

Romans 3 (21-26) – Why our God is the Real God

There are a lot of religions out there in the world today. There are a lot of things and ideas that people call “god” and worship as “god”. In the midst of all this, what sets the Christian concept of God apart? How can we know that our God, as taught by the Bible, is the real God?

This passage shows the righteousness of the Biblical God, His ultimate worth and holiness, and the incredible justice and mercy of the Almighty. I want to show you why this passage proves that Christianity is the true religion, and that our God is God. I want you to think great thoughts today. That isn’t simply an intellectual pursuit it is a spiritual one.

A renewed mind will lead to a renewed life. Not simply changing our minds about what is right and wrong, and trying to find some key to make us act better, but thinking God’s thoughts after Him, seeing just how valuable God is. Concentrating on the perfections of God is what begins to perfect us (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18).

In answering the question of “Why Christianity?” over other religions, we need to ask another important question. Which religion exalts God the highest, which places the most value in God? Whose God is the most holy? That God, the One who is the most powerful, the highest, the most worthy, that is the one I want to worship, the only one worthy of worship. Any God who is less than fully God is no God at all, only someone or something more powerful than us. But this “god” is still not all-powerful, and so that dismisses with many religions right from the start.

A true God isn’t just the most powerful being in the Universe, but the One who created it all and the One who sustains it all. Only such a God could actually be God; the others are only greater than us, but not greater than everything. They may be godlike, but not God. Which God is the greatest, the most powerful, the highest and most different from us? Which God is the most holy? This God is the Highest; this God would be the most worthy of worship.

Think about it, the best religion would be the one which places the most value in its god, and the one who derives the value of everything else based on the worth of its god. It would base all its morals and standards on that. It isn’t just about which supposed god is the most powerful, but which is the most pure, the most perfect. Not just in claim but in demonstration.

A people never rise above their conception of God; if your God is just like you, or if your God is small, then your life will be small, your morals will be small, and your people will live far below the standard of a people whose God is lifted up to the heights. If your god is a lying, malevolent, and reckless being, no wonder its people are the same way; that is what they worship. So, again, which religion exalts God the highest, which places the most value in God?

My belief is that Christianity is the true religion because its God has the highest majesty and holiest mercy. This passage, Romans 3:25-26, proves that. Only Christianity has an infinitely valuable God who is infinitely holy and takes out infinite justice against infinitely bad sin and gives us infinite mercy, which can lead us to heights of infinite worship. The Christian God is the only One who is truly holy. That is why our God is the real God. Christianity has the highest conception of God. In this light, let’s consider the other major religions of the world.

Is the religion with the greatest god the ones who have many gods? Can they be truly holy? Are they even depicted as such? How about those who have a god patterned after every human emotion, like Hinduism? Considering the human heart, as we see in the Bible and we see all around us and in us, how ridiculous and vile. How about the ones who say that god is in everything? Again how awful, or that god is everything, how unholy is that? God to them is just a part of everything good or bad, and their god is just like everything else. How does that exalt God? At its core, these are just a deified form of humanism.

Closer to Christianity, but still so far away, are the other two monotheistic religions: Judaism and Islam. All three speak of God as Creator and Sustainer, but two of them don't go all the way in valuing God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all claim to speak for the same God, that is, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. But they say very different things about Him.

How about Islam, whose god isn't all that holy, and to whom sin isn't all that bad? That sounds very hostile. How can I say that? It is seen in the application of this text, because there is a major difference between *pardon* and *justification*. Pardon says that you are guilty but suspends the penalty of that guilt. Justification declares you to be righteous and without guilt. God accomplishes this by Christ paying the price of redemption. If God were to simply pardon or forgive based on our limited obedience or our bits of penance then that would say that the sins weren't really all that bad and that God was not really all that holy.

Think about Islam and Allah in light of this. Because for them, Allah just forgives: not only there is no payment for our sins, there is none needed. However, if God can forgive without payment for sins, then he's no god. He isn't concerned about holiness. He isn't just if he doesn't punish sin, all sin. If God is not holy and just, then He does not deserve any worship.

How about Judaism? It seems better but it isn't the same as Christianity. Their notion is that God pardons based on our own repentance, a notion of sincerity, which is in a sense matching the rest of the world while still calling on God. They believe that God is perfectly willing and able to forgive us if we are truly and sincerely repentant. No further transaction is needed.

This sounds wonderful. But is this true? No it isn't, it devalues God and His glory. They are stuck in the Old Covenant, but God had always planned a New Covenant, based on the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9:15,26 – in His forbearance He passed over the former sins, made during and before the Old Covenant, knowing justice would be served by a New Covenant.

There is a major difference between *propitiation* and *penance*. Propitiation here means a sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God against sinners. Jesus on the cross reveals God's justice and His righteousness, and it actually saves sinners. By expiating (removing the problem of) sin, God was made propitious (favorable) to us. Again, in the death of Christ, we have both expiation (the removal of sin) and propitiation (the averting of wrath).

The only satisfaction, or propitiation, that could be acceptable to God and that could reconcile man to Him, had to be made by God. For this reason God the Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world in human flesh to be the perfect sacrifice for sin and make atonement or "*propitiation for*

the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:14-17). Christ was put forward by God to demonstrate God’s justice and the value of His glory by Christ becoming a sacrifice for sins.

We make many excuses to repudiate the blood of Jesus. We say, “Certainly we’ve done bad things, but what we’ve done isn’t so bad that a merciful God can’t overlook our failings.” We are wrong on two counts. First, what we have done IS so bad, that we cannot even begin to fathom how horrible it is. Second, God cannot overlook, He cannot wave His hand and let bygones be bygones. He may freely forgive us, but He Himself must bear the cost.

The wrath of God had to be satisfied. God could not simply overlook sin; it had to be judged. The death of Christ proved God’s righteousness. People just want God to pardon but that doesn’t demonstrate His righteousness. That would be saying that sins are really no big deal to God, and it would also mean that offending God and despising Him isn’t all that important. God would be unrighteous if He passed over sins forever as though the value of His glory were nothing.

Instead, God vindicated His glory by slaying His Son. That is how valuable His glory is and how awful sin really is and what it requires. Christ was the only payment that could satisfy the justice of God for us offending and despising His glory. That is what sin is, falling short of and devaluing God’s glory. We have done violence to the throne of God. That is why hell must last forever because you can never pay it back, your worth is nothing compared to His, no amount of penance can offset the terrible injustice you have done against the infinite worth of God.

None of the other religions in the world has a God who is as holy as the one we see in Biblical Christianity, who exalts God to where He is, and sees sin for what it is, and God’s holiness for what it is, or at least in concept, even though we cannot fathom it. Christianity sees our sin as having to be paid for by the ultimate worth of God Himself, and God pouring out His wrath on His Son. How great is His love? He meets His own holiness, the bar of His justice and delivers us in His mercy because of it.

Notwithstanding the intended lessons of Old Covenant typology, Judaism today doesn’t get it. They view God as directly accessible, without a Mediator. There is no longer even a typological atonement, but Judaism replaces it with human prayer, repentance, and affliction of soul.

Islam does the same thing, only differently. If we pursue the question, “How does Allah show mercy?” it begins to look a lot like justice, possibly justice “graded on a curve”: Allah judges intentions and efforts. In Islam, there is mercy, but you need to earn it. You don’t need to be perfect, but you need to merit the mercy. But mercy is by definition that which is undeserved. Mercy in Islam looks a lot like justice. And their god has a level of holiness that lets you pay for your own sins. That doesn’t seem all that exalted to me.

We still have a sense of justice and a sense of mercy, but sin has greatly perverted them. Justice is no more justice (since sin must go overlooked), and mercy is no more mercy (since you do have to merit having your sins overlooked, be it the merit of your intentions or of your overall performance). We’d rather blaspheme God’s perfections than confess that our condemnation is just and His mercy, if granted, is undeserved.

Popular Christianity (civil religion) does the same thing. If you ask the man on the street, “How do you get to heaven?” he will probably answer, “By being good.” If you confront him with the fact that he’s not perfect, this statement doesn’t faze him, as if “Nobody’s perfect” is something that persuades God to grade on a curve, giving out an “a” for “atoning effort.”

A church going man might tell you, “Well, I think God looks at the heart.” Yes, God can see the “thoughts and intents of the heart”. But the question isn’t whether or not God knows your heart, but whether or not He has your heart. If you claim to be a believer, realize that God’s purpose in the world is to demonstrate His righteousness. So why would we dare to think it doesn’t matter to God whether or not we live righteously? If Jesus claimed to be the only way to heaven, why do you think you can get in based on your heart? A heart surrendered to Christ as Lord and Savior, yes, but not a “heart religion” without a heart changed by God’s grace.

Someone may say, “I don’t think a loving God would send people to hell.” Yes, well, that just lessens His holiness, and that makes Him less than God. If sin isn’t such a big deal, then He isn’t such a holy God, like with Islam or Judaism. We’ll talk about your imaginary god some other time, but can you see what the Bible has to say?

Biblical Christianity says that before the foundation of the world, God, who is perfectly just, perfectly merciful, and perfectly holy and wise, planned for the salvation of sinners, while displaying His own righteousness. He would justify the ungodly, the condemned. And He would remain perfectly just. How? We see it in Romans 3:25-26. God’s justice was not bent, diluted, circumvented, or anything of the sort. It was satisfied. God had been an enemy, but now He is a friend. He had been angry, but now His wrath is spent. Christ bore it.

Some people may find the vicarious atonement offensive. It certainly offends our pride that someone else would have to die for us. But it couldn’t have been just anyone, it had to be God the Son Himself, and that shows us how offensive and bad and serious sin actually is, and how much value God places on His own holiness. If God is absolutely holy and absolutely just, what other way to pay for sins could there be, unless God Himself paid the debt for our sins?

I find this passage in Romans to be a compelling reason to be a Christian. I *feel* guilty. The Bible tells me that I *am* guilty and that I ought to know that I am guilty, not just beset by guilt feelings but really, truly guilty. All of the world’s religions line up and tell me how to improve myself and offer me salvation at a reduced rate, with a reduced god, as if mercy is some kind of “no interest for 90 days” gimmick.

Only Christianity steps forward and says, “Actually, you *are* as bankrupt as you feel.” Only Christianity maintains a God who is perfectly just and perfectly merciful. Only Christianity exalts God’s holiness and His infinite worth to the level where it takes a God to pay for even one sin. Only Christianity steps forward with a historic person whose whole purpose in life is to die, whose worth is so great He can pay for all sin.

We need to understand just how bad our sin is, up against just how holy God is, how powerful His judgment is, and then we can see how great God’s mercy is. That is no guilt trip; that is the

gospel truth. You don't do it out of fear, you don't do it out of gratitude, you don't do it out of trying harder; you do it out of worship, because nothing else looks good at all compared to Him.

A.W. Tozer – We need to improve the quality of our Christianity, and we never will until we raise our concept of God back to that held by apostle, sage, prophet, saint and reformer. When we put God back where He belongs, we will instinctively and automatically move up again; the whole spiral of our religious direction will be upward.

The renewed mind that dwells on God's greatness will result in great lives. That is true worship. You can find it in this passage; you will find it nowhere else but in Christianity. Only Christianity has an infinitely valuable God who is infinitely holy and takes out infinite justice against infinitely bad sin and gives us infinite mercy, which can lead us to heights of infinite worship. That is the highest worship, and it doesn't start with a feeling, it starts with an understanding. You are now informed; will you be transformed by this truth? Do you understand the value of God? Do you understand why Christianity must be true?

Christianity is the one worldview that is not merit-based. All other religions provide a set of rules that must be followed if an adherent wants to be saved. Every false system of faith is constructed around the righteousness that can be achieved by each individual, rather than the righteousness that is ascribed by God. Only Christianity contains the concept of unmerited favor that we know as "grace". Even those who deny the existence of God are operating within a work-based worldview; their value is directly related to what we can achieve, accomplish or perform.

In Biblical Christianity, the forgiveness of sins is grounded, not in my finite worth or work, but in the infinite worth of the righteousness of God, upholding and vindicating the glory of His name. To pronounce the unrighteous righteous is unjust by itself (cf. Proverbs 17:15), yet by the propitiation God is able to justify the ungodly and He is just for doing so (Romans 4:5, 5:6 / 1 John 1:8-9).

Will you receive that righteousness which God has provided in Jesus Christ? If you do, your salvation will be a demonstration of His righteousness. If you do not, your condemnation will be a demonstration of His righteousness.

God's righteousness is not at stake. Your eternal destiny is.

If you have already received that righteousness which God has provided in Jesus Christ, is the demonstration of God's righteousness central in your life? It should be. If believers understood that God's purpose in the world is to demonstrate His righteousness, they would know true Christians will indeed live righteously. Not perfectly, but purposefully. In Ephesians 2:8-10, we see that salvation is by grace, through faith, and salvation is never the result of good works. But we also see the truth that salvation will always result in good works.

The Christian God is the only One who is truly holy. He is the only One who is just while at the same time the justifier of the ungodly. His righteousness and mercy have met in the death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why our God is the real God. He is real, whether you believe it or not. The question is, is He real to you?