

Romans 4:23-25—How God Punishes Sin Without Punishing The Person Who Sinned

Memory Verse

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Introduction: How God Punishes Sin Without Punishing The Person Who Sinned

“How can God punish my sin without punishing me?” This would have to be one of the most important and concerning questions that we must all ask. However, before a person can ask this question, they must first come to realise that that they are not perfect. Every person must admit or confess that they have broken God’s perfect moral standard of righteousness before they will see their need to ask God to forgive them for all their sins.

We have all lied, which makes us liars. We have all stolen, which makes us thieves. We have all taken God’s name in vain, which makes us blasphemers. Also, according to Jesus (see Matthew 5-7), we have all hated and been angry with someone, which makes us murders, and we have all lusted after someone, which makes us adulterers. You see, it’s not just what we do, but also what we think and say.

Simply put, the Bible clearly states that every person is born a sinner and so they sin. Paul describes the battle that every believer experiences. As a believer he had received a new perfect heart or nature which loved God and wanted to obey God, but he still had his old sinful nature that he was born with. Listen to how he describes the difference between his old sinful nature that he was born with, and his new perfect nature that he received when he was saved:

*“And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, **in my sinful nature.** [My new nature wants] to do what is right, but [my old nature] can’t. ¹⁹ [My new nature wants] to do what is good, but [my old nature doesn’t]. [My new nature doesn’t] want to do what is wrong, but [my old nature does] it anyway. ²⁰ But if [my old nature does] what [my new nature doesn’t] want to do, [my new nature is] not really the one doing wrong; **it is sin living in me that does it**” (Romans 7:18-20 NLT).*

We are all born with a sinful nature; we have within us the natural desire or tendency to disobey or rebel against God—we sin because we are sinners. Therefore, before any person chooses to receive God’s forgiveness, they are guilty. Everyone, before they accept God’s gift of forgiveness, is a criminal in God’s eyes—condemned and waiting sentence. We all deserve to suffer for eternity in the Lake of Fire as the just or fair penalty for all the times that we have broken God’s perfect moral law. God’s justice demands that the guilty be punished, and the punishment for sin is death (see Romans 6:23).

The Scripture that we are about to read explains **how God can punish sin but not punish the sinner**, the person who committed those sins. God gave a special promise, and anyone who believes that promise can be forgiven of all their sins. Let’s find out what the special promise is, and just **how God can punish our sin without punishing us.**

Outline

1. What God will do for us if we believe a very special promise
2. The three stages of our salvation: positional, practical, and a new kind of body
3. What does a person need to believe so that they can be saved?
4. Why is the resurrection so important?
5. Why did Jesus have to suffer so much because of sin?

Romans 4:20-25 NKJV

²⁰ [Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² And therefore *“it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

²³ Now it was not written for [Abraham’s] sake alone that [God’s righteousness] was imputed [transferred or credited] to him, ²⁴ but also for us. [God’s righteousness] shall be imputed [transferred or credited] to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Romans 4:20-25 NLT

Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹ He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. ²² And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous. ²³ And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was recorded ²⁴ for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in Him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ [Jesus] was handed over to die because of our sins, and [Jesus] was raised to life to make us right with God.

1. What God will do for us if we believe a very special promise

We just read that, simply and only because Abraham believed God’s promise to him, God forgave Abraham, and now sees Abraham as being as righteous or perfect as Himself. This leads us to ask two very important questions.

1. **What promise did Abraham have to believe to be counted as righteous (to have his sins forgiven)?**

God says to Abraham in Genesis 22:18, *“And in your Seed [Christ] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”* (AMP). This promise that a very special descendant of Abraham (the Messiah or Jesus Himself), would be a blessing to all nations is found many times in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments—for example, Genesis 12:2–3; 13:16; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25, 26, and Galatians 3:16. Paul explains this promise in his letter to the Galatian church.

Galatians 3:16 AMP

Now the promises (covenants, agreements) were decreed and made to Abraham and his Seed (his Offspring, his Heir). He [God] does not say, And to seeds (descendants, heirs), as if referring to many persons, but, And to your Seed (your Descendant, your Heir), obviously referring to one individual, Who is [none other than] Christ (the Messiah).

So what promise did Abraham have to believe so that He could be saved? That God would one day send the Messiah, who would be a Jew, a male descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Also, Abraham believed that the whole world would be blessed by this One man. How? Because through Jesus, it would be possible for man to be reconciled to God. Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour, would come to earth as a man, live a perfect life, and then suffer and die in the place of sinful mankind. Jesus' death would be the full payment for all the sins of all mankind. Consider the following verses:

"All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on Him the sins of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 NLT).

"And He [that same Jesus Himself] is the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours alone but also for [the sins of] the whole world" (1 John 2:2 AMP).

Now, all who put their trust in Jesus' sacrificial death, believing that Jesus died in their place, and was the full payment for all their sins, will receive forgiveness just like Abraham did when He believed.

2. **What does it mean for God to count Abraham as being righteous?**

What does it mean to be forgiven by God, to be declared righteous? We read in Romans 4:24 that *"[God's righteousness] shall be imputed [transferred or credited] to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead"*. The Greek word translated "imputed" is a financial term which means to transfer money from one person to another. God is saying that He will transfer His righteousness from His account to ours.

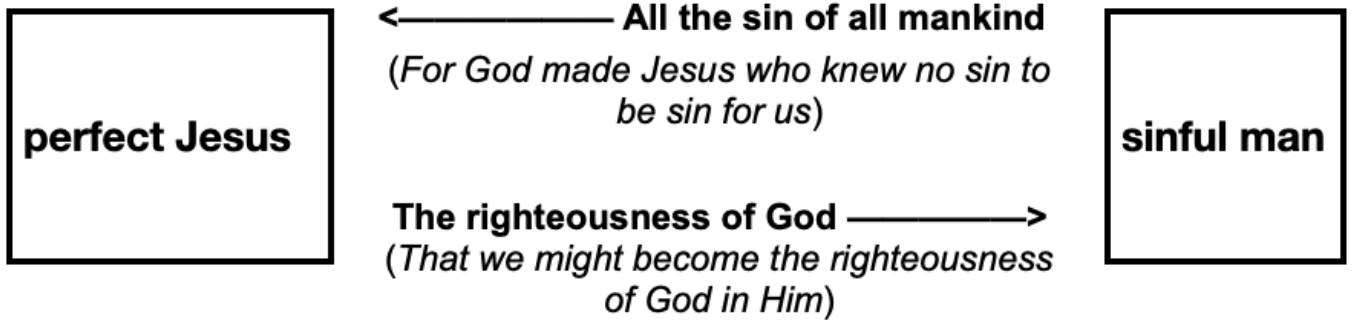
But the Scriptures also tell us that there was a double transaction or transfer. Not only did God transfer His righteousness to us, but also the sin or unrighteousness of mankind was transferred to Jesus.

Let's use an illustration using money to explain this. Bill is very rich—he has lots of money in his bank account, and he doesn't owe any money. Joe is very poor—he doesn't have any money in his bank account, and he owes a lot of money. Then one day Bill kindly offers to do a double transfer for Joe. Bill will transfer all of his money into Joe's bank account, and he will transfer all of Joe's debt into his account. Now Joe has lots of money and no debt, but Bill now has no money and lots of debt. The rich man became poor, and the poor man became rich.

This is exactly what Christ did for us, except it wasn't money that was transferred, it was righteousness. *"For you know the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV). Think of the money as representing the perfect life that the perfect Jesus lived while on the earth and His perfect nature. Think of the debt as being all the sinful things that we sinful humans have ever done, said, and thought, as well as our sinful nature.

2 Corinthians 5:21 explains this double transfer or transaction that happened when Jesus died on the cross:

For [the Father] made [Christ Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)



For God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for us: All of mankind's sin was transferred, credited, imputed, or placed onto Jesus. Jesus, the only perfect man who ever lived, was therefore treated as if He was guilty of committing all the sins of all mankind. The perfect Jesus was treated as a sinner. When the Father looked at Jesus as He hung on the cross, He saw Jesus as being guilty of committing all the sins of all mankind. According to plan, the Father then punished Jesus as if He was actually guilty of committing all the sins of all mankind. Jesus was treated as you and I deserve to be treated—it should have been me and you on that cross. ***This is how God could punish our sin without punishing us.*** Jesus was punished in our place. Every sinful thought, word or action was transferred to Jesus and Jesus was punished for them all. But this is only half the story. It gets even better.

That we might become the righteousness of God in Him: God credits, transfers or imputes His own perfect righteousness to those who choose to repent and believe in the gospel (see Mark 1:15). This means that God takes Christ's righteousness and transfers it to sinful man. God can now treat sinful man as if he had lived Jesus' perfect life. Again, sinful man is treated not just as if he had done nothing wrong, but also as if he had lived Jesus' perfect life. This is what it means to be justified or made right with God—to be counted or reckoned as having lived Jesus' perfect life when standing before God in His courtroom. This is why there is no fear of judgement or condemnation for the Christian (see Romans 8:1). In fact, when God looks at the believer, the person who has accepted this gift of forgiveness or righteousness from God, God sees the perfect Jesus.

Colossians 1:27 NLT

For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

2. The three stages of our salvation: positional, practical, and a new kind of body

1. Positional: What we have explained so far is our positional or legal standing before God—the penalty of our sin has been paid by God when Jesus died in our place. Simply put, when the believer stands before God, God sees that the fine or penalty for our sin has already been paid by Jesus when Jesus died on the cross, and so He can legally set us free without punishing us for our sin. ***This is how God could punish our sin without punishing us.*** God sees the believer as being perfect from the moment they believe.

2. Practical: Yes God sees the believer as being as perfect like Jesus, but every day the believer still sins. What this means is that our minds still need to be renewed or changed. This is called **practical sanctification**. Sanctification means to be made holy or set apart. Legally or positionally we are already seen as being holy and set apart. But the process of renewing our minds to think like God thinks, to love the things that God loves and hate the things that God hates, takes our entire life. This transforming us into the image of Jesus is a work that God does, beginning the day we first believe, and finishing the day we die. Simply put, our purpose for living is to work with God as He transforms into the image of Christ.

Romans 12:2 NLT

Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Philippians 1:6 NLT

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

3. Physical (a resurrection body): The physical body we live in now will die. It is cursed. It gets sick and tired. Our sinful nature is attached to it. We need a new perfect body that will never die if we are going to live with God forever. God promises that in the future, at the time of the rapture, all believers will receive a glorified body like Jesus did when He rose from the dead. Jesus was the firstfruits—He was the first one to receive this new kind of glorified body. And because He did, so will we, when Jesus comes back to take us back to be where He is (see John 14:1-3). This receiving of our resurrection body is the third and final stage of our salvation.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 50-53 NLT

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. ²³ But there is an order to this [physical] resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back [the rapture].

⁵⁰ What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.

⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! ⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. ⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

Here's a summary of the three stages of our salvation:

1. **Positional:** God forgives the believer, forever seeing them as being legally perfect or justified in His court
2. **Practical:** God then begins to change the believer to think and live like Jesus—the renewing or sanctifying of the mind
3. **A new kind of body:** God gives all believers new glorified body at the resurrection (at the rapture)

3. What does a person need to believe so that they can be saved?

Romans 4:23-25 NKJV

Now it was not written for [Abraham's] sake alone that [God's righteousness] was imputed to [Abraham], ²⁴ but also for us. [God's righteousness] shall be imputed [transferred] to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Romans 4:23-25 NLT

And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was recorded ²⁴ for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God.

David Guzik comments on what a person needs to believe in order to be saved: "When we talk about faith and saving faith in Jesus, it is important to emphasise that we mean believing that His work on the cross (**delivered up because of our offenses**) and triumph over sin and death (**raised because of our justification**) is what saves us. There are many false-faiths that can never save, and only faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross and through the empty tomb can save us.

- Faith in the historical events of the life of Jesus will not save
- Faith in the beauty of Jesus' life will not save
- Faith in the accuracy or goodness of Jesus' teaching will not save
- Faith in the deity of Jesus and in His Lordship will not save
- *Only* faith in what the real Jesus did for us on the cross will save"

4. Why is the resurrection so important?

Romans 4:25 NKJV

Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Romans 4:25 NLT

[Jesus] was handed over to die because of our sins, and [Jesus] was raised to life to make us right with God.

[Jesus] was raised because of our justification, or, [Jesus] was raised to life to make us right with God: Why is the resurrection so important? Because it proves that God the Father accepted Jesus's payment of our sins on our behalf. It proves that Jesus' death on the cross was the full payment for all the sins of all mankind, and so anyone who chooses to believe in Him will be saved from penalty of their sin.

"Jesus' resurrection always includes his sacrificial death but it brings out the all-sufficiency of his death. If death had held him, he would have failed; since he was raised from death, his sacrifice sufficed, God set his seal upon it by raising him up." (Lenski)

Jon Courson explains why the resurrection is so important.

“Not only did Jesus die for our sins to redeem us, but He was raised from the dead to justify us and to be an Advocate for us. As our Advocate, our defense attorney, Jesus lives to make intercession for us continually (Hebrews 7:25). Satan, on the other hand, condemns us not only in our hearts day and night, but before the very throne of God (Revelations 12:10), saying, “Look at those people down there. They’re hypocritical, weak, and faltering.”

But the moment Satan hisses these accusations, Jesus is literally there, saying, “Depart, Satan. They’re washed in My blood and robed in My righteousness.”

And the Father says, “Case dismissed for lack of evidence,” as He casts our sins into the depths of the sea (see Micah 7:19).

... On the basis of the finished work of Calvary, every sin you’ve ever committed, are committing, or will commit is forgiven, forgotten, and out of sight.” That’s forgiveness. That’s justification. That’s Good News!

5. Why did Jesus have to suffer so much because of sin?

Romans 4:25 NKJV

Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Romans 4:25 NLT

[Jesus] was handed over to die because of our sins, and [Jesus] was raised to life to make us right with God.

Jesus was delivered up because of our offenses, or, [Jesus] was handed over to die because of our sins: Nowhere in the Scriptures does it make it more clear that Jesus did not die for His own sins, but for those of sinful man.

“The ancient Greek word translated **delivered** (*paradidomi*) was used of casting people into prison or delivering them to justice.” (David Guzik) “Here it speaks of the judicial act of God the Father delivering God the Son to the justice that required the payment of the penalty for human sin.” (Wuest)

So why does God hate sin so much?

Psalm 7:11 NLT

God is an honest judge. He is angry with the wicked every day.

Here’s an illustration from Jon Courson to help us understand, not only why sin is wrong, but also why God hates sin so much and why sin makes Him so angry. This story helps us to understand the extent of the suffering that Jesus experienced while suffering in our place on the cross—all the anger and wrath of God towards sin was poured out on Jesus.

“A man in Texas had the urge for a midnight snack. So he rolled out of bed and walked down the hallway toward the kitchen. Passing the nursery, he noticed his three-month-old son’s bassinet toppled on the floor. Racing back into the bedroom, he woke his wife to see if she had taken the baby from the bassinet, but his wife was sound asleep and knew nothing of the matter. Panic filled his heart as he ran down the hall, down the stairs, and into the living room, where, much to his horror and shock, he saw his twelve-foot pet python with a large lump in its centre. He knew immediately what happened to his baby. In anger and outrage, he went to the back porch, grabbed an axe, chopped up the snake, and ran out of the front door screaming. He was later committed to a mental institution.”

This true story haunts me and is helpful to me in understanding a biblical concept often misunderstood by people who wrestle with theology. You see, although people do not have a problem when we talk about the love of God, the wrath and judgment of God are things with which people struggle. Yet if the man in Texas was justified in smashing that snake, how much more is God justified in dealing with snakelike people who have devoured others mindlessly and heartlessly.”

As we take communion today, we need to recognise that Jesus’ payment of our sin was more than just going to the police station and paying a fine. No, it was much greater than that. All the wrath, anger, and outrage of God against sin was poured out on Jesus instead of us.

Remember that when we sin we sin against God, but we also hurt those around us. Like the man was angry towards his snake because it had murdered his baby, so God is angry with us because we hurt Him and each other.

Also, consider that because the man loved his baby very much, he was also very much angry with the snake. God loves people infinitely, therefore he is infinitely angry with us when we hurt Him and others. In addition to the penalty due to us for breaking God’s perfect moral law, all the anger for all the hurt that we have caused God and each other was poured out on Jesus.

The perfect Jesus suffered while the guilty were set free.

Jesus paid a debt He didn’t owe, we had a debt we could not pay.

There is a story in all the gospels about Barabbas that highlights how the innocent was punished, but the guilty was set free.

Mark 16:6-15 NLT

Now it was the governor’s custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner—anyone the people requested. ⁷ One of the prisoners at that time was Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising. ⁸ The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner as usual.

⁹ “Would you like me to release to you this ‘King of the Jews’?” Pilate asked. ¹⁰ (For he realised by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.) ¹¹ But at this point the leading priests stirred up the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. ¹² Pilate asked them, “Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?”

¹³ They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

¹⁴ “Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?”

But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”

¹⁵ So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

Consider that we are all Barabbas, we should have been the one crucified, but Jesus died in our place.