

The Wednesday Word, Jan. 29, 2014: Righteous Grace, Part 1

God is the God of all Grace (1 Peter 5:10). He is also the God of righteousness (Ezra 9:15). It is as we see that God saves us, not only by grace, but also through righteousness that we enjoy His full and perfect peace (Isaiah 45:21, Romans 4:5; Isaiah 26:3).

At the heart of the gospel, we discover that grace is, as Horatius Bonar terms it, "Righteous Grace." Unless we understand this, we will continually struggle with assurance and peace. God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5) and does so as a matter, not solely of love, but also of righteousness. At the cross, the justice of God punished Christ as though He were the worst of sinners (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because God refused to gloss over the sin problem, Christ was condemned as though He were us. Justice has, therefore, been satisfied.

Luther, at first, struggled to understand this very thing. One day he read David's prayer in Psalm 71:2: "Save me in thy righteousness" and cried out, "What does this mean? I can understand how God can damn me in His righteousness, but if he would save me it must surely be in His mercy." Through time, however, He came to understand that gospel grace is righteous grace.

In the Gospel, we are not confronted with a vague forgiveness, arising out of some sort of paternal love on the part of a bemused God. That would be far from righteous grace. We've got to get to grips with this! We need to know both the righteous and gracious basis of our acceptance before God. Indeed, if we are not clear on this, we have no gospel! If we take away either righteousness or grace from the gospel, we have eliminated its very life-blood, and there is, as Spurgeon says, "Nothing left worth preaching, worth believing, or worth contending for."

Righteous grace is at the heart and soul of the gospel: without it, the gospel is dead. Without righteous grace, there is no comfort for the troubled conscience. From first to last, everything in salvation is of grace and that grace comes to us righteously.

Additionally, to help us understand this we need to ask:

- 1) Did God recognize our absolute guilt, but chose to ignore it since He is our Father?
- 2) Or, did God acquit us because He loves us and, at the back of it all, He is very good-natured?
- 3) Or, is God indifferent to sin?
- 4) Or, was it that because God's absolute holiness demanded He took action against our sin, He punished Christ Jesus at the cross of Calvary?

So, how say you? On what basis does God acquit us? Are we declared not-guilty because God is kind and tender? Or, does God forgive us in a righteous, just and gracious manner? We must be clear on this. We must be clear that, at the cross, our sins were paid for by our substitute. Christ was legally cursed on our behalf (Galatians 3:13). Our gracious acquittal is, therefore, based on the work of righteousness. It was righteousness that had condemned us in the first place. It was righteousness that had barred us from heaven and if ever we were to be saved it had to be done righteously.

Now that Christ has been righteously punished in our place, our condemnation has been righteously and graciously removed (Romans 8:1). Christ has died in place of the ungodly and has been righteously

condemned. Believers have now been declared righteous, not because the Lord is nice, but because of righteous grace. Christ died and intercepted our well-earned wrath as He purged and took our sin away (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 1:3, John 1:29).

Since the perfect righteousness of Christ has now been graciously reckoned to us, it would be, therefore, an unrighteous thing for God to condemn anyone for whom Christ died (Romans 4:22-25, Romans 8:34).

And that's the Gospel Truth!