

Romans (3:25-31)

Justifying God

Part 12 – September 26, 2004

TOWING VIOLATION

When I was 17, I hauled wrecked cars from Seattle for my dad (Larry's Auto & Truck Parts). One time I had a *lot* of cars to haul, and I got this "time-saving" idea ... and I did a very, *very* stupid thing: I tried to tow three cars simultaneously from Seattle (at night)!

The police pulled me over just outside Mount Vernon. And I got a HUGE ticket. So, I went to court hoping to get it reduced to a few hundred. In court, a lawyer was representing a handcuffed man. I followed them into the hallway and asked the lawyer what I should say to the judge. He didn't really understand, till I showed him a photo.

Ken Ekle steered the last car ... without brakes! Every time we slowed, he had a minor collision. The lawyer thanked me for a good laugh. And then he said, "Just tell the judge that your council will speak for you." And I did. And he did. And he got me off the hook for about thirty bucks!

- I was ecstatic ... but I'm not so sure that God was.

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the Lord detests them both. – Proverbs 17:15 NIV

Q: But isn't this what *God* does? Acquitting those guilty of sin?

Paul tackles this very question in today's verses:

God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. – Romans 3:25-31 NIV

SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT

As we learned in our last lesson, we are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| A. Justified | (Declared “not guilty”) |
| B. Freely | (It’s an unearned gift) |
| C. By God’s grace | (He’s too rich to sell; we’re too poor to purchase) |
| D. Through redemption | (Christ was the ransom) |

This good news Paul brings, brings with it a seemingly giant contradiction concerning God’s character. Look at the following proverb.

Whoever says to the guilty, “You are innocent” – people will curse him and nations denounce him. – Proverbs 24:24 NIV

Yet Christ is presented as the *advocate* (1 John 2:10) of the guilty, who trust in Him to make their scarlet sins white as snow. So, Paul begins his explanation by saying ...

God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement (*hilasterion*), through faith in his blood. – Romans 3:25a NIV

To the Jews, “sacrifice of atonement” speaks of the “mercy seat” (on the altar) where blood was poured to *atone for* (remove) sin. There was even an annual “Day of Atonement” ritual:

... [Aaron] shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place ... – Leviticus 16:20-22 NIV

- The word “scapegoat” was invented to describe this animal.
- Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away (*atones for*) sin.

Now, to the Greeks, “*hilasterion*” speaks of sacrifices made to *appease wrath* (of albeit *pagan* gods). But it is in this sense that Paul addresses this “contradiction.”

- In Christ’s death there is both atonement *and* appeasement

And in fact, atonement is not possible without first having an appeasement (satisfying) of God’s wrath (i.e. divine justice).

He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand [that is, before Christ’s death] unpunished ... – Romans 3:25b NIV

Q: But He's God! Can't He just *choose* to leave sin unpunished? Or, put another way: If Jesus paid the debt, and the debt was owed to God, and Jesus and God are one, can't He just say, "I don't owe Me anything?"

A: Yes. He could! But it would cost Him something ... His glory.

All sin dishonors, demeans, and despises God's glory. If God overlooks sin, He is in effect agreeing with the sinner's low assessment of His glory – that is, perfect truth and love.

Q: What would you think about a judge who simply let wrongdoers off without consequence for their actions? Is he a good judge?

A: No. Even a merciful judge is expected to uphold justice.

And by justifying those who trample His glory, God appears not to value perfect truth and love. Therefore, because of our sin, God had to give up one of three things:

1. **He could give up His glory** (renounce His name)

Q: But *could* God choose *not* to preserve perfect truth and love?

That would be *unrighteous*. And God can only act in concert with His own nature – He can not *not* be who and what He is.

2. **He could give up His children** (annihilate mankind)

If he obliterated anyone who ever acted against perfect truth and love it would certainly convey the magnitude of His glory.

Q: But is there any parent here who thinks this is an option?

3. **He could give up His life**

By becoming flesh, living a life of perfect truth and love, dying for sin, and rising from the dead, He could demonstrate His unique and ultimate authority, and His incredible love for mankind ... but perhaps most of all He could demonstrate the *infinite value* of His glory – that such a loss should be suffered for its sake.

Listen to what Jesus said on the night before His crucifixion:

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." – John 12:27-28 NIV

The *life* of Christ was a personification of God's glory, and His *death* (out of love for us) only served to magnify it all the more. That's why Paul says it was in his *forbearance* that he left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. It wasn't apathy, it was *anticipation!*

... He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as **to be just** and **the one who justifies** those who have faith in Jesus. – Romans 3:26 NIV

“**To be just**” and to be “**the one who justifies**”. Before the cross was for *our* sake, it was for *His* sake. Through Christ, justice has been so fully appeased, and we have been so thoroughly atoned, that God can express absolute mercy.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. – Romans 3:27-28 NIV

Instead of taking credit for something we had *nothing* to do with, all glory and honor and praise must return to God.

Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. – Romans 3:29-30 NIV

Jesus' sacrifice reached all the way back to Adam:

- A. To atone for *every sin ever* committed by *every* human.
- B. To reestablish the immeasurable worth of God's glory.

Paul argues: According to Mosaic Law the Lord is one God, therefore, He *must* be the God of the Gentiles!

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. – Romans 3:31 NIV

- According to the law: It is blood that makes atonement *(Leviticus 17:11)*
- According to the prophets: The righteous live by faith *(Habakkuk 2:4)*

Animal sacrifices were a “forbearance”, a temporary covering until the coming Messiah could cleanse mankind completely. So, the essence of the Law is upheld *and* fulfilled:

- We are justified by *faith* and cleansed by *blood*.
- A blood far superior to that of bulls and goats.

And as we grow in intimacy with God through His Spirit (made possible by Christ) His glory becomes ever more precious to us. We find it upheld *in* our minds and written *on* our hearts. *(Jeremiah. 31:33)*