

A LOVING GOD AND PUNISHMENT

- A. Introduction: We are talking about dealing with the fear of what God may do to us because of our sins.
1. We aren't talking about these things to encourage people to sin or to tell people that it's okay to sin and it doesn't matter how you live. It does matter how you live.
 - a. You and I are called to walk even as Jesus walked (I John 2:6). It is our duty to fear God (have awe, respect, and reverence for Him) and keep His commandments. Eccl 12:13
 - b. If your motivation for trying to live right is that you are afraid of God, that is better than living a loose, sinful life. But, it's God's desire that we obey Him because we love Him. Matt 22:37-40
 - c. I John 4:19 says we love Him because He first loved us. When we know God's love for us and what His love has done for us and our sins, it inspires our love for Him, it inspires our desire to obey Him, and it removes fear (terror) of what God may do to us. I John 4:18
 2. We have a lot of erroneous ideas about God and punishment which make us afraid when there is no reason to be afraid.
 - a. Something bad happens and we say: God must be punishing you. We use clichés like: You're going to have to answer to God for that one. We speak in ominous tones: God is a just God. All this undermines our faith and confidence in God.
 - b. In this lesson we want to talk about who God punishes, why He punishes, and how He punishes. Knowledge from God's word will help us banish fear.
- B. The thought of God having wrath against sin, the thought of God punishing people, scares us because we impose human emotions on God and think of Him in terms of what it means when a human is angry.
1. But, God's anger at man's sin cannot be thought of in terms of human anger. God's wrath works righteousness. The wrath of man does not. James 1:20
 - a. God's wrath is not an emotional response to sin. It is the right response to sin. It is a righteous, just, response to sin. Anger and wrath are God's judicial responses to sin.
 - b. Righteousness is rightness. Justice is doing what is right. God is right and God always does what is right. He is righteous and just. Because God is righteous and just He must respond to sin, to man's rebellion. It is right, it is according to justice, that wrong be punished.
 2. The dictionary gives two definitions for punishment: One, the penalty for a crime (the punishment for speeding) and, two, severe, rough, or disastrous treatment (the punishment of a storm). One is judicial, in accordance with the Law. The other is arbitrary, changeable, potentially emotional.
 - a. We get these two confused when we talk about God. God's anger and punishment for sin are not emotional. It is His just response to sin. Punishment is the carrying out of the penalty of the law.
 - b. There are a number of words used in both the Bible which are translated punish, punished, punishment. None of them mean "God gets mad and pops someone upside the head." They mean to carry out the penalty of the law. An incident in the Book of Acts can help us see the difference.
 1. Peter and John healed the lame man at the Temple in Acts 3. The Jewish authorities were very upset. They threatened the men and commanded that they stop preaching Jesus.
 2. Acts 4:21 says that when the authorities had severely threatened Peter and John they had to let them go because they could find no reason to punish them according to the law.
 3. These authorities had plenty of emotional reasons to want to punish Peter and John. But they could not because there was no legal reason to do it. They had broken no law.
 3. You may be thinking, "That's great for Peter and John. They didn't break any laws so they didn't get punished. But, I have broken God's laws and I deserve wrath and punishment."
 - a. God must punish sin to be true to justice. It is right to enact the just penalty of the Law. God

came up with a marvelous plan to punish sin, enact justice, and not destroy us. Jesus went to the Cross for us as us and was punished in our place.

1. The just penalty of the Law was carried out on Jesus. He was smitten of God. Smitten is a Hebrew word for punished. Isa 53:4--But we thought of him as someone punished, struck by God, and brought low. (Jerusalem)
 2. Isa 53:4--Surely He has borne our griefs --sickness, weakness and distress -- and carried our sorrows and pain [of punishment]. (Amp)
- b. What was the punishment Jesus endured? There is way more to it than we can discuss here, but consider these points in connection with our discussion.
1. He did not receive a “pop upside the head” because God was really, really mad at Jesus or at us. Jesus took the judicial response of God to our sins on Himself in order to satisfy justice.
 2. The judicial response of the Law for sin (wrath) went to Jesus. Isa 53:6 says our iniquities were laid on Jesus. That word in the Hebrew is one of four main Hebrew words that can be translated punishment, AVON. It includes the sin and the punishment that goes with it. The punishment that went to him made us whole.
- c. The Cross is an expression of the wrath of God or His just response to sin. But it is also the supreme demonstration of God’s love in that God poured out His wrath, God satisfied Justice, God punished us in, on, and through Jesus, so none of it has to come to us.
4. Through the Cross of Christ God satisfied His own justice and was able to justify us (Rom 3:24). To justify means to acquit. Acquittal or justification is a judicial deliverance from a criminal charge. It means all charges are dropped.
- a. Col 2:14--Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over his own head on the Cross. (Phillips)
 - b. If all charges against us have been dropped (and they have) there is no more need for punishment.
5. God does not dole out wrath and punishment on a sin-by-sin basis. God’s wrath is not now being displayed on earth. God is not punishing men through natural disasters and tragedies. God’s wrath against sin was displayed at the Cross when Jesus was punished for our sins. Rom 1:17,18
- a. That does not mean there aren’t consequences for sin. Sin works death in our lives. You do reap what you so. But the consequences for sin don’t come from or through the hand of God.
 - b. That does not mean God does not discipline His people. He does. But, He does it through His word by His Spirit, not with afflictive circumstances. (Another lesson for another day)
- C. God’s judicial response toward sin (wrath and punishment) has been expressed, but you must receive that expression in order for the charges against you to be dropped and His wrath to be removed from you.
1. If a person has not received Jesus the wrath of God that should have come to them went to Jesus, but because they have not received Him and His sacrifice, God’s wrath remains on them. John 3:36
 - a. God is not now dealing with men in wrath. He deals with them in mercy, giving them a lifetime to repent. II Pet 3:9; Luke 6:35; Matt 5:45; Acts 14:16,17;
 - b. However, if a person never believes on the Son he does face the wrath and punishment at death.
 1. The penalty of sin is death which is separation from God who is Life (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23). People who live separated from God in this life (all unsaved people) will continue in that separation from God in the next life when their physical body dies.
 2. When a person dies apart from Christ he goes to a place of separation from God -- hell.
 - c. Eph 5:6 says the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. Disobedience in the Greek is unbelief. It is the same word used in Eph 2:3 where Paul is talking about unbelievers, those who

- have not received of Christ. That is a statement of their future fate -- if they do not receive Jesus.
2. The words punish, punished, punishment are used nine times in the New Testament. Only four times do these words refer to God punishing people. Matt 25:26; II Thess 1:9; Heb 10:29; II Pet 2:9
 - a. Notice, these four all verses refer to punishing people who have rejected Jesus Christ and His sacrifice and three of them directly connect it with the Second Coming of Jesus.
 - b. There is coming a Day of Judgment and wrath, not a twenty-four hour day, but a time of administering justice or judgment at the Second Coming of Jesus. Acts 17:30,31; I Thess 1:10
 1. For those who are His this will mean rewards. For those who are not His this will mean punishment (Another lesson for another day). When Jesus returns to earth will administer the wrath of God, His judicial response to sin, to all who refuse His sacrifice. Rev 6:16, etc.
 2. Wrath cleanses. God's wrath poured out on Jesus made us whole and cleansed us from sin. Jesus is coming to remove all sin and corruption from creation. Matt 13:40-42; Rom 8:19-22
 3. Jesus, who is God and shows us God, is not coming back because He is ticked off and He is going to wop everybody upside the head. He is coming to do what is right, to administer justice. II Thess 1:6-9
 - a. Notice, Jesus is coming to carry out vengeance. Vengeance means to execute justice or the execution of a sentence. Punished comes from a word meaning to pay a price or penalty.
 1. v7,8--And to you who are being afflicted, there is a surcease from this stress and strain [due to your persecutions] in the relaxing anticipation of the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in a fire of flame, allotting full justice to those who do not know God. (Wuest); Those who have refused to know God. (Phillips)
 2. v9--Such people will pay the penalty and suffer the punishment of everlasting ruin (destruction and perdition) and [eternal exclusion and banishment from] the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. (Amp)
 - b. God's wrath against sin is judicial, not emotional. People who do not receive the sacrifice of Christ for their sins never see life in this life of the life to come. (Another lesson for another day.)
- D. Let's talk some more about God's wrath and punishment in the Old Testament. Some would say that God seemed eager to punish people because He was really mad. Is that true?
1. Before God brought Israel into the promised land He told them that He would punish them for their sin if they did not obey His commandments (Lev 26:18, 24). The word punish is the same word translated smitten in Isa 53:4 referring to Jesus on the Cross.
 - a. Why seven times? Seven is the number of completion. Seven times means until justice is fully satisfied. God wanted Israel to understand clearly that if they were unfaithful to Him full justice would be carried out against them. A few things to remember:
 1. God did not expect them to be perfect. He gave them a system of blood sacrifices to cover their sins. Those sacrifices pictured (foreshadowed) what Jesus would ultimately do for them.
 2. God's primary command to them was: Don't abandon Me to worship false gods. If you do your enemies will overrun you and remove you from the land (punishment). Deut 4:25-27
 - b. God told Israel when they entered the promised land that if they worshipped the gods of the people around them, they would ultimately be overrun by their enemies and removed from the land. That is what eventually happened. First Assyria, then Babylon, conquered Israel, scattering some of the people throughout the Assyrian Empire and taking others to seventy years of captivity in Babylon.
 2. The most commonly used verb for punish in the Old Testament means to visit and to search out. It refers to someone (usually God) paying attention to someone to do them good (Gen 50:24,25; Ex 3:16; I Sam 2:21) or to bring them punishment (Ex 20:5; Isa 10:3-6).
 - a. Isa 10:3 refers to the Day of visitation or punishment when the Assyrians will come and removed

Israel from their land. v5--The Assyrian! He is the rod that I wield in my anger, and the staff of my wrath is in his hand. (NEB)

1. God did not “raise up” the Assyrians or the Babylonians to punish His people. God did not “make them” fierce, violent, idol worshippers. God in His All knowingness knew before time began that they would arise, when and where they would come to power, who they would attack and conquer and when.
 2. Remember, in the Old Testament God is said to do what He in fact only allows. But, through the words of the prophets God connected everything to Himself, not because He “did it” to His people, but so they would understand that: I am the only God. You owe me your obedience. Calamity comes on you because you are out of right relationship with me.
- b. In Ex 20:5 God says He will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children -- punishing children for the sins of their fathers (Moffatt).
1. It wasn't that God got so mad at them that He punished innocent children down to the third and fourth generation (down to grandchildren and great-grandchildren).
 2. The consequences of the sins of the fathers (removal from the land) affected their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren who were carried away into captivity and who were born into captivity down to the third and fourth generations.
3. God does not delight in seeing His people punished, seeing them reaping the consequences of their actions. Ezek 18:32--I have no desire for anyone to die...so repent and live. (Moffatt); Ezek 33:11--I would rather a wicked man mend his ways and live. (NEB). Consider these thoughts.
- a. God sent Isaiah to prophesy to the northern part of Israel in the last years before they were conquered and carried off by Assyria. He also spoke to the southern kingdom which was following in the sins of the northern kingdom and would be attacked by Babylon 150 years later.
1. Isaiah warned Israel for over forty years that if they did not turn back to God destruction would come on them suddenly and swiftly just as it did on the Philistines in the time of David.
 2. Isa 28:21--God allowing Israel to reap the consequences, the punishment, of their idol worship through destruction at the hands of Assyria and Babylon is called God's strange work, His alien act. Strange and alien come from words meaning foreign.
- b. Jeremiah was the last prophet to the southern kingdom before destruction came from the hands of Babylon. Jeremiah actually saw the invasion. He saw Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed. He wrote the Book of Lamentations as an expression of his anguish over what had happened.
1. Jeremiah says that God's heart was not in what happened to His people.
 2. Lam 3:33--For he has no pleasure in troubling and causing grief to the children of men. (Basic); For He does not enjoy afflicting men and causing sorrow. (Taylor); He does not willingly afflict or punish any mortal man. (NEB).
- E. Conclusion: We could say many more things about all of this but we are out of time and space. Consider these points as we close. Why does God punish? Who does God punish? How does God punish?
1. God punishes all who are guilty of sin because it is right and just to execute justice. In a supreme demonstration of His love God punished us, carried out justice against us, through our substitute, Jesus Christ. He took our place at the Cross. There are now no more charges against us.
 2. God is not now punishing you for your sins. He did it at the Cross. He will not punish you for your sins in the Day of Judgment at the return of Jesus. He did it at the Cross. He will rightly and justly welcome you into His presence. I John 4:17
 3. Perfect Love has done this for us. Therefore, there is no reason to fear the wrath and punishment of God. We will never experience it because God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, took it for us.