



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Whole Story

TIM PAULEY

1 JOHN 1:9 - 2:2

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It may be a stereotype but it is often noted that the world of politics is often all about “spin”. Spin is giving a particular viewpoint, bias, or slant to a story or an event. Spin often involves emphasizing only positive or negative aspects, focusing only on the “good news” or the “bad news”, and failing to tell “the whole story” associated with a presentation.

This may be true in politics, but many people are also guilty of “spin” when it comes to the message of the gospel and the truth of the Bible. Rather than proclaiming a balanced presentation of God’s Word it seems we are often tempted to focus on either only the good news or bad news and “spin” the gospel according to our own understanding.

This is particularly true when it comes to the attributes or characteristics of God. Some focus on the justice, judgment, and anger of God toward sin. Others emphasize the love, grace and mercy of God. Both sides may leave out any mention of the other aspect of God’s character.

God’s justice and grace seem to be irreconcilable. If God is truly just, then our sin must be punished. For God to show us grace and forgive our sin would seem to violate His justice. Yet both these truths are clearly taught in the Bible and we see these diverse qualities most clearly demonstrated in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us.

In our studies this year we have been looking at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ through the lens of what Jonathan Edwards called the “divine excellencies” found in our Savior.¹ Nowhere are the diverse qualities found in Christ more vividly demonstrated than at Calvary when He suffered and died for us for the forgiveness of our sins. For it is at the cross we see most powerfully expressed both the *divine justice* of God and His *mercy and grace*.

AN OLD TESTAMENT ANGRY GOD?

Many perceive the Old Testament as presenting a harsh, vengeful, angry God. Yet the Old Testament clearly portrays God as both merciful and gracious and just:

“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished... Exodus 34:6-7

Others understand the New Testament to present a loving, gracious, merciful God as found in Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus uttered these severe words regarding justice and judgment:

¹³ *“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴ For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*
Matthew 7:13-14

We must realize that God’s Word clearly teaches both. God is a perfectly holy and just God who must punish sin. He is also a God of grace and mercy who forgives sin. We should not “spin” one quality to the detriment of the other. Rather we need to seek to understand and present both. There is no greater aid to help us do this than when we consider how these “diverse excellencies” are brought together at the cross. John gives us a description of this in His first letter:

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. ¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. 1 John 1:9-2:2

Let us briefly see how John demonstrates that the diverse excellencies of justice and grace are brought together in Christ.

BIBLE STUDIES

INTERIM BIBLE STUDY: **TUESDAY, JUNE 17, 12:00 NOON**, TREASURER’S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)

The Whole Picture

GOD'S JUSTICE SATISFIED

John's description takes place in a courtroom setting. We stand before the judge guilty and deserving of just punishment. Amazingly, we have an advocate, a lawyer who goes before the judge on our behalf to plead our case. Because of what Christ did for us, our sins can be forgiven and we can be declared innocent.

John tells us that if we confess our sins, God is **“faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (vs. 9). “Righteous” can be described as “just”. John says God is just in forgiving us and cleansing us from our unrighteousness. If we have all sinned (and we have), and we deserve God's punishment for our sin (and we do), then how can God be just in forgiving our sin? It is because Jesus Christ satisfied God's justice when He suffered and died on the cross in our place. Peter shared how Christ **“...Died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...”** (1 Peter 3:18) In 1 John 1:7 we read that **“...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all unrighteousness”**. John says that Jesus is **“the propitiation for our sins”**. This is a word we rarely use which simply means that Jesus satisfied the justice of God on our behalf. In forgiving our sin, God does not ignore or overlook justice. Because of Christ, justice has been served and the penalty or sentence has been fully carried out.

Part of our “spin” of the message of the gospel is our failure to recognize the seriousness of our sin. Our sin – my sin – was so serious that it required the death of Jesus Christ to pay its penalty. We try to spin it to ourselves thinking “I'm better than...” or “I'm basically a good person”. But when we look at Jesus suffering and dying on the cross, we see the severe penalty God's justice requires. This is when God's grace truly becomes amazing to us.

GOD'S GRACE DEMONSTRATED

Christ suffering and dying in our place to pay the just penalty for our sin is a tremendous demonstration of God's grace and mercy. It is something we do not deserve and cannot earn. Paul reminds us it is **“...by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9**

Even though God is perfectly holy and just, He can forgive our sin because of what Christ did for us when He satisfied that justice of God when He bore the punishment for our sin on the cross. One pastor described it this way:

Having already suffered so much, He can now plead our case before God in perfect righteousness. He can be an Advocate before the throne of divine justice on behalf of guilty, hopeless sinners, and He can gain their full acquittal, because justice has been completely satisfied through His perfect sacrifice.²

KNOWING AND TELLING THE WHOLE STORY

This year we have looked at many of the “diverse excellencies” found in Jesus Christ. None are more diverse or more excellent than the justice of God and the grace of God demonstrated at the cross.

As we seek to understand the Bible and apply it to our own lives, we must work to assure we do not “spin” the truth as we may focus on or neglect various aspects of its teaching. When we seek to share its message with others, we must be careful to tell the “whole story”, especially when it comes to God's justice and His grace. In his farewell address to the elders from the church at Ephesus, Paul reminded them that during his time with them, **“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”** (Acts 20:27 ESV) He sought to faithfully proclaim to them the whole story, the complete message of God's Word. We should seek to do the same.

CONCLUSION:

- **HAVE YOU EVER COME TO THE PLACE WHERE YOU RECOGNIZED YOUR GUILT BEFORE A HOLY AND JUST GOD? HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE GRACE OF GOD IN FINDING FORGIVENESS OF SIN THROUGH REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN HIM?**
- **ARE YOU CAREFUL TO UNDERSTAND AND PRESENT THE “WHOLE STORY” OF THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S WORD? THIS TAKES SOME WORK TO STUDY AND UNDERSTAND THE WHOLE STORY OF THE SCRIPTURES.**

¹Edwards, Jonathan. *The Admirable Conjunction of Divine Excellencies in Christ Jesus*. <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/admirable.html>

²Johnson, Phil. *The Paradox of Divine Justice*.

<http://www.thegracelife.pulpit.com/Sermons.aspx?code=2012-02-26-PJ>