and it was Israel's choice.

But God knew, from the beginning of time, that there was a better way. He planned for it. He sent One who could stand in the gap for all. One who said, "Here I am. I have come to do your will" (Hebrews 10:9). That One "...offered for all time one sacrifice for sins...for by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (12, 14).

Now we can, in full assurance, say with David. "Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered" (6). Yes, He is taking care of us in our current situations, but Christ, standing in the gap, has delivered us for all eternity.

In light of this, can we not say with Christ, "Here I am. I have come to do your will" and stand in the gap in the here and now? Our world is dying; like the Israelites, people are choosing death over life at every turn. Do we love God enough to willingly, boldly stand in the gap for Him?

Question: Do I love God more than myself and my ease? Am I willing to stand in the gap for Him?

*Dearest Lord God, Thank You for making a better way. Thank You that Christ's sacrifice was once for all and that you remember our sins no more. Help me to lovingly stand in the gap for You.*