

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

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Pastor/Teacher
Gary L.W. Johnson

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD: A MOST INCONVENIENT TRUTH (PART VII)

Security. Webster defines the word this way: The state of being or feeling secure; freedom from fear, anxiety, danger, doubt, etc.; state or sense of safety or certainty.¹ Security. How we all want security in everything! Consider how we use this word. We need job security so that we can have some degree of financial security. Social security is supposed to provide people in their old age with the same thing. Most people realize that social security is so meager that they will have to make other provisions for security in their retirement years. Now we are being told how desperately we need healthcare security. The different types of insurance we purchase (home, auto, life, etc.) are so that we can have a sense of security. This has even become the focus of our relationships. Enrichment seminars now stress the need for developing a sense of security in marriage and the home. Psychologists tell us that one of our greatest "felt needs" is a sense of security. Businesses have been quick to pick up on this. Companies advertise their products with money back (or double your money back) guarantees so that the consumer will feel secure before buying the goods. Security. People need it and want it. But there is a false sense of security (or a false peace) that is the product of presumption and misplaced hope. Thomas Manton said that it is the devil's policy to fill people with a sense of security so that men will be content with their lost condition.² This is why the Puritans (like Manton) spoke of the sinner being awakened out of their sinful slumber. The sinner is no longer secure in his sins, for his thoughts of God and death now fill him with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. When people realize that they must deal with the Living God of Holy Scripture, it will awaken them out of their slumbering.

Historical Context: Ezekiel 22:1-31 is an indictment against Jerusalem. The city is characterized by a number of sinful traits. (1) It is a bloody city. This blood guiltiness included the killing of children by offering them as sacrifices to idols (cf. verses 6, 9; 20:26; 24:6-9). (2) It was a lewd city, full of sexual immorality (22:10, 11). (3) It was a corrupt city and full of slander (22:12). (4) Its wickedness included the dishonoring of parents (22:7). Charles L. Feinberg notes, "This relationship [children/parents] ultimately underlies the proper submission of citizens to their Rulers. If parents were slighted, the sojourner could not hope for consideration."³ In verse 12, the root cause of all this wickedness is stated, "You have forgotten me, declares the Sovereign Lord." Since God is at the center of all moral relations, social and moral rights and proprieties are secure only when God is recognized in His sovereign rule. The application to our own hearts and our own day is obvious.⁴

I. DEALING WITH GOD: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPENITENT SINNERS

There is no escaping God (cf. Hebrews 2:3; 12:25). The guilty cannot, by any means, deliver themselves, nor can they do anything that would excuse them. "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God" (Hebrews 10:31). "Were we not safer," wrote Machen, "with a God of our own devising – love and only love, a Father and nothing else, one before whom we could stand in our own merit without fear? He who will, may be satisfied with such a God. But we – God help us – sinful as we are, we would see Jehovah. Despairing, hoping, trembling, half-doubting and half-believing, trusting all to Jesus, we venture into the presence of the very God."⁵ The only God we will deal with is the One "to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

A. God Will Reckon With All Mankind and Satisfy His Justice

It is popular to say that since God is love, He does not require satisfaction. The Gospel, some say, is about God's love, not His Holiness and Justice. God may hate the sin but He always will love the sinner. Is this true? Consider this: What is sin? It is the violation of God's law (I John 3:4); as such, sin deserves punishment. But sin is not a substantial thing when abstracted from the sinner. On the contrary, sin is, in strictness of speech, the sinner acting. Sinful acts are, in fact, nothing more than the personal actions of the individual sinner. God will deal with individual sinners, not only for what they have done, but also for what they fail to do (I Samuel 3:13, 14).

1. **BECAUSE OF THEIR REBELLION.** Since they have no regard or respect for God or for His commandments (Psalm 10:13), God will hold them accountable (Amos 2:4). Why will He do so?
2. **BECAUSE OF HIS JUSTICE.** Revelation 20:12 states that God has recorded all the sins of all mankind in a book; not one of them is forgotten, and every one of them must be paid. The cross of Christ was a demonstration of God's justice (cf. Romans 3:25, 26).

B. God Will Vindicate His Majesty

The God of Scripture is declared to be perfectly righteous: "Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne" (Psalm 89:14); "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor" (Habakkuk 1:13); "He hateth all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). Therefore, "the wicked will not go unpunished" (Jeremiah 25:29; Proverbs 11:21). God does offer mercy. He does call men to repentance. He calls, but they refuse to hear.

1. **SINNERS DESPISE GOD'S MAJESTY.** To scorn God's Law and His offer of mercy is an insult to the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. He will repay those who hate Him (Deuteronomy 7:10).
2. **SINNERS DESPISE GOD'S SON.** Jesus said, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23); "You do not know me or my Father – If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (John 8:19); "If God were your Father you would love me" (John 8:42); "I honor my Father and you dishonor me" (John 8:49); "My Father will honor the one who serves me" (John 12:26); "He who hates me hates my Father as well" (John 15:23); "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

II. GOD WILL SUBDUE THE IMPENITENT

Deuteronomy 32:41 states, "I will render vengeance to my enemies, and will reward them that hate me." Deuteronomy 7:10 declares. "He will not be slack to him that hateth him: he will repay him to his face." Exodus 34:7 says that God "will by no means clear the guilty." Nahum 1:3 reads, "The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked."

A. The Present Conduct of the Impenitent is One of Pride (Psalm 10:4)

They lift up their heads and conduct themselves very proudly and with contempt (Psalm 101:5; Proverbs 21:4). They sin with a "high hand" (Numbers 15:30 ASV).⁶ The person who sins in this way "reviles the Lord" for "he has despised the Word of the Lord" (Numbers 15:31).

B. God Will Confront Them

They presently reject the Scriptures, but they will be convinced of the truth of Scripture by God Himself. They reject the testimonies of God's ministers now, but the day will come when God will confront them (Ezekiel 8:18).

III. THE IMPENITENT CANNOT AVOID GOD

The text reads, "I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it." There is no room for doubting the actual fulfillment of this divine threatening. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Some have flattered themselves, that although God hath threatened very dreadful things to wicked men for their sins, yet in his heart he never intends to fulfill his threatenings, but only to terrify them, and make them afraid, while they live. But would the infinitely holy God, who is not a man that he should lie, and who speaketh no vain words, utter himself in this manner?"⁷

A. The Certainty of Their Punishment

This is seen in God's character. If God has sworn that He will punish sin, then He will do it. He will deal with the wicked (Deuteronomy 7:10; 32:41; Exodus 34:7; Nahum 1:3).

B. The One Who Will Punish the Impenitent

There can be no greater adversary than God. Who can possibly oppose or resist Him? Who can abate the fierceness of His wrath? "If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but is a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" (1 Samuel 2:25). Those who die in their sins have no hope of a mediator after death. No intercessor will plead their case. They will not be able to escape.

C. Their Punishment is Eternal and Unbearable

This doctrine, so unpopular even among many professing Christians,⁸ nonetheless finds its strongest support in the teaching of Jesus. W. G. T. Shedd notes, "The Apostles enter far less into detailed description, and are far less emphatic upon this solemn theme, than their divine Lord and Master. And well they might be. For as none but God has the right, and would dare to execute the sentence; so none but God has the right, and should presume, to delineate the nature and consequences of this sentence."⁹ The Jesus of the Gospels has more to say on the subject than the rest of the New Testament combined. (cf. number 119 in this series for a list of the passages in the Gospels.) "Very terrible was Jesus' own anger as the Gospels describe it," said Machen, "a profound burning indignation against sin; and very terrible is the anger of the God whom He proclaimed as the Ruler of heaven and earth. No, you certainly cannot escape from the teaching of the Bible about the wrath of God by appealing to Jesus of Nazareth. The most terrible even among the Biblical presentations of God's wrath are those that are found in our blessed Savior's words."¹⁰

CONCLUSION: The British philosopher/mathematician Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) is considered one of the foremost intellectuals of the 20th century. He was also an agnostic who positively loathed Christianity. He wrote a widely read popular book back in the 1960's entitled Why I am NOT a Christian. The chief reason? The doctrine of Hell, especially as taught by Jesus. Here is what Russell wrote. "There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ, certainly as depicted in the Gospels, did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His Preaching—an attitude which is not uncommon with preachers, but which does somewhat detract from superlative excellence. . . . I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world. . . . I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that." Too bad Brian McLaren, the emergent guru was not around to set Russell straight. Turns out, according to McLaren, Jesus really did not teach what Russell is so upset about. In his book, The Last Word and the Word After That (Jossey-Bass, 2003), McLaren concocts a fanciful view that the Jews during the intertestamental period wove together the mythological views of the Mesopotamian, the Egyptian, the Zoroastrian and Persian religions and created hell. When Jesus came on the scene, the Pharisees were using hell as a club to keep the people in line. Through the threat of hell, the Pharisees could motivate sinners to stop sinning and then perhaps God would send the Messiah along with His kingdom. Jesus takes the Pharisees' club and turns it on them. Jesus didn't really believe in or endorse hell, as we understand it; He just used it as a "truth-depicting model." Jesus used hell "to threaten those who excluded sinners and other undesirables, showing that God's righteousness was compassionate and merciful, that God's kingdom welcomed the undeserving, that for God there was no out-group." This convoluted argumentation leads to there being "no out-group." If there is no out-group, does that mean McLaren is a universalist? While he flirts with this possibility stating, "Universalism is not as bankrupt of biblical support as some suggest," he never firmly lights on it. But without question, McLaren does hold to the doctrine of

inclusivism which teaches that while salvation has been made possible by Jesus Christ, it is not necessary to know who Jesus is or the precise nature of what He has done. Emergent church leaders follow the reasoning of missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin's position concerning Christ and salvation which runs along these lines: Exclusive in the sense of affirming the unique truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ, but not in the sense of denying the possibility of salvation to those outside the Christian faith; inclusive in the sense of refusing to limit the saving grace of God to Christian, but not in the sense of viewing other religions as salvific. In other words, salvation is not exclusively found in the gospel, therefore there are saved Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and so forth. Soon hell becomes a mute issue because no one seems to be going there anyway.¹¹ "You who now hear of hell and the wrath of the great God, and sit here so easy and quiet, and go away so careless, by and by will shake and tremble, and cry out, and shriek, and gnash your teeth, and will be thoroughly convinced of the vast weight and importance of these things which you now despise."¹² Thus Jonathan Edwards warned his listeners. If you will not heed Edwards, listen to the Apostle Paul: "Therefore knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Corinthians 5:11). As we come to the Lord's table today, call to mind the price that was paid to deliver you from the wrath to come (I Thessalonians 1:10; Colossians 3:6). If you are here this morning and have been awakened to see your true condition before God, then I call upon you to turn from your sins and place your trust in Christ the Redeemer. He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).

ENDNOTES

¹ Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition (The World Publishing Co., 1972), p. 1288.

² The Complete Works of Thomas Manton XIV (rpt. Maranatha Publications, N.D.), p. 396.

³ C. L. Feinberg The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord (Moody, 1969), p. 126.

⁴ cf. the comments on this by Feinberg. Ibid. pp. 127-128.

⁵ J. Gresham Machen, Christianity and Liberalism (Eerdmans, 1946), p. 135.

⁶ The expression "high hand" is translated "defiantly" in the NIV and NASB. The KJV reads "presumptuously." The Hebrew is literally "being high with the hand," meaning done willfully and openly in disregard for God. To put it in contemporary slang, it would reflect the attitude expressed by "in your face!" It is an "arrogant at" of open insurrection and contempt. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, Studies in Dogmatics: Sin (Eerdmans, 1971), p. 289.

⁷ The Works of Jonathan Edwards II (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 79. I am indebted to Edwards for the general framework of this sermon. It is based on his sermon "The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable."

⁸ cf. the article "Evangelical Megashift: Why you may not have heard about wrath, sin, and hell recently" in Christianity Today, February 19, 1990. One of the most vocal opponents of the traditional Christian position on the subject of eternal punishment is Clark Pinnock whose argument against Hell amounts to this: "Because I don't like this doctrine, it cannot be true!!"

⁹ W. G. T. Shedd, The Doctrine of Endless Punishment (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1980), p. 12-13.

¹⁰ J. Gresham Machen, The Christian View of Man rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 223. The famous British mathematician and agnostic Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) wrote in his bok, Why I Am Not a Christian, that one of the major reasons he rejected Christianity was due to Jesus' teaching on hell. This was highly offensive, he says, and renders Jesus unacceptable as a religious and moral teacher.

¹¹ As cited by Gary Gilley, The Emerging Church Part 2, http://www.svchapel.org/Resources/Articles/read_articles.asp?ID+123. Gilley contributed a chapter on Brian McLaren for the book Reforming or Conforming? Postconservative and Emergents that I credited with Ron Gleason (Crossway, Sept. 2008).

¹² Edwards, op. cit., p. 83.