

This is a sermon based upon portions of, "A Discourse of the Punishment of Sin in Hell; Demonstrating That the Wrath of God is the Immediate Cause of That Punishment."

"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompence, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge (avenge) his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb. 10:30, 31.)

**"In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."
(2 Thes. 1:8-9.)**

"What if God willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endureth with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." (Rom. 9:22.)

What Hell and Destruction are, is a Mystery, as what Heaven is; And the true and proper Notion or Conception of either, are a Riddle to the most of Men. As Eye hath not seen, Ear not heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart of man (Natural Man) what God hath prepared for those that love Him, so, nor what God hath prepared for them that hate him. For it is the same, and no other punishment but that which is prepared for the devil and his angels, as Christ says. And what it should be that should torment them or be the immediate executioner of vengeance, on them the imagination of man confined to worldly Agents and Instruments, cannot divine or take in. Other scriptures go metaphorically to work, in fetting out this punishment by things outwardly, sensibly, dreadfully. But these Scriptures (of all others) that are my texts, do more plainly, and without parables declare it to us, in its immediate causes, and from them do leave us to infer the fearfulness. For instance, other Scriptures set it out to us as a prison, (1 Pet. 3:19.) Large enough to be sure to hold men and devils.

"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all nations that forget God." (Psa. 9:17)

As also by their being retained in chains of darkness; (2 Pet. 2:4.) Where men must lie till they have paid the utmost farthing, (Matt. 5:26.) Where is nothing but darkness, utter darkness, blackness of darkness; (Jude 4-6.) That is, an emptiness of all good, not a beam of light to all eternity. Also a place of torment, (Luke 16:28.) Where there is not admitted one drop to cool one's tongue (Luke 16.) In the midst of the most raging scorchings.

Also, I find it elsewhere expressed by the most horrid punishments and tortures that were found amongst the nations, cutting men in pieces, dividing them in the midst, (Matt. 24:49, 51.) Tearing them in pieces, (Ps. 50:22.) cutting them up to the back-bone, ***"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."*** (Heb. 4:12, 13.), drowning men in perdition, (1 Tim. 6:9.)

And with millstones about their necks, as Christ adds, (***"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."*** Matt. 18:6.) to make sure they never rise again: also unto a being cast bound hand and foot (***"Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*** Matt. 22:13.) into fire to be burnt alive; a furnace of fire, twice in one chapter, Matthew 13:42, 49, 50.

A lake of fire; and so drowned over head and ears, for ever. A lake fed with a stream of brimstone, which (of all matter that feedeth fire) is the most fierce. Then again, eternal fire, and that, never to be slacked or extinguished. And you may with the like analogy, go over whatever else of torment is most exquisite to outward sense. But these and all else you can imagine, are but shadows and similitudes (as Thomas Goodwin reports “*I myself heard one upon the rack of terror of conscience cry out, in a like comparison, these are but metaphors to what I feel*”) and indeed unto what the thing itself is. As to say in heaven, there are rivers of pleasures: a City whereof the streets are of gold, the gates of pearl, and such like; they are but metaphorical descriptions, for it is God himself that is the fountain of life: and oppositely it is said, of the wrath to come, that God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:29.)

But these Scriptures which I have read, they all speak offences, quaint-offences. And as hell is said to be naked before the Lord and without a covering; so do these words lay hell open nakedly (not unto our senses, but) to the understanding of us, and then they leave us to infer how fearful! And although these scriptures consist of words that differ, yet they conspire together in the same scope and matter, to fet out damnation to us in the true and proper causes, and the real horridness thereof argued from those causes.

The subject of this discourse, fet out and reduce the two heads: The first, That God’s wrath is the immediate cause of the punishment of sin in hell. I shall confine myself to these two heads. And in handling thereof, what the one of these scriptures is wanting in, the other will supply; in what the one is dark, the other explains. The heads themselves, I shall take as I find them in the first of these scriptures:

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”(Heb. 10:31)

First, that God himself, by his own hands, that is, the power of his wrath, is the immediate inflictor of that punishment or destruction of men’s souls in hell: (It is a falling into the hands of God.) Secondly, the dreadfulness of that punishment, inferred and argued there-from. It is a [fearful thing] to fall into the hands of the living God. Which two are the doctrinal parts of this discourse. For the first, that God himself is the immediate inflictor! For explanation, we must distinguish how that God performs two parts herein. 1. Of the judge, to give forth the sentence by his authority. 2. Of an avenger, a party injured and provoked, and, as such, the inflictor.

My scope in this distinction, is, that we may in reading the scriptures that speak of this punishment, know how to put a difference, and not transfer the whole of God’s Agency in this matter, unto that of sentencing it as a Judge only. And besides that many scriptures do apart show this distinction, there are some that still carry along with them both these agencies, or hand of God, in it together and yet as distinct to the one under the term of wrath and vengeance, and the other under the notion of its being a judgment [the judgment of God, and the judgment of hell-fire] as:

***“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”
(Matt. 23:33.)***

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries... For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.”(Heb. 10:26, 27, 30.)

The Lord shall avenge his people! I can’t wait for that.

Add this, *“But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds... But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile...”* (Rom. 2:5,6,8,9.) All of which reduces the discussion to these two: God’s righteous judgment and His wrath and indignation treasured up.

Further *“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: [There is the righteous judgment of God and the inflicting cause of it.] Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, [There is also the sentence.] In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;”* (2 Thess. 1:4-9.) Likewise, as sovereign Lord, he shows authority in his punishment, and then as the immediate inflictor of his wrath and the power of his wrath.

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction...”(Rom. 9:21, 22)

And also, from the mouth of our dear Lord Jesus about this matter, and recorded by our beloved brother Luke, we have this: *“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”* (Luke 12:4-5.) So, as the Judge, who casts the malefactor into prison. Also recorded by our beloved brother Matthew as: *“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.”* (Matt. 10:28.) Noting thereby that he uses his intrinsic power and force as the inflictor.

Now to handle this latter, as a great truth, please begin with this premise: We must not exclude other miseries as inflicted by creatures used as God’s instruments accompanying this, but that which I contend for, is that principally and eminently above all such, it is the wrath and indignation of God himself, working immediately in and upon men’s souls and consciences, that is intended in these and other scriptures. This is the subject of the first section of this discourse. And please take note, now, that the same scriptures and reasons that shall be brought to prove this first premise, will be found again to serve as new arguments by way of inference to fet out and infer the latter also, that is, the dreadfulness of it, as will appear in the second section. Let us first fet what the scriptures speak more directly to this great point.

“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”(Hebrews 10:28-31)

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Observe the occasion of the apostle's mention of this punishment here, to be his having treated of the highest sin and kind of sinners, the sin against the Holy Ghost. By the occasion of which he gives us to understand what for the substance is indeed the recompense of all manner of other actual sins small and great; the punishment being in solido, one and the same to all, though with a vast difference of degrees. And therefore it is said unto all that are found wicked at that day, whether of greater or lesser proportions and sizes of wickedness, GO into fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ***"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..."*** (Matt. 25:41.)

The devil is the greatest of sinners, yet all go with him into the same torment, that is, the substance the same. And upon the like ground, what is here spoken by way of imminency concerning the punishment of these the highest sort of sinners of the sons of men, is true of all others, there being but one common fire or punishment, in the substance of it, for all. Observe, the manner of his fettering forth the dreadfulfulness of that punishment to us. It is only by way of insinuation. For seeing he could not express the soreness of it; he thought fit to suggest only, who is the immediate Author and Inflictor of it; and so leaves it to our thoughts to infer, how dreadful it is!

This in general: To argue the point in hand of this text, let us take these things along with us: 1. You see he here brings in the great God, as an enraged enemy, challenging the execution hereof to himself. This vengeance belongeth to me, or: ***"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord."*** (Rom. 12:19.) It is as if he said: Let me alone with it. 2. In that when he would fet out the severeness of this punishment (which is his professed aim, ***"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?"*** [Heb. 10:29.]) as infinitely exceeding all those kinds of corporal deaths of Moses Law, he inferreth the soreness of this from God himself as the Avenger: ***"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge (or avenge) his people."*** (Heb. 10:30.) That is, what a great and powerful God he is.

The saints only know God by faith in himself, and his greatness, as Hebrews 11, and that so as no other men in this life do. And by what we know of him, and the apprehensions we have of him, we cannot but forewarn what the punishment must needs be, when God himself shall thus solemnly profess himself to be the Avenger. It is argued then, that you flee both from what this God is, and from that knowledge that the saints have of him. They and they alone know him in his love, and have tasted and found that his immediate loving-kindness is better than life; and from the Law of Contraries, they know that his wrath must be more bitter than death. They are able to measure what he is in his wrath, by what he is in his love. And some of the Primitive Saints, especially the apostles, who had the first fruits of the Spirit, knew and had tasted how good the Lord is in his Love, by immediate Impressions of it on their Souls, in Communion with Himself.

The like tenour of speech has this: ***"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences."*** (2 Cor. 5:11.) It is termed "His Terror" as noting out that which is proper to Him and his greatness, in his being able to punish and destroy sinners. Moses, who in the Old Testament had seen the Glory of God the most immediately of any man (and was therein a type of Christ) was thereby made sensible of this very thing, as touching this punishment; and therefore complains in the very like language:

"Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." (Ps. 90:11)

Lamenting how the generality of men did not know it, because indeed they knew not God. But we, says the apostle, have known him. I love you. Amen.