

What is the gospel? Part 8: The holiness of God.

Bible readings: Ephesians 2.1-10, Romans 5.1-2.

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### **Introduction:**

We saw last time that sin has created three major barriers between us and the abundant life that God has planned for us, today we will look at the first:

The **problem of perfection** – heaven is perfect, we are not therefore we cannot enter heaven without spoiling it and it ceasing to be heaven. God is perfect.

God is **holy** & we are not: it is difficult to be with someone really good and know that we are not; what if they really knew about us, if they knew what we had said and done, we would feel even more uncomfortable, how about now if they could read our minds? Uh-oh, God can

Even before we do wrong and are disqualified, we fall short of total moral purity, and therefore do not qualify – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3.23.

Even our good stuff isn't perfect, Isa 64.6 our righteousness is as filthy rags, and even if we got it 100% we would then be proud! Like the old joke about being given a badge for being so humble, and then having it taken away because we wore it. Our motives undo us.

God is **just** and must punish sin

It is actually this sense that wrongs must be righted, and our moral outrage at the evil that is done, and any delays for justice that are a dim reflection of the image and likeness of God

Even then we will tend to go lightly on those whose faults are like ours, just in case we too are found out – this is not the case with a holy and perfect God

- How about anger? Many of us these days recoil from the caricature of the accusing and finger pointing preacher of yesteryear, listen to Jonathan Edwards' sermon "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" from July 8<sup>th</sup> 1741 Enfield, Connecticut.

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment."

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- I don't know how many of us would go and hear him a second time, and that message is certainly out of step with our relativistic culture. It is important to notice that this sermon doesn't reveal the full appreciation that this anger comes from God's love and involvement with his creation. We become angry when somebody damages or vandalises something we value – even just scratching our car! Even more so when a person hurts someone we love, if it was done through laziness, negligence or selfishness we are upset, and even more so when it was malice or deliberate.
- So God's anger towards sin, and those who perpetrate sin is based on his love for the creation, Jonathan Edwards presents a remote and angry God who is vengeful because his laws have been broken, and yet while justice must be done, we must see the reason *why* God - who is love - must be angry when sin has been the cause of so much suffering, pain and death.
- So, this is the problem of perfection – we know that the gospel is good news, so what has God done for us?

### Part 1: propitiation.

Propitiation: “to turn away wrath by the satisfaction of violated justice”

**Eph 2.1-10** As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, **Eph 2:2** in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. **3** All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. **4** But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5** made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. **8** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - **9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

- 1) Propitiation = **NT hilasterion** = **OT mercy seat**
  - a. Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies Ex 25
  - b. Two angels with wings overstretched = righteousness and justice. They span and look down on the solid gold seat which was symbolic of Gods throne on earth.
    - i. Psalm 99.1 The LORD reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim.
  - c. 3 things inside the ark
    - i. **Manna**: Num 11, symbol of men's rejection of Gods material provision
    - ii. **Aaron's rod**: Num 16, symbol of the rebellion and rejection of God's leadership and authority

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- iii. Tablets of **the law**: Ex20 / Ex 32 (golden calf) mans rejection of Gods holiness, standards and exclusive worship of him as God
- iv. Therefore when the two angels look down on the seat they see the threefold evidence of man's rejection of God.

### 2) Day of Atonement:

- a. After the sacrifice and offering the seat is covered with blood – this is why it is called the **mercy seat**, the blood covers the evidence of mans rejection of God and the consequential judgement and punishment.
- b. Justice could say 'I'm satisfied, the death penalty has been paid', Righteousness could respond "I am no longer offended because the evidence of mans sin has been covered and I see the life / sacrifice of an innocent who has paid the penalty"
- c. Therefore what would have been the throne of terrible judgement has become the mercy seat and throne of grace
  - i. Heb 9.11-12 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.
- d. Not innocent, perfect
- e. Not a bull or goat, but fully fitting sacrifice, God became a man, for man was under sins penalty
- f. It had to be God, not even just a perfect man (not that there could be) because the value of the life had to be greater than that of just one man
- g. 1 Pet 1.18-20 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.
- h. Acts 20.28 Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.
- i. Not once a year, but once for all.

Propitiation means that God's character of holiness and justice are satisfied, but there has to be more:

### 3) Propitiation leads to Justification...

- a) It isn't 'just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned' – the absence of sin would just leave us neutral; the absence of wrath and offense is not the same as a loving relationship.

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- b) God is holy, we need more than just the subtraction of sin; we need the addition of Christ's righteousness.
  - a. 2 Cor 5.21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- c) Justification and righteousness by faith alone
  - a. Phil 3.8-9 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

### 3) Rom 5.1-2

- a. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

- i. **Peace with God** – been justified, past tense, not dependent on our ability to live the Christian life 'correctly'
- ii. "Man's knowledge of his failure to please God has brought fear of punishment, fear of rejection and a loss of self esteem. There is absolutely no way for these barriers to be removed between us and God until we accept as true the fact that God is now at peace with us because he has justified us once and for all."

#### **b. Therefore peace with ourselves and with others**

- i. Cp Jn 13.34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."
  - ii. if you are not convinced of Gods love for you is unconditional on the basis of his justification of you, then your acceptance and love of yourself and others will be based on your abilities and performance and therefore will become distorted by failure.
  - iii. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
- c. **standing in grace,**
    - i. **Gods Riches At Christ's Expense**
    - ii. We can't earn it and we don't deserve it therefore because God wants us to have it, it has to be a gift which we receive; and because of Christ we have a standing in

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grace – there will never be a time in our lives when God will require us to deserve or earn any blessing from him.

- iii. What we earned and deserved is judgement, wrath and exclusion, but because he *justly* justified us and declared us righteous, he is able to give us his gracious blessings at all times, quite apart from any merit from us.
- iv. This means we can relax about our standing, in a few weeks time we will learn that this does not mean we are careless, lazy or passive, but that we grow and learn from this position of security towards a holiness of life, which is an active adventure in God.

### d. *Rom 8.1 No condemnation*

- i. Because you have been (past tense) justified, and are standing (present tense) in grace it means that you are not under any condemnation, and never could be again!
- ii. The penalty has been paid – it can't be paid again
  1. 1 Pet 3.18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

Romans 8 ends by asking us a number of important questions:

- If God no longer condemns you, do you? It is time to enjoy freedom from guilt and fear
- If God be for us, who can be against us? It is time to walk tall, not because we are so great, but because God is, and his grace is more than enough.
- Who can separate us from the love of God? No-one, so put aside fear and doubt, for he has promised he will never leave us or forsake us, and all things will work together for our good, and to his glory.

Amen.