

## THE MOST IMPORTANT PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE

### *Discover God's Grace Study Series*

#### Study #4 - Read Romans 3:19-26

Previously, we looked at the fact that we are justified before God “freely” as a result of the “redemption” paid by Jesus Christ (vs.24). We are pronounced ‘fully forgiven and perfectly righteous’ by God, because He offered up Christ “as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood” which is received by faith only (vs.25). Salvation is offered as a free gift because it was purchased for us with “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18). There is another side of the cross, however, that is often overlooked. The cross demonstrates God’s justice.

#### F. The Cross Demonstrates God’s Ultimate Justice (Romans 3:25-26)

(vs.25b-26) “...**He did this to demonstrate His righteousness** [His perfect justice], **because in His forbearance** [His patient restraint] **He had left the sins committed beforehand** [the sins committed before the cross] **unpunished—he did it to demonstrate His righteousness** [His perfect justice] **at the present time** [the time of the cross], **so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.**” (NIV)

Note: God’s justice refers to His *fair evaluation and appropriate punishment* of all that is unfair, unrighteous and ungodly. Unlike man’s justice, God’s justice is always completely unbiased because it is based on His perfect knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Whenever God exercises His wrath toward sin, or sinners, it is always right, fully deserved and equitable (the punishment is always *equal to* the crime or sin committed). This means that His judgment is never too harsh or too lenient. As a result, no one has ever, or ever will be, treated unfairly by God. It is also important to understand that any compromise of justice or fairness by God would be a violation of His divine nature and totally inconsistent with *who He is*. Because He is all-righteousness, all-knowing and all-powerful, He must judge all sin and evil.

Q1. In the verses above, Paul says God offered Christ as a sacrifice of atonement “to demonstrate His justice”. How do you think Christ’s death demonstrates the justice of God? (*If you need additional insight into this question see Isaiah 53:4-12 below.*)

(Isaiah 53:4-12) “**Surely He** [Christ] **took up our pain and bore our suffering** [the pain and suffering we deserved], **yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace** [with God] **was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed** [from sin]. **We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him** [Christ] **the iniquity of us all...By oppression and judgment He was taken away...for the transgression of my people He was punished...Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer...the Lord makes His life an offering for sin...by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities...He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For He bore the sin of many...**” (NIV)

Note: Isaiah’s words (written 700 years BC) vividly portray Christ’s suffering and what they reveal is nothing short of astonishing! His suffering was primarily inflicted by God the Father.

***The Father poured out the full fury of God’s righteous wrath toward sin (every sin ever committed or that ever will be committed) on His own dear Son!  
“He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross...” (1 Peter 2:24)***

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This means that the pain and agony experienced by Christ was not primarily from the hands of the Roman soldiers who crucified Him, but from His own Father who was executing the just sentence for sin on Jesus. If understood correctly, this is astounding and even appalling. It's what some have called "the scandal of the Gospel". Hanging on the cross, Christ experienced the onslaught of God's justice and righteous retribution.

He bore the damnation that I deserved!

(1 Peter 3:18) **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous [i.e., the Righteous One suffered for unrighteous ones - the wicked and rebellious], to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive [resurrected] in the Spirit."** (NIV)

***"But, as Jesus cries, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,' we see the day of God's judgment was not falling upon those evil sinners, but rather onto Jesus. He was the one who was crying and being forsaken and crushed by the wrath of God. What we're seeing is substitution. Jesus was taking the place of sinners, our place. When it comes to the cross, we're no innocent bystanders. It's our sins that are nailing Jesus to the cross, hanging Him there and killing Him. Jesus was taking our place and receiving what we deserve."*** - Austin Stone

The idea of Jesus suffering the wrath of His Father is not at all popular today, especially among people (including Catholics and most Protestants) who think of themselves as being religious, moral or good. The reason for this is that when we take an honest look at what took place on the cross, it exposes the ugly reality of our own sinfulness. For if Christ, who was pure, perfect and without sin, had to suffer so horrifically for us, then we have to conclude that our sins are reprehensible and evil beyond comprehension.

***The cross strikes a deadly blow to our self-deceiving notions about our own goodness. It reveals that the best of our religious devotion and commitment is of absolutely no value, and without the least bit of merit, in the sight of a holy and righteous God. The cross demonstrates conclusively that there is 'nothing behind the curtain' (the facade) of our perceived self-righteousness.***

Q2. What occurred on the cross is most often a "stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). If an unbeliever were to ask you, "Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?", how would you answer?

The reason for Christ's suffering is found in both the love and justice of God. In order for God to fully extend His love to us, He had to first deal justly and righteously with our sins (justice demands a full and fair retribution for all evil committed). He had to see to it that justice was *fully served* and the punishment and penalty we deserved was fully meted out. So in His grace He provided the substitutionary sacrifice of "the Lamb".

(Revelation 5:9-11) **"You are worthy... because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation... Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand... In a loud voice they were saying: Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"** (ESV)

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(Romans 5:8) **“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners [His enemies], Christ died for us.”** (ESV)

Motivated by divine love, the Son of God stepped down from His throne in heaven, became human, and offered Himself willingly and voluntarily as our substitute, deliberately taking upon Himself the full punishment that we deserved (Hebrews 7:27 & 9:14). This was the loving plan and purpose of God from all eternity! (Acts 2:22-24).

***The cross reveals God's perfect justice and judgment against sin (all sin). It also reveals His infinite love. Because God's justice was fully served on the cross, He is free to lavish His unrestrained kindness and generosity to the wicked and undeserving (like me)!***

#### G. Forgiveness for Sins Committed Before Christ Died

How did God deal with the sins that were committed before the time of the cross? And, how were people forgiven and declared 'righteous' in God's sight in O.T. times? The answer to these two questions is provided here in Romans 3:25-26. With this in mind, let's read this passage again.

(vs.25-26) **“...He did this to demonstrate His righteousness [His perfect justice], because in His forbearance [His patient restraint] He had left the sins committed beforehand [the sins committed before the cross] unpunished—he did it to demonstrate His righteousness [His perfect justice] at the present time [the time of the cross], so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”** (NIV)

When Paul says that God “left the sins committed beforehand unpunished”, he is referring to all of the sins that were committed before Christ's death, i.e., every sin from Adam and Eve's disobedience in the garden, right up to the time when evil men were hammering the nails into Christ's hands and feet. Or, to be more accurate, right up to the moment when Jesus cried out “It is finished!”.

The term “at the present time” refers to *the time of Christ's crucifixion*, the time in which Paul lived and wrote. What Paul is getting at is that God did not punish the sins committed in the Old Covenant period in *real time*, but He reserved judgment for those sins until the cross. That is to say, He carried out His sentence against those sins *post facto* - after the fact. God judged the sins committed before the cross, at the cross.

(Hebrews 9:15) **“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first [the old] covenant.”**

No one has ever been declared 'righteous' before God on the basis of animal sacrifices and offerings. This is true because the law-ordained sacrifices, offered by the priests of Israel, could never “take away sin” (see Hebrews 10:3-4). Those sacrifices served to vividly and repeatedly illustrate the future sacrifice of Christ. O.T. believers were justified by faith in their coming Messiah and His future payment for sin on their behalf. Paul uses Abraham and King David as primary examples of people who were declared “righteous” by faith alone, totally apart from offering sacrifices, keeping the law of Moses, or doing good works (See Romans 4:1-8 & 4:23-25).

*Optional: For further study, see Heb. 6:18-28, Heb. 8:6-7, Heb. 8:13, Heb. 10:1-14*