

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-12-09—VENGEANCE OF GOD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

What happens to the incorrigibly wicked when they are judged? The world is filled with terrible injustices and horrible evils, but the firstfruits are not called to avenge those things. We are to love our enemies¹ and that is difficult. What does that mean anyway?

LUKE 6:27-31 “But I say to you who hear: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,** 28 “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 “To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. 30 “Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. 31 “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

Loving an enemy is NOT responding with hatred and malice. Quite the opposite—we bless them, pray for them, and do not respond in kind to their hatred and malice. If we cannot love an enemy, how can we expect God to apply the blood of Jesus to our own sins? If we love our enemies, then God gives us a promise:

ROMANS 12:17-20 **Repay no one evil for evil.** Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;** for it is written, **“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.** 20 Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For **in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.**”

In the end, God will execute justice and judgment. But people, when injustice occurs and judgment is withheld, have a desire for vengeance. It is a natural response to injustice. While we are to love our enemies, it does not mean that the saints do not desire righteous vengeance:

LUKE 18:7-8 “And shall God not avenge His own elect **who cry out day and night to Him,** ...

REVELATION 6:10 [saying,] “How long, O Lord, holy and true, **until You judge and avenge** our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

LUKE 18:7-8 ... though He bears long with them? 8 “I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

While this may seem contradictory to blessing and praying for our enemies, that is required of us in this life while there is hope that the wicked will repent so they can be forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life. God is abundant in mercy and grace for all to overcome their sins, which is why the last thing that occurs before the New Heavens and New Earth is the

¹ Matt. 5:44.

eternal death of the wicked—“anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Rev. 20:13).

But what about justice, righteous judgment, and vengeance? What is the difference between *justice* that renders a righteous judgment and *vengeance*? Righteous judgment punishes the perpetrator AND **compensates** the victim. If righteous judgment is executed, then there is no need for vengeance. In this world, vengeance is *punishment* rendered against a criminal because the judicial process was deemed to fall short of judgment. When carried out, God’s Law produces righteous judgments. In fact, the Law of God even *compensates* victims beyond their losses. Many times it is double as for theft². Still, justice in this world is rare.

That is where God’s vengeance comes into the picture—it is solely **punishment** of the wicked who reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. When God judges the wicked, there is no possible compensation for the victims because His judgment occurs *after* the final resurrection to eternal life. Spirit beings cannot be compensated by physical beings.

So, what does God’s vengeance involve? Is it just a quick death in the lake of fire? This might be the impression we get from the parable of Lazarus and the rich man:

LUKE 16:19-25 Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and daily indulged himself in luxury. 20 And there was a certain poor man named Lazarus, who was laid at his porch, full of sores. 21 And he longed to be nourished with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table; and the dogs even came and licked his sores. 22 Now it came to pass *that* the poor man died, and he was carried away by the angels into Abraham’s bosom. And the rich man also died and was buried. 23 And in the grave he lifted up his eyes and was in torment, *for* he saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he cried out *and* said, ‘Father Abraham, have compassion on me and **send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am suffering** because of this flame.’ 25 Then Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that in your lifetime you received good things to the full, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted, and you are suffering.

The suffering endured by the rich man seems to be only severe thirst. But is that reality? As I have stated before, the Bible is usually an understatement of the reality. Just read about the sufferings of Jesus Christ. So, too, I believe is the case with the vengeance of God. Another account says that the wicked will weep and gnash their teeth during their punishment³:

LUKE 13:27-28 “... Depart from Me [*Jesus Christ*], all you workers of iniquity [*injustice*].’ 28 **There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

It is not hard to imagine that some will lament their suffering for selfish reasons (“What did I do to deserve this!”) and some will be angry when they are punished. Their attitude, however, still does not reflect the terrible vengeance reserved for them. Notice this:

² Exod. 22:1-4.

³ Also Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30.

PSALM 119:120 **My flesh trembles for fear of You, And I am afraid of Your judgments.**

Trembling is uncontrolled shaking that occurs under *extreme* apprehension for something that is about to happen. If a **righteous man** shakes uncontrollably when considering the vengeance of God, there is obviously more to it than just weeping and gnashing of teeth or being thirsty. What did the Psalmist know or what visions had he seen? Even Paul said:

HEBREWS 10:31 **It is a fearful thing [phobos] to fall into the hands of the living God.**

Paul describes a fear equivalent to phobia (*phobos*), which is extreme and irrational, regarding God's vengeance. Now notice the reaction of demons⁴!

MARK 5:2-9; LUKE 8:31 And when He [*Jesus Christ*] had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, 3 who had *his dwelling among the tombs*; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, 4 because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. 5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. 7 And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? **I implore [BEG] You [Jesus Christ] by God that You do not torment me.**" 8 For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" 9 Then He asked him, "What *is* your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name *is* Legion; for we are many." ... Luke 8:31 And **they begged Him** that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.

Whatever the extent of their coming punishment, the demons shudder and tremble⁵ at the thought because they KNOW what is coming. Mankind cannot even imagine it. What is even more unimaginable is that some will receive a DOUBLE punishment:

REVELATION 18:6-10 "Render to her [*Babylon*] just as she rendered to you, and **repay her double according to her works**; in the cup which she has mixed, **mix double for her**. 7 "In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her **torment** and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' 8 "Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her. 9 "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, 10 "standing at a distance **for fear of her torment**, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Merchants will *fear* the **torment** of the vengeance of God. The Greek word for *torment* means severe suffering due to TORTURE. Are you getting a sense of the severity of the

⁴ Also Matt. 8:28-29; Rev. 20:10.

⁵ Jas. 2:19.

vengeance of God? (This should give us a new emphasis to reconcile offenses mentioned in Matthew 18:21-25. Those who refuse to do so are “delivered ... to the **torturers.**”)

Even with this perspective, we cannot imagine the torture of God’s vengeance. The wicked will be tormented *at least* according to their evil works. Some doubly so. I do not believe God’s vengeance will be a quick death—I would guess it has degrees of pain and duration all according to the level of wickedness. An angel describes the torment of God’s wrath:

REVELATION 14:9-11 Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 “he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. **He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 “And **the smoke of their torment ascends** forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

The wording suggests the smoke occurs WHILE they are being tormented and it may seem like ‘forever’ to the wicked⁶. Perhaps you are thinking of smoke from a small fireplace or campfire, but I think it will be more like a raging forest fire. That produces a thick smoke that envelopes everything around with utter darkness and makes the air unbreathable. Their torment will be fearsome. Whatever the torment, it causes uncontrolled fear and trembling in the biblical authors who have glimpsed it.

In this life, it is comforting to know that God will prevail—but vengeance belongs to Him alone. Only He can righteously punish the wicked for their works. However, there is perhaps another reason that God alone will execute vengeance. In the day when all the righteous are spirit beings, they will be PERFECT agape love. Will we even be capable of having feelings of anger and thoughts of vengeance? As John said, “There is no fear in love; but **perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.** But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18). At that time, we might even weep as the wicked are tormented unto death for rejecting the gift of God. Could these be the tears that God wipes away that is mentioned AFTER the final resurrection?

REVELATION 21:4 “And **God will wipe away every tear** from their eyes; there shall be no more death, **nor sorrow, nor crying [for those who rejected eternal life?]**. There shall be **no more pain**, for the former things have passed away.”

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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⁶ Rom. 6:23 clearly establishes that the punishment for sin is eternal death.