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Reformation  
& Revival



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## Four Aspects of Divine Righteousness

Fred G. Zaspel

Psalm 97:2 declares that God dwells in “righteousness and justice” (*tsedek* and *mishpat*). That is to say, He is Himself right and true. He is morally and ethically right, and He acts according to what is proper. This, the psalmist affirms, is God’s very “habitation.” Righteousness is no accident to Him, no incidental quality. It is essential to His very being and always characterizes everything that He does. He is and does only what is right and just.

This theme is common in Scripture. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly?” (Gen. 18:25). He is a “righteous Judge” (2 Tim. 4:8). “He will judge the world in righteousness” (Ps. 9:8; Acts 17:31). The Father is the “righteous Father” (John 17:25), the Son is the righteous Advocate (1 John 2:1), and the Spirit was sent to convict the world concerning righteousness (John 16:8, 10). God is righteous, and He always acts only in keeping with what is just.

But what is that righteousness which is so characteristic of God? How shall we understand this attribute? The primary words which the biblical writers use (*tsedek* and *dikaio-sune*) denote, in a physical sense, “being straight,” or in a moral sense, “being right,” and hence, “conformity to an ethical or moral standard,”<sup>1</sup> being and doing what is right. One who is righteous “lives up” to expected obligations; he acts in accordance with what should be done. A righteous man is one who is right and who does what is suitable, one who maintains a “right relation with”<sup>2</sup> what is expected.

For this reason, theologians have described God’s righteousness as the ethical dimension of His holiness, or as His “transitive holiness,”<sup>3</sup> or as a “mode” of His holiness.<sup>4</sup> It is that aspect of His holiness which distinguishes Him as consistent with His own moral demands.

But then what is that rule, that standard of moral rectitude to which God is conformed? What law is it that obligates Him? We must be careful at this point not to imply that

God is bound to some abstract rule external to Himself. To subject Him to any rule outside of Himself would be to make Him something less than God. No, He does not conform to anyone or to anything. He conforms only to Himself. That “rightness” to which He is obligated is nothing other than His own nature and will. It is His nature and will that determine right from wrong. And when Scripture declares that God does what is right, it affirms merely that He faithfully adheres to His own perfections. He acts only and always according to the very highest principle of justice: Himself.

In other words, righteousness is determined by lordship. Divine sovereignty makes no concessions here. “Who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?” (Rom. 11:35). “The right, therefore, which God hath to act his righteousness or to act righteously towards others, is supreme and sovereign, arising naturally and necessarily from the relation of all things unto himself.”<sup>5</sup> “In this respect God is wholly arbitrary, and hath no other rule but his own will; he doth not will things because they are just, but therefore they are just because God wills them.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, Plato rather blindly grappled at some length with this question. In his dialogue with *Euthyphro* he appears frustrated at his inability to come to any certain conclusion as to “whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.” For him, the answer was illusive. “For somehow or other our arguments, on whatever ground we rest them, seem to turn around and walk away from us.”<sup>7</sup> In light of the unpredictability and inconsistencies and the disagreements among Plato’s many gods,<sup>8</sup> and given his nonbiblical frame of reference, his frustration is understandable! But viewing the question from the vantage point of monotheistic special revelation, the answer is not at all speculative: God is sovereign, and as such it is His nature and will that constitute the very essence of righteousness. In the words of Mastricht, “God is

proto-, in fact auto-dikaion.”<sup>9</sup>

For this reason John Piper is certainly correct in emphasizing that Paul “conceive[s] of God’s righteousness as his unswerving faithfulness always to preserve and display the glory of his name.”<sup>10</sup> God is ever concerned to glorify Himself in all that He does, and His “righteousness” is no less designed to that end also. This is why man’s “unrighteousness” (*adikia*, Rom. 1:18) is described in terms of “not glorifying God as God” (v.21). Righteousness consists in glorifying God and nothing less. The law to which men are bound is His law in every respect. The law is “not above Him” but “within Him.”<sup>11</sup> And this standard, being nothing other than the nature and will of God, is the standard to which the immutable God has bound Himself.

This is a truth about God which we are glad to know! It is one thing to know that He is sovereign and so rules the world by His own will. But it is something more indeed to know that He rules in righteousness. For all the apparent inequities of life, for all the favors He shows the wicked, and for all the afflictions that fall upon the righteous, it is necessary indeed that we know that God is just and that He will do what is right—however difficult it may be for us to see it at the moment. Or again, it is one thing to know that He is the Judge of all the world. But it is something much more to know that He judges according to what is right and in a way that is consistent with Himself, that He will not condemn the innocent or clear the guilty. Unlike the “gods” of the heathen, the true God is not whimsical or capricious. He is righteous. Immutably righteous. “Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen. 18:25). “The Lord is righteous within her; He will do no injustice” (Zeph. 3:5).

But there is more to God’s righteousness than this. This is but the larger, more general picture. God’s righteousness expresses itself in various ways, and so as theologians (particularly the older theologians) studied the ways in which

God's righteousness is presented in Scripture, they tended to speak of it in various theological categories. These categories are very helpful as we seek to understand this very basic and important attribute of God.

### **Rectoral Righteousness**

God's "rectoral" righteousness is that aspect of His nature which demands or requires righteousness of all His creatures. This is perhaps what we normally think of when we speak of God's righteousness. It has to do with the imposition of laws and standards. It is "the rectitude which God manifests as the Ruler of both the good and the evil. In virtue of this He institutes a moral government in the world, and imposes a just law upon man, with promises of reward for the obedient and threats of punishment for the disobedient."<sup>12</sup> God is not only righteous in Himself; He requires the same of all His creatures. Vos calls this "the righteousness of cognizance. . . . By this we mean that Jehovah is held to take notice and keep account of all moral conduct. . . . All conduct falls under the divine jurisdiction."<sup>13</sup>

One important word in this connection is the word "law-giver."<sup>14</sup> God is the One who imposes laws. He determines right from wrong, and He legislates accordingly. In fact, Scripture speaks of God as the ultimate source of all justice. "And the strength of the King loves justice; Thou hast established equity" (Ps. 99:4). Any given device designed to promote fairness in business—weights, scales—is from God (Prov. 16:11). And so "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight" (Prov. 11:1). So also God abhors any who "justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous" (Prov. 17:15). He despises those who steal or defraud others, not because this is a violation of some abstract standard, but because it is contrary and an affront to God Himself Whose very nature demands what is true and right.

Furthermore, all the things that God requires of us are themselves just. "Thy testimonies are righteous forever" (Ps. 119:144). They are not unfair; they are right and necessary as expressions of the righteousness of His own nature.

For this reason, theologians have emphasized that this aspect of divine righteousness is a necessary one. God is God, and we are His creatures. It would be unrighteous, inconsistent with His own being, were He not to require us to live to glorify Him. Just as it is "necessary" for God Himself to maintain His righteousness, so it is necessary for Him to require it of man made in His image; this rises "naturally and necessarily from the relation of all things unto himself. . . . [I]t followeth naturally and necessarily, not as a new thing in God, but as a natural and necessary respect which his nature and being hath unto all creatures upon their production."<sup>15</sup> "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab.1:13).

So God is Himself righteous. As such He imposes laws. Those laws are righteous. And His laws are binding, for all are accountable to Him as the righteous Judge.

This, of course, is what our society despises about God. Our society wants a God who conforms to its standards. This is precisely the indictment on the world by the apostle Paul in Romans 1:18ff. What men have known they have suppressed. Their problem, their wickedness, lies not in an ignorance of God's law; it lies in their rebellion against it and the one who gave it. They "disapproved God" (*edokimasan ton theon*, v.28). Natural man violently refuses any idea of a God who dares impose His will on others. This is our generation's cry for "freedom." A God who would be more cooperative, more flexible, they would have, but not a God who imposes His law. But this is the true God, and His very nature demands that we live to glorify Him. And no denial of Him can alter the reality that He is the righteous Lawgiver and Judge.

**Retributive Righteousness**

God's "retributive" righteousness is that aspect of His nature which inflicts punishment for all unrighteousness in His creatures. It is variously referred to as His "punitive" or "vindictive" or "avenging justice." It has to do with the infliction of penalties for failure to conform to His righteousness. It was first expressed in the Garden of Eden: "In the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). It is reiterated in the law: "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them" (Deut. 27:26). It is echoed in the writings: "He will judge the world with righteousness" (Ps. 96:13). It is echoed again in the prophets: "The soul who sins will die" (Ezek. 18:4). It is reaffirmed in the epistles: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). In reference to sin and sinners, "God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). These are familiar notes to anyone who reads the Bible. Nor is it merely threatened. From the Garden to the flood to Babel to Sodom and Gomorrah to Egypt to the Canaanites to the captivity to Ananias and Sapphira this threat has proven to be a real one. "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18), and has been so since the beginning.

Neither is reformation or rehabilitation the only intended goal. God's acts of retribution may well have this effect at times (Ezra 9:15; Lam. 1:18), and this is always good. But the goal of God's vindictive righteousness is not that of reclaiming the offender or reshaping his character. It is on this score that Vos criticizes Ritschl who denied the idea of God's righteousness as punishment anywhere in the Old Testament. According to Ritschl, God's purpose in exercising His righteousness was a benevolent one, "safeguarding the structure of society." Vos rightly points out that this is but a part of the whole, and he rests his case on Amos 5:24: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing

stream." Against the backdrop of Israel's apostasy this is hardly a call to abundant expressions of goodness on Israel's part; it is a call for retribution against sin, and this "from the supreme motive of giving free sway to the infinite force of His ethical indignation."<sup>16</sup> The idea is that of punishment or retribution, and the goal is the vindication and demonstration of the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:5), "the maintenance of right and justice."<sup>17</sup> The perspective is not forward but backward, to the evil that has been done. "Its first object is requital."<sup>18</sup> This is the purpose of the casting down of the angels who sinned, the flood of Noah's day, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and so on. And when John speaks of the awful sight of the wicked being cast into the lake of fire to "be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10-14; 14:10-11), the only possible object in view is just retribution upon sinners. It is the "punishment"<sup>19</sup> of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

Again, this is a necessary and essential aspect of God's righteousness.<sup>20</sup> "[V]indicatory justice is the very rectitude and perfection of the Deity. . . . For if such a law were not made necessarily, it might be possible that God should lose his natural right and dominion over his creatures, and thus he would not be God."<sup>21</sup> It would be impossible for God not to punish sin. Without it, justice would not be maintained. It would be a denial of His veracity to impose a law with threats against disobedience and not follow through. "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind" (Ps. 110:4). "He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7). Moreover, it would be wrong, a denial of God's own nature, to treat lawbreakers as if they were lawkeepers. He cannot do it. "Indifference to sin is a moral blemish."<sup>22</sup> "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13). "It is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you" (2 Thess. 1:6); that is to say, this vengeance upon the wicked is necessary to the satisfy-

ing of God's justice. Punishment of sin is "just recompense" (*endikon misthapodosian*, Heb. 2:2). "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Nah. 1:3). In short, every sin must be punished.

In fact, so necessary is it that each sin be punished, and justly so, that Scripture goes further to speak of the punishment of sin in degrees. "Few" or "many lashes" will be given according to knowledge and responsibility (Luke 12:47-48). It will be worse in the day of judgment for that city which rejects the gospel than for Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15; cf. 11:20-24; Heb. 10:29-31). "Every careless word" will be taken into account and justly punished (Matt. 12:36). Men by their many sins "are storing up wrath" for themselves (Rom. 2:5) in that day when God will judge "according to their deeds" (Rev. 20:12). Every sin must be punished and that with appropriate severity.

Wicked men want very much to discount God's retributive justice, and understandably so! But many professing believers seem embarrassed by it also,<sup>23</sup> thinking it unworthy of God. But both must recall that "it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you" (2 Thess. 1:6). The punishment is a just and necessary outworking of God's own righteous nature. It is one essential aspect of His glorious being which He has determined to "demonstrate" (*endeixasthai*, Rom. 9:22) and for which all the saints, with one great voice, will at the last say "Hallelujah!" (Rev. 19:1-6).

Now our society may refuse the idea of God's rectoral righteousness, but this idea of retributive righteousness they despise still more. But the one very naturally flows from the other. We are accountable to God to act in keeping with His righteousness, and any failure to do so demands retribution (cf. Gal. 3:10). If there is a God and if He is righteous, then all unrighteousness will one day be punished. Indeed the knowledge of this aspect of divine righteousness is innate in

every man. Though they deny it, still they "recognize [*epignontes*] the righteous judgment [*dikaion*] of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death" (Rom. 1:32). No denial of the facts will alter their reality. Knowing it they hate it, and hating it they deny it, but only to become more culpable. It is one horrible prospect that awaits the sinner.

### Redemptive Righteousness

But all this presents a very real problem. God reveals Himself as a righteous God Who demands the same of us all and condemns all who do not conform. He will "by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Ex. 34:7). The problem is obvious: how can any of us ever escape God's wrath? How may any of us ever enjoy any blessing from God at all? There is that aspect of God's righteousness which causes Him to faithfully reward all righteousness on the part of His creatures; and we will see that in a moment. But how can that be a realistically happy thought to any of us? Even if we could turn over a new leaf and from here on live in perfect conformity to God's law, we still stand condemned for our past sins. If God must condemn sinners, there is, it would seem, no hope at all.

In this sense our justification is (if we can use such language) a kind of moral dilemma for God also. We cannot imagine that God will in the end somehow merely overlook our sins. This is the idea most seem to have about God, that He will eventually let bygones be bygones and all will be well. But God is righteous, and if salvation is to come at all we may be sure that it will only be in such a way that this righteousness is satisfied. This is His very nature, and He cannot deny Himself.

So here is our predicament. God demands righteousness and will surely punish all unrighteousness. He cannot do less. We have neither produced righteousness nor could we

by doing so pay the penalty for past sins. By ourselves we stand hopelessly condemned before a just God.

It is here that we come to learn of God's "redemptive" righteousness—that aspect of His righteousness by which He provides righteousness for His offending creatures.

It is a curious thing that in the Old Testament God's righteousness began to be spoken of as the source and ground of salvation. "In Thy righteousness deliver me" (Ps. 71:2). "With righteousness He will judge the poor" (Isa. 11:4). "There is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior" (Isa. 45:21). "My salvation shall be forever, and My righteousness shall not wane" (Isa. 51:6). "Every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from Me, declares the Lord" (Isa. 54:17). "I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). David's forgiveness resulted in his singing aloud of God's righteousness (Ps. 51:14).

Perhaps more surprising, the inspired apostle describes the Christian gospel as the revelation of "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17). We might expect that a message of salvation should be a message of leniency or of mercy or a waiving of the sentence. Never would we expect a message of Divine righteousness to be "good news"! How can God be "faithful and righteous to forgive us our sin" (1 John 1:9)?

This is precisely the beauty of the gospel. God will not and cannot relax His justice. Nor can He abolish it. His righteousness will not allow that. But He can, if He would so choose, provide a substitute. And herein lies the necessity and design of Christ's death. God must punish sin—every sin. He cannot let one evil go without retribution. But freely choosing to save, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32), and in Him the punishment of sin for all His people is fully meted out. Those for

whom He died receive all its attending benefits (Rom. 8:32) and so cannot be condemned (Rom. 8:34). We go free not by a sidestepping of justice but on the ground of a full satisfaction of justice. Our sin is punished and we go free! "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24) and thereby satisfied the demands of justice against us. God has "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:6).

We cannot speak of God's redemptive righteousness, then, unless we also speak of His retributive righteousness. Indeed, the nature and redemptive value of Christ's death on the cross cannot be rightly understood apart from an appreciation of God's retributive justice.

In the whole matter of salvation by the Mediator, God-man, there is no excellence of God, no essential property, no attribute of his nature, the glory of which is the chief end of all his works, that he hath more clearly and eminently displayed than this punitive justice.<sup>24</sup>

God must punish all sin, and in saving His people He makes no exception. He will not compromise Himself. But instead, He Himself becomes responsible for us and bears the judgment of His own wrath. God the Son, forsaken of God the Father, suffering as a sinner under His condemnation. Jesus Christ, the sinner's substitute, bearing the sin of many.

Still there is more. There is an exchange. He not only takes our sin, but in exchange He gives us His righteousness. In dying for us He satisfies God's righteous demand for punishment. But He goes still further. He was not only "made to be

sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21); He "became to us . . . righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ is "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6). He pays the penalty of our sin and provides us with His own perfections. Our record becomes His, and so He dies. But His record becomes ours, and so we live.

This is what has often been referred to as Christ's "active and passive" obedience. "Born under the law" (Gal. 4:4) He actively performed for us all that was our responsibility to perform, and in our place He suffered the full penalty due us for our sin. He is "the end of the law for righteousness" (Rom. 10:4). We are "found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9). Christ, the substitute sinner, provides a substitute righteousness.

It is in this way that God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel. God has not sidestepped His justice. He has not saved us by overlooking our sin. He has saved us by doing for us all that was required of us. His righteousness is perfectly upheld. So righteous is God that He would not spare even His own Son as He took the sinner's place; the punishment was administered fully. And righteousness is freely provided. God, then, is both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

It is this that makes the notion of salvation by human merit so blasphemous. It is to say that Christ's righteousness is not enough. It is to say that His death was not sufficient payment for sin. It is to say that "Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). And this is why the Scriptures make so much of justification "by faith" (e.g., Rom. 5:1). God cannot pronounce us righteous on the basis of our own merit, for we have not merited enough. "All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isa. 64:6). To approach God on the basis of what we have done is to sidestep Jesus Christ who alone has done enough. We can only approach God on the basis of faith in

His Son, acknowledging and trusting Him as the only Savior. "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith'" (Rom. 1:17). It is the revelation of a righteous God who demands perfection and punishes all sin. But it is also the revelation of the righteous God who in mercy saves sinners by doing for them what He requires of them.

Ironically, this is where Paul's opponents who were so zealous for the law fell so short of it. How could a man be righteous apart from the law? they wondered. It is the law that defines righteousness! How can a man be righteous without conformity to it? But in arguing so, they missed the obvious fact that no one has ever kept the law sufficiently for justification. To claim to be right before God on the basis of one's own merit is to alter the standard of God's righteousness and make it something less. But in this message of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, who kept the law perfectly and satisfied its every demand, Paul says, "we establish the law!" (Rom. 3:31). Yes, we admit our failure to keep the law, but still we claim to be acquitted by it, for we have as our own the perfect record of our righteous substitute who bore in our place the punishment of our sin.

It is only in "having been justified by faith," therefore, that "we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). Peace judicially and peace of conscience. If we were to attempt to be justified by our works, we would always wonder if we had worked enough. We could never be sure. Our every sin would cause such anxiety as to make us doubt that we could ever be saved. But if God comes to us beforehand and gives us His Son and tells us ahead of time that if we will but trust Him to be for us all that God requires of us, and if we do believe on Him so, then our conscience may be at rest. We feel safe, not for what righteousness we have of our own but for Christ's very righteousness which has been made ours. We will rest in His righteousness and not in our own, and this we do "not

for curiosity, nor contention sake; but for conscience sake; that it might be quiet.”<sup>25</sup>

We must say, then, that the gospel reveals much more than God’s righteousness. It also reveals His grace. God is righteous, uncompromisingly righteous. But He is not only righteous. He is also gracious. Through the merits and works of Jesus Christ received by faith, His righteousness becomes ours.

### **Remunerative Righteousness**

God’s “remunerative” righteousness is that aspect of His righteousness by which He rewards His creatures for the righteousness which they have done. It has to do with the distribution of rewards according to justice. “God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name” (Heb. 6:10). “Whatever good thing each one does, he will receive back from the Lord” (Eph. 6:8). This point is at issue also in several of our Lord’s parables.<sup>26</sup> God rewards righteousness.

Strong seems to miss this point entirely. He contends that God’s bestowal of reward has not to do with His justice but His goodness.<sup>27</sup> Now it is plainly evident that these rewards do stem from God’s goodness. But as just noted, God deems it an act of His righteousness also; it is something He must do.

Now this aspect of divine righteousness is perhaps more startling than any. That God would be so gracious as to provide righteousness for the undeserving and that at His own expense is grace enough. But why go any further? What need is there to then reward us for the good we have done? Indeed, the good that we have done is but our duty (Luke 17:10). We are what we are “by the grace of God” (1 Cor. 15:10), and what good we do comes only as a result of His workings in us (Phil. 2:13). It is not necessary to God’s righteousness to reward anyone for anything. David recognized

this when he said, “But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand we have given Thee” (1 Chron. 29:14).

But that is not the point. The point is not that God is obligated to us, but that He has obligated Himself by promise (cf. James 1:12).

It is part of his justice to make good his word; by promise God hath made himself a debtor. . . . It is just with God to pay what he oweth, and God oweth what he hath promised; and so it is a crown of righteousness which God the righteous Judge will give us at that day.<sup>28</sup>

Though no primary and original obligation rests upon the Creator, to reward a creature made from nothing, and continually upheld and helped in the service which he renders, yet he can constitute a secondary and relative obligation. He can promise to reward the creature’s service; and having bound himself to reward obedience, his own word establishes a species of claim. . . . In the words of Witsius (Covenants, I. i. iv.), “God by his promise, has made himself a debtor to men.”<sup>29</sup>

Now think about this. Imagine looking back over your life and measuring up whatever degree of faithfulness there has been, and then marching into God’s presence and expecting repayment. The whole idea is so wrong! We know that we are deserving of only punishment and that the righteousness we possess is only by grace. But still, God has said it is a righteous thing for Him to do this. He has pledged Himself to it, and He will perform it.

Perhaps I can illustrate this better than I can explain it. Christmas at our house is a very happy time. We go all out. Gifts are exchanged in the extreme. One Christmas when my

daughter was very young, we were opening our presents, and she just couldn't wait for me to open her gift to me. I waited until I thought she might burst and then picked up the package and read, "To Daddy, From Gina." Taking my time, I began to guess. "Is it a new car?" "No, Daddy!" "Is it a new motorcycle?" "No!" "A new house?" "No. Now Daddy, open it!" "Okay." So I unwrapped the gift slowly, and when finally it was open I found a nice new pair of gloves. "Do you like them, Daddy?" she asked. I took her up in my arms, assured her that I did, gave her a big hug and kiss, and thanked her many times over for what she had given me. And I told her, in terms she could understand, how good it was to have such a wonderful and generous daughter.

Now I have a question: who do you think paid for those gloves? Where did she get the money? Curious, isn't it—there I was rewarding her for the things that my own money had purchased.

In a way much like that God has promised to reward us, His servants, for the very thing that He has purchased and freely provided. No wonder we find the twenty-four elders in heaven removing their crowns and throwing them back at Jesus' feet and saying, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God" (Rev. 4:11). And no wonder the prophet asks in searching challenge, "Who is a God like Thee" (Mic. 7:18).

The truth of God's righteousness is a frightening one for sinners. But when this righteousness is wedded to His grace (Ps. 85:10), it is a happy truth indeed.

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#### Endnotes

1 Harold G. Stigers, *tsadeq* in *Theological Wordbook of the*

*Old Testament* (TWOT), R. Laird Harris, ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:752. For discussions see TWOT, 752-55; Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, James D. Ernest, transl. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:318-61; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:452-53, 744-45; Colin Brown, "Righteousness" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library/Zondervan, 1986), 3:352-73. Related words in this semantic field include "right," "righteous," "righteousness," "uprightness," "just," "justice," "justify," "justification," and "judgment."

- 2 Louw and Nida, 452.
- 3 Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (1907; reprint, Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1979), 290.
- 4 William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (1889; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1979), 364.
- 5 John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, W. H. Goold, ed. (reprint; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1862), 19:100.
- 6 Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (reprint; London: James Nisbet & Co., 1872), 8:438. Some care should be given here, for this often has been misunderstood to imply that God has "arbitrarily decided," willy-nilly, certain things to be right or wrong, and that if He had so "decided," lying, e.g., would be proper. As Anselm aptly said, this would be like speaking of "dry water" or "moist fire," for God is a God of truth (*Cur Deus Homo* in *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, S. N. Deane, transl. [reprint; LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1962], 205). No, God's "arbitrariness" is not of that kind. By "arbitrary" Manton means only to say that God's

moral demands are determined by none but His own being. "The law was not made according to arbitrary fiat, it is a righteous law, because conforming to the divine nature, higher than which there is and can be no norm" (Vos, op. cit., 251).

- 7 *Euthyphro*, in *The Works of Plato*, Irwin Edman, ed. (reprint; New York: The Modern Library, 1956), 46, 48.
- 8 A problem which Plato acknowledges, *ibid.*, 40, 44-45, etc.
- 9 Quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (1861; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 97.
- 10 John Piper, *The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 100.
- 11 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (1948; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 251.
- 12 Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (1933; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 68-69.
- 13 Vos, op. cit., 251.
- 14 Cf. Manton, who called this aspect of divine righteousness "God's legislative justice" (op. cit., 440).
- 15 Owen, 19:99-101.
- 16 Vos, op. cit., 252-53.
- 17 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 76.
- 18 Shedd, op. cit., 381.
- 19 *Diken*. *Dike* has in the New Testament only this meaning of "the punishment reserved for sinners." Spicq, op. cit., 320.
- 20 Several fuller treatments of this are available. See John Gill, *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (1795; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 156-57; Thomas Manton, op. cit., 442ff.; James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (1887; reprint, n.d.), 105-106; John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, W. H. Goold, ed. (reprint; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1862), 10:505ff., 522ff., 554ff.; 19:101ff.

- 21 Owen, 10:505, 509.
- 22 Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead* (reprint; Chicago: Moody, 1979), 76.
- 23 Often to the point of denying the eternity of hell.
- 24 Owen, 10:547.
- 25 Augustus Toplady, *The Works of Augustus Toplady* (1794; reprint, Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1987), 164.
- 26 E.g., Luke 19:11-27.
- 27 Strong, op. cit., 293.
- 28 Manton, op. cit., 441.
- 29 Shedd, op. cit., 368.