

# Righteous Grace

by Horatius Bonar

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the righteousness of God's love and the necessity of the cross in the work of Christ to satisfy the conscience and provide a righteous pardon.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 85:10, Isaiah 53:5, John 1:16, Romans 3:26, Romans 4:5, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Peter 5:10

**Topics:** "Righteousness", "Grace"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes that God's grace is rooted in His righteousness, highlighting that true forgiveness is not merely an act of love but must also align with divine justice. He warns against a superficial understanding of grace that overlooks the necessity of Christ's sacrifice, which satisfies both God's holiness and the sinner's conscience. Bonar explains that the righteousness of God is essential for genuine peace, as it assures the sinner that their guilt is truly addressed through Christ's atonement. The sermon underscores that this righteous grace is freely given, independent of human merit, and is available to all who believe. Ultimately, Bonar reassures that through faith, believers can fully embrace this righteous grace and the peace it brings.

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## Transcript

We have spoken of God's character as "the God of all grace." [14] We have seen that it is in "tasting that the Lord is gracious" that the sinner has peace. [15]

But let us keep in mind that this grace is the grace of a righteous God; it is the grace of one who is Judge as well as Father. Unless we see this we shall mistake the gospel, and fail in appreciating both the pardon we are seeking, and the great sacrifice through which it comes to us. No vague forgiveness, arising out of mere paternal love, will do. We need to know what kind of pardon it is; and whether it proceeds from the full recognition of our absolute guiltiness by him who is to "judge the world in righteousness." The right kind of pardon comes not from love alone, but from law; not from good nature, but from righteousness; not from indifference to sin, but from holiness.

The inquirer who is only half in earnest overlooks this. His feelings are moved, but his conscience is not roused. Hence he is content with very vague ideas of God's mere compassion for the sinner's unhappiness. To him human guilt seems but human misfortune, and God's acquittal of the sinner little more than the overlooking of his sin. He does not trouble himself with asking how the forgiveness comes, or what is the real nature of the love which he professes to have received. He is easily soothed to sleep, because he has never been fully awake. He is, at the best, a stony-ground hearer; soon losing the poor

measure of joy that he may have got; becoming a formalist; or perhaps a trifler with sin; or it may be, a religious sentimentalist.

But he whose conscience has been pierced, is not so easily satisfied. He sees that the God, whose favor he is seeking, is holy as well as loving; and that he has to do with righteousness as well as grace. Hence the first inquiry that he makes is as to the righteousness of the pardon which the grace of God holds out. He must be satisfied on this point, and see that the grace is righteous grace, ere he can enjoy it all. The more alive he is to his own unrighteousness, the more does he feel the need of ascertaining the righteousness of the grace which we make known to him.

It does not satisfy him to say, that, since it comes from a righteous God, it must be righteous grace. His conscience wants to see the righteousness of the way by which it comes. Without this it cannot be pacified or "purged;" and the man is not made "perfect as pertaining to the conscience;"[16] but must always have an uneasy feeling that all is not right; that his sins may one day rise up against him.

That which soothes the heart will not always pacify the conscience. The sight of the grace will do the former; but only the sight of the righteousness of the grace will do the latter. Till the latter is done, there cannot be real peace. The hurt is healed slightly, and peace is spoken where there is no peace.[17] The healing of the hurt can only be brought about by speaking peace where there is peace.

Here the work of Christ comes in; and the cross of the Sin-bearer answers the question which conscience has raised, - "Is it righteous grace?" It is this great work of propitiation that exhibits God as "the just God, yet the Saviour;"[18] not only righteous in spite of his justifying the ungodly, but righteous in doing so. It shows salvation as an act of righteousness; nay, one of the highest acts of righteousness that a righteous God can do. It shows pardon not only as the deed of a righteous God, but as the thing which shows how righteous he is, and how he hates and condemns the very sin that he is pardoning.

Hear the word of the Lord concerning this "finished" work. "Christ died for our sins." "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." "He gave himself for us." "He was delivered for our offences." "He gave himself for our sins." "Christ died for the ungodly." "He hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." "Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh." "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." "His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree."

These expressions speak of something more than love. Love is in each of them; the deep, true, real love of God; but also justice and holiness; inflexible and inexorable adherence to law. They have no meaning apart from law; law as the foundation, pillar, keystone of the universe.

But their connection with law is also their connection with love. For as it was law, in its unchangeable perfection, that constituted the necessity for the Surety's death, so it was this necessity that drew out the Surety's love, and gave also glorious proof of the love of him who made him to be sin for us. For if a man were to die for another, when there was no necessity for his doing so, we should hardly call his death a proof of love. At best, such would be foolish love, or, at least, a fond and idle way of showing it. But to die for one, when there is really need of dying, is the true test of genuine love. To die for a friend when nothing less will save him; this is the proof of love! When either he or we must die; and when he, to save us from dying, dies himself, this is love. There was need of a death, if we were to be saved from dying. Righteousness made the necessity. And, to meet this terrible necessity, the Son of God took flesh and died! He died, because it was written, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." [19] Love led him down to the

cradle; love led him up to the cross! He died as the sinner's substitute. He died to make it a righteous thing in God to cancel the sinner's guilt and annul the penalty of his everlasting death.

Had it not been for this dying, grace and guilt could not have looked each other in the face; God and the sinner could not have come nigh; righteousness would have forbidden reconciliation; and righteousness, we know, is as divine and real a thing as love. Without this exception, it would not have been right for God to receive the sinner nor safe for the sinner to come.

But now, mercy and truth have met together; now grace is righteousness, and righteousness is grace. This satisfies the sinner's conscience, by showing him righteous love for the unrighteous and unlovable. It tells him, too, that the reconciliation brought about in this way shall never be disturbed, either in this life or that which is to come. It is righteous reconciliation, and will stand every test, as well as last throughout eternity. The peace of conscience thus secured will be trial-proof, sickness-proof, deathbed-proof, judgment-proof. Realizing this, the chief of sinners can say, "Who is he that condemneth?"

What peace for the stricken conscience is there in the truth that Christ died for the ungodly; and that it is of the ungodly that the righteous God is the Justifier! The righteous grace thus coming to us through the sin-bearing work of the "Word made flesh," tells the soul, at once and forever, that there can be no condemnation for any sinner upon earth, who will only consent to be indebted to this free love of God, which, like a fountain of living water, is bursting freely forth from the foot of the Cross.

Just, yet the Justifier of the ungodly! What glad tidings are here! Here is grace; God's free love to the sinner; divine bounty and goodwill, altogether irrespective of human worth or merit. For this is the scriptural meaning of that often misunderstood word "grace."

This righteous free love has its origin in the bosom of the Father, where the only begotten has his dwelling. It is not produced by anything out of God himself. It was man's evil, not his good, that called it forth. It was not the drawing to the like, but to the unlike; it was light attracted by darkness, and life by death. It does not wait for our seeking, it comes unasked as well as undeserved. It is not our faith that creates it or calls it up; our faith realizes it as already existing in its divine and manifold fullness. Whether we believe it or not, this righteous grace exists, and exists for us. Unbelief refuses it; but faith takes it, rejoices in it, and lives upon it. Yes, faith takes this righteous grace of God, and, with it, a righteous pardon, a righteous salvation, and a righteous heirship of the everlasting glory.

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