

## Week 6

# How Can One Person's Death Pay for Another's Sin?

March 28



Hi, everyone!

In this week of the *You Asked For It* series, we're tackling the question, "How Can One Person's Death Pay for Another's Sin?" I'm Brock Pickett, a member of our Spiritual Direction team, and here's my take on the matter.

Here's the thing about my relationship with this question: I've never really struggled with it. Believe that God sent Jesus to die for me? Easy. I've grown up in church and have heard since I was in preschool that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son. So, when I ask myself that question, I'm all in. Until, that is, I started diving into the research for this week's devotionals.

Nothing's changed about my belief that God did save me through the death of Jesus; the question that remains is, "How?" What spiritual events transpired on the cross? How did this punishment that Jesus took upon Himself work? How can a loving God allow His own son to take an unfair punishment He didn't deserve? Didn't Jesus abolish the 'eye for an eye' version of justice, and if so, why did He have to take that kind of retributive punishment? So, at the end of the day, I'd just like to thank whoever assigned this week to me.

After the reading, searching, and digging, here's where I've landed: God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. The death of Jesus is God's divine love on display; the cross is where justice and mercy meet. Check out what the Apostle Paul says about this meeting place.

"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— He did it to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." **Romans 3:21-26 (NIV)**

A few things I notice in this passage that make a huge difference for me.

- Paul says that this righteousness (through Jesus' sacrifice) is new and different but has been testified to by the law and the prophets—the Old Testament. Here's a link to teaching with a video from The Bible Project (<https://bibleproject.com/learn/sacrifice-atonement>) that talks about this idea of atonement: how it started and worked through scripture and how Jesus' death is our once-and-for-all atonement.
- Paul doesn't shy away from the fact that all people are sinful and we're all unworthy and unable to save ourselves from that sin. A price must be paid because death is the punishment for sin. **Read Romans 6:23, Galatians 6:7, and John 3:36.** Sin has a grave consequence and each of us is due the penalty of it.
- God is the one who is just, and He's the one who justifies. The fact that He is just means He couldn't just ignore sin; letting us off the hook isn't an option. The consequence of sin is too grave for each of us. In His love, He chose to send Jesus, who is fully God, which means God came Himself, accepting the punishment Himself. God is love, but He's also holy. His holiness demands justice, but His love desires a relationship. So, it's His love that sent Jesus, not His vengeance. Here's a video that helps understand that.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43qbMJ2TG4E>

We still haven't really answered *how* Jesus' death paid our penalty, and honestly, we can't fully know. There is more happening behind the scenes and God is too far beyond our capacity to know exactly how the payment happened, but we do get a few glimpses of it in scripture.

- This video helped me digest those images in a very compact, simple way:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=By5qy0T3JrQ>
- I'd also definitely recommend a book from a previous week, *Mere Christianity*. Book 2 in particular gives a truly spectacular viewpoint of why Jesus' death was necessary and how it paid our debt of sin.

There's one more thing I'd invite you to do this week to keep your focus on the divine love for all humanity that in the end sent Jesus to the cross. One more observation from Romans 3: God *presented* Christ as the sacrifice of atonement and He *demonstrated* his righteousness through it. I am struck by these two similar words. God put His love and justice on display when Jesus hung on the cross. There is a practice called *visio divina*, which basically means looking at something creative--like art or nature--through the eyes of God to see what it might reveal. See the instructions here (<https://abbeyofthearts.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Visio-Divina.pdf>) and use one of these images to see God's love demonstrated through art. Take your time and use these images as a prayer.

- <https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/salvador-dali/christ-of-saint-john-of-the-cross/>
- <https://www.marcchagall.net/exodus.jsp>
- <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/354631>

As you wrap up your practice, spend time journaling: After sitting with your image(s) of the crucifixion, what stirred in you? Did any particular element cause you to notice anything or shift your perspective? When you consider your own sin and Jesus' work on the cross, what feelings arise?

In the end, what I learned about the sacrifice of Jesus is that it is beautiful. It's a reason to worship and adore God for His divine love that wasn't satisfied to let us die as a penalty. To conclude, here's one of my favorite poems about the beauty of the Gospel story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhe5qLju3h4>

God bless,

Brock