

DO I TAKE GOD SERIOUSLY?

I have been taught: "God hates sin, but He loves the sinner."

So true: in fact, the consequence of God's hating sin is not a slap on the wrist. It is death.

Romans 6:23a *For the wages of sin is death, [NLT]*

And — even more clearly:

Romans 8:13a *for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; [NRSV]*

To spare humankind from such a certain necessity and just fate, God proved the depth and immensity of His love for sinners.

Romans 5:8 *But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. [NRSV]*

Thus, it was for the purpose of sparing us that:

Romans 8:32a *He did not even spare His own Son but offered Him up for us all; [HCSB]*

So that — although the consequence of sin is death — that necessary death was suffered by Christ, rather than by me.

The contrast between God's unlimited intolerance of sin and His immense love for us is so great and so difficult to comprehend with our natural mind, that it is easy for me to miss the contrast and blend the two a little bit.

Thus, I may sometimes think that — after all — God makes some allowance for sins (at least for those, which I may deem to be "little sins") and, on the other hand, I may be worried that His love may — practically — have some limits or restrictions and that His punishment may be visited on me — after all.

Hence, I find it helpful to clear the mind and establish spiritual understanding by considering how fundamental, intense and unremitting is God's determination to stamp out sin and how immense, limitless and gracious is His love for His creatures.

First: sin. God does not hesitate to take drastic actions to clear away sin. For example:

Genesis 6:5 *The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. [NRSV]*

Therefore, God alerted Noah and his seven companions, who had found favor with the Lord:

Genesis 7:4 *"Seven days from now I will make the rains pour down on the earth. And it will rain for forty days and forty nights, until I have wiped from the earth all the living things I have created." [NLT]*

And so transgression and sin were stamped out by the wiping away from the earth and the death of all transgressors.

Another example of God eliminating transgressors altogether occurred when Korah, Dathan and Abiram

Numbers 16:2 *[They] incited a rebellion against Moses, along with 250 other leaders of the community, all prominent members of the assembly. [NLT]*

God unhesitatingly proceeded to their complete destruction by first separating the innocent:

Numbers 16:20–21 *and the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ²¹"Get away from all these people so that I may instantly destroy them!" [NLT]*

And then forthwith,

Numbers 16:32–33 *..... the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. ³³So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. [NKJV]*

That the wages of sin is death was true not only in the Old Testament; rather it is confirmed by this episode of the early church, when Ananias had sold some property and

Acts 5:2–5a *with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³"Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!" ^{5a}Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. [NRSV]*

The Lord's purpose not to allow transgression against the Holy Spirit was all encompassing. When Ananias' wife confirmed the lie,

Acts 5:9–10a *Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." ^{10a}Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. [NRSV]*

Stamping out sin must be thorough and therefore, it is not a matter of issuing a waiver, a stay, a deferred prosecution or a bail, rather it is

a matter of obliteration, achievable only by death: either mine or Christ's.

The fact that in the Kingdom of God the wages of sin is death is so fundamental and God's determination to rid His Kingdom of sin is so total that Christ was commanded by the Father to accomplish it by dying on the Cross in our place so that — instead of spiritual death — we may receive eternal life.

John 10:17, 18c "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ^{18c}I have received this command from my Father." [NRSV]

The Cross is the greatest expression and testimony of God's immense and unlimited love: through it He took away the sin of the world. The result is that:

John 3:18 "Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God." [HCSB]

Indeed God's love is unlimited: it is designed to reach not just a selected few or some chosen ones, but "anyone."

It is unlimited, but it is not indiscriminate; because "anyone" is required to believe "in the name of the One and Only Son of God," Who is:

Revelation 13:8c the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. [KJV]

Furthermore, God, Who — by the Cross — once demonstrated His unlimited love, practices it continuously by His patience, so that all may have the opportunity to eschew death, eternal death.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. [NLT]

Hence, I should be alert and not misinterpret God's patience with sinners as a casual toleration of His for unforgiven sin.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? [NRSV]

The love of God is intended to lead me to repentance. I may realize the fundamental function of repentance by considering the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. Both had been selected by God and both sinned, but their behaviors and the ensuing consequences were much different:

This was the case of David, when confronted by the prophet Nathan, to whom God had revealed David's sin:

2 Samuel 12:13 Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin." [NLT]

However, this happened with Saul, when the prophet Samuel upbraided him for disobeying God's command to destroy the Amalekites completely:

1 Samuel 15:20–21, 16:14 "But I did obey the Lord," Saul insisted. "I carried out the mission he gave me. I brought back King Agag, but I destroyed everyone else. ²¹Then my troops brought in the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and plunder to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." ^{16:14}Now the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and the Lord sent a tormenting spirit that filled him with depression and fear. [NLT]

David, who confessed his sin, received forgiveness; Saul, who made excuses for his sin, reinterpreted or manipulated God's command, according to his own judgment, and shifted the responsibility to his troops, was abandoned by the Spirit of God.

Hence, yes we all

Romans 3:23 have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [KJV]

However, some of us are forgiven sinners, because we repented, confessed our sins and the Lord took all of them away.

Further, it is important to remember that for God, transgression of part is no different than transgression of the whole:

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. [KJV]

Because any transgression is evidence of a spirit in rebellion against the order established by God for His Kingdom, which He intends to be perfect:

Matthew 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." [NRSV]

Impossible goal? Yes, of course: thoroughly impossible for humans, but not for God, for with Him everything is possible:

Mark 14:36a He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible;" [NRSV]

How can this be accomplished? It can, because all things are possible not only for the Father in Heaven, but — as Jesus revealed to the father of the boy afflicted by dumbness:

Mark 9:23b "All things are possible to him who believes." [NASB]

Let us then join the example of the boy's father:

Mark 9:24 *Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."* [NASB]

Yes, Lord, indeed: "Help my unbelief" in both the death sentence levied on sin and in the total power of the miracle of the Cross, the most extreme demonstration of the infinite love of God, as a means — the only means in existence — to gain forgiveness for all sins, no matter how small or how grievous.

Our aim is the Kingdom and its perfection,

Philippians 3:12–14 *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* [NASB]

That is our goal.

Concluding: the statement that God forgives sinners because He loves them is emotional, carnal nonsense.

Rather, the gospel tells us that the consequence of God's love for the world is not forgiveness, but is Christ being sent to the Cross:

John 3:16a "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," [KJV]

The direct consequence of His love is the crucifixion, not forgiveness.

In turn, the forgiveness of sinners is the direct consequence of Christ's death on the Cross and of the belief in Him, which leads us to repentance.

The only way forgiveness is possible is not because of His love, but because of His crucifixion.

Isaiah 53:10 *Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief;* [ESV]

And this is what motivated the Lord:

John 15:13 "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." [KJV]

This is how serious sin is for God: that He sent His Son to lay down His life on the Cross.

Hence the first question: do I take God as seriously and repent? God sacrificed Himself, because He loved us first so richly:

Ephesians 1:7 *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;* [KJV]

Then, the second question: Do I love Him as seriously as to obey Him?

John 14:15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." [NASB]

Because:

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11 *God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.* [NRSV]