



Holy God, Wholly Grace

Study 4a: GUILTY before a HOLY GOD (3:9-20)

3:9-12 Is the Gentile -- or for that matter the Christian -- better than the Jew? (v.23; 11:17-22; 1 Cor.10:6-12)

It cannot be said too often that a false theology finds its source in inadequate views of depravity. -- **J. Stifler**, p.68

Those who do not make progress in seeking after God, are bound to retrogress; indeed, those who do not seek, will lose that which they already have obtained. We must never stand still in seeking after God. -- **M. Luther**, *COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* (1516) p.55

3:13-20 What is the meaning of TOTAL DEPRAVITY?

Negatively, the concept does not mean (1) that every man has exhibited his depravity as thoroughly as he could; (2) that sinners do not have conscience or "naive induction" concerning God; (3) that sinners will indulge in every form of sin; or (4) that depraved man does not perform actions that are good in the sight of man. Positively, total depravity means (1) that corruption extends to every part of man's nature, including all the faculties of his being; and (2) that there is nothing in man that can commend him to a righteous God ... Arminianism ... denies total depravity, the guilt of original sin, and the loss of free will, and ... affirms involvement in the sin of Adam to the extent of giving mankind a tendency toward sin but not a sinful nature ... -- **Charles C. Ryrie**, *BAKER'S DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY* (1960) p.164 (emphasis added)

The point of comparison may be the offensive and pestiferous character of the exhalations of an open grave ... Or the idea is, that as the grave is rapacious and insatiable, so the wicked are disposed to do all the injury with their tongues which they can accomplish. -- **Charles Hodge**, *op.cit.*, p.122

The apostle in drawing this picture ... does not certainly mean that each of those characteristics is found equally developed in every man. Some, even the most of them, may remain latent in many men; but they all exist in germ in the selfishness and natural pride of the the ego, and the least circumstance may cause them to pass into the active state, when the fear of God does not govern the heart. -- **F. Godet**, *ROMANS* (1883) p.142

... distortion has affected his whole being, so that he can supply on his own part no adequate recovering power which shall restore him to

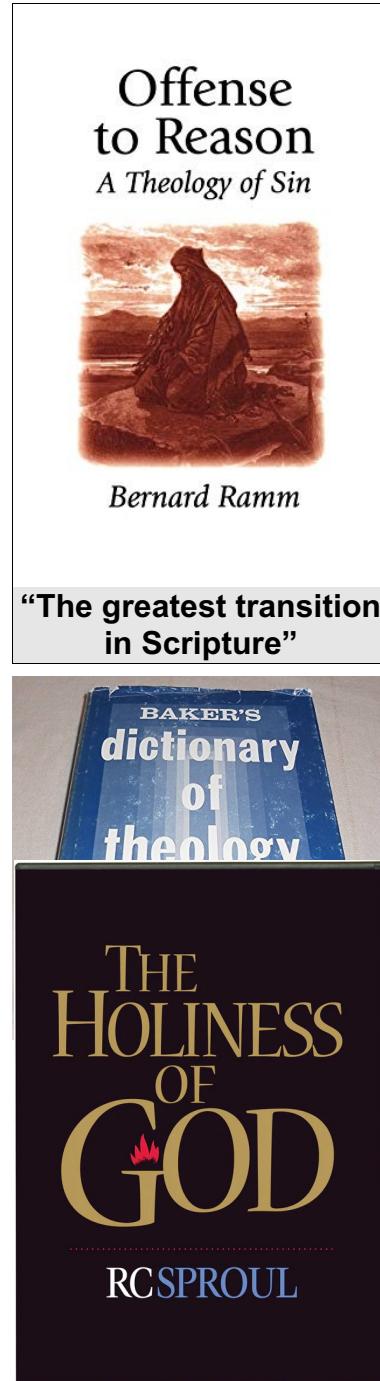
harmony with God. And the Law has nothing more to say to him, except that this condition is not only deplorable, but guilty, accountable, condemnable ... To be a sinner is before all things to be a **transgressor of law**. It is other things besides. It is to be **morally diseased**, and in need of surgery and medicine. It is to be morally guilty, and in urgent need of **justification** -- **H. Moule**, (*ROMANS*, EB, pp.90-91, emphasis added)

Only when these humiliating conclusions are accepted and felt, are we in a condition to appreciate and embrace the grace of the Gospel, next to be opened up. -- **David Brown**, *JAMIESON, FAUSSET & BROWN COMMENTARY* (1871) Vol.2, p.228

The scope of Paul's indictment is the whole of humanity. The indictment is set out in five theses. And the way is now prepared for Paul to introduce the saving work of Christ. Perhaps the greatest transition in Holy Scripture is the one from Rom. 3:20 to 3:21. Up to Rom. 3:20 Paul labored hard to establish the indictment of the race as both sinful and guilty. Then in Rom. 3:20 he inserts with no connectives at all the great redeeming work of Christ. -- **Bernard Ramm**, *OFFENCE TO REASON: A THEOLOGY OF SIN* (1985) p.44

Holy, holy, holy, says the creatures nearest to God, when celebrating His perfection (Isa.vi.), and not *good, good, good*. Holiness, such is the **essence of God**; and holiness is the absolute love of the good, the absolute horror of evil. Hence it is not difficult to deduce both love and justice ... It is obvious that justice is included no less necessarily than love itself in the fundamental feature of the divine character, holiness. -- **F. Godet**, p.161 (emphasis added)

We are so accustomed to equating holiness with purity or ethical perfection that we look for the idea when the word *holy* appears ... But the point we must remember is that the idea of the holy is never exhausted by the idea of purity ... We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of holy to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word *holy* is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. ... The word is used as a synonym for his deity. That is, the word *holy* calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, His mercy is holy mercy ... -- **R.C. Sproul**, *THE HOLINESS OF GOD* (1985) p.57 (emphasis added)



"HOLY ... does not signify one single attribute"

Study 4b: The HOLY GOD REVEALED -- in GRACE (3:21-24)

3:21-22 *The failure of the Jew to justify himself by obedience to Law condemns forever what religious systems?*

... in nothing do our adversaries labour more in the present day than in attempts to blend faith with the merit of works. They indeed allow that man is justified by faith; **but not by faith alone** ... -- **John Calvin**, *COMMENTARIES: ROMANS* (1539) p.148 (emphasis added)

What is the Biblical meaning of righteousness?

Right is the translation of many Hebrew words. The two most important are *yashar* and *mishpat*. The former has the sense of "being straight" while the latter is a forensic term meaning "judgment," as in Gen. 18:25. In the NT the chief word is *dikaios*, meaning "equal." It is usually translated "just" or "righteous." ... Righteousness is the regular translation ... of the Hebrew *sedek* and *sedaqa* and the Greek *dikaiosyne*. Originally these words signified that which conforms to the norm, and for biblical writers this norm is the **character of God himself**. -- **David B. Knox**, *BAKER'S DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY* (1960) p.461 (emphasis added)

What is the only ground upon which we may be declared righteous (= justified)?

... not faith in general, not mere confidence in God, not simply a belief in the Scriptures as the word of God, much less a recognition of the truth of the spiritual and invisible, but it is **faith of Christ**; that is, faith of which **Christ is the object**. -- **C. Hodge**, p.138 (emphasis added)

3:23-24 *What glory has man lost through sin, and so what is the Christian hope?* (Gen.1:26,27; Rom. 5:2; Eph.4:4)

The Rabbis held that Adam by the Fall lost six things, "the glory, life (immortality), his stature (which was above that of his descendants), the fruit of the field, the fruits of trees, and the light (by which the world was created, and which was withdrawn from it and reserved for

the righteous in the world to come." It is explained that "the glory" was a reflection from the Divine glory which before the Fall brightened Adam's face ... Clearly St. Paul conceives of this glory as in process of being recovered: the physical sense is also enriched by its extension to attributes that are moral and spiritual. -- **W. Sanday, A.C. Headlam**, *THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* (ICC, 11e. 1906) p.85

... the divine splendour which shines forth from God Himself, and which He communicates to all that live in union with Him ... He had communicated a ray of it to man when He created him pure and happy: it was intended to shine more and more brightly in him as he rose **from innocence to holiness** ... -- **F. Godet**, pp.148,149 (emphasis added)

In what way are the redeemed in Christ Jesus?

A king of his royal clemency can pardon, but he cannot reinstate the criminal in the position of one who has not broken the law. God does both, and this is the meaning of Justification. Pardon concerns the past only, and cannot possibly deal with a man's future relation to the law; but God deals with both, and the two together are justification. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, Vol 1, p.142

He who **justifies** you does exactly what the word always imports. He does not educate you, or inspire you, up to acceptability. He pronounces you acceptable ... satisfactory to the inexorable Law. How? Because you are transfigured into a moral perfectness such as could constitute a claim? No, but because Jesus Christ died, and you, receiving Him, are found **in Him**. -- **H. Moule**, (EB) pp.96,97

Paul's hope, before he became a Christian, was that by dint of perseverance in observing the law of God, he might at length be pronounced righteous by God when he stood before His judgment-seat. But in this way of righteousness apart from the law, the procedure is reversed: God pronounces a man righteous at the beginning of his course, not at the end of it. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *ROMANS* p.102

Study 4c: The HOLY GOD REVEALED -- in RIGHTEOUSNESS (3:25-31)

3:25-26 *What is the final answer to those who would reproach God for failing to punish wickedness?*

It is not without reason that these two verses have been called "the marrow of theology." ... For 4000 years the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe ... was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgments, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep ... Where were the *wages of sin*? ... God judged it necessary, on account of the impurity so long enjoyed by those myriads of sinners who succeeded one another on the earth, at length to manifest His justice in a striking act; and He did so by realizing in the death of Jesus the punishment which each of those sinners would have deserved to undergo. -- **F. Godet**, pp.150,155,156

Herein lies the deep and precious meaning of the two statements of St. John; "God is light," and "God is love." If God were Light alone, nobody could be saved. If God were Love alone, in the modern sense, there would be the danger of forgetting His righteousness. But in the Cross He is revealed as both Light and Love. All His attributes are blended, united and correlated. "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. lxxxv.10) ... -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op.cit.*, p.147

The noun *hilasterion* [propitiation] is related to the verb *hilaskomai*, which in pagan Greek means "placate" or "make gracious", but in LXX [Septuagint] takes on the meaning of Heb. *kipper* ("make atonement") and cognate words, among which is included *kapporeth*, "mercy seat", "place where sins are atoned for or wiped out". Paul has thus pressed into service the language of the law court ("justified"), the slave-market ("redemption") and the temple ("mercy

seat") to do justice to the fullness of God's gracious act in Christ. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *op.cit.*, pp.105,107

3:27-28 *Why do most human beings reject what is, after all, a free gift?* (Luke 18:9-27)

I believe that the root of every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church as ever suffered has been the effort of men to earn rather than to receive their salvation. -- **John Ruskin**, in *Thomas*, *op.cit.*, p.159

3:29-31 *Spurgeon titled one of his books 'All of Grace'. How do cults (and even Christians) misinterpret this gospel?*

... when it comes to the question of our acceptance by God, how much more satisfying it is to know oneself "justified freely by his grace" than to hope to be justified by "the deeds of the law". In the latter case, I can never be really satisfied that I have "made the grade", that my behaviour has been sufficiently meritorious to win the divine approval. Even if I do the best I can (and the trouble is, I do not always do that), how can I be certain that my best comes within measurable distance of God's requirement? I may hope, but I can never be sure. But if God in sheer grace assures me of His acceptance in advance, and I gladly embrace His assurance, then I can go on to do His will without always worrying whether I am doing it adequately or not ... "He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear."

-- **F.F. Bruce**, *op.cit.*, p.103