

1 and 2 Thessalonians Lesson 9 3Q 2012

Final Events

This week we tackle, what many find to be a troubling topic, how do we reconcile the idea that God is love, with judgment and punishment for sin.

Can we be honest with the Bible text and retain a loving God? How can understand references that suggest punishment and judgment without inciting fear of God?

The Bible does speak of fear – but, according to the Bible, from where does fear originate? From sin – but have you ever noticed how many people are afraid of God?

As soon as Adam and Eve sinned they ran and hid because they were “afraid.” Fear is part of the infection of sin, and throughout history, sadly this fear as been misdirected at God and theologies have been constructed which attempt to resolve our fear of God, when our fear originates in sin itself.

This week’s lesson also provides a great example of how, when we accept the distortion that God’s law is imposed like that of a Roman Emperor, then we read into the Bible false ideas that the Bible does not teach and are not found in the text.

Let’s start by reading 1 Thes 5:1-11

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like

others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Then SUNDAY read first paragraph, “Though the specific...”

Did you hear anything about a judgment from God in these paragraphs?

When one accepts that God imposes law, then one must conclude that the consequences one experiences for disobedience to God’s law is imposed by God, or that God’s wrath is something that he inflicts to punish for sin.

What does the Bible teach?

Romans 1:18-32 – tells us that God’s wrath is giving people up...

From *Hard Sayings of the Bible*:

In some sense, God’s wrath is built into the very structure of created reality. In rejecting God’s structure and establishing our own, in violating God’s intention for the creation and substituting our own intentions, we cause our own disintegration. P 542

The human condition, which Paul describes in Romans 1:18-32, is not something caused by God. The phrase “revealed from heaven” (where “heaven” is a typical Jewish substitute word for “God”) does not depict some

kind of divine intervention, but rather the *inevitability of human debasement* which results when God's will, built into the created order, is violated. Since the created order has its origin in God, Paul can say that the wrath of God is now (constantly) being revealed "from heaven." It is revealed in the fact that the rejection of God's truth (Rom 1:18-20), that is, the truth about God's nature and will, leads to futile thinking (Rom 1:21-22), idolatry (Rom 1:23), perversion of God-intended sexuality (Rom 1:24-27) and relational-moral brokenness (Rom 1:28-32). P 543

The expression "God gave them over" (or "handed them over"), which appears three times in this passage (Rom 1:24,26,28), supports the idea that the sinful perversion of human existence, though resulting from human decisions, is to be understood ultimately as God's punishment which we, in freedom, bring upon ourselves. P 543

In light of these reflections, the common notion that God punishes or blesses in direct proportion to our sinful or good deeds cannot be maintained... God loves us with an everlasting love. But the rejection of that love separates us from its life-giving power. The result is disintegration and death. P 543 (Kaiser, W., et al., *Hard Saying of the Bible*, Intervarsity Press, 1996)

One of the founders of our church also saw it this way:

We are not to regard God as waiting to punish the sinner for his sin. The sinner brings the punishment upon himself. His own actions start a train of circumstances that bring the sure result. Every act of transgression reacts upon the sinner, works in him a change of character, and makes it more easy for him to transgress again. By choosing to sin, men separate themselves from God, cut themselves off from the channel of blessing, and the sure result is ruin and death. {1SM 235.2}

Thoughts?

But some will inevitably point to the plagues of Revelation, which are to be poured out and say, “see God does punish.” What do you say to those who turn to passages that say the cup on iniquity was full, God’s patience reached its limits, vengeance is the Lord’s, the cup of God’s wrath and fury will overflow, and use the plagues of Revelation as evidence that God inflicts punishment for sin?

Here is what our church saw such issues more than 100 years ago. Do we see it the same still, or has something happened to our thinking?

God bears long with the rebellion and apostasy of His subjects. Even when His mercy is despised and His love scorned and derided, He bears with men **until the last resource for leading them to repentance is exhausted**. But there are limits to His forbearance. **From those who to the end continue in obstinate rebellion, He removes His protecting care. Providence will no longer shield them from Satan's power**. They will have sinned away their day of grace. {RH, September 17, 1901 par. 7}

God keeps a reckoning with the nations. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. Those who work evil toward their fellow men, saying, How does God know? will one day be called upon to **meet long-deferred vengeance**. In this age a more than common contempt is shown to God. Men have reached a point in insolence and disobedience which shows that their **cup of iniquity is almost full**. Many have well-nigh **passed the boundary of mercy**. Soon **God will show that He is indeed the living God**. He will say to the angels, "***No longer combat Satan in his efforts to destroy***". Let him work out his malignity upon the children of disobedience; for the cup of their iniquity is full. They have advanced from one degree of wickedness to another, adding daily to

their lawlessness. **I will no longer interfere to prevent the destroyer from doing his work.**" {RH, September 17, 1901 par. 8}

What is being described in these various quotations? Here is a second quote from more than 100 years ago:

"I was shown that the judgments of God would not come directly out from the Lord upon them, but in this way;

"They place themselves beyond His protection. He warns, corrects, reproves, and points out the only path of safety; then if those who have been the objects of His special care will follow their own course, independent of the Spirit of God, after repeated warnings, if they choose their own way, then **He does not commission His angels to prevent Satan's decided attacks upon them.**

"It is Satan's power that is at work at sea and on land, bringing calamity and distress, and sweeping off multitudes to make sure of his prey, and storm and tempest both by sea and land will be, for Satan has come down in great wrath. He is at work. He knows his time is short and, he is not restrained; we shall see more terrible manifestations of his great power than we have ever dreamed of." Manuscript Release vol. 14, p. 3

thoughts?

Read the second paragraph, "Many people..."

What did you hear? Did you hear the idea that the "biblical concept of judgment" includes "threat, condemnation, and execution?" But also keeping record of your good deeds to give you rewards?

Does such a concept cause you to have greater trust in God or more fear? Does God appear more loving or more arbitrary and stern?

How do we understand judgment?

- First judgment is an ability, and God has perfect judgment, he judges, estimates, diagnoses all things exactly as they really are.

Do God's judgments cause reality to be as it is, or do his judgments simply perfectly assess what actually is? When God judges Satan as beyond healing, does God's judgment cause it to be this way, or does God's judgment merely assess and accurately conclude it is this way?

- Second, judgment as an act – judicial and medicinal? God does make interventions based on his judgments, but God's interventions are always therapeutic and beneficial, unfortunately if one looks through the lens of a false law construct then one reads punishment and fails to see healing intervention, or diagnostic assessment.

Look at the third paragraph, "The two-sided nature..."

Thoughts? How do you hear it?

The lesson uses judgment and consequences? Do you hear those the same? When the two are used together it could mean, the consequence is going before the judge and receiving your punishment, or, the judge assesses accurately the consequence that results from one's choice. Which do you believe is meant here?

Those who interpret these passages as punishment for sin do so because of misconceptions about God and his law. God had already disclosed to Adam and Eve what the punishment for sin is – death – not pain in childbirth, wife's subordination to

husband or difficulty in agriculture. These events were a result of disruption to God's design and God's interventions to save and heal mankind.

After Adam and Eve sinned, humanity no longer naturally, automatically, sought to love one another, but instead sought to put self first. And God describes how women, being weaker, would be dominated by man because of sin, not because of God. Men dominate women, not because it is godly, but because of fear, insecurity and selfishness in the heart of the men who do so.

As we experience God's healing power in our lives, as selfishness is purged and love is restored within the marriage relationship, we return more fully to God's original ideal – true and genuine equality. Each partner sacrifices himself to uplift the other, to promote the welfare of the other, and to protect the other. Look at how Jesus treated women. Quite different from the men of his day.

The pain of childbirth is a powerful object lesson allowing women to experience greater insight into the heart and mind of God. Knowing labor will be painful, why do women choose to have children? In the aftermath of labor, the pain of it, why do women rejoice? Is it not because of love? Doesn't love for their children overcome their pain and fear of labor to bring forth new life?

Likewise, the Bible says, "for the joy set before Him" Christ endured the cross (Heb 12:2). It was for our rebirth that Christ labored as a human and suffered through the cross. Thus the birthing process allows women to appreciate in a small way the pain and suffering God went through to rebirth us in newness of life and also the joy in God's heart to see us renewed.

Therefore, Genesis 3:16 does not reveal God "punishing" mankind for sin, but God diagnosing and describing how life will be different because of sin.

In Genesis 3:17 again God looks good as He works to save and heal mankind. In this verse our Savior is pronouncing the natural consequence that impacted nature when God's rule of love was replaced by Satan's rule of survival of the fittest as a result of Adam's abdication of his rule to the devil.

Paul says in Romans 8:22 that all nature groans under the weight of sin. God is announcing in Genesis 3:17, that, for mankind's sake, He would not intervene to prevent the law of sin and death from impacting the earth, but the earth was now under the curse of sin. Why did God allow this? As a protection for mankind in a world of sin.

Once Adam and Eve sinned their natural tendency was toward sin and selfishness. Industry, work, is a hedge of protection from the power of the carnal nature. Maybe you have heard the old saying, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." A powerful truth is espoused in this statement. Idleness allows the carnal mind time to wander away from the right and engage in unhealthy and destructive practices. Therefore, to protect man, to keep his time occupied, to teach self-discipline, self-mastery and diligence, God announced that it was for man's sake that He would not stop the earth from changing.

Further, there is a powerful spiritual lesson in allowing the curse of sin to change the earth, which was also for man's sake. Imagine you have a garden, one you have faithfully tended and is producing a bountiful harvest. What will happen to your garden if you stop tending it? Will it continue to produce good fruit, or will the weeds come up and eventually destroy it?

In a similar way, ever since Adam and Eve sinned, our minds naturally bring up weeds, selfish thoughts, ideas, and conceptions. It is Christ who works through the Holy Spirit to plant the seeds of truth in our minds. He then nurtures and protects the seeds of truth to grow into the fruits of a Christ-

like character. It is by utilizing the Sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God, the truth) that we work with Christ to weed our minds; we uproot the lies and false theories that keep us captive, and instead maintain a healthy and productive mental garden.

So, we find that as soon as mankind fell into sin the natural consequence of deviation from God's law of love was destroying mankind and nature. But God was right there intervening, not to punish, but to save and heal. What an awesome God we serve!

But when we misconstrue God's law we misconstrue the meaning of what we read in Scripture and misrepresent God to be like that which Satan alleges.

What about judicial judgment, that which determines the outcome of one's life? Many point to places in Scripture like the Great White Throne judgment, or where Paul states everyone will stand before the judgment seat of God, and conclude God's government is like a human court room and God's judgments decide our destiny and punishment.

Here is what our church taught more than 100 years ago, what do you think, agree or disagree?

They thought themselves passing judgment on Christ; but in rejecting Him they were pronouncing sentence upon themselves. "He that is of God," said Jesus, "heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

The lesson is true for all time. Many a man who delights to quibble, to criticize, seeking for something to question in the word of God, thinks that he is thereby giving evidence of independence of thought, and mental acuteness. **He supposes that he is sitting in judgment on the Bible, when in truth he is judging himself.** He makes it manifest that he is incapable of appreciating

truths that originate in heaven, and that compass eternity. DA 468

The people who beheld the Saviour at His advent were favored with a fuller manifestation of the divine presence than the world had ever enjoyed before. **The knowledge of God was revealed more perfectly. But in this very revelation, judgment was passing upon men. Their character was tested, their destiny determined.** {DA 475.2}

Thoughts?

What determined their destiny? How they responded to the truth of God's character of love. Who determines your destiny? Whose decisions judge you?

Read bottom green question, "How does the truth..." thoughts?

What is the implication of the question? That when we stand in the judgment God isn't judging us he is judging Christ.

Any problems with this theory?

If you went to the doctor sick and he came in to examine you, would you shove your healthy brother in front of you and say, examine him instead and put his result in my medical record?

Had an email exchange with Brad Cole this week in which we discussed the origin of the legal model of salvation. I suggested that the legal model is not Biblical, but inspired by Satan. But another friend pointed out all the law used by God at Sinai supports the legal model of atonement, I replied that the law given at Sinai was not given as a model of atonement, but like a parent gives rules to protect their children until they grow up. So, in function the law was the healing model acted out as God sought to bring the Israelites to maturity. The model given at Sinai was the sanctuary, which is about healing.

Brad responded with:

The legal model ultimately was "inspired" by the Adversary to:

1. paint God in an arbitrary light
2. blind us to the reality of natural consequence from breaking the Law of Love (as opposed to imposed penalty for breaking an arbitrary rule)
3. blind us to what God really wants to accomplish (which is healing) and to keep us fixated on a legal fix that has no transforming power.

If you haven't visited godscharacter.com recently I encourage you to do so. Dean just rebuilt their website and it is great, and they have so much really good material there.

THURSDAY

Read second paragraph, "Many today feel..." thoughts?

Notice how the lesson cites Romans 1:18, but doesn't cite verses 24, 26, 28 which explains that God's wrath is letting go as we discussed earlier?

What does it mean to "pile up wrath for the day of wrath"?

Every time we sin we experience guilt, we don't like guilt so we want it to resolve. If we refuse to repent and experience regeneration of the HS, then we instead deny and distort to avoid the reality of our condition. And the next sin, lie and distort, and the next and next etc. So with each sin we are piling up more and more lies and warping our minds more and more and hiding more and more from the reality of our own condition so that when we one day stand face to face with the source of all truth, what will it be like?

Read third paragraph, "While we cannot..." thoughts?

What do you think of this idea that “The biblical concept of the wrath of God is more like a nation’s need for justice in relation to lawbreakers who abuse and oppress others.”

This statement is what in medicine we call pathognomonic—the pathology, the sickness, is named in the sign or symptom itself. A pathognomonic symptom means when you see it you know what disease you are dealing with, the symptom names the problem.

This statement reveals that those who wrote this operate under the Imperial Roman imposed law construct believing God runs his universe like Rome runs its government, like human governments, imposing law, which require the ruling authority to impose penalties lest unpunished rebellion ensue.

Here is how our church considered this more than 100 years ago:

The germ in the seed grows by the unfolding of the life-principle which God has implanted. Its development depends upon no human power. **So it is with the kingdom of Christ. It is a new creation. Its principles of development are the opposite of those that rule the kingdoms of this world. Earthly governments prevail by physical force;** they maintain their dominion by war; but the founder of the new kingdom is the Prince of Peace. The Holy Spirit represents worldly kingdoms under the symbol of fierce beasts of prey; but Christ is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. **In His plan of government there is no employment of brute force to compel the conscience. The Jews looked for the kingdom of God to be established in the same way as the kingdoms of the world. To promote righteousness they resorted to external measures.** They devised methods and plans. But Christ implants a principle. By implanting truth and righteousness, He counterworks error and sin. {COL 77.1}

Clearly something has changed in our church. This idea that God must inflict punishment upon sinners is Satan's lie about God. It is the root of paganism, it leads to appeasement theologies. It causes fear of God and alienates people from him. We cannot lighten the world for Christ's return until we throw off such distorted God concepts!

WEDNESDAY

What does it mean to be spiritually asleep?

What can we do to stay awake and alert?

What do you think will awaken the church to give the message to the world?

What do you think of the idea of the General Conference President to mail the *Great Controversy* to every home in America?

Do you think it will win friends or create enemies and put up barriers?

Instruction has been given me that the important books containing the light that God has **given regarding Satan's apostasy in heaven should be given a wide circulation just now**; for through them the truth will reach many minds. Patriarchs and Prophets, Daniel and the Revelation, and The Great Controversy are needed now as never before. They should be widely circulated because the truths they emphasize will open many blind eyes.... Many of our people have been blind to the importance of the very books that were most needed. Had tact and skill then been shown in the sale of these books, the Sunday-law movement would not be where it is today.--CM 123. {PM 356.3} (1905)

God would be pleased to see *The Desire of Ages* in every home. In this book is contained the light He has given upon His Word... {The Publishing Ministry 357.3}

The Great Controversy should be very widely circulated. It contains the story of the past, the present, and the future. In its outline of the closing scenes of this earth's history, it bears a powerful testimony in behalf of the truth. I am more anxious to see a wide circulation for this book than for any others I have written; for in *The Great Controversy*, the last message of warning to the world is given more distinctly than in any of my other books.--CM 126, 127. {PM 358.1} (1906)

Was there something different about the US in the 19th century that would have made the book more acceptable than today?

As an example of the attitudes of the US people toward the Catholic church during that period of history, in the early 1850's Pope Pius IX contributed a block of marble for the building of the Washington Monument which was under construction. . In March 1854 members of the American Party stole the Pope's stone as a protest and supposedly threw it into the Potomac (it was replaced in 1982).

What does it tell you about the attitudes of the average American that the stone was replaced in 1982? What happened when the pope came to visit Denver a few years back?

In the 19th century a book which took a hard line toward Catholicism and its abuses during the Dark Ages had traction and much sympathy from the US reading audience. What about today?

Is the issue we need to focus people's attention upon the Catholic church, or the controversy over God's character and law of love?

MONDAY

Read the second paragraph, “The threefold...” thoughts?

What does it mean to prepare?

- Leave the city and get a house in the woods?
- Stock up on food and water?
- Be sure you have confessed all your sins?
- Get baptized?
- Become so settled into the truth of God and his kingdom of love, both intellectually and spiritually that you cannot be moved?

Could it mean preparing character ready to meet Jesus?

The five foolish virgins had lamps (this means a knowledge of Scripture truth), but they had not the grace of Christ. Day by day they went through a round of ceremonies and external duties, but their service was lifeless, devoid of the righteousness of Christ. The Sun of Righteousness did not shine in their hearts and minds, and they had not the **love of the truth which conforms to the life and character**, the image and superscription, of Christ. The oil of grace was not mingled with their endeavors. Their religion was a dry husk without the true kernel. **They held fast to forms of doctrines, but they were deceived in their Christian life**, full of self-righteousness, and failing to learn lessons in the school of Christ, which, if practiced, would have made them wise unto salvation.-- Review and Herald, March 27, 1894. {ChS 263.1}

Have you ever considered the idea that one’s Christian life deceives one into a false sense of security obstructing the work of the Holy Spirit in renewing the heart?

They [five foolish virgins] were lulled to sleep by the cry of peace and safety, and did not keep their lamps trimmed

and burning. Aroused to their darkness they plead for oil, but **it is impossible for one Christian to impart character to another soul. Character is not transferable.** Those who are ease-loving, world-loving, fashion-loving professors of Christianity will not go in to the marriage supper of the Lamb with those who are represented by the five wise virgins... {TMK 215.2}

Thoughts? Is character transferable? What about Christ's character transferred to us?

Read bottom green section "How do we live..." thoughts?

TUESDAY

Read third paragraph, "In these verses..." thoughts?

Will believers be surprised by the second coming of Christ?

Why not? In what light do they live?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 1 and 3