

4. The God of Grace and Judgment (1Q 2012—Glimpses of Our God)

Biblical material: 1 Cor. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Genesis 3, 6; John 3:17–21; Rev. 14:6, 7; Eccl. 12:14.

Quotes

- Though God's attributes are equal, yet his mercy is more attractive and pleasing in our eyes than his justice. *Miguel de Cervantes*
- Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue. *Eugene O'Neill*
- Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God's grace and knowledge of it makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all his creatures; and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith. *Martin Luther*
- Grace is everywhere as an active orientation of all created reality toward God. *Karl Rahner*
- Grace is but glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected. *Jonathan Edwards*
- The Day of Judgment is an important notion: but that Day is always with us. *Alfred North Whitehead*

Questions

Why place these two aspects of God together here? How are we to see grace and judgment interacting? Is grace not acting right and judgment acting right? Do we fear the day of judgment if we know the God of grace? Is there grace in bringing evil to an end? How do we relate to this God as he reveals himself to the universe?

Bible summary

We are promised that our works will be revealed (1 Cor. 3:13, also Eccl. 12:14) and that all of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). We are also referred to the Fall in Genesis 3 and the Flood in Genesis 6, so we can understand something of the concept of judgment. In Rev. 14:6, 7 we hear the call of the angel that the hour of God's judgment is come. Then we read in John 3:17-21 of God's grace to us in sending his Son. Maybe this apposition of texts has some of us wondering, especially as there are so much more on the subject of judgment than grace...

Comment

There is much misunderstanding about God's judgment. Generally this is seen as negative, something to be avoided. But from a Biblical perspective, it is not only necessary, but desirable! In fact the basis for many of the words used for judgment is to "bring out right." Don't we want God to make things right, to bring out the right from every situation? In the justice of God's judgment, what's happening is that right is being restored. And that is certainly not incompatible with grace.

Sometimes we hear people talk about God's justice and God's righteousness as if they are different things. However the Greek word is the same—so there is no difference between justice and righteousness. In fact it's just a question of different roots—righteous is Anglo-Saxon, and justice is Latin.

More than words—is it not gracious for God to bring things to a conclusion? In his love God judges and his judgment is right. We cannot fragment God’s character and set one part against another. God will always do what is right, and that includes grace and judgment.

Nor is God’s grace something that is not “right.” We sometimes see grace as being the opposite of what is legally demanded. But God is right in the sense of correct even as he exercises grace. God’s grace is not some plea-bargain, or deal behind closed doors that goes against true justice. It is God being himself—totally gracious and totally right!

For God “wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth,” (1 Tim. 2:4 NLT)—showing that it’s not just saving us that’s important, but that as part of the answer in the great controversy it’s important that we understand and agree with God exactly what is true. Then and only then can we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18 NLT). God is not looking for obedient, unquestioning servants but understanding friends: trustworthy children who agree with their loving Father over what is true and right. They walk in the light, following God’s commands—not because they are compelled to do so, but because they would never wish to do otherwise.

God came to be with us, to take on humanity, so that we could see and understand, and by his grace become like him. We are to be participants in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

C.S. Lewis comments that Jesus “said that we were ‘gods’ and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.” *Mere Christianity*, p. 174.

The most important aspect of Christ’s coming to human beings was to reveal God in his true nature—in contrast to all Satan’s misrepresentations. Without Jesus, the image of God would continue to be warped and misunderstood. Who would want to be saved into the presence of a divine dictator, cruel and severe? To deny the charges of the Devil, God comes in person.

The more you read of the kind of person God truly is, the less you have to be fearful of Him. In the Bible, God comes to human beings, and the first words are, “Don’t be afraid!” Why not? Because this returning God is not a stranger. “This same Jesus shall return...” the angels told the amazed disciples who watched Jesus leave earth for heaven. This same Jesus is defined in the gospels, and is the proof of God as He really is—the God of love and truth and right, who will save all who come to Him. Ultimately, perfect love casts out fear...

So what kind of God do you believe in, and do you trust him? Like everything else in life, it depends on your relationship, and how the person has acted. Take a look back through the Bible and you’ll find example upon example of how God deals with people just like us. More than that, the Bible records God’s intentions which history shows came true. Prophecy as it fulfils is another guarantee that God is “working his

purpose out,” and that He can be trusted. So when Jesus says “I will come again,” (John 14:3), your certainty is based on all the proof of God through history.

So, “we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure,” and “therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.” (Hebrews 6:19 NIV, 2 Corinthians 3:12 NIV).

Why? Because God is a God of immense grace, who will always do what is right, and especially in the judgment acts to set everything right. This is a God who is truly to be glorified, one who is always acting for our best, and who loves us with an eternal love. How could we not love such a God?

Ellen White Comments

“Now is the judgment of this world,” Christ continued; “now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die.” This is the crisis of the world. If I become the propitiation for the sins of men, the world will be lighted up. Satan’s hold upon the souls of men will be broken. The defaced image of God will be restored in humanity, and a family of believing saints will finally inherit the heavenly home. This is the result of Christ’s death. The Saviour is lost in contemplation of the scene of triumph called up before Him. He sees the cross, the cruel, ignominious cross, with all its attending horrors, blazing with glory.

But the prince of this world is cast out. The accusations which Satan has brought against God are refuted. The reproach which he has cast upon heaven is forever removed. Angels as well as men are drawn to the Redeemer. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth,” He said, “will draw all men unto Me.” {DA 625-6}

Sin appeared in a perfect universe. . . . The reason of its inception or development was never explained and never can be, even at the last great day when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened. . . . At that day it will be evident to all that there is not, and never was, any cause for sin. At the final condemnation of Satan and his angels and of all men who have finally identified themselves with him as transgressors of God's law, every mouth will be stopped. When the hosts of rebellion, from the first great rebel to the last transgressor, are asked why they have broken the law of God, they will be speechless. There will be no answer to give. {TMK 15}

...the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. {SC 10-11}

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, veiling His glory and humbling Himself, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed in unfolding its record of His own condescending grace. In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father. {21MR 393}