

# OpenTheo

## Is Humanity's Justice Better Than God's?

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether humanity's justice is better than God's, what to say to a Muslim who asks why God's justice requires him to punish sin instead of just forgiving without punishment, and why so much blood, torture, and slaughter for Jesus.

- \* God is not just. Humanity's justice attempts to fit a punishment to the crime and aims for rehabilitation and restoration to the community rather than eternal damnation.
- \* What would you say to a Muslim who asks why God's justice requires him to punish sin instead of just forgiving without punishment?
- \* Why so much blood, torture, and slaughter for Jesus?

## Transcript

You're listening to Amy Hall and Greg Hochl, and this is the hashtag S-T-R-A-S-C-Podcast from Stand to Reason. Welcome. And Greg, we are ready to start this show.

Okay, here's a question from Brad. How does one respond to this challenge? God is not just. Humanity's justice attempts imperfectly to be sure to fit a punishment to the crime and aims for rehabilitation and restoration to the community versus eternal damnation.

It seems reductionist to say the creator makes the rules. Well, I'm pausing for a moment because I don't understand what is reductionist about that. But notice how there is a, in the definition of justice that's given, is the aim for rehabilitation, punishment, and the aim for rehabilitation.

I don't know why the aim of rehabilitation has any role in the exercise of justice. Justice means giving what is due, what someone, what is required under the circumstances. So if someone does, commits a crime for which punishment is due, then punishment is due them properly, and that's justice when punishment is needed out.

There is no requirement of justice to rehabilitate. That is a, actually this is a modern

notion that has infected in many ways our political system, because our political system, our juridical system now has a very strong emphasis on rehabilitation and not on justice, retributive justice, as opposed to what might be called, do they call it restorative justice, something like that. I don't think the word justice even applies in that circumstance.

But in any event, retributive justice is the idea that you are punished for the wrongs that you committed. And I guess there's a positive retribution that you praised for what you do right. In fact, that's the way scripture characterizes the role of government, punishment of evil doers, and the praise of those who do right.

Okay, well, that's justice. Now, rehabilitation, that's an added notion. It may be a good thing, but it's not a function of justice.

And so when the culture redefines justice, and then tries to impose that redefinition on God, they're doing something inappropriate, then they're saying God's not just. Well, wait a minute, he's not just how, according to our new definition of justice. Well, okay, well, the problem here is your new definition of justice.

It is in God's justice. Okay. And so when when even even our kind of common sense intuitions about this, a person commits a terrible crime.

And so then we send them to the Bahamas to help his life be better. You murdered all those children. Oh, yeah, I have problems.

Okay, let's send you to the Bahamas and give you a nice life so that your behavior will change. Nobody's going to consider that an act of justice. They said that person should be punished.

Pay his debt to society. That's the way it used to be characterized, which I think is a pretty fair way of characterizing it. In fact, that's New Testament language as well.

And so and then after he's paid his debt, then we could do what we can to help him function more effectively in society. Nothing wrong with that, but that's not justice. Justice is the first, it's not the second.

And if you include that with your definition of justice, well, then you're going to have a, you're going to find a fine fault with God. God is not improving people. He's just punishing them.

Well, he's punishing people who can, who, who are committed to continuing in their, their, their immoral, a wicked way of living. Anyone who turns to Christ for forgiveness will be given the Holy Spirit to help them rehab. So there is rehab in our system.

It's a function of God's mercy. It's not a function of justice though. One thing here, part of this objection is that humanity's justice attempts to fit a punishment to the crime.

Well, what if this is the fit punishment for the crime of rebelling against our, our ultimate, you know, sovereign king and judge of the universe? We, we all know that the, the higher the authority, the, the greater the sin is to defy that authority and to rebel against that authority. You know, so if you, if I, if I slap my, my sister, that's different from slapping a policeman from slapping the President of the United States, and you know, it goes on up. And so if you have the perfect God of the universe and you're rebelling against him, well, rebelling against the infinitely good and perfect God, what if that requires an infinite punishment? And also, he says, you know, our, our justice aims for restoration.

Well, what if, what if no, what if people will not repent? What if they will never ever repent? And in fact, that is the case. They will never, ever repent. And we, we've talked, you know, I think in the last episode, but about God needing to change people's hearts.

He doesn't owe that to them. He doesn't owe a change. He, he owes the judgment.

And out of grace, he changes some people's hearts and he saves them. Now, in Revelation, right before the book is opened with all of the, you know, the seals are broken and all the judgments are given. It says, you know, who, who is worthy to open this? Who is worthy? And then they look and they see the lamb, which is Jesus, of course, and Jesus is worthy.

And he's not worthy because he's perfect. What the text says is that he's worthy because he redeemed people from every tribe for himself. So all of this has to be looked in light.

And you brought this up to Greg. Jesus died for people who deserved hell. So the fact that he judges people of Psalm is, is you have to look at that in light of the fact that he died, he died for his enemies and he saved them and he showed them grace that they did not deserve.

So you always have to look at it in light of that. That is what made him worthy to, to judge because he didn't just stand far off as a judge. He actually stepped in.

So I think that, I think that was everything I wanted to say. I, I don't think anyone in hell is going to want to change. I think they're going to remain in rebellion against God.

And so even in that case, there's going to be ongoing punishment. And so the punishment will never end because their rebellion will never end. So I think there are a lot of ways to look at this one.

Now Greg, let's go into a question from Sarah and you might build on what you've already said here. What do you say to a Muslim who asks why God's justice requires him to punish sin and why can't he just forgive without punishment? I can argue for the atonement from the Bible, but how do I reason outside of the Bible for someone who

doesn't believe in its authority? Well, first of all, the, just think for a moment, it's, it's completely the will of Allah to release or not to. Okay.

And here is where it may be helpful to employ what I call the inside out tactic. And I actually did it just a few moments ago. And that is an appeal to people's common sense moral intuitions about things.

Now I think that those common sense moral intuitions are actually part of being made the image of God. So there are things on the inside of a person and virtue of them being made the image of God that end up expressing themselves on the outside and in their language, for example, or their behavior. And so when, when we suggest a world in which there is just a loving government, the government, the legal system is just loving and they just forgive.

There is no requirement for retribution. So all this offends people's moral sensibilities, particularly the sensibility of justice, because in this way, people put it, that guy got away with murder. He just got away with it.

And that's not right is what they're thinking is. But this way of looking at things says that, that God will just let everyone in a certain sense just get away with murder. And that, of course, isn't the view of grace.

Grace is, as you were pointing out earlier, that there has been a payment made to satisfy the requirements of justice, but it's been made by a substitute that Jesus who redeemed, and that gives the redeemer, the rescuer, the right to open the seals and to judge mankind. So I think that one way to approach this is to approach from common sensibility about our, our moral intuitions that seem to be legitimate. And we wouldn't consider a government to be a legitimate government, a just government, a proper government, if they did not punish any crime.

Look, we have a situation in California, for example, that a theft under a thousand dollars, say \$950 is a misdemeanor and not a felony. The California district attorney has chastised target for calling on the police to arrest people who steal less than \$1,000 from their store, because it's not a felony. Don't mess with us with just mere misdemeanors.

And of course, all this means is that people can go in one target, steal \$900 worth of stuff and just walk out, go into another, do the same thing, come back to the next, the same target the next day and do the same thing. So the law is not enforced. And this is, I think, by common consent, not right, that the government should just shrug its shoulders at people committing crimes like this and destroying entire business establishments.

That's what's happening in California. Yeah, this isn't right. The rule of law is not enforced, which means that justice is not being done.

And when justice is not being done, evil increases. No duh. Okay.

So again, I don't need the Bible to know that. I don't need to be a Christian to know that. This is a human awareness that is built into all of us.

It's not perfect. But in many cases, it's adequate to make the particular point we need to make that which is inside that God has placed inside is going to come out of every human being in one way or another, because human beings are made the image of God. And that's how the inside out tactic works.

You don't have to trade on a biblical verse. You can say, you know this, do you think this is okay? Do you guys think this is right? By the way, it's interesting in Islam, apostates get punished. And Muslims are free to do the punishing, you know, to take take vengeance out on behalf of God, probably is the way they think about it, and punish the apostates or those who do something offensive to Islam.

You know, so how does that comport with this concern? And it's not just even a pragmatic thing because you were saying that evil increases. We just know it's wrong even if evil didn't increase. So even if it means after, you know, at the end of all things that God forgives everyone and it has nothing to do with increasing evil, we'd still think it was wrong if God never punished sin.

And all you have to do is wait for something in the news to pop up and everybody reveals that they agree with this. And there was this case, I don't know, it was probably a decade ago. There was a kid, he, you know, he was like a college student and he raped one of his fellow students.

And then because he was wealthy and he had connections, the judge just let him off. And the outcry against that judge was so great because everyone realized that is wrong. That is wrong.

He has to pay the penalty. And it's not surprising, you know, someone would ask this question because this is a real problem for religions because every other religion other than Christianity has to make sense of justice. So either at the end, justice is all there is, and you have to meet that justice and you have to do well enough.

And so there's hopelessness. There's no way you can make it. Everyone's condemned.

Or God sweeps all the justice under the rug, the evil, he says, I don't really care about evil. And now not only is he letting people off the hook and that's wrong, now we're seeing something about God. Now God doesn't care about the evil.

Now it's not important to him that it be punished. He's not righteous. He's not good even.

And so that way people get to be with God. But now what kind of God is that? He's not a good judge. Everyone should hate them like they hated that other judge.

But only Christianity has the cross which upholds justice perfectly and is the means by which God offers grace. And so God can be the just and justifier of those. Just and justifier, which is exactly what Paul says in Romans three.

Romans three. Okay. I just wanted to get the address.

Yeah, I knew you would know. To me, it's either in Romans or Galatians, these kinds of statements. Yeah.

But that's actually my favorite passage in the Bible, Romans three right there, 21 through 26. Because this is such an incredible, brilliant way that God handled this whole situation. And it's the only way that we can have grace without God being a bad God.

And so why can't he just forgive without punishment? Because he's good and he's righteous. And we all know that requires him to punish. Incidentally, kind of another facet to this is none of that applies for those who do not believe in penal substitution.

In other words, if they don't think that Jesus was the substitute who took the punishment from the Father on our behalf, then justice still is not satisfied. And there are a whole lot of people. In fact, I wrote a piece a couple of months ago, I'm not sure when it was released, a solid ground titled *Why the Blood*, very controversial with a lot of Christians.

In fact, even after I wrote it in response to pushback, I'd gotten regarding things that I wrote in the story of reality. And then when the solid ground came out for the, my, I think with full throw to justification of the the substitutionary tome of Jesus satisfying the wrath of the Father, we got still got a whole bunch more complaints. But the person, if this isn't what took place, then where is the where how is just God's justice satisfied? If Jesus didn't pay for sins, and by the way, if he paid for sins, if he died for sins, not just died because people sinned, but his death was, in some sense, a payment for it.

I'm trying to think of the right word here. It atoned for the sin, that would be the New Testament word, and therefore appeased God's wrath, which is propitiation. If God, if none of those things happened on the cross, though those are biblical words used frequently in the text, especially the epistles talking about this, then there is no justice done.

God has just forgiven some in virtue of what? In virtue of them believing in Jesus. So it is, God decides not to be retributive merely based on someone's belief. What happened to justice? There is no justice in that.

It is just certainly a merited mercy, it's grace, but the demands of the law has not been satisfied. In penal substitution, God's wrath is satisfied through the payment that he himself makes through the incarnate son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, so that now God is satisfied. And that's what propitiation means.

Satisfaction, it's done, it's resolved. So God has no basis to be angry at us anymore, those who are under that satisfaction. And that's Romans 5, the first couple verses, therefore being justified by faith.

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who's given us this introduction into the grace in which we stand. And we rejoice, he says. Notice that's not the peace of God, that's real, but that's not what he's talking about.

He's saying peace with God, God's not angry at us anymore. None of that could be the case if substitutionary torment is not a fact. And what I found, what I found with people who deny it, a lot of times they don't just lose the justice, they also lose the grace because what people will say is if they have to find some other meaning for the cross, if it's not to pay for our sins, then what is it? Well, a lot of them will say it is to reveal God's, to condemn the powers of the world and to show a different way of living in the world and deny that.

All sorts of things like that. And so he's teaching us to do something on the cross. In other words, there's no grace, it's only another legalistic system where the cross teaches you how to live.

So you lose justice and you lose grace. And that's just not how the Bible characterizes what's going on there. So we need to do one more question because this one follows along all of these other ones.

This one comes from Eric. I hear this question, and while I'm not bothered by it, I am curious as to the prose answer. Why so much blood, torture, and slaughter for Jesus? Why so much blood, torture, and slaughter for Jesus? I'm not sure what those words are meaning to.

I assume he's talking about the cross here rather than the end times. I guess, well, the word slaughter certainly doesn't so much slaughter. I guess maybe I'll confuse a little bit by the word.

The blood, that is simply a function of the kind of execution that Jesus experienced, which is brutal, crucifixion, and before that, flogging. Now, it turned out Paul was flogged four times, 39 strokes of the Maxus 40, but they figure 40 Ochaeus, so they give you 39. That's a lot of blood there.

So Jesus was flogged, and then he was crucified. So you have a very gruesome execution. So that's where the blood comes from.

What were the other words? Torture and slaughter. Again, torture was a function of the execution. God didn't torture Jesus, and this is an inappropriate, I don't know that Eric means it this way, but people use this many times in objecting to eternal punishment.

So God's going to torture us forever. Torture is when people inflict pain for the mere pleasure that they get out of it. This isn't torture.

It's torture us when using that word as an adjective to describe the subject or element of the punishment, but it's not an act of torture. It's an act of justice. No appropriate sentence of a criminal in a healthy judicial system is torture.

It's not fun for the criminal. It may be torture us for him or her to experience the judgment, but it's not torture. It's justice.

It's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. So the same thing here.

The means of execution was torture and torture us because of the ball of that. Maybe torture us is a better word because the it was a terrible act to torture rather to execute somebody through crucifixion, but I don't end. Certainly the point was to cause a lot of pain, but as part as a deterrent to others.

All right, which raises the question, you know, here are the two themes on the cross. This is what they get for thievery. Who would take the chance? You know, but in any event, that's another issue.

And so in the last word was slaughter and I don't even know how that applies here because generally slaughter is applied to numbers of people, a word that applies execution of the killing of numbers of people. But the real pain of the cross and I'd go into detail in this and the story of reality, the real misery was not what Jesus suffered at the hands of men, which by the way, many others have suffered to and arguably even suffered worse than Jesus. But it's the pain that Jesus experienced at the hands of the Father, which is the very point that's under challenge when people when some people read the story of reality.

And I mentioned there that Jesus rescued us from the Father, you know, and Jesus says in Matthew 10, don't fear him who can kill the body and not the soul, fear him who can kill body and soul and throw them both into hell. You know, so this is, I mean, I don't know why this is such a controversial point. Well, especially, I think we've answered most of it already in the previous questions and we've talked about the need for justice and we've talked about all those things.

So I, I just want to read a little bit from this passage in Romans three. It says, we're justified as a gift by his grace through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith, which is satisfaction propitiation means a satisfaction. This and then here's the answer.

This was to demonstrate his righteousness because in the forbearance of God, he passed over the sins previously committed for the demonstration, I say, of his righteousness at the present time so that he would be just and the just fire of the one who is faith in Jesus.



So the simple answer here is the reason why Jesus went through this death is because God was demonstrating his hatred of sin and his righteousness, his justice. So it shows the evil of sin and by the judgment that Jesus suffered.

It shows the fact that God cares about that. It shows it showed his righteousness. Sin is really ugly and horrible.

And if this didn't have to happen this way, it wouldn't have. So we can see the reason why all of this horrible thing Jesus went through is because that is what sin deserves and God was demonstrating that and demonstrating that he cares about that and he brings about justice that he's just and the justifier. Just to add, the justifier part comes in that it wasn't just a demonstration, but it was an act that actually propitiated.

So it had a consequence in satisfying God's just and appropriate anger towards the sinners who Jesus, who Jesus death paid for. It propitiated the father regarding them. And by the way, that word shows up a couple of different places.

But one of first John, chapter two, my little children, I write these things so you do not sin, but if you do sin, you have an advocate with the father and Jesus Christ, the righteous and he himself is the propitiation for sins, not just ours, but for the whole world. In other words, that that is the solution for the world. Now Christians have benefited from that by putting their trust in him.

But the benefit is that the debt has been paid, which is why we could be confident in being freed and forgiven because there's no longer a debt on our account to the father. He has been satisfied. Well, thank you for these great questions.

I'm glad we were able to get all those three together, even though we went over a little bit more a lot. If you have a question, send it to us on X with a hashtag SDR. Ask or you can go straight to our website.

All you have to do is look for our hashtag SDR. Ask podcast page and you'll see a link there. Just click on that link and you'll be able to send us your question and we just ask you keep it, tweet size, which is, you know, two sentences.

No, really no more than that. It's pretty short. And hopefully you can fit your question into that amount of space.

We look forward to hearing from you. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.