



THE CROSS:

God's Peace Initiative

1

Series Theme Slide



Stuffed animals are fun and generally unbreakable. We don't usually care how our kids throw them around.

-- It is a bit different when we are visiting a friend who has heirloom crystal goblets in a china cabinet . . .

-- . . . a cabinet that our child just figured out how to get into.

-- She's got her teddy bear in one hand and the goblet in the other.

-- You are hoping to talk her down because you can picture the impending shattering of glass.

-- You are horrified when she just throws down her stuffed animal, because she is seeming to make the same body movements with her other hand . . .

- . . . the one with the crystal in it.
- Why are we horrified when she moves to drop the one² but not the other?
- Isn't it a matter of breakable-ness and value?

TR: Treating an heirloom, priceless treasure like a cheap Beanie-baby is what comes to mind when we toss around phrases like . . .

Why can't God "just forgive?"

3

READ SLIDE

- **"Isn't it His job to forgive?"**
- **"If He can do anything, why does He have to send people to hell rather than "just forgive" them all?"**
- **We are in danger of having a childish apathy and indifference toward invaluable treasure when we cheapen God's forgiveness.**

TR: Today, I would like us to look at what some have called the most important passage in the Bible, even the most important paragraph ever written.

"Don't Throw Around 'Just Forgive'"
"Just Forgive" versus "Justify Forgive"

Why can't God "just forgive?"

- Because He is just & righteous, payment is required.

If God can't "just forgive," what can I do to make things right between us?

- If we could "make things right" we would pay off our debt ourselves. The reality of the Old Covenant limitations makes it clear that we cannot do that. See Hebrews 10:1-4, 12-14.

If God can't "just forgive," and I can't make things right, am I condemned to face punishment for my debt of sin?

- We would be doomed if God did not "justly forgive." He made payment to Himself by Christ's blood—justifying, redeeming, and propitiating.

How is this "just justification" applied to an unjust person like me? How can I be "justly forgiven?"

- Through faith, belief, by His grace as a gift, received by faith . . . in Jesus.

We "carelessly throw around" the priceless treasure of forgiveness when we:

- act like we are paying off at least part of our debt through our merits
- disconnect our forgiveness from God's (Ephesians 4:32) and say, "I forgive you, but you owe me!"

Receive the Gift—Treasure the Gift—Share the Gift

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction: offer all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ~~yet~~ are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ~~it~~ was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Some have called Romans the "heart of the gospel." Others have said it is the most important passage in the Bible. In what ways is such praise warranted for the truths in this text?
- It has been said that "forgiveness" is the most beautiful of words until we are asked to offer it to someone who has seriously hurt us. Explain what you think was meant by that.
- Explain the relationship between Faith, Works, and Justification. What are the outcomes of getting the "formula" wrong?
- Why is it a "disconnect" to be a professing Christian who says, "I forgive you, but you owe me?" What kind of "forms of payment" might someone expect when they offer this kind of "forgiveness?"
- Share your story of coming to receive God's forgiveness through belief in Jesus. What has helped you to continue to treasure this priceless gift?

ROMANS

3:21-26

Page 1042

You can turn in your Bibles or just use the copy of the passage that I've tried to layout in a way that highlights its thought-flow.

-- One great expositor from years ago put a big heart over this passage, he thought it was that important.

-- These five verses are such a treasure trove that we should handle them carefully . . .

-- . . . and certainly not throw them into the corner of our mental closet with the broken dolls and toys of life.

TR: Let's remind ourselves of the first question . . . the one that is flippant enough to reflect a childish foolishness.

Why can't God "just forgive?"

5

READ SLIDE (read with an attitude)

TR: The central theme of our Romans 3 passage answers that question again and again.

Romans 3:21-22a p.1042

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

ESV

Let's read through the entire paragraph first . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 22 continues . . .

Romans 3:22b-25a

For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 25 continues . . .

Romans 3:25b-26

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: The question at hand is “Why can’t God “just forgive?”

***But now the righteousness
of God has been manifested***

***This was to show God's
righteousness,***

***It was to show his
righteousness***

***so that he might be just
and the justifier***

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

1 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested
apart from the law,
 although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it
 21—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ
 for all who believe.

For there is no distinction:
 22for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 23and are justified by his grace as a gift,
 through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
 24whom God put forward as a propitiation
 by his blood,
 to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance
 he had passed over former sins.

It was to show his righteousness at the present time,
 so that he might be just and the justifier of the one
 who has faith in Jesus.

Perhaps you'll want to connect the thoughts from the notes to the passage.

-- In the work of Jesus on the cross . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Why can't God "just forgive?"

Why can't God "just forgive?"

❖ *Because He is just & righteous,
payment is required.*

10

READ SLIDE

- How can God be just and holy, righteous in Who He is and all He does, if we does not make people pay the debt of sin they owe?
- If you paid \$200K to build a house and then when you came to take possession there was no home there, would you be OK with a judge who says to the swindling builder, "Not guilty . . . I 'just forgive.'"
- We would label that judge a crook. Unjust and unrighteous. We would call for impeachment.
- Salvation, God forgiveness, could not be cheap . . . rather it

had to manifest the righteousness of God.

10

-- It had to somehow evidence that God is just.

-- In our forgiveness of each other, we are flippant with "forgiveness" – "Sure I forgive you." "No big deal." "No worries." "Don't even think about it again."

-- Could it be that we are careless with forgiving others, because we treat God's forgiveness like a floppy kid's toy?

TR: Feeling scolded because I'm playing with the good crystal, being told not to treat is as commonplace, I wonder

. . .

If God can't "just forgive," what can I do to make things right between us?

11

READ SLIDE

- Sure, I want to toss the goblet to my brother. I now know it might break. But is that a big deal?
- Couldn't I just buy another one to replace it?
- That's the way a lot of folks swing in thought . . . first to God "just forgiving" . . . then to "making things right."
- Isn't that what most religion is all about . . . us trying to "make it right" with God?

TR: But . . .

If God can't "just forgive," what can I do to make things right between us?

❖ If we could "make things right" we would *pay off* our debt ourselves.

12

. . . READ SLIDE

- Many are careless with forgiveness because they think it is not a big deal. And it certainly is not how we make things right.**
- If you steal, you have to return it.**
- When we find out we've hurt someone, don't we often say to them something like, "What can I do to make this right?"**
- If the other person tells us what we can do, then we don't even need forgiveness . . . we'll just pay off our own debt.**

TR: But in our relationship with God . . .

If God can't "just forgive," what can I do to make things right between us?

❖ If we could "make things right" we would *pay off* our debt ourselves. The reality of the Old Covenant limitations makes it clear that we cannot do that.

13

READ SLIDE (begin with "The reality . . .")

TR: Romans addresses how the Gospel truths impact both Jews, who had the OT law, and Gentiles who did not.

***apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets
bear witness to it***

14

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested
*apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it*
²² —the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ
for all who believe.

For there is no distinction:
²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation
by his blood,
to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness,
*because in his divine forbearance
he had passed over former sins.*
²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time,
so that he might be just and the justifier of the one
who has faith in Jesus.

**This manifestation of righteousness, showing us that God is just
... is ... READ SLIDE**

**-- The Law had its rules and standards. It also had its sacrifices.
-- Didn't trying your best and sacrificing for the rest make things
right between them and God?
-- To be fair, the OT (Law, Prophets and Writings) point beyond
the Mosaic Law and the sacrificial system to One who was to
come, the very Servant of God spoken of in Isaiah 53.**

**TR: No, it is clear that the Law was not the manifestation of
God's righteousness ... as Paul says in verse 25 ...**

***apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets
bear witness to it***

***because in his divine
forbearance
he had passed over
former sins.***

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested
*apart from the law,
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so that he might be just and the justifier of the one
who has faith in Jesus.

READ SLIDE

- If all it took to be right with God was to pay Him off with a few sacrifices, then why was He so upset with pagan sacrifices.
- After all, the pagans even sacrificed their own kids to try to appease the gods.
- If we could “make things right” by spending lots of money on lots of animal sacrifices, wouldn’t giving our own kids be even more costly?
- But the sacrifices of the OT did not take away the debt of sin.
- What a contrast to how most people think about OT people being saved . . . by keeping the Law.

-- But no one keeps the whole Law. And even the sacrifices did not accomplish making the person making the sacrifice truly holy.

TR: In the book of Hebrews we read this . . .

Hebrews 10:1

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, **it can never**, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, **make perfect** those who draw near.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- The Mosaic Law, with its sacrifices could **NEVER MAKE PERFECT** those who make the sacrifices.

TR: If it could have . . .

Hebrews 10:2

Otherwise, would they not have
ceased to be offered, since the
worshippers, having once been
cleansed, would **no longer have any
consciousness of sins?**

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- The repeated sacrifices speak to us of a continued
consciousness of sin.

TR: The sacrifices themselves are . . .

Hebrews 10:3-4

But in these sacrifices there is a **reminder of sins** every year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

ESV

READ SLIDE (. . . a reminder of sins . . .)

TR: Even the fact that there were no chairs in the tabernacle or temple tells us something, as we read down in verse 11 . . .

Hebrews 10:11-12

And every priest **stands** daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he **sat down** at the right hand of God,

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Jesus sat down . . .

Hebrews 10:13-14

. . . waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering **he has perfected for all time** those who are being sanctified.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- The work of Jesus on the cross is the manifestation of God's righteousness.

TR: As I consider how I am to treat this beautiful glass in my hands, as those older and wise gasp, concerned about my carelessness, I ask . . .

If God can't "just forgive," and I can't make things right, am I condemned to face punishment for my debt of sin?

21

READ SLIDE

EX: Nazi who admitted guilt but said he could never make atonement. Conscience was NOT perfected.

TR: We are all burdened with the debt of sin, as our passage tells us . . .

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

22

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it
²² —the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction:
²³ **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**
²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

READ SLIDE

-- EX: Handly Moule: “The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of (God’s glory); but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine and you on the crest of the Alps; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.”

TR: A truly just God cannot “just forgive” this moral debt. And we cannot pay for our debt with religious sacrifices of any kind.

If God can't "just forgive," and I can't make things right, am I condemned to face punishment for my debt of sin?

❖ *We would be doomed if God did not "justly forgive."*

READ SLIDE

- The contrast today is between the flippant "just forgive" and the awe-inspiring "justly forgive."
- [justly forgiveness] is the just payment made for the debt of another, freeing them from that debt.
- [justification] goes even further, giving us the riches of Christ after He has paid all our debt.

TR: The middle section of our text, squeezed between the two bookends that focus on the manifestation of God's righteousness, tells us . . .

*and are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption
that is in Christ Jesus,
whom God put forward
as a propitiation
by his blood,*

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested
apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it
²¹—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ
for all who believe.

For here is no distinction:
²²for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
and are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
²⁴whom God put forward as a propitiation
by his blood,
to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance
he had passed over former sins.
²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time,
so that he might be just and the justifier of the one
who has faith in Jesus.

. . . we . . . READ SLIDE

- There is a progression here . . . justified = declared right with God
- THROUGH redemption = bought out of the debtors' slave market of sin
- which is in Christ Jesus
- Whom God presented as One Who would turn God's wrath aside and make Him propitious towards us.
- which was done by Christ's shedding His life-blood.

TR: We would be condemned to eternal punishment because of our sins against an eternal and holy God . . .

If God can't "just forgive," and I can't make things right, am I condemned to face punishment for my debt of sin?

❖ *We would be doomed if God did not "justly forgive." He made payment to Himself by Christ's blood—justifying, redeeming, and propitiating.*

READ SLIDE (entire sub-point).

- Using the debt example again. We were in debt. It would be wrong for God to pretend that the debt was "just gone."
- We can't make it right so we can't pay off our own debt.
- But at the cross, God paid the debt and thereby "justly forgives" those who receive His gift.

TR: Doesn't that lead to the really critical question that all of us must ask . . .

How is this “just justification” applied to an unjust person like me? How can I be “justly forgiven?”

26

READ SLIDE

TR: Woven throughout these verses that are the heart-strings of the Gospel. We read . . .

***through faith in Jesus Christ for all
who believe***

***justified by his grace as
a gift . . . to be received
by faith.***

who has faith in Jesus

ROMANS 3:21-26 ESV

²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested
apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it
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because in his divine forbearance
he had passed over former sins.
²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time,
so that he might be just and the justifier of the one
who has faith in Jesus.

. . . the righteousness of God . . . READ SLIDE

TR: How can we be justly forgiven?

How is this “just justification” applied to an unjust person like me? How can I be “justly forgiven?”

❖ *Through faith, belief, by His grace as a gift . . . received by faith . . . in Jesus.*

READ SLIDE

- This treasure of salvation which is the manifestation of God’s righteousness, paying a debt I could never pay off.**
- A debt that all share as sinners who fall short of the glory of God . . . a debt that should find us locked forever in the debtor’s prison of hell.**
- But God, while He couldn’t “just forgive” without becoming unjust . . . did “justly forgive.”**

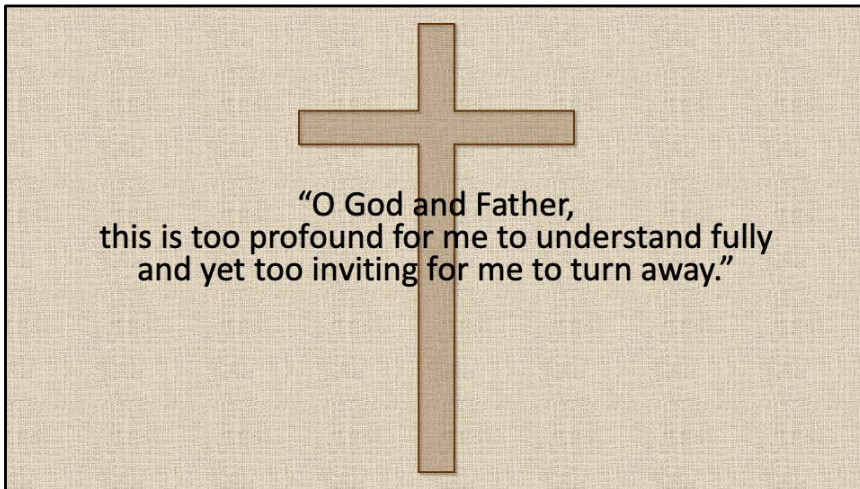
TR: What a contrast between God’s peace initiative and the cheap, childish mockery of saying . . .



. . . why doesn't God just forgive?

-- Perhaps what we need to most pray for, this season of approaching Good Friday, is that we would understand the priceless treasure of God's justly forgiveness.

TR: To pray with Ray Ortlund in his prayer printed on the front of the worship flier that begins . . .



READ SLIDE

- I invite you this afternoon, and perhaps several times this week, to read slowly through it.**
- It is the prayer of someone who just had a growth spurt, maturing to the point where they realized that they have a treasure in their hands, not a stuffed toy.**

TR: Many of us may protest saying that we would never be like that disobedient and thoughtless child. We would never treat the crystal like it was a fiber-filled teddy bear.

**We “carelessly throw around” the
priceless treasure of forgiveness
when we:**



31

But I wonder if we don't . . . READ SLIDE

TR: (when we . . .)

We “carelessly throw around” the priceless treasure of forgiveness when we:



❖ *act like we are paying off at least part of our debt through our works*

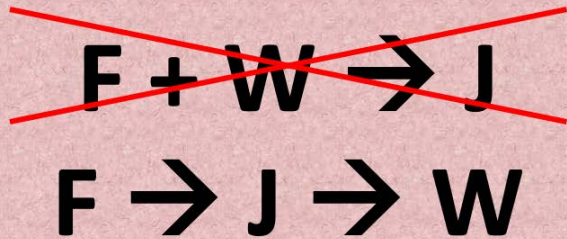


32

READ SLIDE

- The verses that follow in Romans 3 tell us that the work of Jesus on the cross, making God the just justifier of the unjust, renders all our boasting as nought.**
- We can't keep the Law.**
- Any sacrifices we pay for and make, are only like paying the interest but never touching the principal of our debt (and even that illustration is not fully accurate).**

TR: I doubt it is their intention, but many professing believers get this wrong.


$$\cancel{F + W \rightarrow J}$$
$$F \rightarrow J \rightarrow W$$

- Our Catholic friends imagine that $F + W \rightarrow J$. But that falters when we realize that leaves us living under almost old covenant standards . . . we can never sit down because our works are never done . . . we can never have our consciences perfected . . . we have to make up a time after death to finish our works in purgatory.
- We just read that we are justified . . . redeemed . . . propitiated for . . .
- . . . in Hebrews 10 we read that Jesus has “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”
- We needed more than a little help, more than a fresh start, more that a bit of capital to pay off the interest on our debt . . .

we needed the cross of Christ.

-- Yes, works will be manifest but as a result not a cause or ground of justification.

-- “Are you saying your conscience has been made perfect?”

→ Yes, through the cross. I know I still sin but I find rest for my soul at the cross.

TR: Another evidence that we have tossed about the crystal goblet is the crunching under our feet when we read . . .

Ephesians 4:31-32

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: When we are careless about suggesting that God should “just forgive” we are usually bloody with the shards of glass that have cut us and others because we .

. .

We “carelessly throw around” the priceless treasure of forgiveness when we:



❖ *act like we are paying off at least part of our **debt** through our **works***

❖ *disconnect our forgiveness from God's and say, “I forgive you, but **you owe me!**”*



35

READ SLIDE

- Flippant with God's forgiveness will invariable lead to being flippant in our forgiveness of each other.
- If forgiveness is the paying of the debt that one cannot themselves pay, how could there be any debt left?]
- We have witnessed, have we not, people who say, “I forgive you . . . but . . .”
- But . . . you must be humiliated before others
- But . . . you may never be truly near to me again

- It has been said that forgiveness is the most beautiful of words . . . until someone is asking you to forgive them for

something that hurt you deeply.

35

TR: We want to somehow minimize the cost to us of forgiving, forgetting that Jesus' work on the cross and His declaration, "It is finished" tells us that our debt is . . .



36

READ SLIDE

- How tempting it is for us to treat the treasure of forgiveness like it was a cheap stuffed bear.**
- To declare that we have forgiven . . . that we have “paid in full, sort of”**
- We want to reserve the right to bring up the debt in future credit ratings,**
- . . . to use the receipt as a negotiation chip when we disagree in the future,**
- . . . to be able to wave it in front of the other person in vindication and say, “I told you so.”**
- This week we burned in our woodstove old records . . .**

receipts that were paid in full and no longer needed to be findable. Perhaps delighting in the treasure of God's forgiveness will inspire us to do the same with those things we said we forgave, but want so much to hang on to.

TR: My hope today is to help us, as often immature children, treasure what is priceless. As Peter the Apostle said we are to remember that we "were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19)



***Receive the Gift
Treasure the Gift
Share the Gift***

**There is only one place we can have our consciences cleansed,
to be made perfect, justified, redeemed, no longer under God's
holy and righteous wrath . . .**

. . . so we are called today to . . . READ SLIDE

(invite people up to receive the gift of priceless treasure)