



2023 4Q God's Mission My Mission Lesson 5 Excuses to Avoid Mission

by Tim Jennings

SABBATH

What do you think if the title?

We will explore the lesson's focus in a moment, but what are the excuses you have heard or perhaps even used?

- Someone else will do it?
- I am not good that—is that an excuse or a fact? When does this become a fact to act on rather than an excuse?
- It is uncomfortable?
- It will take too long?
- I am busy?
- I am tired?
- I don't feel like it?
- I have other priorities?

Should we stop and inquire—what does it mean to be on Mission for God? Should we define what it means to “do mission”?

Are we on mission everywhere all the time no matter what we are doing?

Was Jesus describing mission when He said this?

- “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Mathew 5:14-16 NIV84).

Or was Jesus describing mission only when He gave the gospel commission to make disciples baptizing people into the church?

What about a parent who works 80 hours a week to provide for their children and get them a Christian education, but doesn't have time to volunteer at a food kitchen, or go on a mission trip—are they doing mission for Jesus?

If we define mission only as seeking out people in evangelistic series to convert for the first time to Jesus do we have too narrow a definition of what mission for Jesus means?

When Solomon built the temple was on mission for God? What about the woodsmen who fell the trees, the stonemen who cut the stone, the craftsmen who made the lamp stands, altars and ark—were they on mission for God when they did these things, or is mission only seeking out those who don't yet know about God?

What about writers, artists, publishers, IT people who keep websites operating—if those books, artwork, and sites are used for the gospel are those people doing mission?

So, what would it mean to avoid mission—doesn't avoiding mission ultimately mean avoiding living our lives as God would have us live, in other words, living for self and this world?

Can people live for self and this world why they are actively evangelizing for the church and winning converts?

Jesus said,

- Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (Matthew 23:15 NIV84).

Weren't these members of God's chosen people who were evangelizing to convert people to God's chosen church group doing mission for God? Why not?

What about the Good Samaritan, when he stopped to help the beaten man and cared for him, was he on mission for God? But do we have any record that the Good Samaritan preached the gospel, gave a Bible study, won the person to be baptized? Then how was the Samaritan on mission for God?

Is there a difference from being on mission for Jesus Christ and being on mission for the denomination? What is that difference?

What is the mission God wants all of us to be on—how would you describe it? Is the mission that we are to be on at this time in history to convert people to membership in a denomination—is that the mission? Is it to obstruct people from joining a denomination? It is neither—membership in denominational churches to not determine salvation—what does?

In the lesson it focuses on Jonah and compares his mission to Nineveh with Abraham's conversation with God over Sodom. Why did God destroy Sodom but not Nineveh? Why didn't God send someone to Sodom like He sent Jonah to Nineveh?

Because there were no people in Sodom who were capable of repentance, the people in Sodom had destroyed the faculties that respond to love and truth, whereas, the people in Nineveh had not destroyed their ability to respond to love and truth and thus repented.

SUNDAY

The lesson points out that Nineveh was known as a violent city, cruel, abusive, and that perhaps Jonah was afraid of what they might do to him. Thus, the lesson points out one obstacle to mission is fear.

Read last paragraph,

- In spite of all of this, we often read Jonah's story with disapproval for letting fear get in the way of carrying out God's instructions. What we fail to realize is that we can do the same thing (i.e., allow ourselves to be controlled by our fears rather than by God). (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 39).

What causes fear? From where does fear come?

When did fear become part of the human experience? And what does fear motivate people to do?

How does fear manifest itself in the action and conduct of people?

What is the motive for

- the greedy?
- the abuser?
- the cheat?
- the liar?
- the megalomaniac?
- the religious oppressor?
- the legalist?
- essentially all actions that seek to control others?

Have you seen any people in the church being controlled by fear to such an extent that they run away from their mission like Jonah?

What about during COVID? Did churches shut down? Did people stop visiting the shut ins, stop evangelism, stop schools, stop almost all mission? Why?

Did you hear the claims that this was all done in love? But does love stop ministering to others, stop seeking to save souls, stop their mission for God? And does love take away liberty, seek to coerce conscience? No, it was driven by fear and fear is a tool of Satan—and fear rises where lies abound, and the fear over COVID was based upon mountains of lies and misinformation, that continues to this day.

What is the solution to this infection of fear?

Truth and love, the truth sets us free and love casts out fear—from where does this truth and love originate or come?

How do we experience or participate in God's eternal truth and love?

Satan counterfeits truth with all forms of propaganda, through authority of office, of getting people to believe based on what an expert says rather than examining and understanding the evidence, facts, truth, principles, methods for oneself. This happened in the Dark Ages church when the religious authorities made proclamations that were enforced—such as the Earth is the center of God's universe and rejected Galileo's observations of reality.

And it happens today all the time from the godless left when they declare things to be so but without evidence.

What counterfeits does Satan offer to God's love?

- Love in a bottle—alcohol, ecstasy, and other drugs
- Porn and erotic exploitation
- Fame and glory seeking—being loved by the masses
- Codependent fear-based relationships of control and manipulation but with intense emotional attachment
- Being loved for your sin—loved/valued by a group like a gang for doing gang violence, or cults for joining the cult, or deviant groups for being deviant
- Others?

MONDAY

The lesson is on false views that interfere with our mission for God. Can you think of any false views that interfere with the church's mission today?

Read first paragraph, which I found quite astounding, true, but astounding that it is in the lesson guide:

- When the storm came, Jonah blamed himself (Jon. 1:1–12). His attitude does reveal something about the kind of worldview and understanding of God or “gods” that many had back then. While various gods, they believed, ruled in their various lands, the sea was deemed the chaotic realm of demons. **In the worldview of the mariners, sacrifice was needed to appease their wrath.** Although Jonah was a Hebrew, **he quite possibly had a worldview that was influenced by the traditional beliefs of his times.** (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 40, emphasis mine).

Do you think the lesson is suggesting that we should not believe in a god who requires sacrifice to appease its wrath? Or should we believe in that god?

Do Christians teach a god who requires the sacrifice of an innocent human to propitiate, assuage, appease, expiate, or in some way turn away its wrath?

- **Roman Catholic:**

Christ, because he was guiltless, sin-free and in favor with God, could **offer himself up as a means of persuading God to relent of his angry wrath against the sins of mankind** (emphasis mine). (Sungenis, Robert. Not By Faith Alone. Queenship, 1997. As quoted in Webster, William. “The Roman Catholic Teaching on Salvation and Justification.” Christian Resources, <https://christiantruth.com/articles/rcjustification>, pp. 107, 108).

- **Eastern Orthodox**

Christ was for us a curse, through being hung upon the tree of the cross, so as to offer Himself **as a sacrifice to His Father**, to annihilate **the sentence of God** by the superabundant worth of the sacrifice (emphasis mine). (Saint Symeon the New Theologian. “On the Transgression of Adam” (homily). As quoted in “Thinking About the Atonement: The New Testament.” Orthodox Church in America, <https://www.oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/thinking-about-the-atonement-the-new-testament>).

- **Methodist**

The sufferings of Christ are an atonement for sin by substitution, in the sense that they were intentionally endured for sinners under **judicial condemnation**, and **for the sake of their forgiveness**. They are an atonement for sin in the sense that they render its forgiveness consistent with the divine justice. They provide for such consistency, in the sense that justice none the less fulfills its rectoral office in the interest of moral government. Such office of justice is so fulfilled in the sense that, in granting forgiveness only on the ground of such a substitution in atonement, the honor and authority of the divine Ruler, together with the rights and interests of his subjects, are equally maintained as by the **infliction of merited penalty upon sin** (emphasis mine). (John Miley, D.D., 1813–1895, Methodist theologian and professor of systematic theology at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey. The Atonement in Christ. 1881. As quoted in “The Governmental Theory of Atonement.” Truth in Heart, <http://truthinheart.com/EarlyOberlinCD/CD/4/Miley/miley.htm>, Chapter 8).

- **Reformation Theology**

Jesus Christ took upon himself the **punishment** that the sins of his people deserved. In other words, the Reformers understood that the atonement was a **satisfaction by means of punishment** (emphasis mine). (Waddington, Jeffrey. “Surveying the Wondrous Cross: The Atonement in Church History.” Reformation 21, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Nov. 2008, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/surveying-the-wondrous-cross-the-atonement-in-church-history.php>).

- **Evangelical**

We affirm that the atonement of Christ by which, in his obedience, he offered a perfect sacrifice, **propitiating the Father by paying for our sins** and satisfying divine justice on our behalf according to God’s eternal plan, is an essential element of the Gospel (emphasis mine).

(Neff, David. "A Call to Evangelical Unity." Christianity Today, June 14, 1999, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/june14/9t7049.html>).

- **Pentecostal**

The word "propitiation" properly signifies the **turning away of wrath by a sacrifice**. Thus it signifies **appeasement**. ... According to Leon Morris: "The consistent Bible view is that the sin of man has incurred the wrath of God. That wrath is averted only by Christ's atoning offering. From this standpoint his **saving work is properly called propitiation**" (emphasis mine). (Van Cleave, Nathaniel M., and Duffield, Guy P. *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*. L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983).

- **Seventh-day Adventist**

The Hebrew wording in both Leviticus 9:24 and 10:2 was the same: "and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed ..." (9:24, NKJV). Consumed what? In the first case, the offering; in the other, the sinners. What a powerful representation of the plan of salvation. **At the Cross, the "fire from God," the wrath of God, "consumed" the offering, and that was Jesus** (emphasis mine). (Goldstein, C. "Fire From Before the Lord." Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, Jul. 25, 2011, <https://www.ssnet.org/lessons/11c/less05m.html>, p. 40).

Does Christianity teach that a human sacrifice of an innocent is needed to appease the wrath of God?

If this is true, then, where is the sacrifice being applied, where is it doing its work, having its influence, applying its merits, or exercising its power—it is working on God. Then what does that mean? If God is the one to whom the sacrifice of Christ must be given, applied, or presented, then something is wrong with God that needs fixing. Is that true?

Who is the one who suggests that there is something wrong with God that needs fixing? It is Satan, the liar from the beginning. And he has introduced his lie into Christianity under the guise of holiness, righteousness, justice, perfection, to have good people believe and teach lies about God, pagan lies, lies that our gracious God functions like a pagan deity who requires sacrifice to appease his wrath.

How did this happen? What is the root lie that causes this lie? It is the lie that God's law functions like human law. Whenever and wherever people believe that God's law functions like human law, the laws that creatures make up and enforce through punishment, they always believe—in fact they are powerless not to believe the subsequent lies about God—that God in order to be just must use His power to inflict punishment for sin. Therefore, the sacrifice of Jesus must be used to pay that punishment payment to the offended deity, that is paganism. And that is what happened when Rome took over Christianity, it substituted Roman law for God's law and teaches that God functions like a creature rather than the Creator.

This is why before Christ returns a message is to lighten the world that calls people to stop judging God to be like a creature, and worship Him who made the heavens, earth, sea, and fountains of water. Worship of the Creator requires we reject imposed law and realize God's laws are design laws.

But just to be sure no one thinks that we reject substitutionary atonement, let me state it very clearly, we do not reject substitutionary atonement but teach it the way the Bible does. No human could be saved from sin without the incarnation of Jesus, His sinless life, voluntary self-sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension. But for the reasons the Bible says—not to appease God or do something to God, but to do something to and in humanity:

- God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might **become** the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV84, emphasis mine).
- the Lamb of God, who **takes away the sin** of the world! (John 1:29 NIV84, emphasis mine).
- Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! **All this is from God**, who **reconciled us to himself** through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that **God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ**, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19 NIV84, emphasis mine).

All of Scripture teaches the reality that God was working through Jesus for the purpose of removing sin from human beings so that we can be restored to at-one-ment, unity, harmony, with God.

Satan's lies have perverted the gospel into a message that states Jesus died to do something to God to get God to be loving, kind, forgiving, gracious, unwrathful to us.

Read third paragraph,

- We, too, can have misunderstandings about God and what He expects of us. One common misunderstanding is that God's desire for us is to focus on our own salvation and to remove ourselves from the wickedness of the world around us. Though we are instructed to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27, NKJV), our focus should be on how we can bring God's blessings and hope to those in need. (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 40, emphasis mine).

This is sad, they recognize that we can have misunderstandings about God, but fail to realize the most serious misconception of all—the imperial Roman dictator view of God that comes from believing the lie that God's law functions like human law and causes people to teach the pagan notion that God requires sacrifice to appease His wrath.

Instead, they focus on one narrow consequence that lie has on the worshiper—focusing on one's behavior, attempts to save self through legal means, or by hiding away from the world. But the real problem is the root to all of this, which is believing lies about God that cause of to fear Him as the source of punishment for our sins.

TUESDAY

The lesson focuses on inconvenience as an obstacle to fulfilling the mission God has called us to fulfill.

Read first paragraph,

- Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish (see Jonah 2) was a dramatic show of God's love and mercy, and Jonah's prayer reveals that he didn't miss God's message of love. **But just because he had had an incredible encounter with God didn't mean that his old thought habits or attitudes would easily change**, even though he went to Nineveh anyway. (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 41, emphasis mine).

This is a very important point and one that many Christians don't fully appreciate. When we are truly converted to Jesus, we have a wonderful and powerful experience with Him, we experience peace, the removal of guilt and shame; we have joy and a desire for better living, a new lease on life, a new perspective, a new heart and right spirit. But all of these new attitudes, desires, motives of the reborn person is still functioning, living, operating on the old hardware, the brain that we built by our life experiences prior to our full conversion to Jesus.

Because of this, even though we have new desires, new motives, a new heart that rejoices in the truth and is repulsed by evil, we still have habits, preconditioned responses, and neural pathways that were built by us before we were converted. These habits and conditioned responses often exert themselves and we sometimes react and do things we no longer intend or want to do.

If we don't understand this process then we are vulnerable to discouragement, about ourselves and God.

- We begin to doubt our conversion—"was I really converted, maybe I just had an emotional high during a powerful sermon."
- We doubt our salvation—"God gave me His grace, but I just blew it again, it was more than 70 times 7, more than the 490th time, there is no hope for me."
- We are vulnerable to doubt God—"my godless friends are right, Christianity is just a lie, if God were real then I wouldn't keep falling back into old habits, after all God is supposed to be all powerful, more powerful than me and my habits."

But when we understand reality—that we get new hearts and right spirits here and now—but we do not get new biology until this mortal puts on immortality and this corruption puts on incorruption at the second coming and that means that we will still struggle against old habits and preconditioned responses, but when those moments occur where we fall short, having been converted we are grieved in our hearts, we recognize it wasn't our true selves doing this, but vestiges of old habits that haven't been fully eliminated from our neurobiology and reflexive responses. We go to God and confess and

thank Him for His mercy and long for our full deliverance, and we choose new actions and over time our brain circuitry does change, we wire in new healthy habits. This is what Paul wrote about in Romans chapter seven, this is from The Remedy:

- We know that the law is consistent, reliable and reasonable; but I am inconsistent, unreliable and unreasonable, because the infection of distrust, fear and selfishness has warped my mind and damaged my thinking. I am frustrated with what I do! For having been restored to trust, I want to do what is in harmony with God and his methods and principles; but I find that even though I trust God, my old habits, conditioned responses, preconceived ideas and other remnants of the devastation caused by distrust and selfishness are not yet fully removed. And if I find an old habit causing me to behave in ways that I now find detestable, I affirm that the law is a very helpful tool revealing residual damage in need of healing. What is happening is this: I have come to trust God, and I desire to do his will, but old habits and conditioned responses — which present almost reflexively in certain situations — have not yet been totally eliminated and thus cause me to do things I do not want to do. I know that my mind was completely infected with distrust, fear and selfishness, which totally perverted all my desires and faculties, so that even when distrust has been eradicated and trust has been restored, the damage caused by years of distrustful and selfish behavior has not yet been fully healed. So, I find that at times, I have the desire to do what is right, but do not yet have the ability to carry out the desire. For the old habits and conditioned responses are not the good I want to do: No! They are remnants of my selfish, unconverted mind. So, if I find myself doing what I no longer desire to do, it is not myself that acts, but the vestiges of old habits and conditioned responses that have yet to be removed. And through God's grace, they will soon be removed.

So I find this reality at work: When I want to do good, my old selfish habits and residual feelings of fear are right there with me. In my mind, I rejoice in God's methods and principles, but I recognize that I remain damaged from years of being infected with distrust and practicing Satan's methods, so that even though the infection of distrust has been removed, the old habits of fear and self-promotion tempt me from within. What a damaged and corrupt man I am! Who will deliver and heal me from a brain and body so diseased and deformed? Praise be to God—for he has provided the healing solution through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I find that in my mind I am now renewed with trust in God and love of his methods, but my brain and body remain damaged by years of self-indulgent behavior. (Romans 7:14-25 REM).

Read fifth paragraph,

- And finally, being involved in mission often requires that we change how we feel about and use our money. Whether related to providing care for people, purchasing literature and outreach materials, or paying for services or conveniences to free up time for mission work, there are expenses related to mission. Whatever form it may take, mission work requires sacrifice. (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 41).

What message do you hear from this paragraph?

Since they are talking about monetary sacrifice and supporting the mission with money—would this include prayerfully and carefully considering where one donates? What is the message being presented by the materials and organization to which one is donating? Do we want to donate to organizations that we believe are misrepresenting God and obstructing the final message of mercy to the world? I can't tell anyone where to give their tithes and offerings, but I can advance the principles of God that we are to support the gospel ministry and that requires us to individually know what the gospel is and then to evaluate what the organizations we are supporting to promoting—doesn't it?

WEDNESDAY

Read second paragraph,

- Jonah had such a deep hatred for the people God sent him to that he felt it was better that he die than to lose face when the failure of his doomsday preaching against Nineveh was revealed. Jonah wanted Nineveh to be the next Sodom and Gomorrah. He was hoping for God's judgment on these hated people. When it didn't happen, his worldview was being shaken to the core, and Jonah would rather die than allow his world to be turned upside down. (Adult SS Guide 4th Q 2023, God's Mission My Mission p. 42).

The day's title is uncomfortable confrontation—what is the uncomfortable confrontation Jonah had to face? Was it confronting the people he hated, or was it confronting the emotions in his own heart?

Consider this quotation from the book *Steps to Christ*:

- The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness. (Steps to Christ 43).

The most uncomfortable confrontation we have is internal, confronting our own fears, guilt, shame, self-righteousness, pride, expectations, fantasies, desires, demands, selfishness.

Many people think that others are their problem, when the problem is how we feel, react, and respond to others, our anger, resentment, bitterness, hurt, hatred, bigotry, prejudice is the problem—especially when dealing with the objectively offensive, rude, cruel, and evil.

When Jesus instructs us to love our enemies and pray for those who abuse us, who is the primary beneficiary of such instruction? Who is the one who reaps the most benefit from doing this, who will 100% of the time be benefited if they do it?

What happens inside of us when someone does objective wrong to us and we don't forgive them, we don't respond with grace, mercy, love and instead respond with righteous indignation, bitterness,

resentment, and desire for revenge—even if that desire is processed through our legal justice system, or anticipating a future in which God makes them pay? What happens in us?

The lesson talks about worldviews and how our worldview often takes something dramatic in our life to get us to reevaluate it and change it.

What they are speaking about is our way of understanding why things happen the way they happen, the system we orient life through that gives us a sense of security, peace, safety, and control.

If we believe in the law and order method, that the system works, that if you do good you get a good reward and if you do bad you get punishment, then when injustice happens, when people who riot are called peaceful protestors and peaceful protestors are called insurrectionists, when violent criminals are not incarcerated and non-violent political opponents are imprisoned, when innocents go to jail and the guilty get off—our worldview is challenged, and we either reevaluate our worldview or surrender our thinking to others and trust them mindlessly. Do you see this happening to so many in the world?

God permits events to happen so that objective reality, consequence of decision-making, including breaking His design laws, will be evidenced and people can see that evidence, that truth and reevaluate the fantasy belief system that comes from Satan.

This is part of the working out of the truth—the false systems always break down, and those who love the truth will, during difficult times, search for answers that are ever more consistent with the truth and ultimately lead back to God.

This process includes the emotional detachment from things that give us security and instead attaching to God, if we are following the truth.

THURSDAY

The lesson asks us to read Isaiah 1:1-8:

- In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. He was sitting on his throne, high and exalted, and his robe filled the whole Temple. Round him flaming creatures were standing, each of which had six wings. Each creature covered its face with two wings, and its body with two, and used the other two for flying. They were calling out to each other:

“Holy, holy, holy!
The LORD Almighty is holy!
His glory fills the world.”

The sound of their voices made the foundation of the Temple shake, and the Temple itself was filled with smoke.

I said, “There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among a people whose every word is sinful. And yet, with my own eyes, I have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!”

Then one of the creatures flew down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with the burning coal and said, “This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven.”

Then I heard the Lord say, “Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?”

I answered, “I will go! Send me!” (Isaiah 6:1-8 GNT).

What lessons do we learn from this passage?

- Did Isaiah feel condemnation when he saw the glory of God?
- Did that condemnation come from God?
- From where did it come?
- What was necessary to resolve Isaiah’s guilt?
- What did the angel do?
- What happened to Isaiah?
- What was necessary for Isaiah to be useful in God’s mission?
- What is represented by the burning coal?

Do we find any other Scriptures that give insight into this scene?

Revelation 14:18-19 reads:

- Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe” (Revelation 14:18, 19 NIV84).

And this was interpreted in our study guide to mean the following:

- “Another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire” (Rev. 14:18, NKJV). Here is the angel who commands the fires of God’s final judgment (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, 2nd Quarter, 2023, “Three Cosmic Messages,” p. 23).

From your reading of Revelation 14:18 in light of Isaiah 6, do you agree with the interpretation of the quarterly? Why or why not?

- Does the angel in Revelation 14 use the fire to inflict punishment?
- Is fire used at all?
- If you allow the text to influence your conclusion about this fire, what fire would you say it is?
- From where is the angel coming?
- The altar of God.

- And when it says that the angel is in charge of the fire, would the text be suggesting that the fire is the fire associated with the altar in God’s temple?
- And is it likely that this “fire” is literal, a fire of combustion, or is it symbolic of something else?
- Is it the same type of fire described in Daniel 7:9, 10, as coming out like a river from the throne of God with billions standing in it?
- Then consider what we just read in Isaiah—the angel comes with coal and fire from the altar and does what with it?
- “This has touched your lips, and **now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven**” (Isaiah 6:1–7 GNT, emphasis mine).

The fire from this altar cleansed Isaiah—burning away his guilt and bringing healing and forgiveness from sin. So, the angel in Revelation 14, who is God’s agent, is in charge of this *cleansing* fire! He is the one who is represented in the prophecy as administering the purifying power of God to cleanse the saints from sin. (Do you think this is a symbolic representation of Jesus in His high priestly role of cleansing His people from sin?)

This angel then leaves his cleansing work and tells the other angel with a sharp sickle to harvest the wicked. Why? Because there are no more people who are willing to be cleansed by the fires of truth and love that flow from the temple of God. Every person has already either been cleansed by the fire from the altar and, therefore, are settled, sealed, solidified into loyal love to God—or they have hardened themselves into rebellion, sinfulness, and selfishness and destroyed within themselves the faculties that respond to truth and love so that they are beyond healing. Therefore, the angel from the altar, the one who is in charge of the cleansing fire, goes to the harvesting angel and says: *There is no one left for me to heal; the harvest is ripe; it is time to reap.*

God’s fires are not the source of pain, suffering, and death—they are the cleansing fires of truth and love that originate in His infinite being.