

Why God sent Jesus

Part 4 – What made Jesus’ sacrifice so acceptable to God?

Scripture states clearly that God sent Jesus to save us from our sins, in scriptures like:

Luke 19:10 - “For the Son of Man came to seek and to **save what was lost.**”

John 3:17 - “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to **save the world** through him.”

1 John 3:5 - “He appeared so that he might **take away our sins.**”

1 Timothy 1:15 - “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**”

But why do we need saving? Because the repercussions of Adam’s rebellion have affected all of us, **Romans 5:18** - “the result of one trespass was **condemnation for all men,**” and “through the disobedience of the one man **the many were made sinners,**” **verse 19.** Just “one sin,” that’s all, **verse 16,** “brought condemnation” on all humanity.

What condemnation? **Verse 12** - “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way **death came to all men,** because all have sinned.” Just one act of disobedience was enough to condemn us all to “the reign of death,” **verses 17 and 21.**

And if that wasn’t bad enough, things got worse when God’s law came along, because instead of the law solving the problem of our sin, “The law was added so that **the trespass might increase,**” **verse 20** - which happens in two ways:

- 1) **Romans 3:20** - “through the law **we become conscious of sin,**” which Paul speaks of personally in **Romans 7:7** - “**I would not have known what sin was except through the law.**” God designed the law “in order that **sin might be recognized as sin,**” **Romans 7:13,** and to help us recognize how “utterly sinful” sin is. We see sin like we never saw it before.
- 2) **Romans 7:5** - “**the law arouses sinful passions.**” Again, Paul speaks of this personally in **verse 8** - “**But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.**” The law feeds our sinful nature, not controls it, so now we’re stuck with a mind full of sinful thoughts, and even worse, we’re stuck with a “**sinful mind hostile to God**” as well, **Romans 8:7.** So here we stand, as ungodly sinners condemned to living out our physical lives, dying and returning to the nothingness we came from, and there’s absolutely nothing we can do about it.

So that's the dilemma we're in, but look at the dilemma GOD's in too. He can't let us have eternal life in the state we're in, not while we're still controlled by our sinful nature, but he doesn't want to lose us for eternity either, because he made us in his image to share eternity with him. But he can't go back on his word. Adam and Eve disobeyed and God said they'd die, and the human race died with them.

So how on earth does God save us from the mess we're in? He can't just wave our sins away and carry on as if nothing happened. We rebelled, we blew up his plans for us and infected his creation with sin. And we still pollute everything we touch with sin. Surely justice demands that we be put away forever. And isn't that what justice is for, to put away evil and stop it spreading? So, yes, justice must be done. But how can justice be done without destroying us as well?

Couldn't God accept our repentance? But we can't repent because we're hopelessly under the control of our sinful nature (Romans 8:3). We don't even like God, let alone love him. And we have no idea, or even interest in, the depths of anger and sadness God feels toward our sin, so why would God even want to save us?

But he sent Jesus to save us anyway. Why? To reveal his love, **Romans 5:8** - "[God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.](#)" So Christ's death proves God still loves us, despite everything we've done - but we're still left with the practical problem of sin. How, for instance, does Christ's death resolve the problem of God's intense anger at sin? How does it resolve the problem of a holy God requiring justice, and what about the little matter of our blatant rebellion against God and his law hanging over our heads, as well?

The standard answer is that God unleashed all his fury on his Son, punishing him instead of us, and that's what made Jesus' sacrifice sufficient enough to save us. But is that what Jesus' sacrifice was meant to convey, that God's holy rage can only be relieved by inflicting punishment? Or that God only saves us after due payment for sin has been paid? Or that Jesus' sacrifice was only acceptable because of his extreme suffering and agonizing death?

But many people have died far worse deaths than Jesus. So what was so special about *his* death? And how was his sacrifice so acceptable to God that it covered every possible problem associated with our sin?

There's a clue back in **Numbers 25**, in another situation where God was extremely angry at sin and the people were in open rebellion against him - to the point, **verse 3**, that "[the Lord's anger burned against them.](#)" That's intense anger. And why was God so angry? Because, **verses 1-2**, Israelite men were cavorting with idol-worshipping Moabite women "[who invited them to the sacrifices of their gods](#)" and the Israelite men "[ate and bowed down before these gods.](#)" This was open rebellion and blatant disregard for God, and justice came swiftly.

God was so angry, **verse 4**, he told Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel." Each judge was to hunt down the culprits in his own group and with his own hand put them to death. No questions asked, just do it. But just as God was giving these instructions "an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel," **verse 6** - a brazen act, thumbing his nose at God and the entire leadership of Israel, with everyone watching.

But in the crowd watching was a man named Phinehas, **verses 7-8**, who immediately "left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them – through the Israelite and into the woman's body." At which point "the plague against the Israelites was stopped."

Notice, **verse 9**, that 24,000 Israelites had already died in the plague, but the plague hadn't stopped, had it? It wasn't punishment, therefore, that turned God's anger away, nor was it killing people that satisfied God's justice and relieved his holy anger. It was Phinehas. How? **Verses 10-13** - "The Lord said to Moses, Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, **has turned my anger away** from the Israelites: **FOR he was as zealous as I am for my honour among them**, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore...he and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, **because he was zealous for the honour of his God**, and made atonement for the Israelites."

What satisfied God and stayed the plague on Israel was the zealousness of Phinehas "for the honour of his God." That's what "made atonement for the Israelites," and why God "did not put an end to them."

God's wrath didn't turn away from Israel because he inflicted punishment on them and killed them. God's wrath turned away because Phinehas felt the same way God did about sin. Phinehas saw that arrogant Israelite stride across to his tent with his foul, idol-worshipping Midianite woman in tow, in full view of all those weeping Israelites, and without hesitation he strode right after them with his spear and skewered both of them to the ground in one shot.

No way was some idiot going to defy his God in front of everybody like that. The honour of his God was at stake. And look at God's reaction: the plague immediately stopped. Why? Because here was someone who understood and shared God's utter condemnation of sin. It was the fact that someone actually understood and felt what God felt - and with the same intensity of feeling too - that turned God's anger away. At least someone understood. It was only one person, but one was enough to stop the plague, turn God's anger away and satisfy the demands of justice. No matter that the rest of the Israelites didn't share Phinehas' attitude – one person was enough.

The parallel with Jesus in **Romans 5** is obvious, **verses 17-19**, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life **through the one man, Jesus Christ**. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also **the result of one act of righteousness** was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also **through the obedience of the one man** the many will be made righteous.”

God’s fair: sin came by one man, but so does salvation. But what was so great about the one man, Jesus, that because of him God stayed the plague of eternal death for all humanity, turned his wrath away from us and had his justice satisfied?

Because Jesus was just like Phinehas. When Adam and Eve blatantly rebelled against God infecting all creation with sin, Jesus, without hesitation, accepted his Father’s will, of being a “**sin offering**,” **Romans 8:3**, to skewer our sin to the wall. “**He humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!**” **Philippians 2:8**, willingly paying the penalty of sin in his own body, nailing it with him on the cross. And look at God’s reaction, **verse 9** - “**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.**”

But what stirred Jesus to do what he did was the same thing that stirred Phinehas - Jesus “**humbled himself and became obedient**” to his Father’s will; Phinehas “**for the honour of his God.**” Honouring God was the reason for their actions. It was always the reason for Jesus’ actions, though. To his Father he prayed in **John 17:4**, “**I have brought you glory on earth,**” and in **verse 26** (KJV), “**I have declared unto them your name, and will declare it,**” and in **Psalms 40:8**, “**To do your will, O my God, is my desire.**”

And that’s what made Jesus’ sacrifice sufficient for our salvation, just as Phinehas’ zeal to do God’s will was sufficient to save Israel. What salvation needed in both cases was one man who honoured God, who understood God’s mind, felt as God felt, accepted God’s anger at sin and took action. To Phinehas what was happening in Israel was terrible. It was utterly wrong, because it not only made a mockery of God’s authority and wonderful purpose for Israel, it was bringing death and destruction on the Israelites, too. It had to stop, and it was in that attitude - **the same attitude GOD had toward what was happening** - that Phinehas acted. And because of that one man acting the way he did to honour his God, Israel was spared.

And isn’t that exactly what Jesus did? He too understood how God felt about sin and he totally agreed with it, enough to willingly accept his Father’s will to suffer and die as a perfect expression of his Father’s burning anger and sadness at our sin. And it was in that attitude - the same attitude his Father had toward human sin - that Jesus acted. He honoured God, just like Phinehas honoured God, by acting out God’s mind and will exactly. It was all in the attitude in which the sacrifice was done.

And that's what makes atonement: the honour of one man for his God, expressing in his actions the same attitude God has. It wasn't God unleashing his anger on Israel that saved them, nor was it Jesus taking the punishment we deserved on himself that saved us, because inflicting punishment and sacrificial deaths aren't satisfying to God at all – a point Jesus himself made in **Hebrews 10:5-6** - "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.'"

Jesus knew his Father's mind, and he knew it wasn't sacrifices that God's pleased by. God's never liked sacrifices, **verse 1**, because "the same old sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year can never make perfect those who draw near to worship," and, **verse 4**, It's "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Sacrifices were never God's solution to sin. If they had been the solution, **verse 2**, "would they not have stopped being offered?" So why was Jesus' sacrifice any different? Because it had **verse 7** added to it: "Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will, O God.'"

Sacrifices by themselves don't get rid of sin. They didn't for Israel, nor did the sacrifice of 24,000 lives stop God's anger at sin in Numbers 25, and Jesus himself said sacrifices don't work in taking away sin, either. BUT he finishes off that statement with what DOES work, and what the Father IS pleased by – it's the person who says, "Here I am, I have come to do your will, O God." And when Phinehas strode across to the rebel's tent, that's exactly what he was saying. He didn't wait to see if anyone else was coming with him, it was "Here I am, O God, I'm doing your will, even if nobody else is."

And that's what stopped the plague. It wasn't sacrificing 24,000 Israelites that turned God's wrath away, it was one man willing to do God's will. So, was it punishing Jesus that took away God's wrath, or Jesus' body being sacrificed in place of ours that saved us? No, because sacrifices, punishment and killing people aren't what God desires at all. It was that one simple statement of Jesus, "Here I am, I have come to do your will, O God" that saved us. Because that's what saved Israel: one man willing to do God's will.

What made atonement for us, took away our sins, and God not putting an end to us, was exactly what made atonement for Israel, and God not putting an end to them. It was Jesus taking that body of his and having it nailed to a cross in agony to condemn sin as zealously as God condemned it, expressing God's heart and mind exactly. Likewise, Phinehas. He took that body of his and in view of everyone expressed what GOD felt.

The only differences between Jesus and Phinehas were that Jesus had himself killed and he died for the sins of everyone, but the reason for atonement in both cases was exactly the same: it was one man expressing and acting out the mind and will of God.

Hebrews 10:16 then relates all this directly to us too, because **“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”** What does this new covenant enable us to do? It enables US to express and act out the heart and mind of God too. It stirs in us the same desire of **“Here I am, I come to do your will, O God.”**

And why is that important? Because this is the acceptable sacrifice that deals with the problem of sin in OUR lives. This is what turns away God’s wrath at *our* sins. This is what satisfies God’s demand for justice in *our* circumstances. This is what cancels out *our* blatant rebellion against God’s law. We know Jesus’ death did all that for all mankind already because of *his* acceptable sacrifice, yes – and we’re certainly not duplicating Jesus’ death - but where is that personal assurance that we’re acceptable to God, too? How do we know we are saved?

It’s in the Spirit giving us the same heart and mind that Jesus and Phinehas had. We know from their examples that this is what saved Israel and all humanity, so if we find ourselves with the same heart and mind they had, there’s our assurance that we’re just as pleasing to God as they were, and therefore we’re just as saved.

Here, then, is how we know we personally are saved. It’s finding ourselves seeing things from God’s point of view, and understanding and agreeing with his utter condemnation of sin. We feel about sin as he feels about it. We hate it. And what do we find ourselves doing? The same thing Jesus and Phinehas did, **Romans 12:1**, we **“offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”**

When we sinned, Jesus offered his body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. When the Israelite rebel sinned, Phinehas offered his body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God too. And because of the Spirit, so now can we. How? By the last part of **verse 2** - by **“testing and approving what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”** This is what the Spirit now stirs in us – the same desire Phinehas and Jesus had, to know God’s mind, to understand God’s point of view, and to express God’s mind, heart and will through our actions. Because of the Spirit we can never get enough of hearing about why God’s will is so good, pleasing and perfect. And we can’t stop honouring God’s will any more than Phinehas could stop himself doing what *he* knew was good, pleasing and perfect **“for the honour of his God.”**

But this is why God sent Jesus, to not only deal with the problem of our sin but also to show us why Jesus’ sacrifice was so acceptable to him – with the added benefit of knowing that what made Jesus’ sacrifice so acceptable and pleasing to God is what makes *our* sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God as well, **giving US the assurance personally that we’re very much saved as well.**