

The Loving Wrath of God

The compatibility between
God's Love and His Wrath

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"The stork in the heaven
knows her appointed times...
but my people know not
the judgment of the Lord." Jeremiah 8:7



The entire Christian world has taught that God will put up with sinners only so long, and then His patience runs out, He gets mad and angry with them and then lets ‘em have it. What a pity. The truth is that God never loves the sinner less. Never.

We do not understand the judgments of the Lord. “How unsearchable are His judgments; how unfathomable His ways!” Paul concluded.¹ “Can we by searching find out God?” Job asked.² God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways, observed Isaiah.³

And God’s way of dealing with the errant, the rebellious, the rejecters of His law is best demonstrated by the cross of Jesus. There He is seen as our *propitiation* for sin.⁴

Propiti- What?

Propitiation is a big word. We don't use it very much, but it's the same word used to describe the *mercy seat*—that solid gold covering on the ark of the covenant. Jesus is the Mercy Seat which shielded the ten commandments and on which the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled for atonement. And atonement is what the Mercy Seat does for us: one side takes the law, the other side takes the blood.



Story Time: King David

There once was a king of Israel by the name of David who got into some real trouble with the wife of one of his soldiers. To try and cover things up he had her husband conveniently killed in battle. But Bathsheba's grandfather, Ahithophel (probably the most influential and brilliant mind in all Israel), became David's most bitter enemy. He even planned his assassination.

But when Nathan the prophet confronted the King with his great sin, David broke in bitter repentance, pronouncing himself guilty of death. Then Nathan added, "The Lord also has put away your sin." God would provide an atonement.

Punch him in the face, bloody his nose, rip out his beard

When David's most bitter enemy would like to punch him in the face, bloody his nose, rip out his beard, spit on him, beat him up...his Atonement, his Mercy Seat, would stand in the way to be his propitiation and take the beating full force *Himself*. Jesus at last *did* take the blows. And there on the cross He has taken the ones aimed at us as well.

Every punishment that has ever been suffered has been first suffered by Christ; just as every good act that anyone has ever performed first comes from Him. And the judgment of God is in taking the punishment for us, becoming a curse for us, condemned for us, murdered in our place, to defend us, to protect us from being hurt. "He has made him to be sin for us"⁵. "He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows... wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" Isa 53:4,5. But if we refuse to let Him take it, He reluctantly steps aside and lets us take it ourselves.

No better description of God's Loving Wrath is given than the commentary on two of David's sons. Amnon had raped his sister and Absalom retaliated by killing him.

"David had neglected the duty of punishing the crime of Amnon and because of the unfaithfulness of the King and father, and the impenitence of the son, the Lord *permitted* the events to take their *natural course*, and *did not restrain* Absalom. When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, God will take the case in hand, *His protecting hand* will be in a measure *removed* from the agencies of evil so that a chain of circumstances will arise to *punish sin with sin*."⁶

C.S. Lewis has said that at the end of this world there will be but two groups of people: Those who say ‘Thy will be done,’ And those to whom God will say, ‘Thy will be done.’ This is the Loving Wrath of God—letting the sinner have his own way.

Story Time: The Prodigal Father

Jesus tried to illustrate this marvelous truth about His father by telling a story of two brothers. Big brother was a hard worker. Little Joe liked to have fun. Dad was getting old and soon they both would inherit the family fortune.⁷

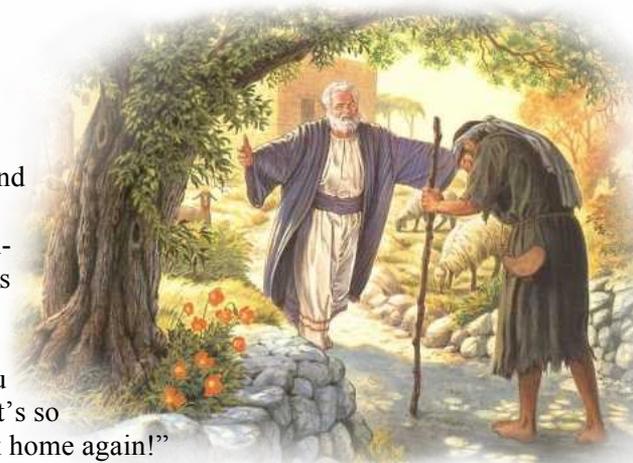
But fun loving Junior couldn’t wait. And so one day, in so many words, he told his father he wished he were dead. “Give me my share of the estate now so I can hit the road and have my fling in life.” Dad was terribly hurt. But he loved his son, foolish though he was, and after all the goodbyes were said, sadly watched him leave.

The boy went to the big city, bought a lot of good times, fair-weather friends and lived it up until the money ran out. Bad times came, he couldn’t find work and finally, while scrounging around for garbage pail scraps, he determined to head back home. He’d work as a hired hand and maybe, just maybe, someday he’d be able to save up enough to pay his father back.

As he neared home he realized that his father had liquidated half of the family assets because of him. The tight budget would have required Dad to leave retirement and help his older brother run the farm. The staggering guilt that all this had happened because of his own selfishness nearly stopped him from going on.

Junior can’t believe his ears

He’s about to chicken out and turn around when down the road he sees an old man running toward him, waving his open arms and shouting, “O son, my son! I thought you were dead, but now you have returned to me alive. It’s so wonderful to have you back home again!”



Junior can't believe his ears. Father quickly sneaks him in a side door so no one can see him in shame. He gets out his best suit. "No boy of mine is going to be embarrassed by coming home looking like a tramp." All the time father is telling him about all the letters he had written, pleading for him to return. And Home-again-Joe never does get a chance to make his offer to become a hired hand because now father is on the phone calling all the relatives and neighbors and inviting them to a big reunion celebration for his son! What a story. The Prodigal Father—reckless with his love and forgiveness.

Older Brother

But that's not the end of the story. Because big brother hears all the commotion going on up at the house, finds out that little brother has come home and the party is for him! "Now, WAIT A MINUTE!" he tells Dad,. "I've stayed right here at home all these years working my tail off to make this place a success and no one's ever thrown a wing ding like this for *me*! But this son of yours insults you, dishonors your name, takes half your life's savings, blows it on wine, women and song, and then has the gall to come back here and *you* welcome him with open arms! Well, it just burns me up! No! I'm not going to come inside or give him the time of day. You both make me so mad I could spit nails!"

Now why didn't Jesus just finish His story with the happy reunion of a lost son come home? Why did He have to bring the older brother into it at all? Because He wanted to make some very important points:

1. God never forces us to love him; He lets us do our own thing.
2. As our Father, He's jealous of our reputation and protects us from embarrassment.
3. God never rejects us, even though we reject Him.
4. And even then He pleads with us. The older brother "was angry and would not go in: therefore his father came out and *entreated* him."

One son anticipated a cold reception and was surprised with a warm celebration; the other son expected paternal vengeance and was disappointed to see fatherly forgiveness.

Older Brothers

The Bible is full of older brothers. Cain refused to follow God's way and hated his younger brother for doing so. Joseph's older brothers conspired to kill him. Esau hated Jacob and intended to march with his

army against him. Each older brother despised the goodness they saw in their younger brother; and each rejected the invitation of God to accept that goodness into their own lives.

For example, Jesus plead with the older brothers of the Jewish nation to let Him gather them under His wings like a mother hen gathers her little chicks, ‘but they would not.’ “What was it that destroyed the Jews? It was the goodness of God despised, the righteousness spurned, the mercy slighted.”⁸

God never rejected the Jewish nation, they rejected Him. Paul said that they put the word of God from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life, therefore he turned to the gentiles.⁹ But will God ever come to the place where He finally rejects anyone? No. When we speak about the close of probation, we are talking about a decision that we make, not one that God makes.

Since the great controversy began, it has been Satan's studied purpose to persuade angels and men that God is not worthy of their faith and love. He has pictured the Creator as a harsh, demanding tyrant who lays arbitrary requirements upon His people just to show His authority and test their obedience. It was this same perversion of the Good News (about the loving character of God) that stirred Jesus most deeply. He was gentle with the worst of sinners. But when some of the religious leaders echoed Satan's lies about God, Christ uttered those awful words, “You are of your father the devil.”

There was no disagreement between Jesus and those teachers as to which day was the Sabbath, or as to the existence of God, or the story of Creation. Their disagreement was about the character of God. Jesus came to bring them a picture of God that would enable them to go on doing many of the same things but for a far different reason-- but they killed Him rather than change their view of God.¹⁰



Where did they get their view? “Satan, the author of sin and all of its results, had lead men to look upon disease and death as proceeding from God as punishment arbitrarily afflicted on account for sin...

Thus the way was prepared for the Jews to reject Jesus.”¹¹ Why? Because when Jesus hung on the cross, why, there you had it: undisputed evidence that He was a great sinner. You don't suffer like *that* unless you've been very *bad!* Him? The Son of God? Impossible.

Story Time: Judas

The mind of Lucifer can be seen in the life of Judas. Judas was ambitious. He was also embarrassed by the very lack of ambition that he saw in Jesus. So he struck on a plan to *force* Him into a position where He would *have* to act like a Messiah was supposed to act. Judas would be proclaimed a hero and get all the credit for such a brilliant strategy. And if Jesus didn't cooperate, then He wasn't the Messiah anyway. Either way Judas would be 30 pieces of silver richer. He couldn't lose.

But Judas didn't understand the mind of Jesus. And when Jesus showed Himself of no reputation but took upon Him the form of a servant,¹² even Lucifer was taken by surprise. Neither of them had ever anticipated such a move on the part of God. Satan had never thought like that; it was foreign and repulsive to him. He couldn't imagine that the Son of God would humiliate Himself. It had never entered his selfish brain that God could be victorious in defeat; that He could bring life to billions through death. To Lucifer this was not only stupid, it was insane. He had imagined in his mind that God was out to get him just as he was out to get God. But he was wrong.

“You give your mouth to evil and your tongue frames deceit...
These things you have done and I kept silent. You thought that
I was altogether such a one as yourself.”¹³

But God's ways are not like ours (Isa 55:8);
He doesn't think the way we do.

The Look of Love

So as Judas watched Jesus submit to insult and abuse he became nervous, then guilty, then desperate. His screams of innocence, his confession of betrayal were met by the priests with stares of contempt, but by the Saviour with a saddened look of pity. The same look that drove Peter to heart-breaking repentance, drove Judas to suicide. So, too, God treats all, the redeemed and the lost, exactly the same.



The God of Protection

The Loving Wrath of God is also revealed in the merciful protection which He grants to His vulnerable creation. The God of the Old Testament was a God of protection. He instructed Moses to have each home sacrifice a lamb and paint the entrance with its blood, for “the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the *destroyer* to come in unto your houses” Exodus 12:23. “The sign of blood—the sign of a Saviour’s protection—was on their doors, and the *Destroyer* entered not.”¹⁴

The Destroyer

Numbers 21:6 records that “the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people.” Yet we are also informed that they were there all the time.¹⁵ But when Israel murmured and rejected the evidences of God’s presence, He was forced to remove His protecting hand and they were exposed to the natural dangers of the desert. Thus Paul wrote that ‘when they murmured, they were destroyed by the *Destroyer*.’¹⁶ And we read that angels have many times “thwarted the Spoiler’s purpose and turned aside the stroke of the *Destroyer*.”¹⁷

It is the restraining power of God that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan...But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed...Every transgression of the law of God is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan.¹⁸

Vengeance “is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown.”

God is the fountain of life and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life...God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. Thus accomplished, they receive the results of their own choice.¹⁹

Since God protects us from the Destroyer if we allow Him, He also honors our choice to not accept that protection when we disallow Him, and He withdraws His hand. Then, as Paul says, “He gives us up to our own sinful hearts.”²⁰

“God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner...but *leaves* the rejecters of His mercy to *themselves*, to reap that which they have sown.”²¹ “So long as the people of Israel were loyal to God and continued in obedience to His law, no power in earth or hell could prevail against them. But when they transgressed God's commandments, then *they separated themselves* from Him, and they were left to feel the power of the *Destroyer*.”²²



Story Time: Miriam's Leprosy

When Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, “the anger of the Lord was kindled against them; and He *departed*. And the cloud *departed* from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous.”²³

God's ways are truly different from ours. When our anger is kindled against someone we move *toward* them, to attack, to strike out! But God moves *away*. He departs.

We attack... God moves away.

And at the cross God personally showed how He will ultimately deal with sin. For “the cross explains all other mysteries.”

In the light that streams from Calvary, the attributes of God which had filled us with fear and awe appear beautiful and attractive. We see His character in its gracious manifestations, and comprehend as never before the significance of that endearing title, 'Our Father.'"²⁴

A Different Kind of Death

On the cross Jesus took the sinner's place and God treated Him exactly as He will treat every sinner who ever lived. There our Saviour died the final death of complete separation from God: the *second death*.²⁵ Jesus assumed the very position of the sinner who wants nothing of God and demands that He leave him alone.

Sadly God leaves, and as He does, His sustaining, life-giving, protective power is withdrawn. Now nothing can save from the awful power of sin as it crushes the life forces into extinction.

It was not bodily suffering which so quickly ended the life of Christ upon the cross. It was the crushing weight of the sins of the world and a sense of His Father's wrath. The Father's glory and sustaining presence had left Him.²⁸

The divine light of God was receding from His vision, and He was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness...The wrath that would have fallen upon man was now falling upon Christ.²⁷

He felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father...As a man He must suffer the consequences of man's sin. As a man He must endure the wrath of God.²⁸



No wonder Jesus cried out, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?’²⁹ Why have you given me up? Why have you let me go?

But it wasn't at the hand of an offended God that Christ died. The Father didn't slay His Son. Jesus did not say, ‘My God, why are you executing me?’ We may have gotten that impression. After all, the Bible does say “it *pleased* the Lord to bruise Him.”³⁰

But the Bible often speaks of God as doing that which He permits.³¹ Because God is sovereign over the events of the entire universe, He also assumes full responsibility for what takes place within it. “We *esteemed* Him smitten, stricken of God and afflicted.” We *thought* that God was smiting Him. But, in fact, “He was wounded for *our* transgressions, He was bruised for *our* iniquities.”

You can also read in 1 Chronicles 10 that King Saul “died for his transgression against the Lord...therefore He slew him.” But we are also told in detail the real story of his own self-inflicted suicide in 1 Samuel 31:4.

Another example is found in 2 Samuel 24 where we are told that “the anger of the Lord was kindled against them to say, ‘Go number Israel.’” But 1 Chronicles 21 tells it like it is: “Then Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.”

The Great Enemy: destroyer, accuser, deceiver, liar, murderer...

Satan is a legalist. He is constantly fighting for his legal right to destroy us every time he gets a chance. “Satan is the great enemy of God and man...In the scriptures he is called a destroyer, and accuser of the brethren, a deceiver, a liar, a tormentor, and a murderer.”³²

“Satan had accused Jacob before the angels of God, claiming the right to *destroy* him because of his sin.”³³ But Jesus only touched his hip. Satan accused Job before the sons of God and demanded *skin for skin*; he claimed the right to keep Moses in the grave; he accused Joshua the High Priest standing before the altar.

Satan wanted to destroy Nineveh. But God sent a preacher to warn them. Satan tried to destroy Jonah by sinking his ship. But God prepared a great fish to save his life. And after all that Jonah *still* didn't understand the character of God.



Wrong Spirit, Boys

James and John wanted to destroy the Samaritans with fire and “consume them, even as Elijah did. But Jesus turned, and rebuked them, and said, ‘Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.’”³⁴

The disciples’ concept of God was one who would use destructive fire for retribution and revenge. To them, God wasn’t one to hold a grudge—He got *even!* But Jesus said that wasn't His style at all.

Then who sent the fire ‘out of heaven’ in Job’s day that “burned up the sheep, and the servants and consumed them?”³⁵ Or the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Or the fire that cremated all the soldiers who came to arrest Elijah?³⁶

When Elijah had fled to Mt. Horeb, he witnessed destructive wind, devastating earthquake, and consuming fire. “But the Lord was *not* in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire.”³⁷

Who is it?

It is vitally important who we believe the Destroyer is, because the time is coming when the world will soon be experiencing the plagues of sickness, disease, pollution, violence, earthquake, tsunami, cosmic impacts, super storms, catastrophe and death during the final hours of earth’s history. And when that time comes, how will *we* react? Will we decide along with the rest of the world that this is the work of an angry God?

When the angel of mercy folds her wings and *departs*, Satan will do the evil deeds he has long wished to do. Storm and tempest, war and bloodshed--in these things he delights... And so completely will men be deceived by him that they will declare that these calamities are the result of the desecration of the first day of the week... They are guided by the enemy, and therefore they reach conclusions which are entirely false.³⁸

It is God that shields His creatures, and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer. But the Christian world have shown contempt for the law of Jehovah and the Lord will do just what He declared that He would. [clobber them with His own hand? No.] He will *withdraw* His blessings from the earth, and *remove* His protecting care... Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He [Satan] will bring trouble and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them.³⁹

And it is Satan who leads men to believe that it will be God who will finally afflict them with the fires of hell. The people of planet earth will be in a panic to do whatever is necessary to appease what they see is the wrath of God. Enforce global religious conformity? Why not. Vote for the Pope? You bet. Anything! Just make God happy.

We who delight in God's law may be accused of being legalists now, but when the plagues begin to fall, watch who become the real legalists.



Story Time:

Ahab and Jezebel

There once was a King by the name of Ahab who stole a vineyard and then had the evicted owner bumped off by the treachery of his priestess-wife, Jezebel. There you have it: a preview of earth's last great conflict. The state power allows the church to carry out its murderous schemes with state approval and support. And, like Ahab and Jezebel, both church and state will perish.

But God didn't execute Ahab *or* Jezebel. He didn't have to. They were both destroyed at the hand of their enemies when the protecting hand of God's mercy had been driven away. God never loves the sinner less. But in the face of stubborn rejection He reluctantly turns away and leaves the rejecters to their own natural consequences.

The *restraint* which has been upon the wicked is *removed*, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent... The Spirit of God persistently resisted, has been at last *withdrawn*. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no *protection* from the evil one. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God *cease to hold* in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be *let loose*.⁴⁰

God says, “I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms... The horses and their riders shall come down” How? “Every one by the sword of his brother.”⁴¹

Remember when the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites ganged up on Judah? King Jehoshaphat was told “You will not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord... for the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of them, *every one helped to destroy another...* and none escaped.”⁴²

“The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which He executes: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hand.”⁴³

Story Time: Hanging Haman

There once was a man by the name of Haman, an Amalekite who lived in the land of Persia, a man of position in the King’s court, and who hated a certain Jew named Mordecai. Now Mordecai happened to be the uncle of a very lovely, beautiful, gorgeous young lady named Esther.

Well, through the providence of God, Esther won the Miss Persia Beauty Pageant and became Queen of the land. Meanwhile, Mordecai saved the king from a political coup and was recognized by his majesty Ahazuerus with full royal honors and tickertape parade.

This made Haman very, very jealous, resentful, pouty and down-right angry. He finally got so mad, he rigged up a clever scheme to get the King to sign a law that would guarantee the extermination of every Jew in the kingdom. The bill was of course worded in such a way that it appeared to be a matter of national security, but down there in the small print at the bottom of the page was Haman’s true intentions. Now it looked like his master plan was almost ready for final execution!

He went home to Mrs. Haman, jumping up and down with excitement. ‘And I know just what I’ll do with Mordecai! I’m going to make a gallows 90 feet high just for him, so everyone can see him swinging way up there by his neck!’

Well, Haman was a real dummy when he did that. Because the whole plan backfired when Mordecai heard about it, leaked the news to

Esther, who told the King, who was so infuriated that he had Haman hung on the very gallows he had custom built for Mordecai.



“Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.”⁴⁴

Story Time: A Den for Daniel

There once was a prime minister of Babylon, a Jew by the name of Daniel. He had demonstrated integrity, wisdom and loyalty to four different monarchs over two successive world empires. But certain other governmental appointees became extremely jealous of Daniel, a member of an ethnic minority group, and they determined to get rid of him.

First, they tried to dig up every scrap of dirt and any shred of irregularity in the life of Daniel in order to ruin his reputation and discredit him before the King. But they couldn't find a thing. There was nothing out of order. Squeaky clean. No cover-ups. No hanky-panky. Nothing. Nada. Zero. Zip.

So they decided that the only way they were going to be able to nail this guy was to frame him. They finagled the King into passing a nice little law that would in effect make him ‘God of the Month.’ “Just think, your Highness, every man, woman and child will be praising and worshipping you every day for a whole month! And, uh, well, of course, if anyone should even dare to insult your Greatness by not recognizing you as their god, why then, they would be deserving of the sternest consequences--yes, they would be thrown to the lions!”

Well, Darius, flattered by the thought of all that attention, signs the Law of the Medes and Persians “which cannot be changed.”

Meanwhile, Daniel continues to follow his lifelong custom of morning devotions and prayer to Jehovah. His enemies, spying on him, quickly report this flagrant criminal act to the King, reminding *him* that this subversive conduct is a treasonous violation of *his* law, the one that *he* signed, and that now Daniel *must* be thrown to the lions!

Poor Darius couldn't sleep that night. He had been cruelly tricked into betraying his trusted friend Daniel into the hand of fate. But no, Daniel is in the hand of God! And very early the next morning when the King calls out to him from the mouth of the den, Daniel answers him.

“The God whom I love and trust has protected me, O King.”



Then it was the other guys' turn to face the felines. And the Bible tells us that every bone was broken before they even hit the ground.

“His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own scalp.”⁴⁵

The Final Showdown:

Mischief Makers Make Their Move

As Esau gathered his army against his younger brother Jacob, so at the very end of time, after a thousand years of consideration, Satan marshals the billions of all history against the saints within the City.

But their approach is arrested by the appearance of Jesus. It is now that “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”⁴⁶ They, who refused to be warmed by the burning love of God throughout their lives, are now to witness a great gigantic panoramic display of God’s all-out effort to save them down through the ages. They see His heart of love—a love that “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”⁴⁷

They see how He had plead with all the older brothers holding out His hands pierced for them: “Return to me for I will abundantly pardon.⁴⁸ My hand is not shortened that it cannot save.⁴⁹ For I am able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Me.⁵⁰ I am merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.⁵¹ I am not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.⁵² As I live... I have no pleasure in your death, but that you turn from your way and live. So, please, turn back from your ways; for why will ye die?”⁵³

But they spurned His love. And now they remain outside. “Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: Thy right hand [that nail-scarred hand] shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a *fiery* oven ... and the *fire* shall devour them... for they intended evil against thee. They imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform.”⁵⁴

Fire for Judas

Jesus reached out to Judas with His hand of love in an effort to draw him back from the edge of eternal darkness. He gently leaned over to him at that last supper table with a moistened piece of bread and whispered in his ear: “He it is, to whom I shall give this morsel.” No one else heard it. How protective! How considerate! How very gracious of our Lord who was about to be betrayed.

But Judas refused. It was his own choice to burn inside with intense guilt, grief and self-hatred until he couldn't stand it any longer and he hanged himself. Judas exchanged the fire of Christ's soul-cleansing love for the fire of guilt and eternal remorse.

“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink: for you will heap coals of fire on his head.”⁵⁵

God's Fire

Solomon tells us that the Loving Wrath of God is as “strong as death; His jealousy for us is as hard as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of *fire*, which have a most vehement flame... many waters cannot quench His love, neither can the floods drown it.”⁵⁶

This is the anger of the Lord which He kindles—the fire of love that never dies. Jesus said, “I am come to send *fire* on the earth and what will I, if it be already kindled?”⁵⁷ Isn't that what Cleopas said? “Our hearts *burned* within us as we walked on the way.”⁵⁸ They were being exposed to the burning love of Jesus. God's love is a consuming fire.

**It is God's intent
that we are warmed by His love;
It is not His intent
that we destroy ourselves
as we try to run from it.**



Jeremiah said it this way: “His word was in mine heart as a *burning fire* shut up in my bones.”⁵⁹ But the fire of Jesus' love works in two different ways. It will either melt your heart like wax or bake it hard like a brick; it will either burn in your heart to give you life, or it will burn in your life to bring you death. Jesus said, “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”⁶⁰

It is God's desire that we will be melted by His love; it is *not* His intent that we destroy ourselves as we try to run from it. But because men will reject His burning love for them, they will reap their own burning hate. The “sweet savor of Christ” will be to those who are saved “a savor of life unto life.” But the same love will be to “them that perish... the savor of death unto death.”⁶¹

There shall be gnashing of teeth

As Satan looks upon the fruit of his toil he sees only failure and ruin. He has led the multitudes to believe that the city of God would be an easy prey; but he knows that this is false... Then the spirit of rebellion, like a mighty torrent again bursts forth. Filled with frenzy... he rushes into the midst of his subjects to inspire them with his own fury for a last desperate struggle against the King of Heaven.

But there are none now to acknowledge His supremacy. His power

is at an end. The wicked are filled with the same hatred of God that inspires Satan; but they see that their case is hopeless. Their rage is kindled against Satan and those who have been his agents in deception, and with the fury of demons they *turn upon them*. And there follows a scene of *universal strife*.⁶²

And when people burn with hatred and anger as they did when they rushed upon Stephen to stone him, they “*gnash* their teeth.”⁶³ There will also be gnashing of teeth when they turn on each other with burning hatred and anger upon those who deceived them. “The horn of the Lord [His trophy of saints] shall be exalted with honor; the wicked shall see it and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away.”⁶⁴

“For they have made ready their heart like an oven.”⁶⁵ “Wickedness burneth as the fire... no man shall spare his brother.”⁶⁶ “Every man’s sword shall be against his brother.”⁶⁷ “A great disturbance from the Lord shall be among them and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbor, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbor.”⁶⁸

Who dwells with everlasting burnings?



In Revelation we see fire coming down from God out of heaven and devouring the wicked.⁶⁹ We are told by our friends that eternal fire is to be the reward of the wicked. But in Isaiah the question is asked, “Who shall dwell with the devouring fire...with everlasting burnings?”⁷⁰ The answer is given: “He that walks righteously, and is upright...” It is

the saints who are going to dwell with everlasting burnings, within the eternal fire of God's love. And where is that? In the presence of God Himself.

Our God is a consuming fire—consuming to sin,⁷¹ but to those who receive His Spirit into their own lives, who are baptized with His fire, who become just like Him—it is the fire of love that gives them life. Daniel's three friends were thrown into the fire and it didn't hurt them. Why? Because Jesus, the *real* Fire, was there with them, and they couldn't be hurt. They had become like the Fire, just like the angels, for "He calls His ministers a flame of fire."⁷² And "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" 1John 3:2.



While the redeemed stand upon the Sea of Glass "mingled with *fire*," the lost of all ages will be immersed in a lake of the same fire until consumed.

Sin is a deadly poison. It kills without exception.

Digging His Own Grave

Satan taught them how to hate, how to kill, how to destroy. Now he has dug his own grave. "Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God... I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit."⁷³ Who dug the bottomless pit? Satan, and he will fall right into it himself.

At last the universe will know for certain that sin is a deadly poison. It kills without exception. And there is not one thing Jesus or His Father can do for anyone who will choose the fatal separation that sin causes.

The Wages of Sin

We all know that any worker is paid only by the employer for whom he works. Neither the master of sin nor righteousness will pay wages earned from the other. Satan never pays anyone with eternal life, the gift of God; the only currency he is familiar with is death, the wages of sin. Likewise, the Lord never pays the wages of sin; He is the purveyor of life, and that is the only merchandise He dispenses.

A Last Desperate Message

We are living in the time of the third angel's message of Revelation 14. It may sound fierce and violent, but remember, "our heavenly Father is about to witness the loss of vast numbers of His children. For one last time He raises His voice. He—the Gracious One, the One who would so much rather speak to us gently of the truth—raises His voice in one last awesome warning and appeal: 'If you are determined to leave me, I will have to let you go. But when I give you up, you will be destroyed!'" "The devil would have us misunderstand this message as the words of an angry god. But they are the heart-breaking words of a maligned benevolent Creator who is being rejected."⁴

"Oh, how can I give you up?
How can I let you go?
How can I forsake you?
My heart cries out within me;
How I long to help you!"⁷⁵

The Cry of God

David understood the heart of God when His own son rebelled against him, and then as a consequence was killed in battle. He cried out, "O Absolom, Absolom, Absolom, O my son Absolom. Would that it was I that died."⁷³ This is the cry of God.

"There are explanations of the death of Christ and of His intercession in our behalf that put God [the Father] in a most unfavorable light" that depict Him of being much "less gracious and understanding than His Son. Such subjects as sin, the law, and the destruction of the wicked... are sometimes presented in such a way as to leave the people with precisely the picture of God that Satan has been purporting."⁷⁴

God's children should be known, more than anything else, for their effective witness to the Good News about God. We desire to be counted among God's loyal people, but if in our eagerness to obey we leave the impression that we worship a legalistic god, then we have not witnessed well to the Good News.

No greater privilege and honor can come to us than to be entrusted with the Good News that God never loves the sinner less. Surely the time has come that God's friends everywhere who share a jealous regard for God's reputation should speak up with pride and conviction as to what we believe is really the *Loving Wrath of God*.

“At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love.” Christ's Object Lessons p. 415

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- 5 2Cor 5:21
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- 7 Luke 15
- 8 *Desire of Ages*, E.G.White p. 600
- 9 Acts 13:46
- 10 Maxwell, Graham: *Can God Be Trusted?* PPPA, 1977
- 11 PP 471
- 12 Philippians 2:5
- 13 Psalm 50:19,21
- 14 PP 280
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- 16 1 Corinthians 10:10
- 17 Education p. 304
- 18 *Great Controversy*, E.G.White p. 35, 36
- 19 DA 764
- 20 Romans 1. When the unrighteous choose to disregard God's warnings, He gives them up to uncleanness (verse 24), gives them up to vile affections (26), and gives them over to a reprobate mind (28). This is God's strange act mentioned in Isa. 28:21 where it is said He 'shall rise up in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth in the valley of Gibeon.' In both of these events, recorded in 2 Sam. 5:14-20 and Joshua 10:12-14, the Lord did not actively vent His wrath upon the wicked but rather permitted destruction to come upon them naturally.
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