

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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

Series:	Scripture Memory	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	122	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Hebrews 10:26-31	
Date:	November 5, 2023 (a.m.)	

### AN INEVITABLE CERTAINTY

If we accept the authority of the Bible, we are forced to deal with the Bible's teaching about the subject of Judgment (and doctrines like *wrath* and *eternal punishment*, i.e., *Hell*). We are **not** free to *pick and choose*. For instance, we have the declarative statements of Christ in Matt. 13:42, 25:41, 46; and Mark 9:43, 44. The language used in these passages seem perfectly clear – certain persons are sent to a place of eternal suffering. How long is *eternal*? Does “forever and ever” mean everlasting as in Revelation 14:11? In Matthew 25:46, the word *aionion* is used by Jesus to describe both the length of punishment for the wicked *and* the length of eternal life for the redeemed. Rob Bell, however, thinks there is a different way to understand the text. He confidently declares, “The goats are sent, in the Greek language, to an *aion* of *kolazo*. *Aion*, we know, has several meanings. One is *age* or *period of time*; another refers to intensity of experience. The word *kolazo* is a term from horticulture. It refers to the pruning and trimming of the branches of a plant so it can flourish. An *aion* of *kolazo*. Depending on how you translate *aion* and *kolazo*, then, the phrase can mean *a period of pruning* or *a time of trimming*, or an intense experience of correction.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, according to Bell, the notion of everlasting eternal punishment only means temporary and remedial. A. T. Robertson, the noted Greek scholar, pointed out years ago that, “The word *kolasin* comes from *kolazō*, to mutilate or prune. Hence those who cling to the larger hope use this phrase to mean age-long pruning that ultimately leads to salvation of the goats, as disciplinary rather than penal. There is such a distinction as Aristotle pointed out between *mōria* (vengeance) and *kolasis*. But the same adjective *aiōnios* is used with *kolasin* and *zōēn*. If by etymology we limit the scope of *kolasin*, we may likewise have only age-long *zōēn*. There is not the slightest indication in the words of Jesus here that the punishment is not coeval with the life. We can leave all this to the King himself who is the Judge. The difficulty to one's mind about conditional chastisement is to think how a life of sin in hell can be changed into a life of love and obedience. The word *aiōnos* (from *aiōn*, age, *aevum*, *aei*) means either without beginning or without end or both. It comes as near to the idea of eternal as the Greek can put it in one word. It is a difficult idea to put into language. Sometimes we have *ages of ages* (*aiōnes tōn aiōnōn*).”<sup>2</sup> The writer to the Hebrews is likewise concerned with this sobering and solemn subject – in this passage He is drawing a parallel by means of illustration of “the lesser compared with the greater (Moses and Christ) and the consequences of apostasy. What is this? Who are *Apostates*? Note the particulars of v. 31:

- I. ***A description of God is given:*** The living God (used earlier in 3:12)
- II. ***The event of their sin:*** They “fall into His hands.”
- III. ***The nature of this:*** “it is a fearful thing.”

John Brown long ago observed, “The same sentiment, as to the omnipotence of God to punish, is very strikingly repeated in the 31<sup>st</sup> verse. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Who knows the power of His wrath? According to His fear, so is His wrath.” The scriptural description of the final punishment of the enemies of God is enough to make the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. Well may we say, with our Lord, -- *Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they*

can do: but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him. Such is the doom, the certain doom, of the man who lives and dies an apostate. Let none despair. It is not the act of apostasy, it is the state of apostasy, that is certainly damnable. Let all beware of being *high-minded*. Let them fear, lest a promise being left them, any man should seem to come short of it. Let them guard against every approach to apostasy. The grand preservative from apostasy is to grow in *the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*; and to *add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity*. It is in doing these things that we are assured that we shall *never fall*, and that *so an entrance shall be ministered to us abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.<sup>3</sup>

**OBSERVATIONS:** That God is the living God and falling into His hands implies at least three (3) things:

**Observation #1.** Having to do with God immediately – a twofold respect

A. Without Christ to mediate

B. Without an instrument to convey God's Wrath

**Observation #2.** Having to do with God necessarily and unavoidably, He cannot be eluded or hid from – Rev. 6:16. There is no escape – Heb. 2:3.

**Observation #3.** Having to do with God everlastingly -- Luke 12:4.

**CONCLUSION:** You have an appointment with God – which you will keep (9:27) – outside of Christ you will meet with a God who is pictured as a “consuming fire” (12:29) – *it is this doctrine that motivated* the Apostle Paul, 2 Cor. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:1. Leon Morris has well said, “The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here, it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere.” Evangelical Christianity teaches that the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the One who knew no sin, became *sin for us* (2 Cor. 5:21). The holy God who is allergic to sin punished Christ in our place. The Cross is God's infinite response to man's sin. Christ exhausts the punishment due to sinners because He Himself was the infinite and eternal God. Christ did not die for our potential nonexistence, but for our eternal bearing of the wrath of God in a place separated from Him. One theologian accurately remarks that “A gospel . . . that trades on a diminished view of sin, a modified notion of divine righteousness, and a restructured Atonement is not one that is more appealing . . . but one that is less. It is a gospel that has lost its nerve because it has lost its majesty.” Rather than holding that Christ “descended into Hades” during the three days between His death and resurrection (a view shown in chapter 4 to lack scriptural foundation), the Bible indicates that He was in “Paradise” (Luke 23:43). One of my theology students asked, “Didn't Jesus *have* to go to hell in order to bear our judgment there?” The question is a good one. The cross was the venue where the judgment was borne by the Lamb of God. Jesus' work of atonement was finished on the cross as He Himself declared (John 19:30). We realize that the atoning work of Christ by which He turned away the wrath of God is to be understood in more than a quantitative fashion. But is there no quantitative dimension to His becoming sin for us? It seems to be consistent with New Testament teaching to say that Christ bore our hell on the cross. One's view of Christ's work on the Cross is directly related to what one believes will happen both to those who receive that work and to those who reject that work. For the one who believes, everlasting blessedness is promised in the presence of the Savior. For the one who does not believe, only “eternal punishment” awaits that person (Matt. 25:46).<sup>4</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and The Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (Harper One, 2011), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament I* (Broadman, 1930), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> John Brown, *The Epistle To The Hebrews* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1983), p. 476.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of The Good News: Confronting The Contemporary Challenges To Jesus' Teaching on Hell* (Christian Focus, 2003), p. 217.