

Question: What if my repentance is not deep enough? What if my faith is not strong enough, large enough, perfect? How do I know if I've repented far enough that God will forgive me and bring me near to Him? Can I ever know that I've repented deeply enough?

Answer: The *perfection* of our repentance and faith is not our salvation. It is the object on which we depend that secures our salvation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord IS our salvation!

Key Words: *Righteous* – the state of having no liabilities against one's person, to be "right" is to be entirely coherent with a standard – w/God, it is being entirely for His glory in heart and in action

Propitiation – removing the barrier to right relationship with God by turning aside God's righteous wrath

Romans 3:21-26

1. What is the "righteousness of God"?
 - a. "Right" refers to a legal condition, namely, to have no liabilities or claims against you.
 - b. To be "right with God" would mean to be in a condition of complete obedience, having no liabilities against you because you have satisfied all your obligations to him from the heart. So, righteousness, is a legal standing that is the result of perfect behavior.
 - c. "from", "a gift", and "apart from the law" tell us that this standing of righteousness is *received*, not earned. In other words, the "perfect behavior" that results in this legal standing is not *our* perfect behavior, but that of someone else.
 - i. See 3:20, where Paul speaks of being "righteous in His presence."
 - ii. The Law is not a means to our righteousness, but a revealer of the nature of God's very character, holy, righteous, good, etc., and therefore gives a knowledge of sin in our "falling short of God's glory"
 - d. Therefore, to receive this righteousness is to be declared righteous, to be treated or to be seen as perfectly righteous by God.
 - i. It is received, not earned
 - ii. "*Dikaioisune*" – used for "just" and "justified" in the immediate context are from the same word, "righteous"
 1. To be "*righteous*" is the same as *receiving* the righteousness of God
 2. To be justified is to have a record of merit; it is the opposite of "guilty", which is to have a record of wrongdoing in accordance with the glory of God (v23)
2. How do we receive the righteousness of God?
 - a. It is by faith in Jesus
 - i. Not "faith" in general, not even faith in God, in general
 - ii. Not merely sorrow over our sin, or even agreement with God's just decrees
 - iii. It is faith "in Jesus Christ" that brings the righteousness of God
 - b. More particularly, it is by faith in Christ's work on the Cross
 - i. Not a general admiration of Him
 - ii. Not an agreement that we deserved the same
 - iii. "through faith in His blood" we become righteous (v25)
 1. Some people say, "I believe in Jesus" but they mean a general admiration of His teaching, or in Him as an example of God's love, or even of God's wrath, but this is not saving faith

- iv. Saving faith is the dependence in the work of Christ on the Cross as the basis for our legal standing of righteousness that we receive from God.
 - 3. Why did Jesus have to die to give us God's righteousness?
 - a. The word "through" in vv24-25 shows that there is a barrier between us and God in regards to righteousness and forgiveness. Only "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...by His blood" is there a way through that barrier
 - i. In our day of a low view of sin, we think that an "I'm sorry" brings reconciliation. We do it with our children, why does God talk about blood? Can't He just forgive us when we're sorry?
 - ii. In this view, Jesus only comes into the world to show us how much God loves us, or how bad sin is (Jesus died), mere examples intended to *move us*.
 - 1. The problem between us and God, however, is not merely that we need to be moved, it is that God is righteous and we are not.
 - a. Our sin in light of His righteousness is the barrier. V23 – "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
 - i. Sin is the act, either actively or passively, of not loving the glory of God above all else
 - ii. Remember David in 2 Samuel 12 – Nathan calls David's sin "despising the Lord."
 - 1. David could have responded, "I don't despise you, Lord. I love you. I just wasn't even thinking of you when I got caught up in lust."
 - 2. That's just it. Sin is not loving the glory of God above all else. Even "not thinking of Him" is falling short of His glory.
 - a. Therefore, "unrighteousness" is not loving the glory of God above all else,
 - b. This basic sin, rebellion by making ourselves to the most important, gives us a record of animosity toward God.
 - 3. Sin may be doing the right outward action with the wrong motive (not for God's glory)
 - a. See Pharisees – Matt 6:16-18; 9:14ff; 23:23; Luke 18:10-14
 - b. Rom 12:9 – Let love be without hypocrisy
2. God is not only the Father who loves us, but also the judge who must do right (according to His own intrinsic character).
- b. What is this talk of God "demonstrating" His righteousness?
 - i. Does this mean that the Cross was *merely* God showing how righteous He is in punishing sin?
 - 1. To some extent, yes, He is showing that He is just in His wrath toward the sins committed before (by those in the past). But that is not all the Cross shows us.
 - 2. In fact, the substitution of Jesus in our place of sin, actually satisfying God's righteousness, is what makes God righteous in His forgiveness of those in the past. God "held back" His judgment from those who repented and trusted in His mercy *until Christ atoned for them.*
 - 3. It was God's forgiveness and mercy that made Him appear unrighteous (incoherent with His own glory). *Forgiveness* had to be shown to be *righteous*. *Mercy* had to be proved to be *Just*.

- ii. The problem with those under “former sins” (those in the past whom God showed mercy before Christ died) was that God seemed unrighteous by forgiving their sins
 - 1. Our culture doesn’t really think this way because it doesn’t think God is righteous
 - 2. But God is righteous and He hates sin. The question we are faced with when we read the Old Testament revelation of God is simple: How can God keep His unconditional promises to create a people for Himself, AND keep His conditional promises not to have a people for Himself that are unrighteous?
 - 3. When God “passes over” sin in the OT He seems to be unrighteous, not delivering justice like He promised that He will (see Ex. 23:7, “I will not acquit the guilty,” cf. 34:7; Deut 7:10; 8:19-20; Nah 1:3; Ezra 9:15; Is 59:18)

Deut 8:19-20 – “And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.²⁰ Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

- a. God has set up a tension in His OT revelation between His unconditional promises (Gen 12) to keep His people for Himself and His conditional promises to destroy them if they fail to obey Him (Deut 8:19-20; cf. 4:26; 30:18). This tension is not resolved in the OT.
- b. Nathan revealed his sin and David exclaimed, “I have sinned against the Lord” to which Nathan replied, “The LORD also has put aside your sin. You will not die.”
- c. Does that look just to you? What does this say about the value of Uriah’s life? Of the value of the honor of Bathsheba? Of the severity of treachery?
 - i. “Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?” – Gen 18:25
- d. If a man deceived your sister-in-law and had an adulterous affair, then had your brother killed to cover it up. What would it say when the court found him guilty, but when he said, “I’m sorry,” they released him to go free.
 - i. What does that say to the value of your brother’s life? Is it just?
- 4. God accepted repentant believers in the past (“the sins having been done before”, “holding back”, used also in Rom 2:4, God “held back” His wrath toward His elect in the past) who trusted in God’s mercy and not in their own righteousness *in lieu* of Jesus Christ’s work on the Cross. Therefore, He is just in forgiving them though their righteousness (even the perfection of their repentance) was not enough AND He is just in His wrath against their sin – through being wrathful against Jesus. They received the righteousness of God through the blood of Christ as well.

“Here is a great objective foundation for the full assurance of hope: the forgiveness of sins is grounded finally not in my finite worth or work, but in the infinite worth of the righteousness of God—unswerving allegiance to uphold and vindicate the glory of his name.” ~John Piper

- 4. God is the “just and the justifier” of those who believe
 - a. God presented Jesus as a “propitiation by His blood”
 - i. Propitiation means to “pacify or turn away one’s wrath”

1. Some deny the true sense of “propitiation” because it seems to put the Law of God over and above God Himself. In a sense, to make God subservient to the Law. He *wants* to justify us, but *His Law* will not *allow* Him to do it.
 - a. A wrong view of God’s Law
 - b. God’s Law is binding because He is its Creator, not its prisoner
 - c. The Law flows out of the character, nature of God, and as such is not merely binding as an “external power” but rather is explicative and powerful because it finds its source in God Himself.
- ii. It means that God’s righteousness/wrath had to be turned away by a blood payment for sin (life for life). Jesus’ death pacified God’s wrath (1 John 2:2; 4:10; Heb 2:17).
 1. This is the meaning of this word, propitiation (*hilasterion*),
 - a. Rom 5:9-10 – “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.”
 - b. 1 John 1:7 – “...the blood of Jesus His Son purifies us from all sin.”
 2. Many object to the view that God is a vengeful God who must be appeased with blood. This sounds like pagan gods who demanded human sacrifice.
 3. Consider this:

“Paris had carried off Princess Helen to Troy. The Greek expeditionary force had taken ship to recover her, but was held up half-way by persistent contrary winds. Agamemnon, the Greek general, sent home for his daughter and ceremonially slaughtered her as a sacrifice, to mollify the evidently hostile gods...[Why, then, does] the idea of propitiation – of averting God’s anger by an offering – run right through the Bible? In the Old Testament it underlies the prescribed rituals of the sin-offering...In the New Testament, the ‘propitiation’ word group appears...in Rom 3:21-26, Heb 2:17, 1 Jn 2:1, and 1 John 4:8-10...In paganism, man propitiates his gods, and religion becomes a form of commercialism and, indeed, of bribery. In Christianity, however, God propitiates His wrath by His own action. God presented Him as a propitiation...” ~ J.I. Packer

“The doctrine of propitiation is precisely this – that God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own son to the end that He, by His blood, should make provision for the removal of His wrath.” ~ John Murray
- iii. To complain that the idea of a substitutionary sacrifice that appeases God’s wrath (propitiation) is primitive and immoral is to miss the central theme of the gospel that God substituted Himself.
 1. The gospel is not about humans appeasing a vengeful or cantankerous bloodthirsty God, but about the LORD Himself coming down willingly and voluntarily as the substitute. This is the very *opposite* of pagan sacrifice.
 2. The real issue underneath the surface today is that modern people do not understand the absolute holiness of God.
 - a. The Cross shows us that there is *real* evil and *real* guilt and *real* transcendent divine justice
 - b. The holy justice of God *must* be honored because it is Who He is.
 3. Ancient peoples had no concept of a God so loving and so gracious that He would substitute Himself to appease Himself.

4. But, modern people have no concept of a God that is so holy and so righteous that He has to do right by His own character
- b. The beauty of the Cross is that *in the very same stroke*
 - i. Jesus' death satisfies the love of God (that aspect of His nature that seeks our justification)
 - ii. Jesus' death satisfies the justice of God (that aspect of His nature that demands punishment of sin)
 - iii. Because of the Christ's death as our divine substitute, God can be both just and the justifier in forgiving us freely and giving us His righteousness.
- c. The Cross does not represent a compromise between God's wrath and God's love.
 - i. It does not satisfy each partly
 - ii. It satisfies both fully.

"The cross does not represent a compromise between God's wrath and love; it does not satisfy each one half-way. Rather, it satisfies each fully in the very same action." ~Tim Keller
 - iii. The gospel "upholds the law" (v31), meaning that the righteous standard of God still stands – it must be satisfied for anyone to stand in God's presence.
 - iv. For those who trust in the finished work of Christ, it has been. It is finished by Him! It is done by Him! The blood of Jesus washes your sin away!

Conclusion:

It is not the *perfection* of our repentance in which our salvation lies, any more than it is in the *perfection* of our faith. Rather, it is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that our salvation lies, so it is objectively and divinely secured for us by our Savior, our Master, our God

The reality of my soul's sin is that I am constantly finding myself trusting in things other than the Lord. I trust my intelligence, my morality, my own sense of being right, and I have to always be finding more contrition, more repentance, constantly turning away from putting my faith in myself.

If I am trusting in the perfection of my repentance, where then does this lead me? Joy? Hope? No! Into utter fear and despair that my contrition might not be good enough and God's wrath may still be upon me!

However, if my trust is not in the perfection of my repentance, but rather is in the death of Christ on my behalf, then I take great joy in HIS perfection of obedience and His atonement for my sins against God. HE has removed the wrath of God from me, which was justified because of my sins and has put His righteousness, the very righteousness of God, upon me by faith. I trust in Him. God substituting Himself for sinners!

How vastly different from the pagan understanding of god is this? Is this some immoral human sacrifice? The seeming injustice of the innocent dying in the place of the guilty? If it were an innocent person dying the place of a guilty person *for the appeasement of a third* person, then yes! But that is not the gospel! The gospel is God appeasing *His own* just and righteous hatred of sin by becoming weak, so weak as to die under His own wrath. Jesus is God! Jesus' death is God substituting Himself for sinners! Both sin and salvation are connected with substitution. John Stott says this,

"The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone." (taken from *The Cross of Christ*)

There is joy! There is freedom from fear! There is hope! Jesus is my SAVIOR! He is my SECURITY! The Cross is my righteousness and by faith I will never be turned under God's wrath. To the repentant heart, with knowledge of the severity of his sin in light of the holy justice of God, this is truly GOOD NEWS!

The blood of Jesus takes my sins away (1 John 1:7)!! Don't let Satan convince you that you haven't done enough or been strong enough or been Praise Jesus for His immeasurable kindness and unfathomable love!

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us draw near to the Lord with great hope and assurance that Jesus has opened the way for us into the holy place of the Father. Draw near to Him, for He has drawn near to you. Go forward in the joy of your salvation! When you stumble, come undone and functionally believe again in the atoning blood of Christ as the means by which you stand righteous before God. The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirits that we are children of God for He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all will graciously give us all things that we need. Praise the Father for His loving plan! Praise Him for His righteousness! Praise Jesus for His atoning Cross by which we are redeemed and declared righteous! Praise Him for your actual salvation from your sins and for His righteousness imputed to you through His blood!

The grace our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.