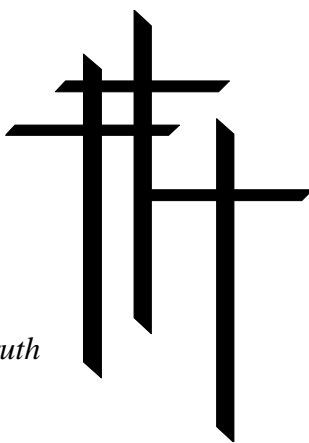


Timely Messenger

*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*



Volume 64 No. 8

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THE PERSON OF GOD

By Gregg Bing

What is God like? The world has many different viewpoints, most of which are false, or at least incomplete. Some view God as a loving, tender Father who only seeks to help His children, would never judge them harshly, and would certainly not condemn anyone to a place like hell. Those who hold this view typically believe that if a person does their best, that God will accept them. Others view God as a totally impersonal God, or “force,” who is all powerful but inapproachable. They see Him as a faraway

God, holy and majestic, a God who judges and condemns us because of our sin. While both of these viewpoints are wrong, there are elements of truth in each one.

How can we know what God is like? While we can see attributes of God in His creation or in His law, one of the clearest expressions of the person and nature of God is found in the Cross of Christ. As we examine the crucifixion of Christ and understand the true meaning of the cross, the first thing that becomes evident is that ...

GOD IS LOVE

God is a God of love, mercy and grace. The greatest display of this love is found in the Cross.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

One of the most important words in this familiar verse is the little word “so,” a word which speaks of the manner in which God loved. How did God love us?

God’s Love is Unconditional

Who did God love? “the world.” The word “world” refers to those who do not know God; those who are sinners by nature. This includes everyone. Romans 3:23 tells us: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Yet, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for

us” (Rom. 5:8). The word for “love” is the Greek word “agape,” the highest form of love. It is a love which is given freely, without requiring anything up front and without expecting anything in return.

God’s Love is Sacrificial

How did God express His love for us? “He gave.” God’s love is a giving love. What did God give? “His only begotten Son,” His beloved Son, in whom He was well-pleased. It is interesting to note the first use of the word “love” in the Bible. As we might expect, it occurs in the book of Genesis, but not until the 22nd chapter, where we find God telling Abraham:

“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering ...” (vs. 2)

While it is impossible for us to fully understand how difficult it was for God the Father to give His only Son to die on the cross

for us, this story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice His only son, Isaac, whom he loved so dearly, gives us a little better feeling for the sacrifice God made for us.

How did God give His Son? There are two aspects to this, both seen in 1 John 4:9-10.

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10)

God gave His Son by “sending” Him. The Greek word translated “sent” is “apostello,” the verb form of the word “apostle,” a sent one. It carries the idea of sending someone away. God sent His Son “into the world” to become a Man. In a way, this involved a separation of Father and Son. Paul describes this humbling of the very Son of God in this way:

“Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:6-8)

How difficult this must have been for God to send away His own Son, from His very presence in glory, to come and live on this sin cursed earth in the likeness of sinful flesh. This, in itself, is clearly sacrificial love, but the sacrifice was even greater, for God also sent His Son “to be the propitiation for our sins.” Jesus suffered tremendously for us, for our sins. He was beaten, scourged, crowned with thorns, and crucified on a cruel cross. How difficult it must have been for God the Father to see His Son suffer these things, but even more difficult to turn away from His Son as He bore our sins there on the

tree (1 Pet. 2:24). Here is the ultimate example of sacrificial love, God sending away His only Son to “become sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21).

God’s Love is Unfathomable

Why did God love us so? Some teach that God loved us because of Christ’s death, but this is faulty theology. The Scriptures plainly tell us that Christ died because of God’s love for us. God did not love us because of us. We read in Romans 3:24 that we are “justified freely by His grace.” The word “freely” literally means “without a cause or reason.” There was no cause in us, either our character or our deeds, that would lead God to love us or to justify us. God did not love us because we first loved Him (1 John 4:10). The only way we could love Him, or anyone else, was because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). So, why did God love us? Because of who He is.

“Beloved, let us love

one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:7-8)

These verses tell us two things about God: He is the source of love, for “love is of God,” and He is the essence of love, for “God is love.” Ephesians 2:1-3 describes our terrible condition in times past, being spiritually “dead in trespasses and sins,” but in verses 4-5 we find God steps in with the answer to our sad situation.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),” (Eph. 2:4-5)

God was merciful toward us and saved us from our sins by His marvelous grace, because of His great love for us. While we cannot fathom the depths of

(Continued on page 4)

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GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

1450 Oak Hill Road
Fort Worth, TX 76112-3017
(817) 451-0937

Website:
www.gracebiblechurch-fw.com
Email: gbcfw@juno.com

Gregg Bing — Editor

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(Continued from page 3)
such love, we can believe it, for it has been demonstrated at the cross, and when we believe we receive the gift of “everlasting life.”

But why did salvation come at such a tremendous price to God? Why did Jesus have to suffer “so” for us? Why did it have to be this way? The answer is because ...

GOD IS HOLY

The cross is also the greatest expression of God’s holiness. The word “holy” carries the idea of separation. God is holy because:

God is Separate From Sin

The prophet Habakkuk was led of the Spirit to write of God:

“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. ...” (Hab. 1:13)

There are other things that are called holy in the Scriptures such as holy an-

gels, holy priests, the holy temple, but as Hannah prayed: “None are holy like the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:2). The saints who will win the victory over the beast during the future tribulation period will ask:

“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy ...” (Rev. 15:4)

God Hates Sin

Because He is a holy God and is separate from sin, God’s attitude toward sin is one of hatred. Sin is an abomination to God; a disgusting thing that He abhors or detests.

“The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves him who follows righteousness” (Prov. 15:9).

This was particularly God’s attitude toward the sin of idolatry, and He sent His prophets to warn Israel:

“Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!” (Jer. 44:4).

God Must Judge Sin

God is not only holy, He is also righteous or just. He will do what is right, and so God says:

“I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.” (Isa. 13:11)

What is the just payment for sin? Death! “For the wages of sin is death ...” (Rom. 6:23a). Not just physical death, but spiritual death, which means separation from God.

So we seem to have a dilemma. How can a holy and righteous God ever have any kind of relationship with miserable sinners such as us? Consider these Scriptures which describe our terrible condition.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all

sinned.” (Rom. 5:12)

“As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. ... There is no fear of God before their eyes. ... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10-12, 18, 23)

“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” (Isa. 64:6)

On the basis of our character, our nature, and our works, there could be no acceptance by a holy God. It would be impossible. Yet, we read in the opening chapter of Paul’s letter to the saints at Ephesus that God has made us “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). The

“Beloved” here refers to God’s beloved Son. How can this be? How could God place us in His Son and accept us, and yet, still be holy? The answer is: the Cross! Consider these facts:

1) Hanging on the cross of Calvary was the Lord Jesus Christ, the God of glory, who came in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet “without (literally ‘separate from’) sin” (Heb. 4:15). The Holy One of God, perfect, sinless, altogether righteous, was put in this place of death. This was God’s only begotten Son, His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.

2) But, while hanging on that cross, the Lord Jesus “bore our sins in His own body” (1 Pet. 2:24). He was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21).

3) Even though this was God’s own Son on that cross, who was Himself holy and righteous, yet, because of the sins that He bore, our sins, the sins of the whole world, God demonstrated His holiness!

How? God poured out His wrath and judgment, even upon His own dear Son! Christ bore sin’s penalty for us, which was death. He died physically, shedding His blood to pay the price for our redemption (Eph. 1:7), for “without shedding of blood, there is no remission” (forgiveness) of sins (Heb. 9:22). However, the penalty of sin was not just physical death, but spiritual death as well—separation from God. While hanging on the cross, God the Father completely and utterly forsook His Son (Matt. 27:46) because of our sins. God judged or condemned the sins of the world in the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.” (Rom. 8:3)

It had to be this way. No other way was possible, otherwise, God could not

have remained holy and righteous. Now, with our sins paid for by the death of Christ, God is propitiated. His holy and righteous requirements have been satisfied, thus allowing Him to justify (declare righteous) sinners such as us. Paul explained this wonderful truth in his letter to the Romans.

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:24-26)

Though the sins of the world have been paid for, the whole world is not automatically made righteous. God only justifies those who put their faith in Christ, trusting and relying

on Him and the work that He accomplished on Calvary to save them from their sins. When we believe, God places us “in Christ.” We become “the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). This is God’s way of saving sinners—the Cross of Christ—and there is no other way. It is just as Jesus told His disciples:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

How important it is to see and understand what God is like, for He truly is a wonderful God!

God is not some impersonal, unapproachable, and uncaring “force.” God loves you and has provided the way, at great expense to Himself, for you to be brought into a relationship with Him.

But, God is not a God who can just overlook your sins and your weaknesses. God is holy and righteous. He hates sin and He must judge sin. The good news is that He has already

judged our sins in His Son on the cross of Calvary. The issue for people today is not how they will deal with their sins, but how they will respond to God’s Son. In order to be saved from your sins, you must put your faith in Him. The offer of everlasting life is there for “whoever believes.”

How will you respond to the Son of God? How will you respond to the Cross of Christ? You can believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of the cross right now. You can be saved from your sins right now. You can be placed “in Christ” right now and be “accepted” by God in His Beloved Son. What must you do? The Philippian jailer asked this very question of Paul and Silas: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer they gave him is the same for us today:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household...” (Acts 16:31)



RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

by Jim Roberts

In Romans, Chapter 4, the Apostle Paul reminds us that God counted Abraham as righteous because Abraham believed what God said, and then Paul concludes that God has always dealt with mankind upon this very basis.

“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” (Rom. 4:5)

Much of the hatred we see in our world today is caused by the different religions of the world. Many times Muslims in Muslim communities simply follow the customs taught by their Muslim leaders. Many Hindus just follow the teachings of their Hindu leaders. Many Christians base their lives on the doctrines of Christian traditions. On judgment day, God will not judge people on the basis of their compliance with their religious culture. He will judge on the basis of our faithfulness to what God has said. That is why the

Apostle Paul told Timothy,

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15)

God has dealt with different people in different ways through the centuries, and our task is to find out what God expects from us and to learn from His relationship with others? To accomplish this task we must rightly divide the word of truth.

In the Old Testament, God gave the nation of Israel a kingdom which brought great physical blessings to its citizens. To live in that kingdom, the Jews were required to live according to the Mosaic Law of the Old Covenant.

During the period of time covered by the book of Acts, God offered the New Covenant Kingdom to the nation of Israel. According to the words of the Lord Jesus at the Last Supper, His shed blood was the basis for the New Cove-

nant.

“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matt. 26:28)

In accordance with this New Covenant ministry, Paul was sent to the Gentiles and revealed what it means to be saved by grace through faith in Christ. During that dispensation, Jewish believers continued practicing all of the Mosaic Law, while Jews and Gentiles alike experienced miracles and practiced water baptism.

One might ask why the Lord Jesus said that the blood of the New Covenant was shed for many. Didn't Jesus die for the sins of all people? Indeed, it was the New Covenant which opened up the salvation of God to the Gentiles. However, the New Covenant does not apply to every believer. There were saints who lived under the Old Covenant, and there were saints who lived even before the Old Covenant.

Furthermore, as Israel rejected Christ and the New Covenant Kingdom during the Acts period, God began to call out the Church which is the Body of Christ. This Church is a heavenly church,

and it too has no connection to the New Covenant. It was revealed in a message, or dispensation, which was given to the Apostle Paul. In Colossians, Chapter 1, Paul said that he was called to be a minister of the Church which is the Body of Christ, and that his calling was according to the deposit of truth which God had given to him.

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.” (Col 1:24-25)

Paul wrote the doctrinal books of Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians after God’s offer of the New Covenant Kingdom was set aside. Therefore, it is in these books that we find the full revelation of the dispensation concerning the Church. According to this dispensation, anyone who accepts Christ as Savior is automatically saved and given a position in the heavens as a member of the Body of Christ. The miracles and the rituals associated with the New Covenant message, which were so prevalent in the Acts period, are conspicuously absent from these epistles. In Colossians, Chapter 3, Paul said,

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above,

where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Col. 3:1-2)

After the Church which is the Body of Christ is caught up to be with Christ at His appearing, God will offer the New Covenant Kingdom to Israel once again. At that time God will again perform many miracles, wonders, and signs as He protects the nation of Israel from the wrath of the antichrist and prepares them to rule with Christ in the New Covenant Kingdom.

Thy Word is a lamp
unto my feet and a
light unto my path.

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