

“All Those Who Hate Me Love Death”

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“Now therefore, listen to me, *my children*, for blessed *are those who* keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain *it*. Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the LORD; But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death.”¹

Introduction:

If, as John Calvin proposed, man’s highest wisdom consists in the knowledge of God and of himself, one of the most important facets of that knowledge is the knowledge of God as a sin-hating God, and of himself as a sinner. This corresponds to one of the first op-erations of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to a right knowledge of God: He convicts them “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”² Since the function of the Christian ministry is to serve as the instrument of the Spirit, it should be apparent that pastors must be employed in ministry suited to bring their hearers to these convictions. Nevertheless, if one surveys the contemporary religious landscape, one fails to find much serious con-viction of these things. “Sin,” in the popular culture is a term for something forbidden by prudes, or it refers to a subjective psychological problem, a failure to be one’s authentic self. We need God more to heal our hurts and help us overcome our hang-ups rather than forgive our offenses. Perhaps, as in Romanist theology (where original sin is removed at baptism), or in many evangelical circles (where original sin is practically ignored except in references to the “old nature”), sin is limited to “actual sins,” i.e., actions forbidden by God. The idea that man’s very nature is guilty, calling for divine punishment apart from the deeds that flow from it, is most strange to the ear. If men are ignorant of sin, they are likewise ignorant of righteousness, particularly the righteousness of God revealed in sin’s punishment. God is widely pictured as one who does not take offense, but is only con-cerned about how people hurt themselves and how they underestimate His love. What about “judgment?” Except for the utter secularists, those modern Sadducees who ac-

¹The New King James Version. 1996, c1982 (electronic ed.) (Pr 8:32-9:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson. All biblical quotations following are in the KJV or NKJV, unless otherwise noted.

²John 16:8-10

knowledge neither spirit nor resurrection, the suspicion of future punishment or hope of reward lingers, but the traditional Christian idea of an eternal fiery hell is reinterpreted as a new purgatory (from which even the most wicked will be ultimately delivered), rejected as sheer myth (imposed by an impotent clergy to keep the masses in line), or reformed from misinterpretations based on biblical language referring to temporal destruction or to annihilation of the wicked. Given these interpretations of “sin, righteousness, and judgment” it would seem that the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit is superfluous. On the other hand, perhaps these interpretations have such prominence only because the church, not content to rely on the Spirit, nor to humble itself and seek His face, has re-jected the Spirit’s teaching for something more palatable to carnal men.

Our objective in this paper, therefore, is to strengthen our own conviction concerning the preaching of the scriptural doctrine of sin. In particular, we are examining the truth summarized in Chapter VI, paragraph 6, of our confession:

*“EVERY sin, both original and actual being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.”*³

Put more succinctly, in the words of the Wisdom of God, “he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death.”⁴

I. All Sin is Hatred of God

A. Actual sins are hatred of God

The English word “sin” corresponds to a number of biblical expressions, word groups, and associated ideas.⁵ Most often it expresses an objective violation of the Divine re-quirement of the creature, a trespass or transgression of God’s law, a failure to keep His covenant, a “missing of the mark,” where the mark is a due performance of obedience to

³ On the subject of sin, the following only are mentioned as reflecting most closely, and most nearly in time, the doctrine as set forth in our confession. On the general subject of original and actual sin, see *The Sinfulness of Sin*, by Edward Reynolds, *The Unregenerate Man’s Guiltiness Before God*, by Thomas Goodwin, *Human Nature in its Four-fold State* (Part II) by Thomas Boston, *The Great Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, by Jonathan Edwards, *Men are Naturally God’s Enemies*, by Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, by John Owen, *The Evil of Evils*, by Jeremiah Burroughs, and *The Plague of Plagues*, by Ralph Venning. On the necessity of “sin-punishing justice” see *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, by John Owen. On the eternal punishment of sin please see Edwards’ *Concerning the Endless Punishment of those who Die Impenitent*, his *The Eternity of Hell Torments*, and *The Future Punishment of the Wicked Unavoidable and Intolerable*. Though after the Puritan era, see W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, and “Sin” in J.C. Ryle’s *Holiness*.

⁴ For support of the following two sections, please refer to the following scriptures: Exodus 20:5; Deut. 7:9-11; 32:29-42; 1 Sam. 15; 2 Chron. 19:1-2; Psalm 21; 50; 51; 68; Isaiah 1; 30; 40; Malachi (whole book).

⁵“As might be expected of a book whose dominant theme is human sin and God’s gracious salvation from it, the Bible uses a wide variety of terms in both OT and NT to express the idea of sin.” Douglas, J. (1982; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996). *New Bible Dictionary*. (Page 1116). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House. This is a great succinct article on our subject.

God, and consequently a debt against a creaturely obligation. When this is remembered, it is not difficult to see that actual sins (whether prohibitions violated or good omitted) are expressions of hatred of God. If this seems too strong, consider what it actually means to transgress God's law. It is to disregard God's revelation of His will, which is a rejection of His authority, a denial of His right as Lord. His Lordship, moreover, is rightly His as the perfect and simple "I AM", and as the creator of all that exists. Each and every act of sin, then, is a denial and rejection of His infinity, His eternity, His immutability, His wisdom, His power, His holiness, His justice, His goodness, and His truth. It is to refuse to respect His right as the creator, preserver, and governor, whose glory and pleasure is the chief end of all things. Sin against the creation is against God because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Sins against our fellow man are all directly and indirectly, i.e., doubly, sins against God, for man is the image of God. Furthermore, there is not a single crime or offense committed against men (insult, slander, theft, robbery, adultery, murder, etc.) that is not committed against God's own person, attributes, or office, in every sin that is committed. Sin is a worship of that which is not God, the performance of that which is opposed to God. It is a robbery of God, treason against God. Ultimately, to sin is to wish that God would not be the God He is; which is to wish Him not to be, for He cannot be other than what He is.

B. Original sin is hatred of God.

In addition to the idea of objective transgression of the law, sin also has a subjective connotation, referring to the spiritual condition of the sinner. God's law addresses not only what man *does*, but also what he *is*. It commands what he is *to be*, and forbids what he is *not to be*. The scriptures utilize a particularly rich vocabulary and vivid imagery for this as well: sin that "lieth at the door," a heart whose thoughts are "only evil all the time," deceitful and desperately corrupt, it is pictured as the uncircumcised heart, the corrupting leaven, leprosy, "the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Those demonstrating its character are thistles, thorn bushes and evil trees that receive God's rain and produces only evil fruit, whose end is to be burned. It is described as pollution, corruption, foolishness bound up on the heart of the child who is "born in sin and shapen in iniquity," going astray from the womb. It is evil, loving the darkness and hating the light, having a hard forehead, dull ears, and a fat, stony, and impenitent heart, foul bondage, the flesh, the evil concupiscence, the man of sin, and the sin that remains in our members and which seeks to reign over us. It is that worldly, fleshly mind that cannot be subject to the law of God for it will not. Why not? Because it is at enmity with God since it cannot bear that there should be another god but itself. Even in the godly (in whom it remains dwelling in the body and its members) it seeks to reign, and those Christians who fail in their campaign against it, who fail to mortify and crucify it, grieve the blessed Holy Spirit, bring humiliation, sorrow and divine chastisement to themselves, great disadvantage to the church, and occasion for the enemies of God to blaspheme. Its "exceedingly sinful" character is demonstrated in the way it is excited into rebellion by the holy, just and good law of God. So powerful a force against God is it that it drives the godliest of men to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this

death?” It should not be difficult to see that original sin is hatred of God, and that God is utterly opposed to it.⁶

All of these expressions and many others refer not to what man does, but to the nature of man, and that very nature is, as such, a violation of God’s law.⁷

C. All stems from Adams transgression, which as we have seen, was an act of hatred against God.

While theologians may argue about the theory of the imputation of Adam’s sin, impute it God did, with all its character as a guilty act of hatred against God. Thus did the entire offspring of Adam become a brood of vipers, children of disobedience, and heirs of wrath. It is a mistake to think of fallen man as an innocent victim, or as his inability as a morally neutral tragedy.

II. Being the transgression of the Law of God, God must punish it.

According to the confession, it “doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner.” This follows from its being a transgression of the law, but it brings up a most important question: though all sin *deserves* to be punished, *must* it be. May not God simply, freely, forgive sin, upon repentance and amendment, apart from any restitution or penalty? It is of the greatest importance to our subject, and to our entire understanding of the gospel, to realize that, not by any external compulsion but by an inward necessity of His nature, God must punish sin. There are at least six scriptural arguments in support of this view.

A. Scripture describes God’s pure and holy nature as opposed to sin, as hating and detesting it.

God’s holy nature and its profound detestation of sin is apparent from Habakkuk 1:13 – He is “of purer eyes than to look upon” it. Again, in Joshua 24: 19, it is due to God’s holy nature itself, that Joshua argues that the Israelites cannot serve the Lord, for “he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.” In other words, to assert that God is holy and just is all the same as to say that it is an in-

⁶ Genesis 4:7; 6:5; Ezekiel 44:9; 1 Cor. 5:8; Leviticus 13; Jeremiah 17:9; Eph 4:22; Matt. 7:15-20; Heb. 6:7-8; Prov. 22:15; Psalm 51:5; 58:3; John 3:6, 19-20; Ezekiel 3:7; 36:26; Acts 28:27; Romans 2:5; 3:10-19; 6:12-8:13; Col. 3:9-10.

⁷ In his *Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*, A.A. Hodge writes, “This corresponds exactly with what the apostle teaches (1 John 3:4): “Sin is *avouia*”—any discrepancy of the creature or his acts with God’s law. This is evident—(1) Because from its very essence the moral law demands absolute perfection of character and disposition as well as action. Whatever is right is essentially obligatory; whatever is wrong is essentially worthy of condemnation. God requires us to be holy as well as to act rightly. God proclaims himself as “he which searcheth the reins and hearts.” (Rev. 2:23.) (2) The native corrupt tendencies which constitute original sin are called sin in Scripture. Sin and its lusts are said to “reign” in our mortal bodies; sin is said to have “dominion”; the unregenerate are called “the servants of sin.” (Rom. 6:12–17; 7:5–17; Gal. 5:17,24; Eph. 4:18,19.) (3) God condemns men for their corrupt natural dispositions, for their hardness of heart, spiritual blindness of mind. (Mark 16:14; Eph. 2:3.) (4) In all genuine conviction of sin, the great burden of pollution and guilt is felt to consist not in what we have done, but in what we are—our permanent moral condition rather than our actual transgressions. The great cry is to be forgiven and delivered from “the wicked heart of unbelief,” “deadness to divine things, alienation from God as a permanent habit of soul.” ... (Rom. 7:24; Ps. 51:5,6.)

extricable feature of God's nature to hate and punish sin. The same is evident from the name of God, as given to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7 as "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*." The point is that sin punishing justice is inherent in God's nature, as revealed by his name.

Throughout the scriptures it is declared, as a divine excellence praised by saints and angels, that God's very nature is opposed to sin.

"For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Psalm 5:4-6, cf., Jeremiah 44:4, Psalm 5:4-5.)

Indeed, the scriptures describe the opposition of God's holy nature against sin by the most vivid negative expressions. He is said to hate, detest, abhor, loath, despise, and abominate sin, and react to it with anger, fury, and rage; bringing upon the sinner bowls of wrath, the sword of vengeance, the winepress of his indignation, crushing, bruising, smiting, affliction and other expressions. Because these expressions seem to indicate a weakness or fault in God, the following remarks by Dr. Owen may be helpful:

In what sense passions and affections are ascribed to God, and what he would have us to understand by such a description of his nature and attributes, is known to everybody. But of all the affections of human nature, hatred is the most restless and turbulent, and to the person who is under its influence, and who can neither divest himself of it nor give a satisfactory vent to its motions, the most tormenting and vexatious; for as it takes its rise from a disagreement with and dislike of its object, so that its object is always viewed as repugnant and offensive, no wonder that it should rouse the most vehement commotions and bitterest sensations. But God, who enjoys eternal and infinite happiness and glory, as he is far removed from any such perturbations, and placed far beyond all variability or shadow of change, would not assume this affection so often, for our instruction, unless he meant clearly to point out to us this supreme, immutable, and constant purpose of punishing sin, — as that monster whose property it is to be the object of God's hatred, that is, of the hatred of infinite goodness, — to be natural and essential to him.⁸

The scriptural witness is incontrovertible: God hates sin.

⁸ *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*, in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. X, p. 551

B. Scripture ascribes to God the office of a judge, who will judge all things with justice.

God, who commands earthly judges to judge with justice, neither condemning the innocent nor excusing the guilty, does so because they are his own agents, representing him and administering justice at His will.⁹ Consequently, Abraham and Paul are able to argue from universally held principles about the justice to the execution of divine justice. Abraham, pleads God's own character of the ultimate just judge in Genesis 18:25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is a plea that God will distinguish between the righteous and the wicked and not, in punishing the wicked, destroy the righteous as well. The point for us is that Abraham acknowledges that, as a judge, God will judge and execute His judgment. Paul acknowledges the same in Romans 3:5-6, "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?" Again, the argument is that as a judge, God is just when he takes vengeance against evil. As a judge sets the time for trial, God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31) which is elsewhere called "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). It is the glory of God as a judge to judge justly, which glory the saints acknowledge in Rev. 16:5-6, "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy."¹⁰

C. Scripture asserts that sin is, and must be, punished for the glory of God.

If God's chief end in the creation of the world is the manifestation of his own glory, if sin is such a God-denying thing, utterly opposed to that glory, it is also clear that God, to preserve his glory as the Holy One, as the wise creator and the just judge of all, must, by a necessity of His nature, punish sin. This association of God's righteousness, anger, and glory is clearly seen in 2 Thess. 1:6-10,

...it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

As Owen argues,

⁹ Romans 13:1-4

¹⁰ See also on this, *The End of The Wicked Contemplated by the Righteous*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. II, pp. 207-212.

Suppose, then, that God should let the disobedient, whom it is a just thing for him to punish, go unpunished, and that those who are worthy of death should never be required to die, but that he should clear the guilty and the wicked, although he hath declared them to be an abomination to him, where is the glory of his justice?¹¹

D. Scripture teaches that men acknowledge the justice of the punishment of sin.

Though men protest against it, and the world has much disparity in its expression of it, it is nevertheless universally acknowledged in every religious taboo, every penal code, and every accusing conscience, that sin deserves punishment. The Scripture affirms this in Romans 1: 32 speaking of men who “knowing the judgment, of God,” know that “they which commit such things are worthy of death.” The pagan Abimelech could accuse Abraham of bringing destruction near to him by giving occasion to him to sin (Gen. 20). Jonah’s travel companions likewise both recognized Jonah’s sin as the source of their disaster and prayed not to be accounted guilty for casting him overboard. While men may be mistaken about their innocence, the universal cry, “Why? What have I done?” is a tacit acknowledgement that suffering supposes guilt.

E. Scripture asserts that Christ was crucified for the exercise of divine justice against sin.

There is no other just or sufficient cause for the cross of Christ than the propitiation of divine vengeance against sin. Indeed, the scripture reveals that by this divine execution of the penalty for sin, God has demonstrated his justice with regard to past, apparently unpunished sins. Indeed, this is the glory of the gospel, that in the cross of Christ, God has demonstrated his justice more clearly and powerfully than in any other possible way, and has done so the praise of his glorious grace in the salvation of his enemies. Nevertheless, apart from the clear demonstration of the sinfulness of sin and the sin-punishing justice of God, the gospel cannot be understood, which was the purpose served by the giving of, and in the preaching of, the la

Let sinners, then, be informed that every the least transgression abounds so much with hatred against God; is so highly injurious to him, and as far as is in its power brands him with such folly, impotence, and injustice; so directly robs him of all his honor, glory, and power, — that if he wills to be God, he can by no means suffer it to escape unpunished. It was not for nothing that on that day on which he made man a living soul, he threat-ened him with death, even eternal death; that in giving his law he thundered forth so many dread execrations against this fatal evil; that he hath threatened it with such punishment, with so great anger, with fury, wrath, tribulation, and anguish; that with a view to vindicate his own glory, and provide for the salvation of sinners, he made his most holy Son,

¹¹ *Works*, X: 555 w.

who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners,” “sin” and a “curse,” (Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13) and subjected him to that last punishment, the death of the cross, including in it the satisfaction due to his violated law. All these things divine justice required as necessary to the preservation of his honor, glory, wisdom, and dominion. Let every proud complaint of sinners, then, be hushed, for we know that “the judgment of God is according to truth against them that do evil.”¹²

F. Scripture asserts that God has demonstrated His justice in the world.

To this fact we turn now as we observe the spiritual and temporal miseries of sinners.

III. The Wages of Sin

“... and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.”

Having seen that sin ought to be punished, and that God, being God, must necessarily punish it, we come now to examine the biblical teaching of the *way* He does so. The confession summarizes it by calling it “death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.” The association of sin and death could not be more positively revealed: “In the day that you eat of it you shall die,” “the soul that sins, it shall die,” “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned,” “the wages of sin is death,” “the law of sin and death,” “dead, in trespasses and sins,” “sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” Nevertheless, it is apparent in the scriptures that this judgment of “death” is carried out in a number of stages and dimensions.

A. God Has Punished Sin.

At the beginning of his exposition of the gospel, Paul asserts, as a truth known (if unacknowledged by many) that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Peter and Jude, seeing the obstinacy with which men will suppress and deny this truth, remind their readers of some of the more outstanding proofs of the divine wrath.

First they say, God spared not the angels that sinned (2 Peter 2:4). Angels--sinned--and were not spared. The thought of it should make us all shudder, aghast with horror. Here, if anywhere, might be made a case for simple pardon, but these creatures were given neither the opportunity for repentance, nor a mediator to assume their nature and die in their place. Instead, they were cast down to hell and delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.”¹³ Next, though not mentioned by Peter and Jude, God punished

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 619-620

¹³ Some, apparently, have an existence as demonic spirits in this world, where they “wander through dry places seeking rest and finding none,” or possess the bodies of men, awaiting with terror the prospect of being cast into the abyss, (Luke 8:28-31), probably the lake of fire prepared for them. No wonder that they “believe and tremble.”

Adam and Eve with expulsion from the garden, the loss of the glory of their creation. Who, besides themselves and the fallen angels can imagine that day? They next tell us that God destroyed the old world. Here is a fact in the lore of all the nations of the world, though little regarded at Peter's time or ours. How horrible must be that vile poison of sin, that it brings the world to such a state that the gracious, long-suffering God must cleanse it with such a deluge! In the Biblical record we also find God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, plague against Israel's Egyptian captors, an entire generation (ex-cepting only two persons) perishes in the Wilderness, the "Amorite" is made put to the sword and fire when his iniquity has become full, all but a remnant of Israel and Judah perish for their apostasy from their covenant God, and the wicked nations that greedily gave themselves to destroy them are overthrown. Indeed, the entire history of God's relationship with his people, based as it is upon a covenant made in the blood of a substitute leaves no doubt that God punishes sin.

B. Spiritual Death, Spiritual Miseries

Paul, in expounding the ways the "wrath of God is revealed from heaven" might well have begun with that which is most obvious. He could have elaborated upon the groan-ing of the creation, its subjection to futility, the cursing of the ground, which yields its produce only after much sweat and toil against the thorn, under the sun that smites by day, until the worn-out and pain-wracked body, yields to death and returns its dust to the ground from which it was taken. He could have spoken of disease, disaster, and war, ex-pounding the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 with seemingly endless examples from sacred and secular history. Instead, he directs our attention to that first act of the divine displeasure: the death of the spirit through its loss of fellowship with that God who is its life: "their foolish hearts were darkened," and they were "given up." Men became, as it were, spiritual zombies, "dead in trespasses and sins," even while they "walked in them." Dead to God, yet living in His world, cast away from his gracious presence.¹⁴

What, then, are the miseries that accrue to the spirit that does not have God as its friend, life, and light, but is under His condemnation and curse? Naturally some of these will vary in kind and degree from individual to individual, according to the providence of God, but among them are the following: futility of thought, spiritual blindness, inability, a guilty, accusing conscience, hardness, vile passions, prejudice, burning in lusts, the emptiness of unsatisfied desires, confusion, gullibility, foolish vanity, loneliness, suspi-cion, envy, self-flattery, obsession, bondage through the fear of death. They are hopeless, or else they lean on reeds that will break and pierce their hands. They are enslaved by the devil, in mind and body, individually and corporately, giving heed to seducing spirits, and some actually undergoing demonic possession or direct demonic torment of mind.

C. Temporal Miseries

Temporal miseries, then, would include all the evils that naturally tend to follow the spiri-tual miseries just named. As men act out their ignorance and lusts against each other they

¹⁴ Rom. 1:18-32; Eph. 2:1-3; Genesis 3:23-24.

“receive” mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, economically, etc., “in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Nor should we be surprised to find that these penalties are visited “upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,” as both the sins themselves and their expected results would naturally flow from one generation to the next unless grace intervenes to break the chain of iniquity.

To these “natural” consequences of sin, may be added many positive divine strokes against the bodies, fortunes, and happiness of men. These may come directly from God’s hand, or mediated through the creation: the elements, angelic or demonic spirits, or other men. Men, thinking they are protecting the goodness of God, oppose the suggestion that the most atrocious acts of men, the most destructive of natural disasters, and the most painful of diseases are punishments from God. The infallible word, however, repeatedly asserts this without flinching, warning all those who do not regard themselves as worthy of punishment that unless they repent they shall all likewise perish.¹⁵

D. Punishment beyond the grave, and beyond the Day of Judgment

The scriptures have a great deal to say about the punishment which takes place after the death of the body. First, undeniably, the punishment of sin continues after physical death. For example, sinners are not only said to be slain, or cut in two, but also after-wards “appointed a portion with the unbelievers,” (Luke 19:27; 20:16) and with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:30-31, 51). The Lord contrasts him that can kill the body only, and the one who “*after* He has killed, has power to cast into hell” (Luke 12:4-5, emphasis mine; Mt. 10:28). Matthew 16:26 which refers to a man loosing his “soul,” obviously does not refer to this life only, for Christ immediately adds, “the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (cf. Luke 9:25-26). Matthew 18:6-9 (Luke. 17:2) asserts that rather than live and die as a sinner, it is preferable to live maimed, or be drowned in the sea. Both expressions plainly assert that the sinful life results in an end following and worse than physical death. Sinners will be “delivered to torturers” (Mt. 18:34-35), “cast away” into “outer darkness,” where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:27). In his detailed description of one particular lost soul, Christ describes this torment as consisting both of the privation of good, and the suffering of the most extreme pains. Listen well to our Lord’s horrifying rhetoric--“The rich man also died and was buried, and, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes.” “Buried,--and being in torment!” No sooner dead than this is his state, with sense to feel the heat of the flames that engulf him, eyes to look upon the bliss of the righteous,¹⁶ a memory to reflect upon his vain and self-centered life, a mind to dread the arrival of those he should have exhorted to right-eousness in his lifetime, and ears to hear the solemn pronouncement that there is no hope for him ever: his place unchangeable, and his thirst undiminished by so much as a single drop of water.

¹⁵ Exodus (chapters 7 through 12); Lev. 10:2; Judges (practically every chapter!); 1 Sam. 5:6; 2 Sam 24:10-25; 1 Chron. 13:10; 2 Chron. 21:18; Isaiah through Malachi (in places too numerous to list!); Luke 13:1-5; Acts 5:1-13; 12:23.

¹⁶ See also 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.”

Men already know that evil-doers deserve death (Rom. 1:32), they also know, or will certainly come to realize, that they are doomed to receive “a fate *worse* than death,” as we see in their response to the coming of Christ:

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”¹⁷

Elsewhere, the Lord tells us that at this time the tares will be bundled and burned, and the wheat gathered into his barn (Mt. 13:30, explained 40-42). This general resurrection (John 5:28-29) includes the righteous *and* the unrighteous. “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* ever-lasting contempt.”¹⁸

As the righteous are “clothed upon” with their former bodies, now glorified to fit their everlasting state of righteous bliss,¹⁹ it is reasonable, the human nature being a unity of body and spirit, that those undergoing the “resurrection of condemnation” to shame and everlasting contempt will likewise receive their bodies, which in their lifetimes had been the instruments of sin, resurrected in a condition fitting their state of God-forsaken wretchedness.

After the final judgment, in contrast to the eternal life of the godly, sinners are cast into an everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels for everlasting punishment (Mt. 25:31-46).

E. This punishment will be according to righteousness.

As already indicated, the punishment of sin is because of the righteousness of God, and it will be according to that righteousness. It is delivered because men “practice lawlessness” (Mt. 7:23), by a God who impartially judges each man’s work. The final sentence is pronounced after the examination of the books, a further indication of its justice.

Given the physical imagery of hell, e.g., as a lake of fire, and the fact that all sin is infinitely evil, because committed against an infinite God, it is a common misconception that there are not degrees of punishment. But we are taught that it is according to the measure of light and privileges received: so that it will be more tolerable for Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre and Sidon than the cities that witnessed the preaching of Christ, who will be condemned by the men of Nineveh.²⁰ Hypocrites receive the greater condemnation (Luke

¹⁷ Rev. 6:15-7:1

¹⁸ Dan. 12:2

¹⁹ 2Cor. 5:2-4; 1 Cor. 15:42-53

²⁰ Mt. 10:15; 11:21-24; 12:41-42; Luke 10:10-16; 11:29-32

20:47), as apparently do those who are the cause of other's stumbling.

F. This punishment will be eternal.

It is most certain that the Scriptures teach the eternity of the suffering of the wicked. Consider, for example, John the Baptist's (Luke 3:17) contrast of the objects of the Lord's final harvest: "His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." It may be argued that *unquenchable* fire does not equal *eternal* punishment in fire. Exegetically, however, the weight of evidence leaves little doubt that this is the import of the herald's words. Compare this with Christ's exposition of the parable of the wheat and the tares:

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 14: 40-43).

In the book of Revelation we read of the secular and religious heads of these exact same persons as being thrown alive into a lake of fire and brimstone, then of Satan being thrown there, where they will be "tormented day and night forever and ever." Finally we read of all not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, cast into the same fiery lake (Rev. 19:20 & 20:10, 15). The duration of their punishment was described earlier in the book in words that are not the least ambiguous:

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Rev. 14:9-11).

Although some have argued that the perpetual ascent of the smoke does not prove their perpetual torment, the fact that it is paralleled with having "no rest day or night" should settle the matter.²¹ Christ says of those in Gehenna, "Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (repeated three times in Mark 9:42-49).

There is nothing to suggest that there is any promise of pardoning mercy to those in hell,

²¹ In his detailed analysis of these references from the Book of Revelation, Greg Beale argues, we believe unassailably, that these passages teach eternal punishment, and cannot be construed in support of a doctrine of annihilation. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., (Grand Rapids: 1999), pp. 760-765, 969, 1029-30,

and much that argues against any future forgiveness. The door is shut to the foolish virgins, not to be opened. In answer to his cry for even the least drop of relief “Dives” is told of the great gulf fixed between. Those who reject the invitation of forgiveness are told that their blood is on their own heads. It is appointed unto man to die once, which is followed by the judgment. So, Christ died once, and returns to bring the finality of salvation to those who believe in him, not to others. Today Christ’s ambassadors and his blood speak to sinners of reconciliation, but,

if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more *shall not we escape*, if we turn away from him that *speaketh* from heaven: ²⁶ Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. ²⁷ And this *word*, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may re-main. ²⁸ Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire (Heb 12:24-29).

Damnation is “the second death,” after which there is no mention of another resurrection. Even if additional room for repentance were offered, saving faith and evangelical repentance would not take place in hell. Apart from the grace of the Holy Spirit, tribulation causes men to become even more impenitent God haters and blasphemers. If they repented not “when the tree is green,” how will they repent “when it is dry?”

G. It will not be annihilation.

Many scriptures speak of the destruction, or perishing of the wicked. False teachers, for instance, “bring upon themselves swift destruction,” and Sodom and Gomorrah were “condemned ... to destruction” (2 Peter 2:2, 6). In some cases, an obvious complete temporal destruction has led some to argue that this is the proper meaning of “destruction,” and therefore, references to eternal destruction must be to annihilation, the complete and final destruction of the being of individuals or institutions. While it is true that cities and institutions may completely cease to exist *per se*, the same is not necessarily true for the human being. It is fallacious to argue that a merely possible meaning in one context proves a similar meaning in another. The context of Peter’s remarks just quoted demands the very opposite interpretation of destruction. Peter is arguing “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9). The antediluvian sinners and the Sodomites, though “destroyed” temporarily, are still, like the angels, undergoing punishment while awaiting the Day of Judgment. This is clear from the parallel with Jude 5-7:

But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and

the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given them-selves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The literal fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah was not eternal, being long since extinguished. Far from being a mere temporal and finished judgment, defining later uses of “destruction” by fire as finite also, Jude clearly views Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction by fire, as a temporal unveiling to the world of the eternal “vengeance of [i.e., by] eternal fire” awaiting those who do not believe. All such depictions of God’s temporal destruction of sinners (like Korah), and nations (like Belshazzar’s Babylon) should be viewed in this light, rather than the other way around.

There are many arguments against annihilation, and no scriptural argument in its favor. In addition to those scriptures that positively assert everlasting torment, a few additional points may be made. It is said of Judas that it would be good for him not to have been born (Mt. 26:24; Mk. 14:21). If Judas is to be annihilated anyway, and annihilation would return a soul to exactly that state of non-existence it had before it was born, then how is not being born at all better than annihilation? Further, if the betrayer of Christ, and, we might add, Hitler, Nero, and Satan himself, are annihilated, then their end is no worse than the brute beasts who have not been created in the image of God, who glorified God in their own non-rational ways and never sinned at all. Indeed, annihilation removes all difference between the final conditions of the most noble of pagans and the most vicious. “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for eventually we come to nothing anyway.” Why exempt Satan? If God must be merciful to all, why not to him?

H. The fact that explains and supersedes all these expressions.

“Cast into prison,” the “lake of fire,” “beaten with many stripes,” the “cup of wrath.” Isaiah (33:14) asks, “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” Are these expressions literal? Are they metaphors? For what? Can there be any justification to the rhetoric of damnation as heard, for example, in Edwards’ *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*? Given what we have observed in the scriptures, we are forced to agree with Thomas Goodwin: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the mind of man what things the Lord hath prepared for them that hate him.”²² That burning, consuming, fire is God himself, an infinite, eternal, “angry God.” “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”²³ The living God: “at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation.”²⁴ The thing that is missed by all who would laugh at, scorn, or apologize for Edwards and other “hell fire and brimstone” preachers like him is that he and Goodwin, and all the biblical Reformers and Puritans realized that everything the scripture said, and all they could communicate by their most horridly vivid imagery,

²² The Unregenerate Man’s Guiltiness before God, in The Works of Thomas Goodwin, Vol. X, p. 490. Cf., John H. Gerstner, The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards,(III vols.) Vol. III, p. 538.

²³ Heb. 12:29-13:1, Heb. 10:31

²⁴ Jer. 10:10

the epitome of the “rhetoric of damnation,” was inadequate: “After we have said our ut-most, and thought our utmost, all that we have said or thought is but a faint shadow of what really is.”²⁵

IV. A Few Points of Application

A. As Men

We are sinners before a sin-hating God. Shall we consider these things academically, without pausing to consider the great evil of our natural state and our danger and end if we have not been admitted by faith to stand in His grace, our sins washed away, our souls clothed in His righteousness of God?

B. As Christians

As we are expected as Christians to set the Lord always before us, let us set before our conscience also His holy hatred of sin. Let us have the mind of Christ towards it, and view our darling vices, our bosom sins, as He. Let us remind ourselves often of what sin is, its deceitfulness, odiousness, and guilt, and of the untold harm it has brought to men of like passions as us. Let us then resolve, for the glory of God, for the souls of men, and as befits the new nature which we have received at so dear a price, that we will prosecute a relentless campaign for its mortification in our own bodies and for its expulsion from our lives in every sphere under our influence.

Let us consider the love and grace of God, who having such a profound hatred of sin, nevertheless, determined to make such abominable creatures as human sinners the recipients of His divine, paternal favor. How? By imputing their trespasses to the Son of His infinite eternal pleasure, and then exhausting the full measure of divine judicial vengeance in blazing indignation and wrath against their substitute.

Let us live in adoration of Him, who, by His own humble life under the Law, wrought for us a perfect righteousness, and who by His death, annulled the power of sin over us, delivering us from the law of sin and death.

Let us the more love and cherish the Holy Spirit, who abides and reigns within us, so that where sin has abounded, grace will more abound, and by Him mortify the remnants of sin within us.

C. As Pastors

As we love God and the souls of men, let us not shrink from presenting to men the true colors of this murderer of souls, resident in their members, if not cherished in their bosoms and reigning in their minds. We must, as Luther told Melancthon, “preach so that your hearers will either come to hate their sins, or come to hate you.”

²⁵ Edwards, Works, II: 844, quoted in Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology*, Vol. III, pp. 507-8.

Likewise we must, if we would follow the example of our Lord, warn our hearers of the destruction at the end of the wide way, the amazement and terror that awaits those who are deceived by a “fair show” of religion, but lack the oil in their lamps and the garment of a perfect righteousness. Indeed, if we are not to be found dealing falsely with the never-dying souls of men, we must give them as true as possible a description of their future doom, remembering that, after we have painted it in the most infernal colors our imagination or language permits, we have, not even come close.

Away with that ministry which leaves the impression that sin is a light matter. Our Re-formed and Puritan fathers in ministry, conscious of their dreadful responsibility, placed themselves between their hearers and the fires of hell with both hands raised and tear filled eyes and voices crying “Turn ye, Turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” How shall we, the watchmen of our day, be free of the blood of men, if we do less.