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Justice or Grace

“Justice and judgment *are* the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.” Psalm 89:14 - צדק ומשפט מכון כסאך חסד ואמת - יקדמו פניך:

1. “*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne*” - צדק ומשפט מכון כסאך

The word for *foundation* is *makon*, מִכּוֹן, and was used in many applications. The foremost thing was it referred to where one placed something. It could refer to where one placed furniture to where one put a building, that is its foundation.

The foundation of a building is the thing on which it sits and is actually the most important part of the building. Great care is taken to make sure that the foundation is level and firmly rooted in the soil. If not, then the building can shift from one side to the other, or as one goes up in stories, then the building will lean to one side and can topple.

All governments are based upon certain ideas and principles; these become the foundation for the rule of those governments. In America our form of government is a constitutional republic. When the framers of the constitution put pen to paper they sought to avoid the problems of Europe, and so based our constitution on many fantastic principles centered around freedom, limited government and personal responsibility, and on the teachings of the Bible. **So a foundation is the thing upon which a government rests. It speaks of the type of rule, or the qualities of rule found in that government.**

In this passage we have the word *throne*, כִּסֵּא, *kisse*, which tells us the type of government that Yahweh rules over the earth and the universe, it's a monarchy. Now the earth has seen all kinds of rule; the rule of dictators, the rule of tyrants, oligarchy, the rule of the few, monarchies the rule of a king, democracies, the rule of the mob and republics, the rule of principle.

(No, I am not in favor of democracies. I prefer republics. The difference? Basically what the two boil down to is a democracy is a rule by the majority, and history has always shown that the majority of people are rarely principled people, and usually constitute a mob mentality. I prefer a republic, the rule by principle. Even better, a monarchy, but it depends upon the quality and integrity of the monarch. History has shown, this too, is a rare quality in people, as evidenced by Europe.)

Aside from all that, the reference to the throne here in the passage shows us what kind of

government that heaven is ruled by, that it is a monarchy with Jesus Christ as its king. It is a kingdom, king plus dom, dom being a reference to its dominion, the subjects of his dominion, and that its dominion is ruled over by a king.

So the throne of God's rule over the universe as its king rests upon, or is based upon two things: his personal righteousness and his justice. **Righteousness and justice are the basis of Yahweh's rule over angels and men!**

In the courts of men there is the law and then there is the concept of justice. Justice is the aspect of establishing and enforcing the law. The law is the basis for justice. What the law says must be done, justice makes sure that it is done. But man's laws are only as good as the character and integrity of those who pass the laws.

The word for *justice* here is *mishpat*, מִשְׁפָּט. *Mishpat* refers to the entire judicial procedure from the charges made, to the reviewing of the evidence in a trial, which includes testimony, to the decision rendered in the case, to the handing down of the sentence, which is the consequence of the decision, to the actual punishment.

The term **justice** speaks of the activity in upholding what is right, just and fair. The **verdict** is the finding, or conclusion, or opinion derived from the trial. The **sentence** states the penalty that is to be meted out. The **punishment** is the actual carrying out of the sentence. And the term **judgment** refers to the entire process.

So we see that the foundation of God's rule over the universe; the thing upon which his government is established is righteousness and justice. Justice being the activity of God in making sure that his righteousness is upheld.

Now in the affairs of men, their laws become the basis by which "justice" is put into action. But in the area of God's rule of justice the thing by which all decisions are made, and all actions performed is **his personal righteousness!**

The word for *righteousness* is *tsedeq*, צְדָקָה. It is both a quality that God possesses and the standard by which he judges the universe. Justice is the acting out of what righteousness demands.

It means that God possesses the quality of being absolutely right and exists in that state. It also implies that if there is a right, there is its opposite quality of being bad or evil. It also tells us that God is in the **absolute right**.

When it comes to man we find varying degrees of human "righteousness", which in the eyes of a holy God, are as filthy rags to him. But when it comes to God his character of righteousness is of such an infinite quality that man cannot comprehend it. He even "finds fault with his holy angels" is a way of expressing that as holy as the angels are that he created, they cannot compare to his holiness.

God is absolutely pure in every respect. He is absolutely separated from every form of sin

or evil, no matter how small it may seem to us. And God not only possesses that absolute qualities of righteousness and holiness, which he has possessed from eternity past, he lives by them, judges by them and demands them in the universe of angels and men that he has created.

So we have God's personal righteousness and his justice being the foundation of God's throne. Righteousness is the standard of God's rule over men and angels; justice is the acting out, or the process of judging by which he implements his righteous rule.

Now what does all this means to us? We have been told, and it is certainly true, that God is a God of love. The problem most people have is that they take that attribute of God and run with it. They think that because God is a God of love he deals with the world on the basis of love!

But that is not the case. We notice in the passage that **the foundation of God's throne, which tells us what the basis of his ruling heaven and earth is, is not love, but righteousness and justice!** God deals with angels and men based upon the standard of his own personal righteousness, which is absolute, and upon his justice, which is perfect.

We see this concept of God's righteousness and justice manifested all the way through the Bible from Adam, who, when he sinned, brought the entire human race into a state of condemnation; to the ancient world that was destroyed by the flood; to ancient Israel that was judged and scattered by God after many years of sin and rebellion against God; and in Jesus Christ who had to die to pay the penalty for all our sins!

2. "Grace and truth precede thee" - חסד ואמת יקדמו פניך :

Now we have the introduction of something else alongside the righteousness and justice of God; the two concepts of grace and truth. We notice that his throne was not based upon grace and truth, even though they were always there, but upon his righteousness and justice; the standards by which he governs the universe.

We must remember that *Yahweh* is God, and he is eternal, loving, gracious, kind, gentle, compassionate, merciful and so many other wonderful things that make up his essence as the eternal God. But we must also remember that *Yahweh* governs the universe; he rules over a domain of many billions of created beings. And that, as the ruler over all, it is imperative that he is fair, impartial and just.

And God's justice is absolutely perfect because it is based upon the standard of his absolutely perfect righteousness. The problem is when it comes to man, his weakness, his fallen nature and rebelliousness. In view of who and what we are there is no way that we could please his absolute righteous nature and no way we could escape his justice. So what could be done about this? God found a way that he could deal with man based upon his grace, rather than upon his justice. And he did this in the person of Jesus Christ who satisfied the Father's righteousness on the cross.

We notice in Hebrews 4:16 it says, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" Grace is there waiting anyone who will come to God for his grace.

And, like in the Old Testament passage, it is still a throne of righteousness and justice. Grace is there under the New Covenant and grace was there under the Old Covenant. The difference being that even though the righteousness of *Yahweh* was completely satisfied by the atoning death of Christ on the cross; the nature of his rule, though, has never changed; he still rules the universe based upon his righteousness and justice.

We also want to note here that there are only two options for man, and this means Christians as well. **There is either the grace of God or his justice. These are the only two options that we have.** God has satisfied his righteousness, thereby his justice does not need to come into play, by the death of his righteous son, but has not set his righteousness and justice aside! They are still there! It's just that man, now, has the opportunity to have *Yahweh* deal with him on the basis of grace!

What does that mean to us? Everything! Man can give up his religiosity, or trying to be good, for salvation, for God will forgive his sins and give him entrance into heaven based upon grace. What man could not do for himself God is now free to do for him based upon his grace. In justice God has to give back to each man according as his actions deserved, as judged by an holy God. But in grace God is free to do things for man that he could never do for himself!

This impacts ever aspect of our lives. Man struggles to eke a living out of life, but in grace God will provide for him. He wants to have a spouse, children, a place to live, something worthy and constructive to do in life. In grace God will do this for him. We're faced with trials, sufferings, health problems, old age, etc., and we worry, fret and stew over how we're going to get through it all, but God, in his grace, has a perfect provision for each one of these things. We wrestle with our problems of the soul, how to handle them, how to keep them from tearing us up inside, but God, in his grace, has the perfect solution for all of them too!

But remember, it's based upon grace! And when we talk about **grace**; we're talking about **God himself doing things for us**. But if we want God to do something for us, remember, it will be him doing it in his way! If we want God to solve our problems, then we're going to have to utilize his solutions!

Our main problem is that **our pride gets in the way!** It's our pride that keeps us from going to God in the first place to ask him for his help. And it's our pride that causes us to turn away from the solution that God has when we see it!

One thing that will help us, though, other than "*humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God*", is being able to see that God rules in righteousness and justice, these will never go away, but that **he also has a grace provision for us!**

The word for *grace* in this passage is *chesed*, חֶסֶד, which is translated in various Bibles as grace, love, lovingkindness and other words along that line. The reason why is that **all these ideas are found in *chesed*.**

We have said that grace is the undeserved, unmerited, unearned favor of God. And it's true. We can't work for it; we don't merit it; and we don't deserve it. True, true, true. We have said that it is a favor of God, and it is. We have said that it is a gift from God, and it is. All these things are true.

But, in addition to, and beyond all these things, it speaks of the infinite love of God! How can we understand this kind of love? We can't! It's beyond our capacity of comprehension, but it's still there nonetheless. And more than that, it's how God wants to deal with all of us! All these things make up his grace.

We need to make one thing clear; God loves his righteousness and he loves his justice. But he knows that there is no way that sinful man could ever satisfy them to be blessed; and they would have to be satisfied before God could ever do anything for us. So he has established a grace plan of blessing for all of us whereby we can receive his blessings!

This grace plan of blessing is brought out, even under the Old Covenant, right here in this passage. *"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne, grace and truth precede thee."*

We want to notice that grace and truth are connected together in the concept of blessing from the throne of God. They are two different concepts, but they are connected to one another, that is, the one comes with the other. **Grace comes with truth and this is the first thing believers need to understand.**

The word for truth is *emeth*, אֱמֶת. *Emeth* refers to the truth of God's Word; it refers to Bible Doctrine, the teaching of the Word of God. God's grace does not flow to us based upon our human good, or our religiosity, the works we get involved in, our good intentions, our being sorry, or our emotionalism, or our fanciness, or anything else that we can do in our humanity. **God's grace comes to us based upon our attitude toward Bible Doctrine!**

"Precede thee", or *"go before thy face"*, as the KJV has it is, or, *"go before you"*, *qadam* and *paniyim*, יִקְדָּמוּ פָּנֶיךָ, is how many of the translations have rendered this passage. Found in the intensive piel stem, *yeqadmu*, it has the idea of interpersonal relationships between God and an individual.

But the ancient Near Eastern background for the word had the idea of the divine attributes surrounding the king as "court servants". They were there with him, along with his majesty and his rule over his people.

Grace and truth are put in the sense of the messengers that a king would send out before him. The idea is not so much one that grace and truth are standing before God in his presence, but one that they, like real messengers, take an active role by going out before him to the people with a message from the king.

Put it like this. A king has brought his army before a nation that is at war with him. The king and his army are now on the border of the rebel nation and are so formidable a force that there is no way that the rebel nation can withstand him. The king has been offended, the concept of righteousness, and is now going to go to war against the offending nation, the concept of justice and judgment.

But, before the king attacks the nation, he sends forth two messengers with a message from the king. If the offending nation welcomes the messengers, believes and heeds their message from the king, then the king's wrath will be turned away and there will be peace.

This is the same idea as we have in this passage. God rules over the affairs of nations, governments and men out of his righteousness and justice. But before he deals with man, including Christians, he sends forth his grace and truth as messengers.

Now here enters in the important connection between the two. **Grace and truth go together; they are inseparable.** If we want grace from God, then we have to receive the truth from God, that is, we have to be positive to Bible Doctrine!

But, sadly, this is lacking in so many churches today. They have their programs, the musical extravaganzas, the stage productions, entertainment, things that tickle the emotions, but the one thing they are so sadly lacking is the sound teaching of the Word of God. If, by reckless chance, they do have a man with the Pastor-Teacher gift who is capable of exegeting and teaching the Word of God, you can be sure he will get second billing after the dog and pony show.

You say, not true! Really. Let's ask the average church, if all these "ministries" were shut down permanently, and the only thing they would find when they came to church on Sunday was just a Pastor teaching God's Word, how many people would come back? Or, how long would it be until he was replaced by a new stage director?

The trend in Christianity for some years has been toward the "Disneyland" approach to get people into the church, as if that justifies anything. The only reason for people to come to church is to receive the sound teaching of the Word of God. Why? For many reasons, to grow in grace, to grow in the knowledge of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, to become competed in our new natures, to glorify God.

But one of the main reasons is found right here; it's so we can receive the grace of God in our lives. Becoming a grace believer, (although all believers are saved by grace, not all believers are grace believers), means that one wants to live the life of grace that God has for them; they want all the grace that God has for them. To do that means that they need to be under the teaching of his Word. **And to do that they have to attend a church that teaches the Word!** Programs and entertainment will not do the job.

To put this simply; to put it clearly; to put this in a way that everyone can understand; **if we reject the teaching of Bible Doctrine, then we are rejecting the grace of God! If we reject the application of the teaching of the Word to our lives in whatever areas it may apply, then, once again, we are rejecting the grace of God!**

The term, the grace of God, **speaks of what God can and will do for us in his grace.** **Grace** is the door, the channel, **the basis** by which God can help us and bless us in our lives. But it is still God doing it all. So, when we ask God for advice, or the wisdom on what to do in a given situation, and he gives it to us, it will be **his** advice.

When we come to God in our suffering, or our desperation, in our misery of soul, when we have no answers, no solution and we have no one to turn to but God and he answers our prayer, he does so in grace, but it is still **his solution** to the problem. Our problem is that often, due to our own pride, we reject it. I guess what we want to hear so much of the time is for God's answers to be the ones we have, which never worked in the first place.

Now we come down to the importance of Bible Doctrine. Bible Doctrine teaches us the mind of Christ and it is the source for the infinite wisdom of God. In Bible doctrine we have all of life's answers. And in Bible doctrine will we find the solutions for our problems; if we will avail ourselves of it, and if we will apply it to our lives. If we reject Bible doctrine, we are rejecting the grace of God and the solutions for our problems. Now do you see the connection that grace has to truth or Bible Doctrine? Our point of contact with God is his truth!

Before God deals with us on the basis of his righteousness and justice, as he does with all his creatures, he sends out to us his grace and truth. Now what will we do with them? Will we accept them or reject them? If we say yes to his grace for our lives, then we will be positive to and sitting under the teaching of his Word. For, to embrace his grace we must also embrace his truth.

Grace also means that it will be done God's way. Not our way with God's help; not our way excluding God's way; not God's way in cooperation with our way, but God's way all the way through! *"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."* Romans 11:6

The grace of God excludes our ideas and activities, and our ideas and activities exclude the grace of God **and there is no middle ground!** The two are mutually exclusive. So, if we want God to work in our lives, to help us with our problems, to give us the answers we need, then we are going to have to recognize that it will be God's ideas, God's wisdom, God's power and God's solutions all the way through.

God has a grace plan for salvation, but the unsaved try to circumvent that and come up with their own, which God rejects. God has a grace plan for the format of the local church; it's the teaching of his Word, but Christians, in their arrogance, works and legalism, try to circumvent it and come up with their own ideas.

God has a grace plan by which he has ordained all of his people to live by, which includes living by faith, metabolizing Bible Doctrine by faith, living in the filling of the Holy Spirit, living in the new nature, prayer, application of the Word to our life, etc.; things that constitute the spiritual dynamic. But Christians circumvent that by coming up with their own ideas. They resort to moralism, legalism, ritualism, formalism, emotionalism and all other sorts of man made ideas.

Before God deals with a nation, or individuals, in judgment, a function of his righteousness and justice, he always gives them an opportunity for them to be dealt with in his grace. So he sends to them his Word. If they receive his Word and abide by it, then his judgment will be avoided. But, if they reject his Word or rebel against it, as we're presently seeing in America, then they have rejected his grace.

God wants to deal with us in grace! He had his Son die for our sins, why wouldn't he want to do all things for us? If he has done the most for us, it only stands to reason that he is more than willing to do anything less than that. But it has to be by grace, that's what we have to understand. *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* Romans 8:32

Many Christians are concerned, and rightly so, about the downward spiral of America. They refer to the passage of 2 Chronicles 7:14 as the solution to America's problem. *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."*

The problem is that they take this passage and give it their own legalistic spin. They have people repenting, feeling sorry for their sins and going down the path of moralism. When the thrust of the passage is about God's people humbling themselves under the authority and teaching of His Word and having a change of mental attitude about Bible doctrine.

There is more religiosity and religious fervor in the churches today than we have seen in a long time; all accompanied by a moral degeneracy. Yet the nation is still going downhill. Why? Because the believers in Christ are not positive to the teaching of Bible Doctrine!

How many Christians attend churches that are grace oriented, that have no programs and the focus of those congregations are centered around the sound, accurate teaching of God's Word? Compare that with the Christians attending mega-churches and para-church organizations with the stage productions, musical extravaganzas, programs, etc.?

If we want God to work with us in our lives, and if we want his blessings, then we're going to have to see that all that will come to us on the basis of his grace, and we will also need to see that his grace comes to us by applying Bible doctrine to our life situations.

Pastor Mike

