



What is the Divine Dilemma?

Exodus 23:7 - Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked

Romans 4:5 -And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

Proverbs 17:15- He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.

Exodus 34:5-7 - The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation

God must punish sin, but God also forgives.

Why does God have to punish sin?

First, God is not like us.

Second, there are no contradictions in God.

Third, God is the Judge!

Why does God forgive sinners?

Because God is faithful to his promises.

Because God is patient.

Because of God's mysterious purposes of election.

The Answer: The Gospel

Paul Washer writes,

"One of the greatest affirmations of Scripture is that nothing is impossible for God! This truth is most clearly revealed in the manner which God contrived to maintain His righteous character while pardoning sinful men: God became a man, bore the sins of His people upon the cross, and suffered the



divine judgment that was decreed against them. By His suffering and death in the place of His people, God satisfied the demands of His own justice against them and appeased His own wrath toward them so that His mercy toward them might be perfectly consistent with His own righteousness.”

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Which side of the dilemma (God judges or God forgives) do you think is overemphasized in our culture? Which one in your experience might be underemphasized?
2. What would you say to an unbeliever who said, “But God is love!” when confronted with news about God’s judgment? How does our culture generally respond to news about God’s judgment?
3. Why is it important that God’s character and attributes are consistent and in harmony with each other? between the old and new testaments? Why is that important for the gospel?
4. How does the mystery of God’s election humble us? How does the doctrine of election encourage us to share the gospel?
5. What are winsome ways one might share the news about the divine dilemma? Which one would you start with first?

What are false dilemmas?

First, the John 3:16 dilemma. You might be wondering where the dilemma is. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The verse states plainly that God sent His one and only Son because he loved the world. Where’s the dilemma? The good news is that the dilemma does not reside in the verse itself, but in the wrong interpretations of the verse. Ironically, the dilemma is similar to our run-away trolley analogy from before. Others have used John 3:16 and the trolley analogy as follows: God the Father has an unbearably difficult



choice before Him—save his Son or save the world. It’s as if the Father is the conductor of this run-away trolley and is torn between the two. With a single tear he chooses to sacrifice his own Son for the world. Preachers have used this one many times before and in the right setting, perhaps with stirring music and a powerful video illustration, it can seem good and true. But there is much wrong here. First, God did not make up salvation as he went along. History is not a run-away train that God barely has any control over. Second, this analogy completely contradicts Jesus’ words in John 10:17-18:

“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Jesus was not a last minute sacrifice—He received this charge from His father and laid His life down of His own accord. Thirdly, God is *never* in conflict with Himself.