

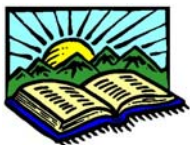
For Love or Justice

We spend a lot of time reading the gospels, listening to sermons about Jesus, His life, His works, and the Old Testament prophecies about Him. This is how we get to know Him better so we are better able to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Mt 16:24). Scripture gives us all we need to know to become better followers; and the rest comes from our experience following. Prayer also plays an important role, letting the Lord know our heart is truly serious about following, and learning where and how He wants us to follow. We know that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance (Mt 9:13), and to save sinners (1 Ti 1:15). However, do you know the fundamental moral attributes of God's nature which manifest themselves in Him saving sinners from destruction? And why we need saving at all? Most people in today's church cannot answer these questions according to what scripture says.

God's moral attributes fall into three categories: goodness, holiness, and righteousness. The goodness of God can be seen in His absolute perfection, the ideal of what is considered good. It is the part of His divine nature that we see when He gives us good gifts, when He shows us love, grace, mercy, and longsuffering in His dealings with us, and when He saves us from the destruction to come. God Himself describes this attribute best in answering Moses when he asks God "show me thy glory" (Ex 33:18); and God responds "I will make my goodness pass before thee" (Ex 33:19); and then "the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." (Ex 34:5-7)

The holiness of God describes His unique and transcendent difference from His created beings, and the fact that His nature is exalted high above them. He is set apart from His creatures in ethical behavior, moral rectitude, and purity of essence. Scripture describes God as holy (Is 6:3, Rv 4:8), glorious in holiness (Ex 15:11), unique in holiness (1 Sa 2:2), and unique in being (Dt 4:35); and He is the Holy One (Ps 16:10, Mk 1:24, Ac 3:14), whose name is Holy (Is 57:15). We, His followers, are told also to be holy as He is holy (Lv 11:44-45, 19-20, 20:7, 1 Pe 1:16).

The righteousness of God describes the perfection of His moral standard, His strict adherence to this moral standard which is inherent in the very essence of His being, and the judging of His created beings according to the measuring rod of this moral standard. God is infinitely righteous in Himself, and therefore requires that judgment, or justice, be levied



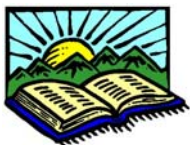
against every violation of His standard. Scripture describes God as righteous (Ezr 9:15, Neh 9:8, Ps 119:137, 145:17, Jer 12:1, Lam 1:18, Da 9:14, 1 Jn 2:29, 3:7, Rv 16:5); He is a righteous judge (2 Ti 4:8); and the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22).

Let me now set up for you the answers to my original questions. It is because of God's holiness and righteousness that He must judge all violations of His moral standard, and meet out punishment to all violators. We know from scripture that there is no one who can satisfy God's standard, save Christ Himself. There is none that do good (Ps 14:1-3, 53:1-3), we all like sheep have gone astray (Is 53:6), there is none righteous, no, not one (Ro 3:10), all have sinned (Ro 3:23), and all are under sin (Ga 3:22). It is only because of God's goodness that He provides a way for some, not all, not to be judged, but to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ (Ro 10:9-10, Eph 2:8-9), who lived a sinless life (He 4:15), and yet was made sin for us so we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Co 5:21); and so all we need to do is confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus, believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, and we will be saved (Ro 10:9-10). This is the gospel message, the good news; we all have heard it throughout our Christian life. Some of us have even passed it on to non-Christians.

However, have you ever stopped to think about the heart of the gospel message? The modern day church presents it as a result of God's love and mercy and grace, as a result of the goodness of God. This representation is true, but it is only half the story. Today we drop the other half, I think due to our incessant fear of violating society's social standard of political correctness, for fear of saying something that will offend someone somewhere. And so we place society's social standard ahead of God's moral standard. We use PC-speak rather than God-speak; when Jesus says "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Mt 10:28)

Yes, it is because of the goodness of God, His love and grace and mercy, that fuels His desire that even some should be saved; and yet, it is because of His holiness and His righteousness, His moral standard, His requirement that violators must be judged, that brings us to the point of need for His goodness in our life. To put it another way, we are given God's salvation for all eternity as a result of His goodness, when what we really deserve is His justice because we cannot live up to His holiness and His righteousness.

So then, is the gospel a message of love or of justice? Many today would answer the former; some would even answer the latter; but how many would answer both? I do. Let me show you a few scripture verses in support of my reason for answering both. We all know "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16); and maybe even "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be



saved” (Jn 3:17); but how many of us know what the next verse means: “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (Jn 3:18). What does it mean to be condemned already because we do not believe? We are all under condemnation, and it is only justification that changes our legal standing before God from condemned to saved. If we never believe, then we are never saved, and therefore we continue under condemnation, our condition unchanged. And yet we, the presenters of the good news, are a sweet savor of Christ, death to them that perish, and life to them that are saved (2 Co 2:14-17). So those who believe are saved and those who do not will perish, are condemned, will be cast into outer darkness, into the lake of fire, and the wrath of God abides upon him (John 3:36).

We have here two sides of the same coin. Jesus said He came into the world for judgment (Jn 9:29), and yet He says He came not to judge but to save (Jn 12:47). Jesus also says He judges no man (Jn 8:15-16), and yet He says all judgment is committed to the Son by the Father (Jn 5:22). Paul says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes (Ro 1:16), and yet he also says that God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to his, Paul’s, gospel (Ro 2:16). And so both sides of the coin must be true at the same time. The gospel brings God’s salvation to those who believe and God’s justice to those who do not. Therefore, the gospel is both for love and for justice. Amen.