

Benefits Of The Third Resurrection

The Positives and Negatives

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Have you ever had a bad experience—one that totally ruins your day? Maybe someone comes up to you and says, "Twenty years from now, you are going to laugh about this!" Or maybe, when you were a little kid, something terrible happened, and they told you, "Well, it may seem hard now, but someday you will appreciate this!"

Now, those are not very comforting words when you are feeling pain, anguish, anger, fear, rage, or whatever from going through that experience. And it does not matter at that time that what they said is true or not. And, if you do not feel like punching the guy out for saying it, maybe you reply, "Yeah, right."

Some of you would also reply, "Yeah, right," if I told you, "The Lake of Fire is a good thing," or, "There are benefits to the Second Death," or, "The Third Resurrection is one of God's wonderful works."

Is that hard to swallow? Are you incredulous? Do you want to brand me as a heretic, blasphemous, a Satan worshipper, or just plain addled?

This does not change the fact that what I have said is absolutely true. It is true. If you believe that the Great God of the entire universe is a God of love, kindness, gentleness, and mercy, you must believe that the Lake of Fire—the Third Resurrection—the Second Death (however you wish to phrase it) are, in their ultimate evaluation, good.

How can such a terrible condemnation (as we might look at it) be a good thing? God says:

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

God has a different way of looking at these things than we do. He has reasons for what He does. Paul says a similar thing:

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past

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finding out!

If you read the context of Romans 11 carefully you will notice that Paul does not say that we cannot search and find out what God is doing, and why He is doing it. And, there is a reason why Paul put it this way. It is not that we cannot understand His ways, but that the normal, carnal mind cannot figure out what God is doing, and why He would do something like the Second Death or the Third Resurrection.

Now, how do I know this? Well, for one thing, Paul had just spent the last three chapters explaining the unsearchable judgment of God in how He was dealing with Israel and with the Gentiles. What Paul means is that without the Spirit of God to give us guidance and understanding of His way, we would have no clue what God is doing! We would have absolutely no idea.

And, that is why the people of this world are the way that they are. They do not have a clue. They may have religious training. They may have gone to church every Sunday. But, they have no idea what God is doing because He has not called them yet (John 6:44). He has not offered to them His Spirit to open their minds to His ways and His thoughts.

Herbert W. Armstrong went to these next verses very frequently when he was searching out the spirit in man. And he searched out the spirit in man for I do not know how long. And then he taught it to us like he taught us the two trees—over and over again. And it ended up in his book, *The Incredible Human Potential*.

I Corinthians 2:9-16 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world [which the people in the world are operating under, and therefore have no clue], but the Spirit that is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly

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judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LOORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

This makes so much sense. A huge and great chasm separates our understanding from the understanding of the carnal mind. The normal, average mind of the everyday Joe on the street cannot comprehend the things of God.

You may have heard some minister in the past say that until you are called and receive the Holy Spirit, you are not all there. And that is true. You are only operating at half efficiency, or less, with just the spirit of man uncombined with the Holy Spirit of God. It is the Spirit of God that opens up His word that allows us to understand and comprehend what God is doing. What this does is to make the judgment of these people out in the world who have not the Spirit of God skewed toward unbelief.

John 7:37-39 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

What the teaching here is that these people in the world will not always operate without the Spirit of God. One day they will receive the sure promise of God. They will be given access to His Holy Spirit. And Christ uses the term, "rivers of living waters." It sounds like an inundation of His Holy Spirit, almost without measure like Christ had—enough to drown us.

But, with it comes the stipulation that a person must believe in Christ, which is simply a summary statement on becoming completely converted to His way of life. Yet, billions of people—some say maybe 50 billion—have already lived and died without this marvelous gift. Have they lost out? How can God fulfill His promise to give them rivers of living water if they are dead? What is He to do?

The simple answer is that they are going to live again [this is the second resurrection]! That is the only way that it will work. He must resurrect them to physical life, and give them an opportunity to be saved, just as we are being given the same right now. And, because this is in the context of Him standing up on that Last Great Day of the Feast, this is the major meaning of this day when the gates holding back the Holy Spirit are

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opened up, and the flood of His Holy Spirit is given to those who are raised in the second resurrection, and are offered salvation. The greatest outpouring of God's Holy Spirit will be given at that time to billions of people. We cannot think in those numbers, really. Think of all the family members we will have then! We may have three hundred here today, and more in the other churches of God; but then, billions will have the same opportunity we now have!

The apostle John (in the context of the Day of Trumpets) records something that Jesus said that we should contemplate regarding the Last Great Day and White Throne Judgment.

John 5:21-29 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Three distinct themes flow through this section of scripture.

1. Resurrection—God will resurrect us in the first resurrection and give us eternal life. He will also resurrect most others in the second resurrection to physical life and give them their first opportunity for salvation. And then He will resurrect those few in the third resurrection who must be condemned to the Lake of Fire.

2. Judgment

3. Eternal life

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What I want to stress here is that the people who have not yet been offered salvation will be raised in that second resurrection for the purposes of judgment. They will not be raised up just to have another life and have a good time. But, the whole purpose for them being raised to physical life again is for their own judgment period.

Now, judgment is upon the House of God—when God starts working in our lives, He is working for the purposes of judgment. And that goal is not bad. It is not negative. It is to give them eternal life. That is the purpose of the judgment. But they must believe in Christ. If they fail in their judgment, if they do not repent, and if they continue in their evil, carnal ways, God very plainly says that they will merit condemnation.

Look at this next passage which runs from just after Christ's triumph and return until just before God refashions the earth and heaven. Here we will find the period of the Great White Throne Judgment. And just as it says, this is a period of judgment. This is when the dead of every stripe—all who have ever lived—men and women of every race, social status, historical time period, notoriety, and religion will be raised from the dead, and come under judgment in their day of salvation.

Revelation 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Here we see, just like in John 5, that Revelation 20 shows two possible judgments, two possible end results. One is positive: they will be given eternal life and live forever in the God Family. And the other is negative: they will merit eternal death, and never again exist—never again have the opportunity to join the great multitude who will accept God's way.

Now, the focus of the judgment here is mentioned twice in verses 12 and 13. It is said in two different ways, but the idea is that they are judged according to works. The Judge wants to see how people live, not just whether they profess something. Works are the proof and the evidence that shows the Judge that they not only believe with their head,

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but that they believe with their actions.

God is no patsy. He is not dumb. He cannot be fooled into giving someone eternal life. He does not take our word for it. Just because we might stand up in the middle of church and confess our sins does not mean He believes us. We need to show Him that we believe Him by what we do, by living in faith. He does not take our word for it because He knows our word is variable and uncertain. A human being is liable to say most anything to avoid harm and disadvantage. How many of you guys would say you got a four instead of a five on the golf course because the five would put you to a disadvantage? It can be just as simple as that.

But, when you are talking about the matter of eternal life or death, it is infinitely more important. God tells us to prove it. "You say you have faith? Good! Let me see your faith by your works. I want to see it! I want more than profession, I want to see how you walk." But, He does not leave us without a source to consult regarding which works prove our faith. Verse 12 above said,

Revelation 20:12 And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

You have 66 of them right there in your lap—39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. The word Bible means "book"—*biblia sacae*—the holy book. It is called the Word of God.

Herbert Armstrong said frequently that this is God's word in print just as Jesus Christ was God's Word in the flesh. Everything we need to know about salvation and about how to act to please God is found within the covers of this one book which contains sixty-six books, and they are there for our admonition, correction, and our daily walk with God.

It is interesting that I had in my notes, "by this revelation," before I found out that my dad was speaking about the revelation, and how important that is to us. This whole Bible is revelation, and by it we are judged. God is going to judge each and every person by the same criteria. This book is going to be there in the second resurrection. And they are going to know and follow it just like we do today.

Now like we said, this section of Revelation 20:11-15 has two dimensions to it. We could call one of them positive and the other one negative. Some, as Jesus says, are going to

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be resurrected to acceptance and life, and others will be resurrected to condemnation and death.

But if you look carefully here, you will notice that it might be better divided into neutral and negative. Notice that He does not mention eternal life here. He only says that they will be judged according to their works. Obviously, we must assume that eternal life is their reward—we know that from other scriptures.

But notice this very carefully. This section is in the third to the last chapter of the whole Bible—The Book. And what does God emphasize?—the negative aspects of the Great White Throne Judgment.

He talks about throwing people into the Lake of Fire, the second death, casting them into the Lake of Fire, and other such terms which are weighted toward the negative end of the spectrum. He is so serious about what is happening during this time period. Remember this is the last hurrah, the last chance, and the last opportunity for humans to gain entrance into the God family.

It says in II Peter that He desires all men to come to repentance. So He is super-serious about the one chance we have for attaining to it. And this is it. We think it may be one hundred years in length, a whole lifetime to live and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and to repent.

But if He must dangle their toes (and our toes) over the fires of the Lake of Fire, He is very willing and able, and indeed does it, because He is much more interested in them being there, and us being there, than for those to get their feelings hurt. He will bring about His purpose, and He will use whatever means He deems necessary. And, if it means scaring the wits out of us, He is willing to do it.

Now back in June of this year, we received a letter from a lady who is having some problems with the fact that God could preside over such a thing as the Lake of Fire. Now in our day, we have been sensitized to things like the holocaust, racism, capital punishment, and other matters where people's lives are taken from them, in some cases very indiscriminately and without remorse. Remember, that this is the era of the liberal press, and the teddy bear type of God—God is love, and all He wants to do is to take us up into His lap, and give us lots of hugs and kisses.

Now, I do not mean to belittle this lady's concern, because I am sure she is genuinely quizzical about this. It is something that she has not thought through all the way. But I have to go back to the scripture that we opened with. God's ways are higher than our

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ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He thinks on such a higher level than us, that we have a hard time understanding how good things can come out of what may seem to be terrible events. But with God, all things are possible. He is the master of making lemonade out of lemons.

Let me read a short portion of her letter. It is interesting, and I think that you will understand her question a bit better. She says:

Correct me if I am wrong, but I have always understood that the church [of God] teaches that the incorrigibly wicked will be physically resurrected to be taken by the scruff of the neck and thrown without mercy into *gehenna* fire.

Why resurrect somebody back to physical life in order to kill them? If it is for the benefit of the person in question, they have already been judged as incorrigibly wicked, and will not repent so that their judgment has already been decided. They are sentenced to eternal death.

Why resurrect them? Is it for an example to the redeemed? The redeemed have already chosen life, and have been given it as a gift from God. Why would they need an example of what happens to the wicked?

Perhaps it is to satisfy God's appetite for revenge? I think, however, that this type of action may be more true of Satan. God's destruction is not lingering, or agonizing for those who have no hope of repentance.

Would a God, whose character is love, take pleasure in the destruction of the wicked in this way? I think that God's mercy extends to them in such a way that He would not want them to suffer in wickedness for a second longer than is absolutely necessary.

Turn to the book of Ezekiel and we will begin answering some of her questions. This is in the chapter about the watchman. And, it is at the end of this section in verse 11 where He concludes this, and tells us why He sends a watchman.

Ezekiel 33:11 "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live [this is God's pleasure]. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Ezekiel 37 tells us that the whole house of Israel will be raised at this time, and be given this same exact opportunity we have today, to choose life—eternal life—or to reject God, and take eternal death. In fact, in Psalm 116:15, God says exactly what He takes pleasure in.

Psalm 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.

He takes more pleasure in us [the saints] dying than in killing the incorrigibly wicked. That may seem ironic or paradoxical. But, He knows in our next waking moment we will be resurrected into the God family having passed our judgment. He takes great pleasure in that. This gives you a better understanding of death to God. For His saints, death is a good thing. It may not feel good, it may not seem good for our relatives and friends, but in the grand scheme of things, the death of the saints is awesomely good because they have made it, and their judgment is over. Here comes the good times in the Kingdom of God!

I want you to see, directly in the context of the fire of the Day of Judgment, that God does not want anybody to be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

II Peter 3:7, 9 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition [destruction] of ungodly men. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

How patient God is with us, giving us every chance to repent! He pleads with us to accept His way of life, and reap the benefits of eternal life in His Kingdom, because His way is so much better. He says, "Turn, turn, turn Oh house of Israel!" This is the spiritual house of Israel (Galatians 6:16). "Repent, and enter my Kingdom," He says.

But then, there is another hand on that. I keep going back and forth on this because I want you to see the goodness and the severity of God. It is all part and parcel of this idea of the Last Great Day, the second resurrection, the third resurrection, and the second death. There is goodness and severity with God. You have to take one with the other, because He is God.

God can soberly assess human nature. He sent His Son as a man so He would have a better grasp of our nature, and the difficulties that we have both physically and

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spiritually. Jesus Christ our judge knows the depths of evil to which man can fall. He did not experience them Himself, but He was sure tempted by them. Satan made sure of that. He soberly knows that some will sear their consciences, and be absolutely unable to repent. They will reject God out of hand. He knows that.

It grieves Him, I am sure, because He wants all to come to repentance. But, He must make provision for that. He has already told us that at least two men, potential sons of God, will be cast into the Lake of Fire—the Beast, and the False Prophet. He has already lost them. So, why would a merciful, loving, totally good God consign people to the flames of *gehenna* fire? It is because God is not only a God of mercy, but He is also a God of justice.

I am still answering this lady's questions.

One of God's titles is Lawgiver. There are three parts to law as I see it. First is the statement of the law's properties. "You shall love the Lord with all your might, etc." That is the law. Second, there is a reward for obeying it. "I will bless you. You will live long in the land. I will give you eternal life," etc. That is the reward. But, the third part of law is the penalties for infraction. "If you do not do this, I will curse you. If you disobey, you shall surely die," etc.

Now, as lawgiver, God functions in three different areas. He is legislator—creator. He is the executive—He enforces the law. And, He is judge. He is all three. We have separated them in our country's government, but God functions as all three—legislator, executive, and judge. Human governments make laws that they never enforce. But, God is not human. Every one of His laws He enforces—strictly.

Can you image if God did not enforce His laws? Can you imagine the chaos that would ensue on earth and the whole universe if He did not enforce His physical laws? What if gravity was no longer in force? What if He no longer sustains His creation by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3)? We would all fly off. There would be nothing to hold us here. What about inertia? What about friction?

Thankfully, God does not allow that to happen. He enforces all the laws exactly as He intended them to be enforced. He is such a stickler for justice that He will not allow even Himself to forgive and forget our sins unless there is something to cover them. His Son volunteered to come to this earth and pay the penalty for us. And once we accept that, then our sins can be forgiven, because there is a substitutionary sacrifice that covers our sins.

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Do not think that the laws of God are done away with because we come under Christ's blood. He paid the penalty for us in our stead, and God's sense of justice was satisfied. Do you understand what I am getting at? God is a perfect executive over His law. He enforces them all. And this has to do with this—the idea of the third resurrection.

Some will not accept the blood of Jesus Christ to cover their sins, unfortunately, and some will not allow God to substitute Christ's blood for them. They will reject it out of hand. They will have seared their consciences and be unable to repent. They will stubbornly refuse to love God, and to live righteously.

God's perfect sense of justice demands that He apply the penalty for sin—death. And since some will reject this offer of salvation, His perfect sense of justice demands that He cast them into the Lake of Fire to suffer the second, eternal death. That is the way that the system works.

He would not be God if He did not follow through with His purpose exactly. This is sobering. But, it fits perfectly with what we know of God. He does not treat sin lightly at all like men do. He is dead serious about it. He is second-death serious about it.

What if He did not do this? What if He let the incorrigibly wicked just remain dead? What if He just let them remain dead and not resurrect them to the Lake of Fire? What if He would just go to the place where He stores the spirits of men, and just delete them forever? What would that do?

Do you know what nihilism is? In layman's terms, this is the philosophical idea that man's existence is senseless, and useless. There is no reason for existence. There is no life before life—like the people who believe in reincarnation believe. And, there is no life after death—like most Christians believe. There is nothing. We were not. We are. We will not be.

This is so different from what God says. He was, He is, and He will always be. These people only believe in the now. When we die, there is nothing. We return to the ground, and that is the end.

Do you know how most of these people live who believe in nihilism? One extreme is, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." "Wine, women, and song—that is all there is." "Sex, drugs, and Rock and Roll." "We might as well live it up now. There is no tomorrow. Ethics, and morality mean absolutely nothing because there is no Higher Power. There is no reason to live. We are not responsible, or accountable to anything. So, hey! Whoop it up! Try everything once. It could only kill us."

The other extreme is very fatalistic, gloomy, dark, and depressed like a Herman Hefsa book. It is because they have no future, they are morose. "There is nothing to live for. Why am I here? Let's die." "We are of men most miserable."

These types often turn to the occult, because they see some spiritualism that they lack from the natural world. Often they turn to dark deeds because of futile depression and desperation. Some, after doing incredible, unspeakably evil things, commit suicide out of despair. Life is not a sport to them, but death.

If God did not apply the punishment for infractions of His law, one could, like the nihilists, do terribly wicked acts against others, or yourself, and keep the hangman away. You could kill yourself, and that would be it. You would be dead forever. You lived it up. You had your fun. Now it is over. Okay. I will not have to pay for any of it.

One could get away with murder—literally—or any other type of sin.

If a person could die, knowing that he would never have to pay for any of his crimes, how many would take this route? My own idea is that many would do so, knowing what human nature is, and how we have the proclivity to follow our flesh into doing what we want. Would that be fair, especially to those who have struggled and fought and persevered against their human nature to gain eternal life?

The people who struggled could say to God, "Why did I try so hard? I could have made my life a whole lot easier by not paying so much attention to keeping Your law, if You are not going to enforce it. If I had known that You were not going to punish people for breaking your commandments, I would have rested on my laurels a whole lot more!"

So, in answer to the lady's question, God must resurrect the wicked so that justice will be met. It shows equality and fairness to all. He must raise them from the dead so that justice can be done. Otherwise, what deterrent is it to us?

Back to our original question: Are there positive effects to the third resurrection? Do we derive any benefit at all from the fact that God has decided that the Lake of Fire is a necessary part of His plan? I have pulled out two primary benefits that derive from this great Day of Judgment. We will call one the current benefit, and the other one the future benefit.

The first one, the current benefit, has value to us immediately, right now, as a deterrent. The criminal justice system in America, and a lot of the western world, does not believe in deterrents at all. They may give lip service to the idea, but it really is not there.

No threat of punishment makes criminals have any second thoughts about breaking the law, even in capital cases. Inmates on death row live anywhere up to 15 or 20 years waiting execution at government expense. We spend \$30,000 per year on each criminal—that is their living expenses. I am not counting all their legal expenses they get free of charge while these extended appeals, which are often mandatory, take place. This is ridiculous. There is no deterrence whatsoever to commit a capital crime.

Light sentences do not deter either. Have you taken a look at prison life lately? Now, there are bad prisons. I do not want to give you the impression that they are all posh. But, they have things that people on the street do not have. They have three square meals a day. They have a roof over their head. They have jobs. They have recreation. They have a weight room. Some were reticent about putting these weight rooms in prisons because they were bulking up, and after being released, resorting to more physical crimes. They were able to do worse muggings because in prison they pumped it up.

They have libraries—extensive legal libraries. These guys go into the prisons as high school or junior high school dropouts, but they come out lawyers, basically. And they get free medical care. Would you not rather be in jail? Many would! Many would rather be in jail than on the street. Did you know that the life span of someone in jail is longer than the life span of a gang member? I do not know if it crosses their minds, but once they are in jail, they are living high in comparison to what they had before. Maybe they do not have the freedoms, but they have more basics, and very little worry.

But, God is a great believer in deterrence! If you read the Old Testament, and read the penal laws, you will find that there is almost no imprisonment—as we define imprisonment. If you count the cities of refuge, that is a type of imprisonment, but they were free to move around within the walls of the city until the high priest died.

Do you know what God's punishments are? Stoning, thrusting through with a dart, hanging by his neck until dead—all depending on the infraction. All punishments in ancient Israel were brutal, swift—almost immediate—and public, so all the people, young and old, would see and know what this guy got for his infraction of the law. And they were final. That is a deterrent!

People say that God's punishments are cruel. But do you know what these punishments did? They kept the crime rate way down. And God was establishing back then that there are penalties for the breaking of law. He wanted his servants—the kings, judges, and prophets—to enforce them.

The Lake of Fire provides the same kind of deterrent for us. It is a scary thought. Paul gives us a taste of it:

Hebrews 10:26-31 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain [certain!] fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

He pulls no punches with us. He set his deterrents out in front of our face, and says to us, "You do not want this, so do it My way." Paul does not stop there because these Hebrews were very much in danger of letting it all slip away. And he did not hold back one bit because he wanted them in God's kingdom, just like God does.

Hebrews 12:25-29 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain [and we want to be among those who cannot be shaken]. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

I ran across something on the internet about six months ago. And it had to do with this verse, "For our God is a consuming fire." And the guy's theory was that, "I think Satan has put into the minds of his people in his churches that hell is fire—the ever-burning hell."

God is fire! God is a consuming fire! Satan so utterly hates God that he has foisted upon

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mankind the image that God is hell. It is just a thought.

Supposedly, what He tells His people that we will do nothing—just sitting on our cloud, strumming our harp while looking into the face of Himself—beatific vision anyone?

That is not God's way! God is a consuming fire! God's chariot is fire. His face is like a burning fire. Light beams from Him, like fire, like the strength of the sun—which is all fire.

Fire has a destructive quality, and a very beneficial quality. What would we do without it? It is the goodness and the severity of God—a consuming fire.

We have learned that the fear of God—godly fear—runs the gamut from awe of Him all the way through to sheer terror, so much so that Isaiah's knees quaked, and his bowels were loosed, and he was so terrified.

On the other hand, we revere Him as our Father. And this fear of God we find in Proverbs 9:10 is the beginning of wisdom. Because we have these feelings for Him which run from awe to sheer terror, we will do what is right. That is wisdom—doing right. Wisdom is not intellect. Wisdom is not knowledge, or understanding something. Wisdom is the right and proper application of knowledge and understanding.

Our respect for God, our awe of Him, and our fear of Him, His might and wrath, should convince us to conduct our lives according to His rules.

God does not shy away from the fear tactic. "Sinners in the hand of an Angry God," said Jonathan Edwards. And God uses that tack every once in a while if we need it.

II Peter 3:10-12 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Are your toes beginning to burn? What sort of people should we be?

II Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent

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to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

He is going to use the method that is going to produce His result—entrance into His kingdom. And if He has to scare you witless, then He will do it. He wants you there. He loves you that much. He does not scare us out of wanting to scare us like He has some appetite for vengeance. He does it because He loves us and wants us there.

I know, there are times with my children, I have had to scare the living daylights out of them just to get them to stop doing something. They were not listening. I suppose I do not do it the way that God does it, but sometimes if you yell at them loud enough, they wake up. I do not do that all the time. There is a proper balance of all these measures that we can take to make our children, and ourselves, to wake up to what God is doing, and what God's purpose is.

Fear of God, fear of eternal punishment, must be among the factors that motivate us to continue toward the Kingdom of God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Otherwise, we have discounted the power of Almighty God. We deny Him, and that is a dangerous thing to do.

The future benefits are much nicer.

Revelation 21:1-8 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts [John 7:37-39]. He who

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overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

What is the future benefit? The Lake of Fire will rid the Kingdom of God of every last vestige of sin, evil, wickedness, perversion, disagreement, curse, and death. It will scour the earth of the dregs of mankind, and do away with them eternally. And, there will be no more pain, no more sin, and nothing that causes weeping, or death.

We have no earthly idea of what this will be like. We live saturated in it every day. It is incomprehensible to think about what the world, the universe, our lives could be without sin, and curse, and death.

Think of it—no more Satan. God will have effectively wiped him from the universe. He will be there, but he will be imprisoned eternally. No more demons around. No more evil leaders of nations. No more Hitler-types. No more perverts lurking in the parks. No more thugs waiting to mug you on your way home as you walk down the street. No more drug dealers. No more serial killers. No more con-men preying on the elderly and their pensions and retirement incomes. No more evil influences to worry about forever.

What a blessing that will be! The burden of sin, and evil, and death, and curse, will be gone. It will be a fading memory. I am sure that once we get out there a couple thousand years into eternity, we are not even going to think about it anymore. We will not even remember it just like God does not remember it. We will just put it out of our minds, and live forever without it.

Revelation 21:27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Only the good guys! There will be only white hats in God's kingdom.

Zephaniah 3:14-15 Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall see disaster no more.

Is that not wonderful? After what has happened to the church of God, all these terrible sins that we are being confronted within ourselves, all the disasters and curses that come as a result of all that will be no more. Our God and King will be among us, and there will be no more evil, no more worry, no more fear, and no more uncertainty. Just think of the progress we can make in this world if we did not have to think about the things going wrong.

What if businesses like insurance companies did not have to factor fraud, or even disaster into their rates? There would not be insurance companies if there were no disasters anymore.

What if we did not need the police or the military? How many billions of dollars would that put into the national treasury every year if we did not have to supply those forces? What if there were no jails? No hospitals? No ghettos? No neutral zones? No buffer zones? No battlefields? No cemeteries? Think of all the space and time and beauty that could be here!

We have a hard time imagining these things. We just do not understand a world totally without sin, curse, and death.

But, all these things await us hopefully just a few years away. And, as immortal spirit beings changed at the first resurrection, the Millennium will fly right by, and we will have this time of the Great White Throne Judgment, and then all of eternity without these curses, pain, and weeping. That is something to really look forward to.

But, we are the ones now who are under judgment, just like they will be under their judgment in the Great White Throne Judgment.

The apostle Peter says:

I Peter 4:17-18 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

We are under judgment now, and Peter says that we are scarcely going to make it. Sobering is it not? We are not perfect. This is our Great White Throne Judgment. The Judge is sitting on that throne right now for us.

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And the verdict will either be eternal life, or eternal death. There is no middle ground. And you are the one who will determine what that judgment will be—by your works.

II Peter 1:1-12 Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature [becoming God], having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust [we coming out of the world getting rid of sin]. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours [in you] and abound [they grow], you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted [not seeing the end], even to blindness [Laodicean], and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins [trampling the blood of Christ under foot]. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent [and urgent] to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.