

The Problem of Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] Not punishing people for their sins.

How is that possible? There's a real problem when God begins to forgive people for their sins. A real problem emerges. And that problem begins just after the Garden of Eden.

When God clothes Adam and Eve. It proceeds on as God continues to forgive people. Noah is a sinner. I mean, Noah messes up royally after the flood, and yet God does not strike Noah dead. In fact, Noah continues on. And God blesses Noah's descendants. Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, he wasn't perfect by any means.

He lied multiple times saying that his wife was not his wife. Abraham's not perfect. Abraham has issues. And yet, Abraham is not only chosen by God, but all of his sins forgiven.

[1 : 14] How about David? David had lots of problems in his life. I mean, he had a man murdered because he wanted to take that man's wife. That's not the kind of person that you want to put up on a pedestal.

And yet, David cries out to God for forgiveness. And God not only forgave David, but God continued to keep his covenant commitment to David. To bless David's offspring throughout history. It's incredible.

The Old Testament is a testimony to God's continually forgiving sinful people that do not deserve it. And that creates a major problem because God himself is holy.

If forgiveness has never, in your mind, ever posed any sort of problem when you think of God's forgiveness of sins, then one of two things is happening there. Either, on the one hand, you have not really considered the weight of sin.

Just the incredible evil of what sin really is. Or, on the other hand, you have not considered what it means for God himself to be holy and righteous.

[2 : 23] And yet, we have seen Paul now, for three chapters almost, we have seen the Apostle Paul lay those two things side by side. Human sinfulness and divine righteousness.

And they have been butting heads throughout. You may not have noticed it. You may not have seen it. But they have been butting heads the entire time. And now, Paul is finally going to answer the question.

How do you reconcile God's pardoning of sinners with his holiness? How do you do that? Because we not only see God continually forgiving people for their sins throughout the Scriptures, but we also see sinners before God standing before His holiness and recognizing their inability to even stand before Him.

Consider Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. God comes down, His presence is revealed on Mount Sinai, and the people can't even touch the mountain. Why? Because He is holy and they are sinful.

Or, consider another instance with Moses. When he begs to see God's glory, and God says, I will let you catch a glimpse of the backside of my glory, and that in itself was almost too much.

[3 : 36] It almost overwhelmed Moses. Moses came down from the mountain. After seeing God's glory, his face shone so bright that he had to put a veil over. That's just a dim reflection of God's holiness and glory among the people.

Or Isaiah. Isaiah. As Isaiah sees the vision of God in Isaiah chapter 6, and he sees God revealed in His holiness, Isaiah's response is to fall down and cry out, Woe is me, I am undone.

For I am a man of unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips. I cannot, as a sinner, survive in the presence of a holy God. Or even in the New Testament, when just for a moment the disciples get a glimpse of Jesus' true glory, of His holiness displayed in visible fashion on the Mount of Transfiguration, they themselves are sort of starstruck, and they don't know how to respond to that,

and they can't handle that.

Or John in the book of Revelation. He says that he fell down as dead before Christ. Why? Because sinners cannot bear the holiness of God.

We cannot survive in the presence of a holy God. But, so that if forgiveness does not pose a problem in your mind, either one, you have not considered the weight of sin, or you have not considered the greatness of God's righteousness and holiness.

[5 : 01] And yet, Paul has been laboring throughout this letter to show us those two things in conflict with one another. To help us to see God is exalted and lifted up and totally righteous in all that He does, and us as fallen, depraved sinners through and through.

So that when Paul asks the question, is it possible for God, is God unjust? Is God unrighteous? In chapter 3, his answer is, certainly not. May it never be. God is in no way unjust.

He's not an unjust judge. In fact, he goes throughout chapter 2 to help us to see that God is not an unjust judge. He says in chapter 2, verse 6, that God is going to render to every person according to their works, so that God's judgment is just.

It's rendered on a fair, balanced scale. He looks at what we've done, and He renders His judgment. You move down a few verses to chapter 2, verse 11, and we're told that God does not show any partiality.

God's judgment is not informed by anything outside of a fair assessment of your life. It doesn't matter your social background. It doesn't matter your ethnic background.

[6 : 18] It doesn't matter the family that you come from. It doesn't matter the church that you've attended. None of these things count on judgment day. God will render a fair and just judgment. That's the kind of judge that God is, because He is indeed holy and righteous.

And yet, that truth, the truth of God's impartiality, the truth of God's fair judgment, is set within the context of the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel, the good news that our sins can be forgiven.

And so the question becomes, how is that possible? How can that be? How can that be? And the answer to that is, He has sent His Son into the world to take upon Himself the punishment that we deserve.

Last week, we looked at three key words from this paragraph. Okay? If you weren't here last week, you can go online, you can listen to the sermon. But we looked at three key words from this paragraph. We looked at the words justified, redemption, and propitiation.

And we said that to be redeemed is to be bought by God, to be purchased out of slavery. It's Paul using the language of the marketplace.

[7 : 31] Christ has bought us, at the price of His life, out of slavery to sin. And then the word justified, or justification, we said, was the language of the courtroom, in which God declares us to be righteous.

He declares us righteous. We're not righteous, but the judge says that He counts us as being righteous. And that happens, Paul tells us, by faith in Jesus. Because His righteousness is counted as our righteousness when we trust in Him.

And then lastly, we saw the word propitiation, that it refers to, as I said a minute ago, to a sacrifice that removes wrath. So that Jesus comes in, and He becomes a sacrifice in our place to remove the wrath of God.

So that through faith in Christ, we can receive His righteousness, we can be bought out of sin, and our sins can be atoned for through His death.

Now, if you want to tie all three of those terms together under one term, you can use the word substitution. Jesus has been substituted in our place.

[8 : 39] And when you ask the question, why? Why must it be that way? Why must there be a substitute for us? The answer comes back, because God is righteous, and yet He forgives.

That's the answer. Notice how Paul words it. verse 25. God put forward Jesus as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.

This was. So this refers back to God putting forward Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice. This was to show or demonstrate God's righteousness.

So the cross is all about showing and preserving and displaying the righteousness of God. That's what the cross is about. And then he says, because, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins.

That's a simple reality if you read the Old Testament. Catalog all the people that we cataloged a moment ago and just multiply them. All the people throughout the Old Covenant that God had simply forgiven for their sins.

[9 : 58] He passed over their sins. He didn't count their sins against them. It's amazing. Some might say, well, yes, but they had, but they had the sacrificial system.

I mean, they had the temple and they came and they offered sacrifices of sheep and bulls and goats and pigeons and doves and all sorts of other things. They offered sacrifices for their sins to which I would respond.

What does the blood of a goat have to do with your sin? What does the blood of a sheep have to do with your sin? How in the world does you killing an animal at the temple, how does that lead to your forgiveness?

In what sense is justice meted out if you just have to bring one of your animals, have them killed by a priest, and walk away feeling alright? Everything's fine now.

What does the blood of an animal have to do with the forgiveness of your sins? The writer of Hebrews answers that question. By the blood of bulls and goats, no one is able to be forgiven of their sins.

[11 : 08] In fact, the writer of Hebrews says that these things were never, never capable of releasing us from our sins. And he goes on to tell us that all these things, all of these sacrifices were only meant to point us to the one and only sacrifice that could actually accomplish the forgiveness of our sins.

All of them. God, throughout the Old Covenant, had simply passed over the sins of His people. Not punished them.

Not held them liable. not called them to account on the future judgment day. He just passed over them. And the Apostle Paul says that the problem of God's having not punished people for their crimes is solved when He punishes His Son in their place.

That's why Jesus dies on the cross. It's about the preservation and displaying of God's righteousness. God is still the just judge even when He forgives our sins because He does not leave our sins unpunished.

He does not simply forget about our sins. He does not let bygones be bygones. He deals with our sins by voluntarily taking our sins upon Himself and receiving in Himself the punishment that you and I deserve.

[12 : 37] Jesus was punished for David's adultery. Jesus was punished for Abraham's lying. Jesus was punished for Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit.

Jesus was punished for the sins of all of those Old Testament saints. He took upon Himself their guilt and their punishment so that God can no longer be said to have merely passed over their sins. He passed over their sins so that He might outside Jerusalem on a hill pour out His full wrath that those sins deserve on His own Son.

no longer a problem now the problem is solved. God remains righteous and yet He can pass over sins.

But this doesn't have application merely to our understanding of Old Testament saints. God is doing more in the cross than displaying His righteousness in having forgiven sinners in the past.

[13 : 38] Paul says this is how He's able to forgive us today. Notice what he goes on to say in verse 26. It was to show His righteousness at the present time so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

He's not just showing His righteousness in the past in not punishing sinners. He's showing His righteousness in the present in not punishing sinners. At the present time God is still shown to be righteous because of the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

in fact He takes it a step further. He says that this is so that God might be just which is the same word righteous it's the same word in Greek so that He might be righteous and the one who justifies or declares righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

How does God go about preserving His own righteousness when He doesn't count our sins against us? Through the sacrifice of Christ. How does God go about preserving His own righteousness when He declares us righteous?

Through the sacrifice of Christ. It's two tracks running parallel to one another. On the one hand you have the not counting of our sins against us accomplished fully and completely in the death of

Christ.

[15 : 11] And then on the other hand you have the counting of Christ's righteousness for us and in our place. His righteousness credited to our account accomplished throughout His life of righteousness and then finally and fully in His last full act of obedience in this earthly life by submitting to death even on a cross.

Forgiveness is obtained while preserving the righteousness of God. And justification is obtained while preserving the righteousness of God because Jesus Christ lays down His life in our place. And He is the only one. He is uniquely qualified to perform that task. Because consider for just a moment, consider the fact that that our sins deserve infinite punishment.

Because if you do harm to an infinitely good, infinitely beautiful, infinitely glorious being, then the only appropriate punishment is an infinite everlasting punishment.

Is it not? That's why hell lasts forever. That's why hell doesn't last a thousand years. That's why the doctrine of purgatory is a false doctrine. You can't pay for your own sins in a thousand or ten thousand or a million years of purging in purgatory.

[16 : 43] It can't be done because sin is infinitely evil. You can't do it. It can't be done. Hell lasts forever because the punishment necessary for sin against God is infinite punishment.

So, aside from our spending eternity in hell and paying for our own sins throughout all eternity, how is it possible that our sins could be atoned for?

Only one who has an infinite capacity to receive wrath could suffer in our place. You ever wonder why Jesus suffers on the cross for roughly six hours and that's enough to replace an eternity in hell?

You ever think about that? That thought ever occurred to you? How is six hours on a cross equivalent to eternity in hell? How can that substitute for that?

How is that possible? Yes, crucifixion is painful. It was incredibly painful. Yes, Jesus' crucifixion in some ways was even more painful than most other crucifixions, so much so that he did die in only six hours, his beatings having been so severe, his suffering so great.

[18 : 09] But there are more excruciating deaths that you can imagine. They do exist in the world. Peter, after all, was crucified upside down. Why?

That's a little worse than regular crucifixion. The Romans were great. They were masters at perfecting pain through crucifixion. And they were always inventing new ways to increase the torturousness of it.

And there have been others throughout history who have come up with equally painful or even more painful ways to punish people and then kill them. The cross is not effective because the physical pain that Jesus endured upon the cross was of a greater capacity than anything else. That's not it at all. In fact, as Jesus hangs upon the cross, we don't hear him groaning in agony towards the actions of the Roman soldiers.

It's not recorded anywhere in the four Gospels. A lot is recorded about the cross in the Gospels and yet we never hear Jesus uttering on his lips about the painfulness of the nails or the lashings or anything else.

[19 : 22] What we do hear Jesus utter is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Because the cross is effective, because on the cross the very wrath of God the Father is poured out on Jesus.

No torture, no death, being merely physical, is enough to atone for our sins. Infinite wrath must be borne by someone capable of in a finite time bearing infinite wrath.

And only God himself is capable of enduring his own infinite wrath and surviving it. He is the only one capable of doing that.

And so God himself must die on a cross or in some fashion in order to atone for our sins. God must receive in himself his own wrath.

So the Father sends the Son so that the Son might endure the wrath of God. Only a divine being is capable of in a finite amount of time suffering the infinite punishment that you and I deserve for our sins.

[20 : 43] And yet, on the other hand, only a human can atone for human sin. only a man can die for the sins of mankind.

So there is one person in all of history and in all of the universe who is uniquely qualified to be our substitute and to endure our punishment.

It is the God-man, Jesus Christ. God enacts in the midst of history His plan to forgive our sins and credit us righteousness by sending His own Son in the flesh to suffer for us and endure for us His infinite wrath on the cross.

all of that aiming to preserve God's righteousness so that God might display His love toward us and yet never be said to be a partial judge or an unjust judge or an unrighteous God.

This was to show, this was to demonstrate God's righteousness so that He might be just and the one who justifies people.

[22 : 07] But not just everybody, not just anybody, He only justifies those who have faith in Christ. On the cross, Jesus is not simply indiscriminately enduring the wrath of God for every human being on the planet.

Jesus is enduring the wrath of God for all those who trust in Him. Do you see that? Do you follow that? Jesus, the death of Jesus only counts for those who are united to Him by faith.

And the righteousness of Jesus is only credited to those who are united to Him by faith. So that faith is the key to all of this. God longs to display His love for His people.

And yet, that longing can never cancel out His longing to uphold and display His own glory. Do you remember how I have defined God's righteousness for you about four or five times throughout our study of Romans?

I have said that God's righteousness is His own commitment to uphold and preserve His own glory. That's what God's righteousness is. It is His commitment to uphold and display His own glory.

[23 : 33] And sin is doing anything to rob God of the glory that He rightly deserves. It is to fall short, to lack the glory of God.

God. And in the gospel, Paul tells us, the righteousness of God is made known.

God's unswerving, unwavering commitment to uphold and preserve His own glory is made known to us and revealed to us in its entirety in the gospel.

Turn back to Romans chapter 1. I want you to see this. Paul says in verse 17, in the gospel, it refers back to the gospel, for in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

In the gospel, the righteousness of God is put on display in two ways. On the one hand, because God credits to us His own righteousness, the righteousness of His Son.

[24 : 41] God gives to us by virtue of our faith, counts as ours, Christ's own righteousness, and in that way, the righteousness of God is displayed and manifested through the preaching of the gospel, because the gospel is the good news that you may have another's righteousness counted as your own.

That's what the gospel is. And Paul says, in the gospel, God displays that righteousness. But we need to say more than that. Because God not only displays His righteousness by crediting righteousness to us, God displays His righteousness by upholding His own righteous character. And in this way, only by sending His uniquely qualified Son, both God and man, only by sacrificing Him upon the cross, only by pouring out His wrath upon Him, can God's righteousness be preserved and God pass over our refusal to give Him the glory that He deserves.

And all of that happens by faith in Jesus and in no other way. Let's pray. to Him