

Saturday 18 April 2020

*Jer.8, 7: "Even the stork in the heavens knows her time, and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keep the time of their coming, but my people know not the rules of the LORD."*

*Tit.2, 14: "Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us of all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."*

The astonishment expressed in Jer.8,7 ought to make us wonder whether we see things as they really are. Because it suggests that in the matter of God's law (doing what is right and good, being in a right standing with God) we don't see things as they are but as we want them to appear.

There are those to whom God says: "You appear to know my law, but you don't because you don't keep it. When you appear to be lawful you are in fact lawless." Who are they? The criminals? The out-and-out doers of evil? But they don't have to worry about appearances! No, it's they who by the law of moral and ethical conduct judge that and whether they are good, and how good or not they are; people who derive their self-worth or -value before God by what they do, by how they perform – by works of the law.

At this we may indeed be not a little astonished! Here I am, thinking I am doing well or at least that I ought to be told that I am, and, if anything, be given a bit of grace to help me along! Should I appear lawless to be in fact lawful?!

Be astonished. The law serves a self-confirming move whereby God is told, in effect: "I don't need your gift of righteousness as though I was utterly void of it, I'm managing fine" (pride), or: "Your gift cannot (must not?) prevail where I so obviously fail" (despair). Either way the law is used to maintain self's autonomous position over (against) God by making righteousness depend on works (what I do) rather than God's gift (what He does). But this is, and remains, a righteousness in nothing but appearance and is never, in no wise, the fulfilment of what God' law actually wants and demands.

Only through the suffering and death (the cross) of the One who fulfilled all of the law do we see things as they really are. In *this* light the law reveals that I am not what I appear to myself but that I need a righteousness *other* than my own. Here I become the sinner that I am (I appear lawless, as in truth I am, that I may in fact become lawful) and ready to repent and receive the righteousness of Christ – God's gift of grace.