

Why Can't God Just Forgive?

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BEWARE, if you're a pedestrian in San Francisco. It's a favorite city of tourists, but you risk your life when you cross the street. In a recent year, 367 people were hit by motorists and 28 died—the highest fatality rate of any city in California. Recently a hit-and-run driver raced through a red light and struck a 78-year-old grandmother, leaving her critically injured.

Suppose the police apprehended the driver and when his case comes to trial, he throws himself on the mercy of the court. "I always be careful when I'm behind the wheel."

After the jury finds the defendant guilty, the judge addresses him: "By the authority invested in me by this state, I choose to show compassion and forgive you. You are free to go. Have a good life."

Would you agree with this decision? What would happen if the guardians of the law consistently forgave offenders? Society must uphold its laws, or these statutes will be ignored and scorned. We would live in a moral jungle where it's everyone for himself. To maintain the integrity of the law, a just penalty must be paid when it is violated.

When it comes to God's law, the Bible tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of

the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, *NIV*). Not only have we failed to keep God's standards, but we have failed to give Him His rightful place as Lord of our lives. If God loves us, why can't He just freely forgive us?

In the same way that the judge must uphold society's laws, God's holiness and justice demand that He must uphold His law, or it becomes meaningless. Unfortunately for those who fail to repent, the penalty for sin and rebellion is death and eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23).

Fortunately for all of us, however, in His love, God found a way to forgive us without compromising His law. Astonishingly, He became a man, in the person of Jesus, and took the penalty of death upon Himself on the cross. While we can freely receive God's forgiveness, He paid the highest price to make it possible.

No longer do we need to try to make ourselves good enough for God—an impossible task—or pretend that we are worthy within ourselves. We simply need to acknowledge our sin and accept Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf (1 John 1:8, 9). When we do, God restores us to relationship with Himself as His beloved children, now and eternally d;5

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