

## About Punishment

Jonathan Mitchell and John Gavazzoni

The following combines complementary comments from Jonathan and John while participating in an internet discussion:

Good morning, dear ones.

Charlie, Walter, Marilyn, Kenneth, I enjoyed and concur with what each of you said. Walter, you spoke my thoughts re: the word "punishment." It is all too easy to forget that the central idea of "judgment" is to make things right. And if we have a Just One separating out the issues, and making decisions according to His purpose, which is love, then we can abide in His rest about it for all of us

The thoughts on firstfruits and harvest were also excellent. I would like to pick up on what you said, Charlie, about this possibly going on right now. My response is, "yes!" I believe that we are His witnesses, and when we speak a word of the Lord, that fire proceeds out of our mouths. We are the children of our Father, who is a consuming fire. We, too, are consuming fires. We are here to lovingly purify one another by sharing the Consuming Fire that dwells within us.

We are here to absorb the filth and putrid of the world and transform it. This is intercession -- we intercede into situations to which we are directed by Father, and by being there, we bring this holy fire into it. All of God's fire is the same fire, and as was pointed out, we all must be baptized in this place (which is Himself) of His purification. In Rev. 14, we see that this happens in the presence of the Lamb (the sacrifice) and of His agents (us).

This is so that they can behold Him (like the serpent on the pole) and be healed. This is simply the outworking of the cross, being made effective, as you pointed out, "each one in his own order, or class."

Jonathan

Hi y'all,

I'd like to bring up what I think is a central consideration regarding men being subjected to the fire of God. I think I understand Charlie's discomfort about assumptions, even on the part of Christian universalists about the nature of God's correction, and I, too, have felt that we restorationists have been missing something in our understanding.

I hope that we're all clear that the fire of God has absolutely nothing to do at all with retaliatory vengeance on God's part, and we're more or less clear about where God is coming from in His corrective action, but I think there's been an unconscious need to throw a bone, so to speak, to the eternal torment people, not wanting them to think that we're simply painting God as soft on sin. So we tend to give the impression that we still believe that "God's gonna getcha for that," in the process of correcting us.

There seems to be an assumption that God is bound to inflict pain retributively on the unbeliever before He will save them. Now it would seem to be a safe assumption that to be engulfed by the fire which God is would entail a most primal experience of God as He is. In a word, it will be the intensified experience of being loved. Clearly, when we connect the statements, "God is Love" and "Our God is a consuming fire," with "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," the conclusion must be that the lake of fire and brimstone is and will be an experience of being thoroughly immersed in love.

But, the question I want to raise, and that I think is germane to the discussion, is whether or not there is anything pain-inducing in the nature of true love. Obviously, God knew that His great plan for humanity, conceived out of love, would involve pain, but is it in the nature of God's love that it can inflict pain? What I'm driving at, for your consideration, is that it is not the love that hurts us, it's our reaction to the love that causes us pain.

Don't get me wrong, it still all ends up at God's desk, for He knows the kind of reaction that exposing us to His love in its intensified passion will produce. What I'm trying to say is that there is no equivalent of "you've got to pay your debt to society" with God. There

is, of course, a God-ordained painful consequence to sin, but that's different than God directly hurting us.

I've felt for a very long time that what we do and will experience in the fire of God is the profound and shocking difference between how we (quite unconsciously often) try to add worth to our lives by the good that we do, compared to the worth that we have in the heart of God simply because He is what He is. He simply loves us because He is love and we are the children of His love.

I'm an old gospel singer, and I've sung so many songs that say, in one way or another, "Why should He love me so" or "Oh the wonder of it all, just to think that God loves me." "Why should He love me so?" etc., etc.

Why should He love us so? Because He is love---no other reason. And the wonder is not THAT God loves me, it's the wonder of the DEPTHS of such love.

What a shock to discover that all our persona-building efforts to gain worth have themselves been worthless. It would seem that the fire of God's love, while not being pain-inflicting by nature (in fact, quite the opposite) will cause a very painful reaction on the part of both the self-righteous and the self-worthless.

When one "feels" the fire and "knows" the nature of the fire, the painful reaction will depend upon the loss that will be suffered. To have wasted one's life because of feelings of worthlessness, when one is exposed to the true nature of their worth in God, is and will be a shock, but to have spent a lifetime trying, self-righteously, to become worthy of God's approval and find out that it was all for nought, I would think will be the greater trauma.

In closing, I think it's important to remember that it's those whose names are not found written in the book of life that are cast into the lake of fire. The idea that being or not being in the book of life has to do with going to heaven or hell is pure superstition. There's a clear thread to be discerned from the Gospel of John through to the Book of Revelation as to the meaning of the book of life. The Gospel of John, summing up the Gospels, presents the Word, in whom was life.

The Book of Acts continues this theme with that singular Word of life being multiplied in many, so that it says that the number of disciples multiplied, and the Word grew and multiplied. Going on into the epistles, Paul tells us that we are living epistles. So the singular Word has been multiplied in many to become living epistles. Finally, we see the grand result in Revelation of a Book (scroll) of Life, the complete expression of the living God in a living Book.

Thus, the final issue, is not about making people suffer for their sin, but of a separating of death from life----"death and hades (death's "place") were cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." It's the false death-persona that gets consumed and transformed by the fire, not the essential Being which we have in Him, in whom we live and move and have our being.

Much love,  
John

A further reading on the subject can be found at the following site. The Lake of Fire - J. Preston Eby