



The Vindication of God's Righteousness

A very important question serious Bible students ask is, "How can God be just, holy and righteous in character and overlook, or allow to pass over without notice the sins of Old Testament saints? How could He intentionally overlook their sins?" The apostle Paul wrestles with this problem in Romans 3:25 when he refers to the Old Testament saints who, "in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed." Paul looks back to the old covenant and says God passed over the sins in the Old Testament times. God used self restraint or tolerance as He looked down on sinful man. Since God is a just God, how could He "wink" at the sins committed before Christ came and still be a just and righteous God?

The apostle Paul summarizes the whole Old Testament teaching on the holy and righteous character of God when he declared, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men . . ." (Romans 1:18). In his grand indictment against all mankind in chapter one he concludes, "those who practice such things are worthy of death" (v. 32). "Therefore you are without excuse . . . And we know that the judgment of God rightfully falls upon those who practice such things" (2:1). "The wages of sin is death" (6:23). The first three chapters sums up the righteous character of God and the fact that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (3:23).

Paul reminds us of the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel who wrote, "The soul that sins will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Again he said, "The person who sins will die" (v. 20). "The wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (v. 20). "For his iniquity which he has committed he will die" (v. 26). "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the LORD God. 'Therefore, repent and live'" (v. 32).

Obviously, sin is serious business with God. The Scriptures can be summarized as follows:

- God is holy and He hates sin. He can not look upon sin.
- Because God is righteous He must punish all guilty sinners.
- Unless God can prove that He has punished all sin, He is no longer righteous.
- God poured out His wrath on all sin at Calvary.
- God has punished all sin, and therefore He is just.

The old covenant sacrifices and offerings were never capable of producing a full forgiveness of sins. They did not expiate sin. Their sins were passed over, covered for the time being and another sacrifice would be made for sin the next day. They could not radically deal with sin. It is clear the blood of animals could not do this. All they did was to point forward to the coming perfect sacrifice that could deal with sin, cleanse the conscience of dead works, and reconcile man to God. Therefore, how could God pass over their sins? How could He remain righteous and true to Himself?

All of the Old Testament saints were in heaven on credit. Abraham, David, Isaac Jacob, etc. were forgiven because they looked to Christ and the sacrifice He would make in time. They made their offerings by faith. They took God at His word that one day He was going to provide a perfect sacrifice for sin. They believed God. The thrust of Paul's argument in Romans 3:24-25 is, "It was their faith in Christ that saved them, exactly as it is faith in Christ that saves us now."

The apostle Paul's answer to the question of God's righteousness is clear. At the cross God was publicly declaring His own inherent and essential righteous character and justice. Here He is not referring to the imputed righteousness He gives to believers, but His own personal, glorious attributes. He is referring to His own essential moral, holy, just and righteous character. God gave a public demonstration that He is still righteous, just and holy although He has declared all believing sinners just and righteousness in His sight. How did He do it? God set forth Jesus Christ as propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the passing over of sins formerly committed under the old covenant (Romans 3:24-25). Hebrews 9:15 teaches us the same thing.

God explained Himself and declared His holy character when on the cross, His Son died as a sacrifice for all sin. Although God has in patience and forbearance held His judgment back in Old Testament times, He did not hold it back at the cross. He expressed all His holy wrath against sin on Jesus. The cross was a public declaration that God's righteousness was satisfied. He vindicated His own eternal character of righteousness and holiness at the cross. At the cross God vindicated what He had been doing in the past as He overlooked sin under the old covenant. In verse 26 He answered how He could pass over those sins in the past. The answer is still in the cross of Jesus. Every sin was dealt with once and for all at the cross.

At the cross God declared His righteousness for having passed over sins in His time of self-restraint. He can declare His own righteousness then, now and forever in forgiveness of sins because God poured out His entire wrath on His Son. The wrath of God that should have come down upon all sinners in the old dispensation came down upon His Son, Jesus Christ at the cross. That same wrath that should come down upon you and me because of our sins fell upon Jesus in that same historical event at Calvary. Jesus Christ is "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." Because God knew He was going to execute judgment against all sin in due time He could put off that judgment until the right time. Therefore, God can remain just and deal with sin as He says He is going to do, and still justify the believing sinner.

This is "the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). This is how He could pass over, or put off to another day, judgment against the sins in the past.

How does He deal with our sins now? How does He deal with our sins in the future?

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How does He deal with our sins now? How does He deal with our sins in the future?

The answer is still the same –at the cross of Jesus. Christ is the "propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." All sin was dealt with once and for all on the cross of Jesus. The blood of Jesus covers every sin of those who believe –past, present and future.

Christ has dealt with all sins in His own death. It was done once and forever. God laid all sins on the back of Jesus. The sins you and I have not yet committed were laid on Him there. Christ in His death for sin has already dealt with the sins you have not yet committed. This is the only means whereby God can forgive us of our sins. This is the only justification of God for forgiving all sins whenever committed. All sins are forgiven on these grounds alone. Therefore, God can be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (v. 26). The cross is not just the declaration of God's love; it is also the declaration that He is a just and holy God. He is true to His holy character. At the cross God was declaring that He is "Light and in Him there is no darkness at all." His love must be kept in perfect balance with His righteousness.

The cross is the vindication of God's righteous character. God can remain holy and just because He has punished sins and sinners in His own pure and holy Son. God poured out His wrath upon Christ. The prophet Isaiah said, "He bore our chastisement." "By His stripes we are healed." God punished sin and was therefore true to Himself. He kept His integrity.

Sinners are declared righteous freely by God's grace though the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God set forth as propitiation through faith in His blood. Therefore, God can declare His righteousness for having passed over those sins in the past time of self-restraint. God is righteous in forgiving sin –past, present and future.

Is the apostle Paul teaching universalism? Does that mean everyone is automatically saved because Christ has already died for heir sins? No. It means the provision has been made in God's grace by Christ's death to forgive, but only those individuals who personally believe on Christ to save them will receive forgiveness and salvation. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ to save you from the wrath of God? Are you enjoying His peace and assurance that all your sins have been covered by the death of Jesus Christ? As Jesus Christ to be your personal savior today.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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