

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God's Judgment: Righteous in Every Detail

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8, KJV 1900)

In our present compromised and broken condition, it is ever so easy to think about Scripture's description of eternal punishment and wonder, "Does the punishment match the crime?" Before we could possibly answer that question intelligently, we must fully know the depth of the crime and the righteousness and justice of the judge. In fact, we cannot fully grasp either truth. We are far too close to the crime to understand its gravity in the just judgment of God. Human justice, flawed and limited by human frailty, often stumbles and errs. The God who shall sit as Judge of all humanity at the last day knows every detail of every human's life, thoughts, words, and deeds. He shall judge them by His moral law that has existed from the beginning. While He revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses, He communicated His moral posture, for example, against Cain when Cain murdered Abel, his brother.

Let's examine the moral traits that our passage names as examples of God's righteous judgment in the end. Rather than describe an occasional behavior, these traits appear in John's list to describe a habitual, entrenched way of life. These traits define their existence.

1. **Fearful.** At first thought, we might question this sin, especially in an age of intense persecution. The word translated "fearful" in this verse appears only here in the New Testament. In the first century, it conveyed the idea of being cowardly. How do we translate the idea from that age to our age and culture? I suggest that Paul's description of the wicked might point the way.

For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. (Philippians 3:18-19)

Notice especially Paul's words, "whose God is their belly." These people worship in the temple of self-gratification. Their ultimate goal in life is to please themselves, to satisfy their personal appetite for sin's pleasures. Deny self, worship one who was crucified by the Romans, rejected

by His own people, and who commands that His followers deny themselves and take up their "Cross"? The idea for such people is utterly idiotic. Do whatever you need to do to avoid any threat of discomfort or danger to yourself.

2. **Unbelieving.** Our English language has borrowed many of its idioms and rules from older languages. The word translated "unbelieving" in this verse serves as an example. Think of an English word that describes a person who believes in God. The basic word is "Theist." What happens to the meaning when we add one letter, "A," to the beginning of the word, "Atheist"? You reverse the word's meaning. In the New Testament, King James translation, "faith" and "believe" are translated from the same Greek word. "Faith" is the noun form of the word; "believe" is the verb form of the same word. What kind of person comes to your mind by the single word, "Unfaithful"? You think of someone whose whole character is unreliable and untrustworthy. And that is the character of the people whom John here describes. Whatever Scripture defines as faithful and trustworthy, these people manifest the mirror opposite character. Again, Paul's description sums up their character. Their "God is their belly."
3. **Abominable.** One phrase in the definition of the word translated "Abominable" in this verse gives us a sense of the word, "...polluted with crimes." Imagine the most odious thing you might see or smell. Think of something that smells so awful that the very thought of it threatens your gag response. That thought to you is a bare comparison to the moral character of these people in God's view.
4. **Murderers.** This word doesn't need translation. It does require some thought. How many evening news programs have you watched recently that didn't report at least one murder? Most murders are committed by an acquaintance or relative, or by a criminal in the act of some other crime. The sleepy community where I grew up was shocked in my youth by the discovery of six or seven people who had all been murdered in a grizzly manner. Eventually, the sheriff discovered that the victims and the people who were eventually

arrested and convicted were friends who had joined together in multiple moral and criminal activities. No great surprise, one sin leads to another, to another in an endless downward spiral. The twisted immoral minds that rationalized that all those other sins were acceptable eventually rationalized that killing the people in the group who in any way threatened them was just as acceptable.

5. **Whoremongers.** The word behind this English word refers to prostitutes, people who sell themselves for money. While the dominant flavor deals with sexual sin, it might also include people who sell themselves for other things as well. For such people, personal gain is the ultimate goal, and any behavior necessary for that gain becomes quite acceptable if the value of the gain is sufficiently appealing to them. Many years ago in a work setting, I was having coffee with a group of co-workers. A young man in the group raised a question. We accept that murder is wrong. If you had good reason to believe that you would not be caught, could someone pay you enough money that you would murder someone, even though you know that it is wrong? His question really went to the core of this word. Which principle is stronger in your moral constitution, what God declares to be right and wrong, or what might provide you with the greater gain? The people described by this word have no strong sense of fixed moral values. Their values rest far more directly on their personal sense of gain. Are you getting the sense of Paul's description? Their god is their belly.
6. **Sorcerers.** The root for the word translated as "sorcerers" in this verse surprises most of us. It is the Greek root for our English word for "Pharmacist." Often in the ancient world magical practices were associated with various mind-altering drugs. Many chemicals exist that, regardless their supposed benefit to the human body, twist the mind in a bad way. Have you ever spent time with a person in the hospital who was given very strong pain meds? While many strong pain relievers do a wonderful job controlling intense pain, they also have a bad effect on the mind. People under such drugs may see things that do not really exist. They may become intensely paranoid or angry because of the drug's impact on their mind. Apparently the superstitious or "Magical" practice identified here as "Sorcerers" routinely relied on various drugs that altered a person's normal and sensible thinking. Our culture has sadly seen quite clearly the bottomless pit of self-destruction and sin that grows out of drug abuse. A person who crosses the threshold into these drugs becomes increasingly addicted, literally enslaved, to the drugs. They eventually reach the point that they will rationalize any action however black and wrong

or destructive to other people, to gain their next "Fix." And when confronted with their wicked actions, these people will typically have a long list of people or circumstances to blame for their bad conduct. They refuse to face their own choices and accept personal responsibility for their actions. Whatever they choose to do under the influence of their chosen mind-bending drug, they always see themselves as the innocent victim and someone else as the villain who caused all their troubles.

7. **Idolaters.** The word translated "idolaters" in this verse is defined as a servant or worshipper of idols. When John wrote, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen," (1 John 5:21), he likely had far more in mind than carved images of a superstitious and imaginary god. Anything that commands so much loyalty or respect from us as to entice us to bow to it may become our own idol. Career, family, social status, wealth are all common objects of idolatry, both in our present culture and historically. That John ended his first general epistle with this caution should broaden our thoughts regarding what is or what is liable to become an idol to us. In this letter, John didn't devote large space to carved images. In fact, his primary focus was gnosticism, an ancient religion that rejected all things material, a religion that therefore rejected that God would—or for that matter, could—become a literal, flesh and blood human, as Jesus did to redeem His people from their sins. The gnostic idolatry did not bow before any carved images. It bowed before the image of self-proclaimed pseudo-priestly people who claimed to know more about their unknowable deity than others, people who used their self-proclaimed superior knowledge to enslave others to their wills and their teachings. Anything or anyone that encourages us to bow as its servant or worshipper becomes our own idol, and we thus become idolaters at its (Or his) throne.
8. **Liars.** Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary defines the word as "...maintainers of religious falsehood, corrupters of the truth of God." From this specific meaning, the word was also used to refer to those who habitually lied, whether related to religion or not.

Most people who seriously read and think about this verse are likely believers who love the Lord and may find it difficult to imagine someone so dedicated to everything wicked and black. Such people really do exist, and John makes the point quite clearly that this is the moral character of the wicked people whom God shall judge and punish in the lake of fire at the final judgment.

The Bible never teaches or even suggests that all humans shall eventually be changed into good people and go to heaven when they die. It quite clearly reminds us that such devotedly wicked

people really do exist, and that their final judgment from God shall be altogether right and just.

As you ponder this final event, do not forget John's point in the closing verses of the twentieth chapter. God shall divide humanity at that day into two classes. He shall judge one class, here quite specifically and clearly identified by their utter lack of moral uprightness, "...out of the books." All, every person, so judged out of the books shall be sent to the lake of fire. In our study passage, John reminds us of their sinful character. Another class of people shall also be present on that day. They were written in "...the book of life." They were not cast into the lake of fire. Based on multiple Scriptures throughout the Bible, these people were also sinners, but their sins were previously judged in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In His sufferings and death, He took their sins to their judgment and offered His personal life to the Father as full and legal satisfaction for those sins. These people by nature were sinners and were legally and rightly indebted to God's moral law, but Jesus took that legal debt onto Himself, satisfied the Father and the Father's righteous law for every one of those sins.

If we accept Scripture's teachings regarding Jesus' taking our sins onto Himself and redeeming, paying the legal debt that they accrued against us, we understand the reason that we shall not be so judged at the last day. In terms of human laws and justice, there is a term that relates to this point, "Double jeopardy." Human justice rightly prohibits that a person be punished twice for the same crime. The old respected Anglican theologian and hymn writer, Augustus Toplady, author of the words of the beautiful hymn, "Rock of Ages," wrote a poem that specifically addressed this truth.

Faith Reviving

Augustus Toplady, 1740-1778

From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hath not the Father put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate'er Thy people owed;
How then can wrath on me take place
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood?

If Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand—
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest!
The merits of thy great High Priest
Have bought thy liberty;
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee!

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor