

The Sure Word Bible Studies *Lesson 12*

The Second Death

In this lesson we conclude our study of the subject of the final end of the wicked and how God is involved in that. Knowing the truth about this subject is critical to our understanding of what God is like. As we proceed, keep these two verses in mind:

Job 4:17 *"Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?"*

Isaiah 55:8 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Many times we have been guilty of trying to make God more like us, rather than us trying to be more like Him. We picture Him as a mortal man getting angry and venting His anger by lashing out and inflicting punishment on the objects of His wrath as we do. But we must remember, God does not think like us and His ways are not like ours, they are radically different.

Let's go back to the cross for a moment. When Jesus was being treated so cruelly, how did He react? Remember this is God in the flesh they are torturing so horribly! He had done nothing wrong! Did He have the right to retaliate? As humans we would all agree that He would have been perfectly justified in obliterating them all on the spot! That's what we would do! But what did God do? He forgave them all. And He did this even though no one "repented" or asked for forgiveness. This is what God means when He says His ways are higher than ours!

This fact was apparently overlooked by the churches teaching of the eternal torments of hell which has turned more people against God than any other lie of Satan! Many people choose to be an atheist rather than to believe in a God who will torturously burn people for eternity. Unfortunately most Christians believe in an eternal hell, when in fact God's great desire is that our relationship with Him be prompted from a heart of understanding and love, not superstition, ignorance and fear.

I John 4:16 - 18 *"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."*

The truth is that fear will actually produce the character of a rebel. We see that in young people who are anxious to leave home because of the constant fear of rigid discipline or painful punishment from overbearing parents. Fear of punishment may make a person behave in certain ways, but fear will not produce love and respect, only resentment and rebellion.

Punishment is usually used in one of two ways:

1) Punishment used as a means of "justice."

According to the English Dictionary, over the years the definition of justice has changed from "rightness" to "retaliation." Justice is understood as giving a person what society feels they deserve for misdeeds or violation of the law. In this evil world there is a place for that. But at the same time there are laws against cruel and unusual punishment of even the worst criminals. There are also laws against parents exerting excessive punishment upon children.

Yet many people believe our loving Heavenly Father will torture His disobedient children for eternity for a brief lifetime of sin and that is not justice! And no matter how it may be sugarcoated - whether for eternity or a few minutes - inflicting pain upon a person for no other purpose than "to make them pay" for their past actions is not justice, it is torture!

2) Punishment used as a tool in discipline / training.

A loving, responsible parent does not punish a child to "bring him to justice" or to "give him what he deserves." But when other methods of corrective training have failed, the responsible parent punishes the child in appropriate ways to teach them that certain types of conduct will result in unpleasant consequences. The Bible speaks about this:

Hebrews 12:6 - 11 *"For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."*

The purpose of the "chastening," (the Greek word used here means "training children") spoken of in this text is to produce "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" – that is, produces right behavior that results from a right character.

But if God subjects the wicked to painful suffering after the final judgment, aware that they are hardened in their sin and will not change, what purpose would that serve other than saying to the rest of the universe "If you disobey Me this is what I will do to you!" Then the motive for obeying and loving God would be the fear of what He will do to us if we don't do as He wishes, and to God that is unacceptable!

Which of these two methods we believe God uses depends upon our understanding of God's character. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that the "spirit," (the nature of a person) that would painfully burn sinners alive is not of God.

Luke 9:52 - 56 *"And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village."*

It is important that when we think of God that we remember Jesus said "My Father and I are one" (John 10:30). If Jesus wouldn't do it, then God wouldn't do it. Our opinion of God and our understanding of His character must be based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ who came for that very purpose.

In the last lesson we learned that according to the scriptures, God's "wrath" is not burning people up but God sadly giving the determined sinner up to go his or her own way. God is love and this is the only way love can respond to rejection! We find more evidence of this truth in the following verses:

Psalms 9:15 - 16 *"The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The LORD is known by the judgment He executes; The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."*

Psalms 34:21 *"Evil shall slay the wicked, And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned."*

Proverbs 11:5 *"The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright, But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness."*

Ezekiel 22:29 *"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongly oppress the stranger."*

And does the Lord do to these wicked people?

Verse 31 *"Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord."*

In these texts it is clear that God allows the wicked to suffer the consequences of their own actions. They suffer because of what they are and what they do – not because God inflicts pain or trouble upon them in order to punish them.

If God intentionally inflicts trouble and pain upon those who reject Him – we have reason to fear Him. On the other hand, if we suffer and die as the natural consequence of sin, of ignoring God's warnings and going our own selfish way, we have no reason to fear God, but every reason to fear sin! Every reason to cling to God for He is our only help!

Make no mistake, there will be torment for the unrepentant sinner; but it will not be the physical pain of literal fire. The suffering of the wicked in the end will be a heart wrenching, agonizing pain of despair, terror, and remorse as they come to realize the truth of their hopeless condition.

Let's go again to the book of Revelation and take a closer look at the Great White Judgment to better understand the final fate of the wicked. Begin by reading again the verses 7 - 10 which portrays the period at the end of the one thousand year millennium.

Revelation 20:7 - 10 *"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."*

This is a summary statement of what John saw in vision. In the following verses he goes back and fills in the details of what happened just prior to the fire coming down and devouring those outside the city.

Revelation 20:11 - 15 *"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades (death and the grave) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."*

As hardened sinners gather themselves outside the *"beloved city,"* the *"The Great White Throne Judgment"* takes place. Picture again this scene in your mind. Every person who has ever lived on earth is alive at the same time and place with all the righteous inside the city and all the wicked outside the city walls. This is the time the Bible speaks of when it says, *"we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ"* (Romans 14:10). Christ describes the despair of the lost when they find themselves outside those walls.

Luke 13:28 *"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out."*

At last the terrible realization of the final consequence of sin will be visited upon the sinner. For those who find themselves outside the walls the severity of suffering will correspond with the measure of guilt – because the measure of guilt depends on the amount of knowledge. The more knowledge of God and His righteous ways they have rejected, the more guilt and condemnation they will experience and the reality of that will be clearly shown to them at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The word *"name"* in the New Testament Greek is a word for *"character."* When Christ is seen on the Great White Throne, His gracious *"name"* or character will be revealed to all present. As they see this, everyone, including Satan, will bow in acknowledgement of the truth.

Philippians 2:10, 11 *"That at the name (seeing for themselves the gracious character of God in Christ) of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Words in parenthesis are mine)

As the wicked witness the glory (gracious character) of God as revealed in Christ at the final judgment they will finally acknowledge the truth. All their excuses are gone, they have seen it with their own eyes and they will be speechless. The stark reality of their lost and hopeless condition is now before them.

Remember the text in Revelation says *"fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them."* There is biblical evidence that this fire does not kill them, but that they are already dead and this fire devours only their dead bodies. We have an example from the Old Testament book of II Chronicles -

II Chronicles 7:1 *"When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple."*

As we studied in a previous lesson about the sanctuary services, the sacrifices were to teach that sin kills. The sacrifice being killed by the sinner, was dead before being

placed on the altar and burned. No sacrifice in the temple services were ever burned alive. A text from Isaiah confirms this concept -

Isaiah 66:24 *"And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."*

Jesus referred to this fire that would not be quenched (Mark 9:43). And note again this fire is burning "*corpses*," dead bodies, not living people.

And as we learned in the last lesson, intense emotional pain and stress can cause painful suffering and ultimately death. This is what killed Christ and this is what will kill the sinner. Note the following report from the website, ReligionNewsToday.com

"During the January 17, 1994, Northridge/Los Angeles earthquake, over one hundred Californians literally died of fright. This was the conclusion of Robert Kloner, cardiologist at Good Samaritan hospital in Los Angeles. Apparently a terrorized brain can trigger the release of a mix of chemicals so potent it can cause the heart to contract - and never relax again."

As also mentioned in the last lesson, medical scientists have recently acknowledged this condition named the "broken heart syndrome." The condition where under extreme stress the body secretes excessive amounts of adrenalin which build up in the sac that surrounds the heart, and unrelieved, will eventually cause the heart to stop beating. This may be what Isaiah is speaking of in chapter 33 -

Isaiah 33:10 - 12 *"Now I will rise," says the LORD; "Now I will be exalted, Now I will lift Myself up. (The Great White Throne judgment) You shall conceive chaff, You shall bring forth stubble; Your breath (Hebrew "ruwach" which also means spirit or character), as fire, shall devour you. And the people shall be like the burnings of lime; Like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire."*

(The words in parenthesis are mine)

Stubble is the short stalk left in the field after the grain harvest. The stubble is dead. Notice when the Lord is exalted the wicked "*conceive*" or "*bring forth stubble*." In other words, as a woman conceives and brings forth a child from within her body, the wicked, in the same way, conceive and bring forth a spirit or nature within themselves that becomes as dead stubble and "*as thorns cut up*" will be burned in the fire. Again the point is made that the wicked will be dead when the fire comes down and devours them.

Now note the question asked in verse 14 -

Verse 14 *"The sinners in Zion are afraid; Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*

What or who is the “devouring fire” in this text? In a previous study we learned that according to the Bible, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). So the question really is: Who can live in the literal presence of Almighty God? Who can dwell “in the light which no man can approach unto”? (I Timothy 6:16)

Now note the answer in Isaiah 33:15 as to who can live in God’s literal presence -

Verse 15 *“He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:”* (Isaiah 33:15)

Because the righteous have been changed, their “corruption putting on incorruption” (I Corinthians 15:53) at the second coming of Christ, they can live in God’s literal presence; and they will rejoice as they see Him face to face!

Verse 17 *“Your eyes will see the king in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off.”*

On the other hand, when the wicked witness the glory of God revealed they will perish. Not because God lashes out at them in anger but because they cannot bear the reality of what they are compared to what Jesus is! The enormity of their guilt will crush them. As we saw in the last lesson, the clearest evidence of how the sinner dies is seen at the cross.

As God at last reveals His glory and the wicked die (see note at the end of this lesson), the redeemed will stand at the walls of the city and watch. How will you feel as you see those people outside suffer and die the awful second death?

When we look back into the Father’s face as His lost children die, what will we see? A vengeful, vindictive God crying out “Now at last My justice is satisfied!” No! What we will see is a loving Father weeping over His lost children!

At the same time, the Bible is clear, God “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34). It would do no good. He must give them up - they are incurable. At the last, God will fully unveil His “power and glory” and “fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them.” The fire that devours the already dead bodies of the wicked also purifies the earth.

II Peter 3:10 - 13 *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”*

This will be the end of sin and sinners! The universe will be returned to the state it was before sin entered; freedom and trust and unselfish love will abound throughout. When this is all over the redeemed will witness God's mighty power as He creates a "new heaven and new earth."

Revelation 21:1 - 5 *"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

No more sorrow, no more pain, no more crying. How can this statement be true if there's a place somewhere where the wicked are suffering in agony and pain as they burn for eternity?

But for those of us who love God, what a glorious inheritance He has reserved for us!

I Peter 1:3 - 5 *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, **reserved in heaven for _____,**"*

"Reserved in heaven for _____", put your name there. You have a personal invitation! God created no other one like you; you are an original and He will miss you if you are not there! There will be an eternal void in God's heart for all those who reject His gracious love. Be there! Make your reservations today!

END NOTE: It is clear from scripture that the wicked will perish in the literal presence of God. We have seen His awesome presence described as "fire," "light" and "glory." But since no living human has seen or experienced it, exactly just what it is no one knows for sure. However, since we do know that the angels live in God's very presence and that Adam and Eve also lived in it in the beginning before their fall, we can say with certainty that the "glory," the power of God that would consume the corrupt sinner will actually be a life-giving force to the righteous.

So when God finally unveils His glory before the entire universe, no longer shielded by His grace, sinners will perish because of what they are, and not because God is punishing them by slowly burning them to death. The very fire that consumes the wicked is a good fire that gives life, it is an "everlasting fire" that we never want to go out. But still the most important question is - How is God involved in the final death of His lost children? Hopefully that question has clearly been answered.

As we have alluded to a number of times, there is a lot of contradictory beliefs and teachings in Christianity today. Just as others we have studied, this is true when it comes to salvation - how God "saves." This topic we will study in the next lesson.

Response Questions:

1. Is it clear to you that the wicked are already dead when the fire comes down from heave and "devours" them? Yes ___ No ___

2. Is it clear to you that "*The wages of sin is death – but the gift of God is eternal life?*" Yes ___ No ___

3. Do you realize that there is no reason to be afraid of God but rather it is our own selfish, sinful nature that we should fear? Yes ___ No ___

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