

Who Destroys the Soul?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | May 7, 2009



Tim, Please comment more on Matt. 10:28. Some translations actually say to fear God who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Is God the one to be feared? Yet perfect love casts out all fear.

W

Great question, W, let's first review how this passage is rendered in several versions:

KJV: And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

ESV and NRSV: And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

NASB: Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

GNT: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God,

who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

NIV: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

The text itself does not indicate who is the one who has the ability to destroy both body and soul in hell, thus the first three versions, by leaving it more ambiguous, give a more accurate translation to Christ's words. The latter three versions read into the verse what the translators believe Christ was implying, the idea that God is the One to be feared, but which Christ did not say.

One lesson to be learned from this is the importance of checking a variety of translations before coming to a conclusion and being aware that in translation some inference can be added, as has happened in this case.

Another place this happened was in John 12:32 when Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." The word "men" is supplied by the translators, it is not in the Greek. Colossians tells us that "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Col 1:20,21). In other words, Christ's death was important to heavenly beings and resulted in Satan being cast out of their affections and sympathy. But by adding "men," a subtle narrowing of the impact of Christ's death occurs.

Back to Matthew 10:28, so how do we know who is the one we must fear? The rest of the Bible provides the evidence. The first question we must ask, is God for us or against us?

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:31-34

Notice God is for us, God has chosen us and God has justified us, but if that is not good enough to bring you comfort and alleviate your fears, don't worry, you have Jesus in addition to the Father interceding for you.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. 2Cor 5:19

Again the Bible teaches God is the one reconciling us, through His Son. God is not against us. These are just two texts, but the Bible is filled with the same message, God is our Friend who is on our side, using all His power to save, heal, and redeem. He is not the One of whom we should be terrified.

Then who has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell?

- Psalms 34:21
 - Evil shall slay the wicked - KJV
 - Evil will kill the wicked - GNT
 - Evil brings death to the wicked - NRSV
- Romans 6:23

- For the wages of sin is death – NIV
- James 1:15
 - sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. – ESV

What is it that actually destroys the soul? It is not God! It is unremedied sin!

Sin destroys, God heals, restores, saves, cures, remedies, redeems.

Sadly far too many Christians have been duped into believing that God is the destroyer, when in fact, sin is the destroyer. This confusion arises from failure to read the Bible as a whole and incorporate all the passages together when forming our understanding. When we read passages such as the ones below in isolation we can draw the conclusion that God is the one who destroys.

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. 1Cor 3:17

"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food"—but God will destroy them both. 1Cor 6:13

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 2Thes 2:8

But notice the key revealed in the Thessalonians' text. What destroys the wicked? The splendor or brightness of His coming. Why does this destroy? For a full exploration of this topic please see my blog [**The Question of Punishment part III.**](#)

The bottom line is this, when Christ returns, when God reveals Himself in full glory, those who have experienced a new heart and right spirit, who have had the law written on the heart, who have had the mind of Christ reproduced within – those healed of sinfulness will be transformed by the life giving glory of God. Like Elijah, they will ride in chariots of fire. Like the millions of God's friends described in Daniel 7, they will live in the rivers of fire coming out from God, because there is nothing harmful about the fire of God's presence. But to those whose minds are solidified in sinfulness, the fires of God's presence will consume them. Therefore, as the Bible says, "[our God is a consuming fire](#)" (Heb 12:29), consuming sin wherever it is found.

The righteous, who through God's grace have experienced renewal, rejoice in the fires of His presence, but the wicked are consumed by His life giving glory. Why are the wicked consumed? Because they have solidified their minds and characters into believing lies about God (sinfulness), which is consumed by His glorious presence of absolute Truth and Love.

Therefore, the one who destroys both body and soul is the one who refuses Christ, who refuses to allow God to heal their mind, heart, and character here and now, the one who refuses to be freed from sinfulness, but instead aligns their heart with it. What we need to fear is not God who is trying to save us, but sinfulness, which if unremedied will destroy us.

I hope this helps,