

Articles and Sermons :: Misrepresenting God -bregle**Misrepresenting God -bregle - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/5/2 16:18****Misrepresenting God***by Samuel L. Bregle*

There was a speaker who preached on the mercy of God until it seemed there was nothing in God but mercy. I fear he misrepresented God. Such misrepresentation is easy, and to people who do not think deeply and who do not want to take life seriously, it is pleasant, but it is unspeakably dangerous.

If we are to win souls and save our own, we must not distort the picture of God's character which we hold up to view. It is life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3), but it must be the true and holy God as He is, and not some false god who conforms to our poor, warped human desires and opinions.

Some religious teachers misrepresent God by making Him utterly savage and cruel. Thus men are embittered against God until they feel there is no hope of His mercy.

Others misrepresent God by making Him appear as a sort of weak God who indulges sinners with spineless sympathy and looks upon worldlings and triflers and lukewarm professors with weak, sentimental pity. Nothing can be further from the truth concerning God.

We find God Himself bitterly rebuking those who, living in sin, thought He did not disapprove their ways. He sets before them a list of their sins (Psa. 50:17-20) and then says, "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver" (vv. 21-22).

The truth lies between these extremes. There is mercy in God, but it is mingled with severity. There is wrath in God, but it is tempered with mercy.

The great soul-winners from Bible times till now have recognized this. They have held an even balance between the goodness and the severity of God because the Bible does so, and the Bible, of all the innumerable books written, is the only one which gives us an authoritative representation of God.

Nature reveals to us the goodness and the severity of God. Fire will not only bake our food and bless us, but it will also burn us. Water will not only quench our thirst and refresh us, but if we trifle with it, it will drown us. If we recognize God's ways of working in nature and take heed and obey, we shall find nature's laws most kind and helpful, but if we neglect or refuse to obey, we shall find them most terrible and destructive.

If we want to know God in all the richness of His character and all the fullness of His self-revelation, we must study the Bible and compare Scripture with Scripture.

The Bible tells us of God's unutterable love leading Him, in mercy, to seek sinners, but His righteousness requires of the sinner penitence, faith, separation from evil, and obedience to His will. Various Bible descriptions show how God holds an even balance between His mercy and His judgments.

"Behold, therefore the goodness and severity of God," writes Paul, "on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness; otherwise," he says, (showing that God's goodness does not destroy His severity), "thou also shalt be cut off." We must beware! Then he adds a touch of tenderness—making clear how even in His severity God waits to show mercy— "And they also," though they have been cut off, "if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (Rom. 11:22-23).

Paul also writes, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith." And then he adds, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:16-18).

And again he writes, "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil...but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile, for there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:4-11).

The saving mercy of God revealed in the Scriptures is invariably set over against the wrath of God, as the great mountains are set over against the deep seas.

The writer of Hebrews says of Jesus, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him..." (Heb. 7:25); while Paul writes of some upon whom "wrath is come...to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16).

There is, then, an uttermost salvation for all who "trust and obey," and an uttermost woe for all who go on in selfish unbelief and worldliness and sin. Truly "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7), and He is a God of judgment.

Again, we find Jesus keeping this even balance when He says that those who hear His sayings and do them are like those who build upon a rock, against which rain and floods and winds cannot prevail, while those who hear and do not obey are like those who build upon sand, which will be swept away by rain and floods and wind (Matt. 7:24-27). And again, He says that the wicked shall "go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46).

Jesus further tells of the shut door at the marriage, with some on the inside with their Lord, and some on the outside, rejected and unknown; of the joy of their Lord into which good and faithful servants enter, and the outer darkness, into which the wicked and slothful are cast.

We find John the Baptist faithful to this great truth. He cries out, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

Likewise, all through the Old Testament this even balance is maintained. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment...Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimsons, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword..." (Isa. 1:16-20).

These Bible word pictures show us that no one word, not even the sweet word mercy will sum up the rich and manifold character of God. The Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but it also says, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).

To penitent hearts who trust in Jesus, God will be found to be rich in mercy; but He will defend the moral and spiritual order of His universe by uttermost penalties against those who go on proudly, carelessly, or wickedly in their own ways.

Our only hope is in the wounds of Jesus, and the shelter of His blood. There, and only there, shall we find mercy.