

# How Can God Justify Sinners?

David 2015

Proverbs 17:15 says, “He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to the LORD.” How then can any sinner go to heaven? The word, justify means to “declare guiltless” in a legal sense. If a judge justifies a defendant, it means that he has been cleared of the charges and is free to go. In Proverbs 17:15 God says the one who justifies the wicked is an abomination. We would agree with God in regards to this passage: a righteous judge must pass a righteous verdict.

If a known murderer or rapist is brought to court and the judge declares him not guilty, we would decry his unjust behavior and most likely call for his dismissal. It's obvious that a judge who declares a criminal “not guilty” is not a just judge at all, but a corrupt judge. This is bad news for us though. Why?

## **We are guilty**

In Romans 3:23 God says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” What does it mean that all have sinned? John clarifies it in 1 John 3:4, “sin is lawlessness” i.e. breaking the law. There is a moral law that God has established that reflects His nature and glory. This law is perfect because God is perfect. Sin is breaking God's law and thus falling short of His glory.

What exactly is this law? It is the reflection of God's character. So sin is anything that deviates from God's character. If you think this is difficult to understand, that's fine; you are like the rest of us. To make it easier for His people, God summarized His law in the Ten Commandments He gave to Moses.

## **The Ten Commandments**

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

The obvious question now is: Do I just have to keep the Ten Commandments to go to Heaven? The answer is a little more complicated. Remember the Ten Commandments are a summary of God's law. God requires not only that you follow the actions of the law, but also that you follow the spirit of the law.

Take the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment for example. It says, “You shall not commit adultery.” Seems like an easy one right? The problem is that the specific act of adultery is not just what is forbidden. God also looks at our hearts. Jesus clarifies this commandment in Matthew 5:27-28; “You have heard

that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY', but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

God says in 1 Samuel 16:7, "People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." God not only judges by our actions but He also judges our thoughts and motives. We consider adultery a serious thing. Not a whole lot of people have cheated on their spouse, but who hasn't lusted after someone? I'm sure most people do it every day. Have you ever lusted after someone? If so God sees you as an adulterer at heart.

Another example is the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment: "You shall not murder." Outwardly it looks like an easy one to follow. Most people haven't killed anyone and pretty much everyone will agree that murderers deserve to be punished. The problem is that God sees our hearts.

Jesus says in Matt 5:21-23, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

Also 1 John 3:15 says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." God sees our hearts. Have you ever hated someone or been unjustly angry with someone? If so God sees you as a murderer at heart.

These are pretty steep standards. Who has always had control over their thought life? Who has never once lusted, or hated, or desired something that belongs to someone else. On top of that, how many lies have you told? (The 9<sup>th</sup> commandment) I know I've lied too many times to count. Have you ever disrespected your parents? (The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment) Or loved something more than God, like money or respect? (The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> commandments)

If you've said yes to any of these questions, you've broken God's law. You are a sinner like the rest of us. Now can you understand why God says that all have sinned and fallen short of His glory? There is no way anyone could keep God's law perfectly.

### **God is a Righteous Judge**

The other problem is that God is a perfect judge. Unlike a human judge who is fallible, God is omniscient. Jeremiah 12:20 says, "The Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, tries the heart and mind." He is able to stand in judgment of our actions and our thoughts. Ecclesiastes 12:14 says, "God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil."

There is no hiding our sin from God, and because He is a holy judge, He must punish sin. Most people think that because God is good, he will overlook our sin. But remember the situation of the civil court. If a judge just declares a known criminal "not guilty" he would not be good, but corrupt. It's because God is good that He judges righteously. All murderers and rapists will be punished, but He doesn't stop there. God will also punish fornicators, adulterers, thieves, and liars in hell.

Revelation 21:8 says, “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” God has already declared that the penalty for sin is death. (Romans 6:23) If it’s true that all have sinned and broken God’s law, and that God is a perfect judge who must punish sin, how can anyone go to heaven?

### **God’s Provision for Sinners**

Romans 3:21 says, “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known.” It’s obvious that we are unable to keep God’s law and that righteousness does not come from attempting to keep it. But where we have failed to live up to God’s perfect standards, God made His righteous available to us.

God sent His son, Jesus, to earth to be born as a man; this is why we celebrate Christmas. While all of us have sinned, Jesus never did. Remember the law is a reflection of God’s character so because Jesus was God, He could follow the law perfectly. While He was on earth, Jesus taught of God’s righteousness and man’s inability to attain that righteousness on his own.

Even though Jesus never sinned, he was crucified by the Jews. Remember the penalty for sin is death. Jesus never sinned, why was He put to death? He died to pay our penalty. Since He was perfect, He didn’t have to pay a penalty of death, but He chose to die anyway so He could pay for your sins and mine.

Let’s go back to the courtroom. Let’s say you are guilty of a serious crime and the sentence is a \$1,000,000 fine or life in prison. You don’t have the money so the judge has to send you to jail. Then someone you don’t even know steps up and says he’ll pay the fine for you. The judge counts the money and sees that there is \$1,000,000 there. He then says that your fine has been paid and you are free to go.

That is what Jesus did for us at the cross. We are guilty before God of breaking His law, and we have nothing to offer as payment for that. God then has to sentence us to death, but before he does that Jesus said, “I’ll pay their penalty; I’ll die for them.” God then sees that as adequate payment for our sins. God can then legally declare us free to go because the penalty has been paid by Jesus’ death. Romans 5:9 says, “Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”

### **What must I do to be saved?**

So Jesus paid my debt, what now? God is offering salvation as a free gift to all mankind, but not everyone will be saved. The next question is the same as the Philippian Jailor in Acts 16:30, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer is two-part. You must repent of your sin and believe in Jesus.

The word, repent, means to forsake and turn away from. Repenting means being remorseful for your sins and asking God to forgive you. Believing in Jesus means that when you ask God to forgive you, you trust that He will. Repenting involves turning away from your sin and surrendering your life to God and choosing to life for Him.

You need to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. You need to trust Jesus like you would trust a parachute: not just that it's there, but that it will save you when the time comes to jump. You need to transfer your trust from yourself and trying to keep God's law, and place it in Jesus and His righteousness and grace.

In Acts 17:30-31 Paul tells the Athenians "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed (Jesus), having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." Later in Romans 5:1 Paul writes, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

### **Conclusion**

Proverbs 17:15 says, "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD." Because God is perfect, His law demands moral perfection. We are not perfect and have broken that law. God calls that breaking of His law sin and if there was any doubt, He clearly says that "All have sinned and fall short of His glory." (Romans 3:23)

Like Proverbs 17:15 says, God hates corrupt judgments. He will judge every human perfectly according to their every thought, word, and deed. Since we have all fallen short of the requirements of the law, God being a perfect righteous judge must sentence everyone to death in hell.

Though God is infinitely holy, He is also infinitely loving and merciful. He can't just look past people's sin because that would be unjust and corrupt. But He did offer a way for us to escape judgment that is just. Jesus Christ came to earth as a man, lived a perfect sinless life, and died on the cross to pay for our sins. And if you only believe in Him and forsake your sin, God can legally declare you righteous, and let you into heaven. He can do that because Jesus' death has satisfied the law's demands and instead of seeing our sin, God sees Christ's righteousness.