

OpenTheo

How Is God Just If So Many Wrongs Go Unpunished?

October 28, 2024



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how God could be just if so many wrongs go unpunished, an objection to God punishing people in Hell, and whether God's promise to meet all our needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus is referring to physical needs, spiritual needs, or both.

- * The cross only upholds justice between God and man, but where is justice among men? How is God just if so many wrongs go unpunished?
- * An infinite being existing outside of the time and space he created will set us on fire if we don't let him be called King of our planet? Is that usual behavior for deities?
- * Is God's promises to meet all our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus referring to physical needs, spiritual needs, or both?

Transcript

This is the hashtag STRask Podcast and we're so glad you're listening because if you weren't, we would be sitting here in this little room talking for no purpose other than to talk at each other. Which is actually, we do that a lot. So that's a tremendous amount of fun but is not leveraged.

Yes. Okay, Greg, this first question comes from Alexander Coppersmith. He says, I heard from STR, quote, only the cross upholds justice perfectly.

For justice between God and man, yes, but where is justice among men? How is God just if so many wrongs go unpunished? And yes, they do go unpunished. I don't care what Romans 12, 19, and Galatians 6, 7 say, I need answers because I am so mad at God about this. Well, the first difficulty is the common, I don't care what Romans and Galatians say because they, these are important elements and trying to understand how justice works, okay? It's interesting in Psalm 51, when David is dealing with his guilt regarding Bathsheba and her husband.

I'm trying to think of his name, Uriah, yeah. I thought Mariah ahead of my head and I could get the M out, Uriah. And because his guilt was compounded, the adultery was compounded by the murder of Uriah.

And he put him at the front lines where the battle was fierce as so he died. And he would be able to get away with this. But it's interesting though, there was a sin against Bathsheba and certainly against Uriah.

What David says in Psalm 51 is against you and you only have sinned and done what is evil in your sight. And the point that's being made there is that the biggest crime is the crime against God's character. It isn't to diminish any other aspect of the crime because when David is confronted by Nathan, the prophet on this issue, it's clear that Nathan was identifying a crime that was committed, in which individuals were harmed, okay? So, but it was especially and preeminently a crime against God.

So when God judges, there is justice with regards to God, but it isn't just with regards to God because the Scripture says that we should not take our own vengeance but leave room for the vengeance, the retribution, the justice of God. In other words, when God judges, he is not just in a certain sense of, I don't have any problem with this word by the way, some people do, avenging the harm done to his own character, but he's avenging the harm done to others. That's why we're told to let God handle it, not have us handle it.

So the justice that God meets out is appropriate to cover the crime against God and the much lesser crime against other human beings. It's a lesser crime, but it still is a crime and God's justice resolves that as well. So justice is done all around.

Now, it may be that for some individuals, existentially in terms of their experience, that's not satisfying. They want this person to go down now and go down hard and painfully. And that's what they want to have happen.

But you see, that's a sense of justice that's not informed by truth. And the truth is God's justice. And it doesn't, God's justice says, no, I feel good to us because our judgment is informed by a fallen nature.

So I don't know how we're going to satisfy Alexander on this one, but I think that seeing this in its proper perspective is the right way to approach it. And then, just like anything else in our Christian life, have instruct our emotions to take the backseat to the truth, let the truth instruct our emotions, not our emotions instruct the truth. Right.

So his question, but where is justice among men? The answer is, well, we're fallen, so it won't be perfect here. No matter what, it's not going to be perfect here. There are a lot of things that will be addressed, and there are things that won't be addressed.

But his question, how is God just if so many wrongs go unpunished, that assumes that

they will go unpunished forever. And otherwise, he's, as he's just saying, they need to be punished now, but I don't see why I don't see why that's the case. As long as they're punished, that that is enough.

If they're punished fully and accurately and justly, then it doesn't matter if it's right now or 10 years from now or 50 years from now or whatever it is, it will happen. So now it becomes, well, how can you guarantee that God will punish everything that's been done that's wrong? And the answer is, I think the biggest answer is that we look at the cross. The fact that the cross happened proves without a doubt that God cares about righteousness and justice.

Because if he didn't care about that, Jesus wouldn't have needed to die on the cross. And so if Jesus actually came and died to pay for sins, that means God cares about paying for sins. He cares about punishing evil.

And in fact, if you go through the Bible, so much of the worship of God is grounded in the idea of God bringing about justice. So look at the Psalms. Go through the Psalms.

You'll see Psalm after Psalm praising God for his justice and his righteousness. Look at Revelation and you'll see that the people who are with God are praising him because he's bringing about justice at the end of time. So we see it promised there.

We see it promised for sure in the cross because otherwise the cross makes no sense. It's interesting in Revelation, though, you do have a scene there where the saints who have died, the martyrs are crying out for justice. So the sentiment that's being expressed here by Alexander is understandable.

But even the saints understand that this moral obligation is going to be fulfilled by God in the future. And that is that there are a lot of people who deserve justice who are going to get down the line mercy, the mercy that comes through Christ. Okay, just like presumably Alexander God.

So for the crimes, the moral crimes that Alexander has been guilty of, I'm just going to presume he's a believer. If he has his wish, he'd have to go back to there. Well, the injustice about the crimes that we're not paid for in this life, that includes him as well.

Sometimes when we cry out for justice, we are not, as Lewis puts it, we don't quite understand what we're asking for because when Jesus returns to bring justice, he's going to be to do a complete job. And this reminds me of a point that I've made many times in talks, but it didn't originate with me. I read it on a piece of paper printed apologetics paper.

I have no idea who wrote it, but I've used it because it was very good. If Jesus were to come back tonight at midnight to rectify all the evil in the world, where would you be at 1201? That's the line. And I say, well, our fingerprints are on the smoking gun.

We're not just abused. We're abusers. So we're guilty like everybody else.

And that's why as Christians who have received grace, we can accept the grace that God gives to others. But again, it's grounded in the justice of the cross. And this is where we're back to the comment that only the cross upholds justice perfectly.

And the rest of that sense, if it was from this show, was that he's able to show grace and uphold justice through the cross. The just and the justifier. Right.

So even those who will have their sins forgiven, that has still got to still express his wrath against that injustice. And we can appreciate that because we've received grace. Which incidentally is tied to a penal substitution.

If there is no substitution where Jesus receives the wrath of the Father for our sin, then this is not accomplished. And I wrote a piece on this recently. I'm trying to remember the title of it, but earlier this year it went out.

It was about why the blood, I think, is the title of it. And the whole point that I was making was a defense of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. But I think you do run into this objection.

If there is no suffering that Jesus did on our behalf at the hands of the judge, the ultimate judge, the Father, the King is angry for the fall. And now what? And so Jesus is the substitute who receives the anger, which shields us from the anger of God. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us this introduction.

We have peace with God. It's not the peace of God. Not here, not in this Romans 5 passage.

It's the peace with God. God's not angry at us anymore because he released all of his anger on Jesus. And I'm really glad that you said something about it's good to want justice because I don't want that to get lost in here.

Justice is a good thing. The reason why we want justice is because we are created in the image of God, and God is a God of justice, and he loves justice, and he is a good God, and he's a good judge. And so because of that, and because we care about people and we care about people being harmed, we want justice.

So there's nothing wrong with wanting justice. So sometimes I feel like I hear people telling Christians, Oh, you should just be, you should just be gracious, just be gracious. And they kind of sweep the justice under the rug and make people feel bad for wanting justice.

But that's the beauty again of the cross is that we can embrace both of those things. And

unfortunately, this is, and this is the point you were making Greg we were kind of divided on this because we want the justice until it applies to us, which brings us to the next question, which I think is basically the opposite question of the previous question. And this one comes from Don, an infinite being existed outside of time.

Sorry, an infinite being existed outside of the time and space that he created will set us on fire if we don't let him be called king of our planet. Is that usual behavior for deities? Well, this is a curious question for one. It's, oh, I'm sorry, I kicked out that say it's a somewhat of a distortion of the of our view.

God isn't going to set us on fire because we don't call him king. If you look closely at the account, this is what's necessary to avoid the straw man that has just been presented the mischaracterization that's just been presented is to look at the account and see what happens at the end. In Revelation 20, the books are opened and people are judged from what's written in the book books, according to their deeds.

So these are the rap sheets. This is basically the question is, are you telling me that a person who committed all these crimes against the state. And there they are that that I'm just trying to think of a distortion here.

Oh, now they're going to go to jail. What a vicious government just wants to kidnap these people and torture them in jail. So because of what all of these petty little things that they did.

No, the rap sheet is there to identify the nature of the crime. The crime is committed. And then justice is that the punishment fits the crimes.

That's what it amounts to. So what's in question here is our entire life and the things that we have done that are a violation of the goodness of God. And these deserve punishment.

That's the way law works. Okay. Now, there is a little hint in there.

If I, as I recall from your question about, you know, what a petty God that wants people to affirm him in some noble way, like he's wonderful. He's punishing us because what I'm saying, how wonderful he is. Is this the manner of all other gods or something? How are we put it? Well, no, it's not the matter of other gods because there are no other gods.

Okay. That was just okay. That was throw away.

No, the reason that we honor God is because God is worthy of honor. So we just have the Olympics not too long ago. People got awards.

Why did they get awards? Because they earned them. And nobody considered it like unusual that people would applaud those that won the medals because they earned it.

They deserved it.

It's appropriate to give plaudits to those who deserve it. And if you, the one that you're in question is a morally perfect being, then that not only does that individual deserve it. But it's appropriate for that individual to require it.

It's also a good thing. This is a point that John Piper makes in desiring God, or maybe his other book akin to that book. But that God, God being the most perfect being not only deserves this kind of worship, but it's obligatory for him to encourage others to do that because that's a good thing too.

And he promotes the good. Right. He is the king of the planet.

But this isn't just a raw exercise of power, which the suggest and egotistical power, which is the way, which is what the question, the way it's word, it suggests. And so. Right.

So, and I like that you bring in the other analogy of the government because it's not that we would say, well, the somebody disrespects the government by killing someone. And just so the government, now he's disrespected him. And now he's, they're going to put him in jail.

I mean, that's ridiculous. But you see that part, the disrespect is caught up in the evil. It's caught up in the sin.

The fact that he is going against the government is that he's doing something evil in this case that I'm giving. So even when, when people are rebelling against God, that involves evil and that involves doing something that is, that deserves to be punished. It's interesting in, in my memory, actually, though I'm older than most, I guess, that are listening, but in my memory, the idea of going to jail was characterized as pay for a crime you committed was characterized as paying your debt to the government, which is the society.

You have an obligation to do what's right in the society. And if you do what's wrong, you incur a debt that you then have to pay off. And that's the incarceration paying off the debt.

But that's a retributive justice, which a lot of people are not comfortable with retribution. They want to say, well, we're just put them in prison to keep them away from other people or maybe to help them to do better, not because they did anything wrong and deserve the punishment. But that's a different understanding entirely.

It is funny to me that this is a concept that we're very familiar with. We experience it in our society all the time. And yet suddenly when it comes to God, suddenly people can't make sense of it.

I'm not sure how that happens, but I'll keep making it. We look at a government people say, how did he get away with? He got away with murder. Are you kidding me? Well, yeah.

So that's wrong. And the government isn't enabled to or capable of executing justice perfectly. But God is.

And I remember even in the book story of reality, when I talk about perfect justice towards the end, I mentioned this, you think, oh, he got away with that. Nobody will get away with anything in the long run. It's the point.

And his last comment there is that usual behavior for deities. You made the point. There are no other deities, but the deities that have been created by men, it is not usual for them to have perfect justice and perfect grace.

They're worse. Right. Either they're capricious or they're immoral or they it's some sort of system that sweeps evil under the rug and doesn't punish or it's some system that did not pay for evil himself.

For forgiveness, right? So that he could offer grace. Or it's just power moves. It's just power.

Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

So you're not going to find any safe harbor with the other deities. Tell you what. Right.

All right. Let's go to a question from Alistair. When God promises to meet all of our needs, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus, is it referring to physical needs, spiritual needs, or both? Well, that's a good question.

And I don't think it. Well, it doesn't mean we get everything we want. What it means is that God is going to give us what's good for us.

All right. And the concept of need also needs to be clarified here. I struggle with this notion myself.

I'm just saying because I think of the shepherd's psalm. I shall not want. And I think, well, I want for a lot of things.

Maybe I don't have a shepherd that's taking care of me. I shall not want. But then it says he restores my soul.

And it's the first time I just made the connection between those phrases that are next to each other. I think he restores my soul. We will not want in the regard of having our souls restored.

And that's a multifaceted process. And a lot of times our souls being restored. Anybody who's been around walking with the Lord for a long time knows this explicitly that God restores our soul by withholding things that we want.

And then having to deal with those difficulties. Remember, momentary light affliction is producing for us any turtle way to glory. It's the verb that in set Corinthians 4, they're so important.

God uses these hardships and these difficulties to accomplish particular rounds, not just in the afterlife, but also in this life as well. God, this is a means of great gain, not just for this life, but also for the life to come. So there is a gain for this life.

And so when God is, I think we have to adjust our understanding of needs in a passage like that, because the way our culture characterizes that notion is very, very different than what the way God characterizes. Greg, I think we've been doing this too long because I have basically the same answer as you because my question was, you finally got it. Good.

My question was, you know, is it, he, he, he promises to meet all of our needs. My question is, for what? Yeah, our needs for what? And, and what you said, Greg, I never caught that before in Psalm 23, where I went and it's the same point is to Romans 8:28 and 29, because there it says all things are working together for good to those who love God, to those are called according to his purpose. Okay, that sounds very much like meeting in needs, but then it goes on to say that God is conforming us to the image of Christ.

That is his goal. That is the good that he's working towards. So what I think God will give us is that is whatever we need to make us like Christ.

So that is restoring our soul. It's, it's removing our sin is conforming us to the image of Christ. And we will receive everything that we need for that.

And so that might involve physical needs, that might involve spiritual needs. Who knows what that will involve, but you can know that everything is working towards that end, whatever happens to you. And there is other provision, of course, we experience that emotionally and spiritually and physically God makes provision for us.

We pray for things, but I'm sympathetic to this complaint because I read like Psalm 91 and he will heal us from all our diseases and 10,000 will fall and you're left and on the right and it shall not come near you and all of that. And of course, this is poetry, but it's, it's, it's, it's aggressive language that I guess we have to take hyperbolically as an exaggeration of God's care. He will cover you with his opinions and stuff like that.

And I, and I'm thinking, well, I didn't heal me of all my diseases. How am I supposed to understand that? And so there is a legitimate question that I think we struggle with

through regards to that. I'm sympathetic to the question that Donna's asked.

Well, thank you so much, Alexander, Don, and Alastair. We appreciate hearing from you. We hope to hear from you with your question.

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