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## Understanding Our Problem

There is one great question that every person asks at some time or other: ‘How can I, a sinner, come to God, who is perfect, and not be afraid of punishment?’ People have tried to find answers to this question, but it is no surprise that no one has come close to answering it. We don’t really even understand the question we are asking, because we don’t really understand what sin is, that sin is actually guilt, for which God will judge us.

People consistently treat sin as if it were an unfortunate event, not a crime; or as some kind of disease, not as guilt. It’s as if we think we need a doctor to solve the problem of sin, when actually we need a judge. This is where we go wrong; sin is *guilt* and must be punished. The guilt of the offender (that is, the sinner) must be dealt with before we can answer the question of how a sinful human being can have a relationship with a perfect God.

If we look at human history we ought to be able to see very clearly that sin is a crime, which God hates and must punish. Sin is serious, and has serious consequences – or how else can we explain thousands of graveyards, where loved ones are buried? Is death just ‘natural’? Or what about millions

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of brokenhearted people – is that ‘just the way life is’? Or the casualties of war – can we look at such things and still maintain that human beings are essentially good? Or look at earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes – don’t these also show us the consequences of sin? Or our own emptiness, pain, depression – don’t all these clearly point to one thing: that sin is guilt, and must be punished? If we don’t admit this, then we are actually defending the idea that moral confusion and injustice are normal.

Despite all this, the human race as a whole refuses to see sin as evil, and instead tries to explain it away as a momentary lapse from which we will soon recover. We try to deal with our sin ourselves, and by doing this we only make our situation worse! All our efforts to get rid of our sin in fact just add to it, and if we try to come to God without first admitting our guilt, we only make ourselves more guilty! Sin is far too evil for us to handle ourselves. Once we see this, we have to acknowledge that only God can deal with sin.

So we have seen that in trying to answer this question we must properly understand the seriousness of sin. We must also understand more clearly who God is. We like to think of God as a loving Father, and He is. But He is also a righteous Judge. Can He stop being a Judge, and only be a Father? Or the other way round? Yes, God loves sinners, but He also hates their sin. Should He stop loving sinners because He hates sin, or stop hating sin because He loves sinners? God has said that He doesn’t enjoy it when sinners die (Ezek. 33:11), but He has also said that everyone who sins will die (Ezek. 18:4). Which of these does He mean? Or can He mean them both? In order for sinners to have a relationship with God, His love (God as Father) and His law (God as Judge) must somehow be able to peacefully co-exist. People have tried to reconcile God’s law

and God's love, but their attempts have always failed, because they always end up making God's love more important than God's law, when actually both are equally important.

Can I come close to God, and not die? Can I come into the presence of a God who hates sin, and yet find that the sin He hates does not prevent me from coming to Him? Can my worship of God be accepted by Him? God has the answer to all these questions, and that answer is found in His court of law. God comes into His court, bringing His case against sinful people, and He Himself provides a way to legally resolve the case, in such a way that His justice is satisfied, and man is found not guilty.

As we have said, only God can deal with sin. He does so legally, so that any sinner on earth can come into God's court and have the problem of his sin dealt with. All that is needed is for the guilty person to agree to accept God's solution, and he is declared innocent. He then leaves the court with a clear conscience, free of guilt. He is at peace with God, and God is at peace with him.

God's solution shows how sinful our sin is, and how perfect God's law is, yet at the same time it means that God can love sinful people without bending or breaking His law. God has reconciled His love and His law, without either of them giving way to the other. In fact, both God's love and His law have been displayed completely, in all their beauty, and both of them have been completely satisfied.

Romans 3:20 says, *'Through the law we become conscious of sin.'* Sin and law are connected, and this connection must be kept, both in punishing sin and in forgiving sin. God's law, like God Himself, cannot change, so both the punishment and the forgiveness of sin must be carried out in a way that keeps God's law. God has made a way so that His law can be

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perfectly kept, and yet at the same time sinners can be legally forgiven. He has worked things out so that His law, which once rightly accused us of being guilty, now rightly defends us as being innocent. How He has done this we will see in the next chapter.