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ON BEING RIGHTEOUS

By Ron Allen

When William Wilberforce was campaigning for the abolition of the Slave Trade, in the House of Commons, he dared to base his arguments on an appeal to Christian principles. In one particular opposing speech, one parliamentarian said: “Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life.”

Daniel Webster said: “Whatever makes men good Christians makes them good citizens.” What should we make of these statements? Should my religion impact on public life? Does it, in fact? Am I a good citizen? If so, is it because of my faith, or in spite of it?

How is it that some individuals, having become Christian, go on to become well-known influences for good in their community and in their nation? Yet others, having learned Christianity, withdraw from public life and recede from community involvement. What effect should we expect the gospel to have on the way Christians are in the world?

Let us discuss these questions in light of Romans 3:25, 26.

God presented him (Christ) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.

Paul had begun his Roman letter by announcing that, in the gospel a *righteousness of God* had been revealed. The above passage is part of his exposition of that claim. Romans 3:21-31 deals with something accomplished entirely by God. “A *righteousness from God* has been revealed” (3:21).

“*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ*” (3:22).

“*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement*” (3:25).

“*God did it to demonstrate his justice*” (3:25).

“*God did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time*” (3:26).

“*He did it to be just and to declare just the man who has faith in Jesus*” (3:26).

The passage is not only about what God did, but why he did it. God’s righteousness is both one of his attributes, and

something that he gives. It is something God is, as well as a relationship to himself which he confers on people. He is both righteous, and the one who declares righteous, those who believe.



God’s righteousness is both one of his attributes, and something that he gives.

This righteousness, which is both of these things at once, has been revealed in the history of Jesus of Nazareth; particularly in the event of his death, in which God presented him as a “sacrifice of atonement.”

As a revelation of righteousness, what happened at Calvary went beyond anything that God had ever done before. In fact, Paul seems to think that God’s patient dealings with mankind prior to the crucifixion had somehow served to obscure the righteousness of God (*he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished* verse 25). Before Calvary, God had not moved against sin according to the full measure of his antagonism to it. God had judged evil, but always with restraint.

In the Old Testament, a righteous person appears to be someone who has met the demands imposed on him in a given relationship; he has behaved according to a set of expectations. At the Cross, God conformed to expectations in relation to himself. He was true to himself. Three times in the passage under consideration we are told that God presented Christ as an atoning sacrifice—in the interests of righteousness. Finally (verse 26), he did it to *be* righteous.

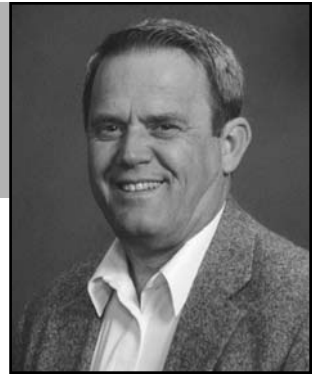
The forbearance of God, before the death of his Son, anticipated this thoroughgoing show of righteousness to come.

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EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

*“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst”
(1Timothy 1:15).*

Was Paul really the worst of sinners? Probably not. Yet he knew a thing or two about himself that prevented him from claiming moral excellence or superiority. Apart from Jesus, few have had such a crucial impact on the world as Paul. For us who have the benefit of his intellect—so enlarged by Christ—his tireless labors, his many imprisonments and beatings (out of which much of the New Testament was born), and his likely martyrdom, it is hard to think of him as a great sinner.

But that is how he thought of himself, yet not in a destructive kind of way. His unflattering self-appraisal was seen through the lens of the cross. Though deeply conscious of wrong-doing, he lived in an atmosphere of liberation. The secret of Christian assurance and peace was his.

Through Jesus we face the awful extent of our corruptions, together with the surpassing measure of God’s mercy. Our personal shortcomings test the forbearance of our friends, but they are not so offensive and vast as to outstrip the grace of God. Conviction of this truth is the genesis of joy and hope.

Making mistakes, forgetting obligations, failing to match our own expectations of those of our colleagues, and often being shocked by the ease and inventiveness of our willingness to triumph over others—this is the human condition. To know that we are enveloped by a love that will not let us go is therefore one of life’s most important lessons. **Studdert Kennedy** knew it; it was the secret of his great usefulness.

*It is not finished Lord.
There is not one thing done,
There is no battle of life;
That I have really won.*


*And now I come to tell thee
How I fought to fail,
My human, all too human tale
Of weakness and futility.*

*And yet there is a faith in me
That Thou wilt find in it
One word that thou canst take
And make
The center of a sentence
In thy book of poetry.*

*I cannot read the writing of the years
My eyes are full of tears.
It gets all blurred, and won’t make sense.
It’s full of contradictions
Like the scribblings of a child,
But wild, wild
Hopes, and longings as intense
As pain, which trivial deeds
Make folly of—or worse.*

*I can but hand it in, and hope
That thy great mind, which reads
The writings of so many lives,
Will understand this scrawl
And what it strives
To say—but leaves unsaid.*

*I cannot write it over,
The stars are coming out,
My body needs its bed.
I have no strength for more,
So it must stand or fall—dear Lord.
—That’s all.*

May the same “trustworthy saying” that unnerved Paul be accepted by you—and by many others. 

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GEORGE WHITEFIELD

1740-1770

By Desmond Ford

This man, who preached with only brief intermissions in Britain and America for forty years, was perhaps the greatest preacher of all time. So say many who have studied his life and work.

As an orator there has scarcely ever been his equal. His voice was not only powerful, but beautifully modulated and under perfect control.... It had a most moving and melting quality that none could resist and, which was the envy of the famous actor, David Garrick.... (and) could pull out all the stops of the entire gamut of human emotions.

-Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century Revival. Vol. 1, 1970 p. 11.*

Whitefield was possibly the most loving and lovable proclaimer of grace ever known. He pioneered open-air preaching. 'From the age of twenty-two till his death, he was the foremost figure of the immense religious movement that held the attention of multitudes on both sides of the Atlantic' (Dallimore). But he wore himself out by the age of fifty-five after setting afoot influences which would never end. Said Cowper of him:



*Wikipedia.org
Church of England
preacher and evangelist
and a founder of
Methodism*

Born: Dec. 16, 1714

Gloucester, England

Died: Sept. 29, 1770

(aged 55)

Newburyport, Massachusetts

"He followed Paul—his zeal a kindred flame. His apostolic charity the same."

Between 1730 and 1740, the life of England was foul with moral corruption and crippled by spiritual decay, yet it was at such time that God called forth the Wesley brothers and Whitefield to stir and cleanse the nation. Historian J. R. Green has written of this time:

A religious revival burst forth.... which changed in a few years the whole temper of English society. The church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.

-Cited by Dallimore, *George Whitefield, p. 32.*

Whitefield's ancestry was clerical, educated, and cultured, but he himself spent his early years serving in the best-known hostelry in Gloucester as a tapster, cleaning and mopping. His father died at the age of thirty-five, and his mother's later marriage was a failure. The new husband turned out to be a drunkard, and after six years the couple separated. These were the most formative years of the life of George. No wonder he fell into the typical vices of youth, but these years were interspersed with devotion to religion. At times he played 'church' with himself the preacher. While he stole money from his mother, with some of it he purchased books of piety, and some of it he gave to the poor. He told his sister that he was convinced God had a special work for him to do.

At St. Mary's school he became acquainted with a set of

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When Christ suffered, God's righteousness came home at last; finally, decisively, irreversibly. God was never more God than at Calvary. All that God was, is, and will be, was poured into the Passion of the Christ.

This means that despite what people are, God's righteousness is established. It is here to stay. God has not shut up the treasures of his righteousness within himself. He has poured them out, lavishing them on mankind. To men and women who trust in Christ, God is just (righteous) and the justifier (the one who declares righteous) of those with faith in Jesus.

That which sets humans free, granting reprieve, forgiveness, peace, hope, joy, and fellowship with God, is substantially the very excellence of God himself. The sinner's justification is grounded in the justification of God. In one climactic moment of history the human tragedy of guilt and estrangement was solved, and God came into his own.

All this has profound implications for the life of faith. God's



God was never more God than at Calvary.

supreme act of self-disclosure must necessarily be the focus for Christian ethics. God's behavior in and through the death of his Son was unrepeatable. What was revealed is unique and consummate. The heart of the deity was laid bare. Here as nowhere else Christians learn how they ought to be in the world.

-To be continued...

'debauched, abandoned, atheistical youths' and was soon in a fair way of being as infamous as the rest of them. So says his journal. But then we read:

Oh stupendous love! God even here stopped me when running on in a full career to hell! For, just as I was on the brink of ruin, he gave me a distaste of their principles and practices.... I began now to be more watchful over my thoughts, words and actions.

At eighteen he went to Oxford as a servitor. Here Charles Wesley noticed his serious demeanor and invited him to breakfast. This was the beginning of a friendship that would have tremendous consequences for Whitefield and the world. He joined the Holy Club and was among the foremost in practices of religion and philanthropy.

But God in his providence put in his way a book by Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. It pointed out that true religion is a union of the soul with God and a consequent transformed nature. Whitefield wrote: "I knew I must be born again, or be damned."

Then began a series of austerities that almost killed him, he prayed for hours on the ground, or upon his knees, beneath the great trees of the university, and fasted recurrently. Giving up the eating of fruit, he gave the money to the poor. He chose apparel that was patched and shoes that were scuffed. Soon he was so weak he could hardly ascend the stairs to his room, and he was forced to tell his kind tutor of his condition. A physician was sent for and he was sentenced to bed-rest for seven weeks. During that time he did not cease to pray for the new birth he now believed to be essential.

God put it into his mind that when Jesus prayed, 'I thirst,' his sufferings were complete. George cried out again and again, 'I thirst,' and God came to him in power. He knew that he was now a 'new creation,' and rejoicing began which never ceased until his death forty years later.


Returning to Gloucester in order to save his health, he now spent hours daily on his knees with his English Bible, his

Greek New Testament, and the bible commentary by Matthew Henry before him. Much of what he prayed over line by line became indelibly inscribed on his heart and mind for the rest of his life. From this storehouse he constantly drew when later he preached forty hours per week.

It was falsely reported that at his first sermon he had driven fifteen people mad. The presiding Bishop expressed the hope that many more would be thus driven to extremity. Justification by faith and its accompanying new birth was Whitefield's great theme, and multitudes responded.

The very day he set off for Georgia in America in response to a call from the Wesley brothers there, John Wesley returned to England, a broken-hearted failure. Whitefield's congregations wept as he bid them farewell. After a year's ministry in Georgia he returned to England to find the church doors closed against him. So he took to the fields and at times, twenty thousand or more came to listen. He made fourteen preaching tours of Scotland, and returned seven times to America. Frequently he delivered twenty sermons in one week.

Whitefield believed in Calvin's predestination, and here he and Wesley differed. But the funeral service Wesley took for George was one of unparalleled affection and respect. Other preachers may have been more learned, but none were more eloquent and moving than this former hostelry tapster who found the gospel of justification by faith and took it to the world.

-This article is an extract from Desmond Ford's book, *The coming World Wide Calvary; Christ versus Antichrist, 2009.* pp. 134-137. 

THE COMING WORLDWIDE CALVARY

by Desmond Ford

The most important New Testament prophecy is also the most neglected and the least understood, despite our Lord's command to know and understand it." See Matthew 24:15. "The abomination standing in the holy place launches the tribulation such as never was, bringing a worldwide Calvary that threatens to annihilate the Christian church. This scenario is also discussed by Paul the Apostle in 2 Thessalonians 2 under the title of the "man of sin," the Antichrist who sits in the temple of God at present restrained by the mysterious hinderer. This book is written for the layperson longing to know what the Bible actually teaches about the future and what will happen at the end of time. In it Dr. Ford describes Antichrist's nature and work and clarifies the gospel of Justification by Faith that Antichrist seeks to destroy.

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The Christ event which Christian faith regards, *retrospectively*, as the culmination of history could not be regarded *prospectively* as such a fulfillment.... The Christ was expected to be a triumphant Messiah, and he is in fact a "suffering

servant" who does not bring the struggle between good and evil to a triumphant conclusion. Instead, the drama of his life reveals the nominally "righteous" are involved in the crucifixion, and that the only resolution of the variance between God and man was for God to take the sins of man upon himself. Thus the suffering Messiah became, in the eyes of faith, a clue to the mystery of the mercy and justice of God, and the atonement became the real content of the revelation. On these grounds the Christ event was recognized to be the "end" of history, not in the sense of its 'finis' but as its 'telos.' History would go on, and human pride and arrogance would create unimaginable evils. But nothing would surprise or dismay the person who had penetrated to the mystery by the help of this key.

-Reinhold Niebuhr: *The Self and the Dramas of History*.