

1026 There is love in righteousness in the Old Testament (Verses refer to those in NASB unless otherwise specified, and by Whirlwind.)

Let us first see that righteousness is one of foundations of His throne. Next, we see that both the New Testament and the Old Testament consistently say that you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Then we use Book Jonah to illustrate group love. Regarding individual love, we use Jacob as an example, who has both worldly and heavenly blessings. He cheated due to wanting to get hold of God. Although he got a penalty, he still worshipped God. Finally, we'll discuss one question which is often asked in reading the Old Testament, "Is it really very cruel when Israelites entered the land of Cannon?"

In Psalms 89:14, it says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Lovingkindness and truth go before You." We can find a similar verse in Psalms 97:2, "...Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." Yes, righteousness is one foundation of God's throne. In the Old Testament, there are many places talking about righteousness. For example, there are 49 times it is talked about in Psalms. It is impossible for us to talk all of them in this short article. For the details, we need to read the Bible. Among them, even the adversaries of Israel knew that righteousness is the foundation of God, as said in Jeremiah 50:7, "All who came upon them have devoured them; And their adversaries have said, 'We are not guilty, Inasmuch as they have sinned against the Lord who is the habitation of righteousness, Even the Lord, the hope of their fathers.'" God's love and His righteousness are among His characteristics. There is forever no change, from the beginning to the end. But in the domain of time, there is an order. Words becoming flesh to make propitiation for the sins of the people has to happen first, so that His righteousness is fulfilled. We believe God's love through the Holy Spirit is shed aboard in us. So, for us the righteousness is needed before the love but due to the Agape love. For God, in order to carry out His love, He has first to fulfill His righteousness.

The teaching about love is consistent in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, it is said in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love (H157) the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love (H157) your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:18) This is said the same in the New Testament, "And He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'" (Matthew 22:37-40)

In the of Book Jonah, it says, "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the

violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish." When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it."(Jonah 3:5-10) The Old Testament says this point clearly in Ezekiel 33:14-16, "But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live." Isn't it because "... God so loved the world, ..." (John 3:16) and "...there is no partiality with God." (Romans 2:11) as the same words mentioned several times in the New Testament, right?

In the Old Testament, there are many descriptions regarding the personal love, and we only use some events encountered by Jacob to explain such points. In the events Jacob encountered, we see not only worldly blessings, but also spiritual blessings. Regarding the worldly blessings in Genesis 32:9-10, "Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,' I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies." Further regarding heavenly blessings, it says in Genesis 32:28-30, "He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." We know that Jacob is not really a good person in the aspect of human. Among the other things, it says clearly in the Bible that he did cheat as described in Genesis 27:36, "Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." ..." As a matter of fact, we have to truly know that we are not necessarily better than Jacob or David, if we are in the same situations. This is why the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:13 says, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. ..."

Although he tried to do everything to take hold of God, which pleased God, but he indeed got punished as described in Genesis 37:34-35, "So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him." It is really not an easy one. In his final days, he still worshipped the God as described in Genesis 47:29-31, "When the time for Israel to die drew near, ...Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed." And "When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people." (Genesis 49:33) The Bible says boldly in Malachi 1:2, "...declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob.""

Finally, some people may think that the God was very cruel when Israelites entered Canaan. Yes, it is true in the aspects of human as clearly described in Deuteronomy 20:17, "But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the Lord your God has commanded you." The reason seems simple enough and was given in Deuteronomy 20:18, "so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the Lord your God." Although the God so commanded, the God knows in advance that Israelites would not utterly destroy them if you believe that the God is omniscient. In Judges 3:5-6, it says, "The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods." If He already knows in advance, why has such a commandment? In fact, the Bible says clearly in Judges 3:4, "They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses." In other words, such a concept is consistent with what stated at the beginning in Genesis. Think of why the God put "...the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."(Genesis 2:9) Like what we shared before, the God knows but we don't since "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"(Jeremiah 17:9) We often truly can know it only after we have done it!

Most likely, people will naturally ask if this is too much in the aspect of human as stated in Joshua 6:21, "They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." In particular, babies didn't do anything yet. Actually, the God gave those people in Cannon more than four hundred years to repent [1] as described in advance of the event in Genesis 15:13-16, "God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."" They didn't repent obviously; otherwise, God would forgive them just like what He did as described in the Book of Jonah. In those periods of time, how many babies were born? In this environment, do you think that they will grow up differently? God is omniscient, which includes knowing things in advance. Doesn't He know how these babies will turn out? And as we mentioned before, not all of them are utterly destroyed. In the aspect of human, the flood in the era of Noah is worse as stated in Genesis 6:7, "The Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."" We must see that the judgement is really due to what humans did to themselves. The reason for flood is stated in Genesis 6:5, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Although the God has absolute authority [2], we can see that He is full of mercy and grace. Let us take a look at one example. David killed Uriah the Hittite by using the sword of the

sons of Ammon. (refer to 2 Samuel 11:6-25) But the God has mercy and grace, He forgave his sin whose penalty should be death. (refer to 2 Samuel 12:1-14) The Bible is written in this way normally. It talks general principles, but often has special cases. In this case, the general principle is what the Law says. We are forbidden to kill. Like in the English grammar, there are often exceptions in general rules. Let us use the baptism as another example to illustrate this point. We can see the general principle using the fact that Jesus was baptized as our example. So, if situations allow, we need to be baptized. The special case is that the criminal nailed to the cross had no chance to be baptized but went to Paradise with Jesus (refer to Luke 23:39-43) We cannot use this example as an excuse to not baptize.

Let us use another example to show the God is full of mercy and grace. As stated in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Therefore, His will is for all to come to repentance. We need to know and acknowledge that the God has the absolute authority, and is full of mercy and grace.

Some related verses

[1] Exodus 12:40-41, "Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

[2] The God has the absolute authority, "For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.""(Romans 9:15) And "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." (1 Corinthians 12:11)