Christ the Sin-Bearer

Can God be merciful to sinners while being absolutely just and upright? Justice demands that sinners should be punished, while mercy allows the guilty to go free. If justice prevails, mercy is refused; but if mercy triumphs, justice is undone. Is there a solution to this dilemma?

Thank God, the gospel message is the answer! The Bible reveals God's infinite wisdom in finding a way to be both just and the justifier of the ungodly who believes in Christ.

The Bible teaches that we were under God's wrath because we are law-breaker. 'All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law' (Galatians 3:10). None of us obeyed God's Law perfectly; therefore all of us were under divine condemnation.

But God sent his Son to the world to take away our sin. The sinless One became sin for us; the blessed Son became a curse for us. 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree' (Galatians 3:13). Christ redeemed – that is, he liberated us – from the curse imposed on us by the Law when he offered his life as a sacrifice. He took our curse upon himself. No curse remains anymore on those who believe in Christ, but rather the blessings of God.

Sadly many people do not accept the biblical teaching on the death of Christ. Someone wrote to me, 'I just can't understand the concept of person "A" committing a sin and having it transferred to person "B" who is punished instead of the other. If I rob a bank, the police don't arrest my daughter or my father. They arrest me. Yet the Bible teaches that Jesus died for our sins. This concept of transferring sin from a guilty party to an innocent party seems so immoral.'

Indeed it would be immoral if the punishment is *imposed* on an innocent person instead of the guilty party. But it would be an act of pure love and generosity, and certainly not immoral, if someone *voluntarily* accepts to pay the penalty for another.

I first understood this concept of transfer of punishment before I opened the pages of the Bible. It was my fifteenth birthday. Without permission and without a driving license, I drove my father's tractor on a busy road and I was involved in traffic accident. I caused hundreds of pounds worth of damages to the brand new van involved in the collision.

I was guilty; my father was not.

Yet my father paid all the damages for me. I did not pay a cent.

That is, in essence, what the Bible teaches about the meaning of Christ's death. I broke the Law; he paid the death penalty in my place. He bore my sins. He took away my curse. He took my punishment. And he did so voluntarily. 'I lay down my life,' Jesus said, 'No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (John 10:17-18).

The cross of Christ is the manifestation of the justice and the mercy of God in perfect unity.

Therefore with all God's people I rejoice in the wonderful truth that Christ 'was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5).

We acknowledge our guilt and that we deserve punishment; but we rejoice in the grace of God who spared us the punishment because he laid our penalty upon his suffering Servant, Jesus Christ.