

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 26 January 2014

No. T0817

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Some important biblical couplets: Righteousness and peace

Life is full of contrasts. Contrasts which are nevertheless related! Black and white! Night and day! Summer and winter! Love and hate! And so we might go on.

Our study today is similar - **Righteousness and Peace**, and the balance between the two. They are linked together, among other scriptures, in Isaiah 32:1-2, 17; Psalm 85:10; and in James 3:17-18. In each case, righteousness is mentioned first e.g. Hebrews 7:2, referring to Melchisedec as a prophetic picture of the Lord Jesus, tells us about a king who is "*first ... King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.*" It is, therefore, reasonable for us to consider righteousness first and then, afterwards, peace.

Righteousness

Righteousness involves doing what is right in the right way, at the right time, for the right reason because it is the right thing to do. Tracing things back to their origin, we must begin with the righteousness of God.

The righteousness of God

God is righteous. He is right. He does right. In every conceivable way; in thought, word and deed! He is absolutely consistent with what He has revealed and declared Himself to be. In line with that, He requires righteousness, absolute, total righteousness, in and from men, whom He has created after His own image (See Genesis 1:26-237). Perhaps I should say at this stage that the terms righteous and just are used synonymously throughout this talk. They mean the same thing.

The unrighteousness of man

Ever since Adam onwards, not one righteous man born of woman could be found (Psalm 14:1; Isaiah 44:6; Romans 3:10). Men as a race have proved themselves to be utterly and totally incapable of meeting that just requirement. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God is the only exception. As the only truly righteous man Who has ever lived on earth, He alone could therefore be acceptable to God as a righteous substitute for the believing sinner. CF Alexander's hymn rightly states:

*"He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in."*

It was for this that He suffered at Calvary. The time will come when He will rule the world in righteousness as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (prophesied in Isaiah 32:1-2 and confirmed in Acts 17:31 and Revelation 19:16). He will eventually exercise His supreme authority as The Righteous Judge of all who have lived responsible lives on earth (see 2 Timothy 4:8).

The inherent wickedness of man was ultimately demonstrated to the full in the rejection and crucifixion of Christ. That was the darkest day, and the darkest act, in the history of man. God chose that very day, and that specific event, to demonstrate the righteous basis upon which He can be righteous, and at the same time make righteous, those who believe on the One Who was crucified for them.

The Gospel of God

God's good news, as expounded, particularly in The Epistle to the Romans, states with repeated emphasis that God is righteous. In the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. It affords the only possible escape from the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:17-18). It focuses the attention on God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. There could be no 'good news' at all apart from Him.

Mind you, God's righteousness does not at first sight appear, in itself, to be good news to unbelieving sinners. The last thing that an unrighteous man would want to do is to meet and be judged by a righteous God. The essence of the Gospel is this. Men have proved themselves incapable of acting righteously. They are subject to the judgment of a holy God, before whom sin is completely obnoxious and unacceptable. God has therefore provided a way to furnish them with a righteousness acceptable to His own absolute standards. This is good news indeed (Romans 1:17; Titus 2:11). To bring it into effect, the Son of God became a man. Having lived a perfect life, on the Cross He took the place of sinful man, being made sin and glorifying God in bearing the judgment of sin. But, if, after living that perfect life on earth, He had returned to His Father in heaven, without His sufferings and death upon the Cross, He would not have saved a single soul. As we learn from John 12:24, *"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone."*

The Cross of Christ shall remain throughout all eternity the greatest manifestation of the righteousness of God. It also manifests equally His love (Romans 5:8), but not at the expense of His righteousness.

The poet A Midlane wrote:

*"The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour's blood
'Tis in the cross of Christ we see
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.*

*God could not pass the sinner by
His sin demands that he must die
But in the cross of Christ we see
That God can save, yet righteous be."*

No one who hears the Gospel should be ignorant of the consequences of refusing to obey it. The inevitable exceeding greatness of the wrath of God against unrighteousness demonstrates the exceeding riches of his grace in providing righteousness for the unrighteous (Romans 1:18).

There is only one righteous way of approach to God, and the remission of sins by God. The righteous claims of God have been fully met by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross of Calvary. The sinner must accept, in faith, that the only remedy for his sins is to accept the death of Christ on his behalf.

The value to God of the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to cover all the sins of every sinner who has ever lived. That is the potential power of the blood of Christ. However, it is only those who actually trust the Lord Jesus as Saviour who come into the benefit of that value. It is 'unto all', potentially, but only rests, effectively, "upon those who believe", (Romans 3:22). This gives us confidence to draw near to God with full assurance of faith.

Imputed righteousness

God can righteously justify those who by nature and practice are unrighteous. The only truly Just One, Jesus, has suffered for the unjust, so that God can righteously justify the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). The Epistle to the Romans gives great prominence to the fact of God's righteousness in justifying those who have put their trust in Jesus. It is not the mercy of God, nor the kindness of God, nor even the love of God, in the remission of sins, which is emphasised, but God's righteousness in justifying the unrighteous. It is of the greatest importance to God that in justifying the believing sinner He might Himself be *"just, and seen to be just"* (Romans 3:26). In whatever He does, God is righteous, whether in condemning the guilty who refuse His mercy (Romans 2:5-6), or in justifying those who have put their trust in Jesus (Romans 3:25-26).

To be justified is to be righteously cleared of every charge that can righteously be brought by God against us. This can only be realised by faith in Christ, so that the sentence of condemnation is lifted from us. But justification involves much more than the negative blessing of our being completely and righteously cleared from the condemnation our sins have brought upon us. It also involves our standing before God in Christ, in a righteousness which is both positive and divine.

Grace, free, unmerited favour, is available to us, but only on the sure foundation of righteousness. Without departing in any way from His own absolute righteousness, God acquits all who believe the gospel of every righteous charge against them; that is, in simple terms, their sins. Even more, He credits them, in a most positive way, with a status of righteousness before Him according to His own absolute standards. On the other hand, the lake of fire, reserved for unsaved sinners, is, and ever will be, an eternal expression of God's righteous judgment upon those who reject God's way of salvation (see Revelation 20:15).

It is also true that the unsaved sinner is in a state of enmity towards God. That state must inevitably continue until the sins that caused it have been put away. God alone can do that, and then only in absolute righteousness. The removal of man's enmity depends upon the provision of a sure foundation whereon God can righteously remit the sinner's offences. Only then can man be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20-22). Man, being by nature and by practice the enemy of God, can secure peace with God only through being reconciled to God. This was effected through the death of the Son of God (Romans 5:10).

It is important to realise that God has never needed to be reconciled to man. God has not changed one iota, nor has He had to change in any way. It is man, defiled by sin, who needs reconciliation with God. God was never the enemy of man. The enmity between God and man has always been on man's side. Man can therefore secure peace with God only through being reconciled to Him. He can then enjoy the blessings that flow from that. Those who have been justified with God have entered into peace with God, having now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:11).

Practical righteousness

We need to think now about the practical righteousness which characterises every Christian. By knowing God's righteousness the believer becomes the servant of righteousness (Romans 6:18). And again, "*He that doeth righteous is born of God*" (1 John 2:29). When Christians are with the Lord, in heaven, they shall be credited as those who were true to Him, and lived righteously for Him, while they were living upon earth. This is highlighted in Revelation 19:8. The Lamb's bride, a picture of the total multitude of those who have believed the Christian gospel between Pentecost and the Rapture, is represented as "*arrayed in fine linen, clean and white*" (Revelation 19:8). This is a picture of the aggregate acts of righteousness performed by the totality of those Christian believers.

What an honour! What a privilege! Let us do our best to warrant inclusion in that happy, honourable band.

Peace

And what about peace? The guilty state of man by reason of his sins has been righteously dealt with in the Cross. Hence the believer is justified by faith and has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Christ made peace through the blood of His Cross" (Colossians 1:20) and to the Christian God is called "*the God of peace*" in several scriptures (Romans 15:33, 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20). The Lord Jesus Himself is "*the Lord of peace*" (2 Thessalonians 3:16). Fundamentally, "*He is, in Person, our peace*" (Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossians 1:20-22; 2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Peace "with God" (see Romans 5:1) is the result of having our relationship with Him placed on a righteous footing through the work of Christ. The Cross was at the same time the complete answer to all our guilt, so that we who believe are justified by God Himself (Romans 3:25-26). It was also the full condemnation of all that we were in ourselves as sinful children of Adam (Romans 6:6 and 8:3).

Peace with God is always and necessarily preceded by the anxiety which is produced by having the eyes opened to one's dangerous position before God as an unsaved sinner. Peace depends on faith in the gospel of God (Romans 5:1). It sets before us a Saviour "*who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*" (Romans 4:25). Peace, then, is the result of receiving and believing God's witness as to the value to Him of the work of Christ upon the Cross.

The resurrection of Christ assures the believer of the reality of peace with God. Settled, firm, continuing, everlasting peace, in every kind of circumstance. It rests upon the enduring foundation of the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ. He came to earth in person. He proclaimed peace not only to those who were near, the Jews, but also to those who were afar off, the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:17), in fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 57:19. He made peace by the blood of His Cross (see Colossians 1:20). When He appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, His first word to them was, "*Peace*" (John 20:21). This is the message of peace that falls so sweetly, and with such assurance upon the believer's ear, when he learns that his sins have been put away, because of the value to God of "*the blood of Christ, God's Son, which cleanseth us from every kind of sin*" (1 John 1:7).

When the Lord Jesus left the earth He said to His disciples, "*My peace give I unto you*" (John 14:27). Peace is also spoken of as the state of heart in which a believer is kept in every kind of circumstance. "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee*" (Isaiah 26:3).

The Christian "*makes his requests known unto God, and the peace of God that passeth all understanding keeps his heart and mind in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:6-7). What a contrast to Isaiah 57:21, which warns, "*There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.*" The Lord Jesus will, in the future, among His other titles, be hailed as "*The Prince of Peace*" (Isaiah 9:6).

What is the practical benefit of peace with God?

Christ was delivered to death and judgment with our sins in view. He was raised from the dead with our justification in view. Full assurance cannot be fully enjoyed without the meaning of the resurrection of Christ being understood. Our sins and their penalty were indeed fully dealt with by His death. The declaration and proof of our clearance is demonstrated in His actual, personal, bodily resurrection. Without this, settled peace cannot be fully known and enjoyed. The resurrection of Christ is thus seen to be, among many other things, the divine declaration of the righteous clearance of the sinner who believes in Jesus. But, the justification of individual sinners becomes effective only as and when they believe. Only then, can we know real peace.

That brings today's two subjects together. If we believe that Jesus loves us, and gave Himself for our sins, we can be assured that our sins have been righteously put away by a righteous God. Then, the assurance of peace for eternity leads to the enjoyment of peace day by day, indeed moment by moment. How good is the God we adore!

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