

The Question of Punishment - Part II

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So, if God doesn't actively inflict penalties, pain, suffering, death upon the wicked, then what does God do to the wicked? What does God do to those who are infected with sin and refuse to allow God to heal them?

What would you as a parent do to your adult child dying of leukemia who refused to accept your bone marrow? What would you do? Would you not "let them go"? Would you not respect their choice? And if you did what would happen? Would you kill them? Would you torture your child? No! But would your child suffer and die? Yes! Why? Because of their own unremedied condition and their refusal to be healed. This is exactly what the Bible teaches:

Romans 1:18-31 tells us the wrath of God is revealed against wickedness and godlessness and then tells us three times in verses 24, 26, 28 exactly what God does, because they refused God, because they reject God, because they won't allow Him in their lives God does something. God "gives them up." God "lets them go." Just as a loving parent would eventually give up their adult child who refused treatment, so too, God gives up His children who refuse His treatment. This is God's wrath.

"There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land...My people are being destroyed because they don't know me. It is all your fault, you priests, for you

yourselves refuse to know me... They have exchanged the glory of God for the disgrace of idols." (Hosea 4:1,6,7 - NLT)

Why are they being destroyed? By being disconnected from God, by not knowing God, severing themselves from the circle of love, the law of life which emanates from God resulting in ruin and death.

"My anger will flame up like fire and burn everything on earth. It will reach to the world below and consume the roots of the mountains. I will bring on them endless disasters and use all my arrows against them." (Deuteronomy 32:22,23 - GN)

Notice the strong words from God above, but what did He actually do? The Bible says:

"They fail to see why they were defeated; they cannot understand what happened. Why were a thousand defeated by one, and ten thousand by only two? **The Lord, their God, had abandoned them; their mighty God had given them up**" (Deuteronomy 32:29,30 - GN)

Notice again, God's wrath is giving them up, letting them go, just like any loving parent would do for a child who persistently insisted on leaving.

"They **angered** him with their heathen places of worship, and with their idols they made him **furious. God was angry when he saw it, so he rejected** his people completely. **He abandoned** his tent in Shiloh, the home where he had lived among us. **He allowed** our enemies to capture the Covenant Box, the symbol of his power and glory." (Psalm 78:58-61 - GN)

"You will feel my anger when I turn it loose on you like a blazing fire. And I will hand you over to brutal men, experts at destruction." (Ezekiel 21:31 - GN)

"I will hand you over to other nations who will rob you and plunder you." (Ezekiel 25:7 - GN)

Notice again the strong language of God, but what did God actually do? What is the anger and wrath of God? He abandoned them to their own choice. He let them go. He allowed them to have their own way. He handed them over to their own choice. God does not need to inflict punishment because sin severs us from God and automatically results in ruin and death.

One of the founders of my church, back in the 19th century realized these same truths and came to these same conclusions and expressed it so powerfully:

"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

"In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. **Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice.**" DA 761

Notice all the Bible evidence above reveals God does not inflict punishment upon the wicked in the end. Their own condition separates themselves from God and results in ruin and death. Thus the Christian author above concluded that those who suggest that "every sin must meet its punishment and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice" are promoting Satan's gospel, Satan's argument, Satan's mischaracterization of God.

Well if God doesn't have to use His power to inflict penalties, if God has actually been using His power to intercede with the destructiveness of sin and in the end He merely lets go and sinners die as a result of their own unhealed condition, then how do we make sense of all the texts in the Bible that speak of fire, brimstone, hell, burning etc?