

The Wednesday Word, May 19, 2010: Righteous Grace, Part 1

God is the God of all Grace (1 Peter 5:10). He is also the God of righteousness (Ezr 9:15). It is as we see that God saves us, not only because of grace, but also through righteousness (Isa. 45:21, Rom 4:5) that we enjoy His full and perfect peace (Isa 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 be deficient in our knowledge of the Gospel. God justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5) and does so as a matter of righteousness. Our great God and Savior recognized the awfulness of sin and righteously punished Christ as if He had been the worst of sinners (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now He can acquit the sinner righteously since the sinner has already been punished in the person of His substitute. Christ has been righteously condemned as if He were us and justice has been satisfied.

Now the God of Justice righteously and graciously declares us not guilty. When we, therefore, approach Him we approach His throne as people who have been, not merely forgiven, but acquitted both as a matter of righteousness and 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 removed 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.

To further understand this we need to ask,

- 1) Did God recognize our absolute guilt, but chose instead to ignore it since He is our Father?
- 2) Or does 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 did God's absolute holiness demand that He took action against our sin punishing it at the cross of Calvary, 2000 years ago?

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 (Gal 3:13). Our gracious acquittal is, therefore, based on the work of righteousness. It was righteousness that condemned us in the first place. It was righteousness that 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 (Rom 8:1). Christ has died in place of the ungodly and has been righteously condemned. We have been declared righteous, not because the Lord is a nice guy, but because of righteous grace. Christ died and intercepted our well earned wrath as He purged and took our sin away (Rom 3:25, Heb 1:3, John 1:29).

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

Enjoy these truths and you will be at peace.

And that's the Gospel Truth