

## WHEN AND HOW GOD PUNISHES

When and how God punishes is a topic that gets a lot of discussion today. Does God punish people today? It depends on what kind of church you have grown up in or your knowledge of God that you have your opinion. For instance, if you grew up in a very harsh family or a church that was very legalistic, then you are taught God is vindictive. In fact, Jonathan Edwards, years and years ago, wrote a great sermon called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". People who attend a church that does not require from their members tend to think God would not send anybody to hell. Everybody is going to go to heaven. It is kind of a wishy-washy type of Christianity. However, God does discipline and God does punish. The Bible says that He does. He does it in a deliberate way which will straighten you out and make you a better person. Your path straightens out. I belong to a church that I think they do discipline the right way, they certainly do it biblically. They will definitely call people to task if they have done something that they should not have done. But there is compassion in it. I see that. I think they do it God's way. They correct someone and then they make sure they get proper counseling. They stay with them, they do not abandon them. When they are restored, they let everybody know they are restored, and God has won again. I personally think it is a great way to be.

I am not too interested in that harsh, mean, vindictive God. I just do not think it is God. However, the Old Testament is full of God punishing people. You might say, "Why would God do that? I mean, it is right there in the Bible, Betty. Read it. He did do it. But if you read it carefully, you discover the people were stubborn and would not listen. No matter how much God warned them and said put away your idols, they did not do it. No matter how much He said when you go in to the Promised Land, do not inter-marry, they did it anyway. Their kings did it, their queens did it; they worshipped idols and they were not willing to listen to God. God gave them warning after warning. He sent His prophets to them. He sent events to them. And they never would repent. God gave them space to repent. The Bible says that God is not a respecter of persons. Recently a man fell from a great place in a world government situation. One of the articles I read about this man falling said that he thought he was above the law. He thought all the rules and regulations applied to everyone but him and that he could do it the way he wanted to do it. For a while, he got away with it. However, when he fell, it was publically and everybody knew what really happened.

Have you ever read what it says about teachers in the book of James? Teachers need to be very careful about their lives, because they will receive a greater punishment when they do wrong. I know that is true. God is going to punish sin anywhere it is found. Do not make the mistake of saying that it has not happened yet so maybe I am getting away with it. No, you are not. You are not. God is warning you. Stop it. Stop it. Even world leaders, even government leaders think they can get away with it. Even the ones that do not believe in God think they can get away with it. Yet God is giving, even them, time to repent, correct things and to change their mind. When you hear about it in America, especially in the media, they call it hell-fire-and-damnation talk. Immediately that person is not to be listened to. The truth is, folks, hell is real. It is going on right now. Heaven is going on right now. Earth is going on right now. And hell is going on right now.

My friend Bill Weiss says when God allowed him to see hell, he saw billions of people there. I said, "Bill, I listened to your tape, and I watched when you were on television. One place you said millions and one place you said billions. Which was it?" He said it was billions. I said, "Why did not you say that in the other one?" He said, "I did not think people would believe me. There were billions there." He said, "In hell you have heightened understanding, and I do not know how you have it, but you have it. And one thing I knew was, out of the billions of people in hell, not one of them could say that God did not give me a chance. Not one." Nobody can say God did not give me a chance and look where I ended up. That is what I am trying to tell you. When you are doing wrong, God is going to warn you so many different ways, you are going to have to stumble all over it. In fact, I heard a person say one time, if you end up in hell, you are going to have stepped over a lot of bodies that laid down in front of you to try to keep you from going there.

In the Bible in Galatians 6:7, it says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked." What a man sows, that is what he is going to reap. If you sow sin, you sow destruction. If you sow hate, you sow bad things. Why would you think you are going to get something good? Even if it looks like you are getting away with it, you are not. God is not mocked. He is so much bigger than we are. He is not going to be mocked by

some man that thinks they can get away with it because they are so powerful. The world is full of men who thought that was true and look where they are now. Whatever you sow you are going to reap. Think about it. Common sense tells you that. If you sow cotton seed, what are you going to get? Cotton. If you sow apple seeds, what are you going to get? Apples. The amazing thing about apple seeds is that one seed when you get an apple tree from it and then you look at all of those apples you get hundreds of seeds and so much of the time you sow seeds and they multiply. So you want to be sowing good seeds. You want that kind of multiplication working in your life. You want the blessing of God on your life. If there is something that you are doing and you know God is telling you, do not do this, I do not like it, do not do it. Pay attention, before it is too late. Pay attention. God is trying to warn you, do not do it. Instead, make a big turn in your life. Turn around. Sometimes the people who are the strongest sinners, the biggest sinners can turn around and be the biggest Christians. You can do that.

How do I know that? Look at the apostle Paul. He said, "I was the chief of sinners. I was out there chasing down Christians taking them out of their homes, throwing them in jail. I held the coat of Stephen while he was being stoned for believing in Jesus." Then he had a dramatic encounter with the living Jesus, the living God. Jesus said, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" He said, "Who are you Lord?" He said, "I am Jesus." It changed his life. He made a big turn around and he became so sincere for God and you can do that too. You might even be there sitting there thinking, what if it did not stick? It can.

When I was in Africa this last time, we had a van we had to rent because our team was so large. And there was a driver. Somehow in all of the stuff going on, I did not realize he just came with the van. I thought he was a member of the church, and he was just driving us around to all of these places. At some point in that trip people came up to me and said, "You need to witness to Emmanuel, he's not saved." I said, "Oh, okay." Because I sat up there by him every day and we would talk away. Remember now, I am still thinking he's just a member of the church and he must not be living for God. So I am just talking to him about Jesus and his relationship with Jesus and all of the sudden he says, "I need to talk to you, privately. Could we do that?" I still do not know if he is a member of the church. And I said sure. So we sat on the edge of a porch at a building and we talked about God. He said, "I need to tell you something. I haven't lived a good life. I have done a lot of things that there is no way the church would think was good. I do not know if I want to give it up. I need to be honest with you. I do not know if I want to give it up." I said, "Let me tell you. It will never turn out for good. I do not care if it feels like fun now, but the Bible says there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is death."

One way God punishes is letting sin itself punish you. God does not have to. It has its own punishment. If you do it, you are going to be sorry. If you do drugs long enough you will become addicted. It will ruin your life. If you drink and are an alcoholic long enough, it will steal everything from you; kids, family, job, finances and everything. Sin has its own payday. I said to this man, Emmanuel, "Let me tell you, it is a good life and you ought to know Jesus, he's wonderful." He replied, "Let me go home and think about it." I said, "You could pray right now if you want to." He said, "No, I want to go home and think. I want to think about it. My wife is a real strong Christian. Actually she likes to go to church all the time. I do not like it. I do not want to go." I said, "It is because you are not a real Christian." When you get saved and you become really committed to Jesus you cannot get enough of Church. You cannot get enough of the Bible. It is wonderful. He said, "I still want to go home and think about it." He came back the next day. I said, "Do you want to talk about it?" "Uh-huh." I said, "What do you think about it?" He said, "Well, I talked to the Lord and I said help me be a good person." I said, "Emmanuel, I am not talking about that. I am talking about being born again. I am talking about a new life, a complete change." And he prayed that prayer. I want you to think about what he said next in terms of what we are talking about today. He said, "If I do this, what do I have to do to be sure I keep it?" I said, "You've got to be in a good church. You have to read the Bible and get growth from that. You also have to get good Christian friends that keep you strong in the Lord." He said, "Okay, I just want to know." So here is a man living a real life. He has been living a way that I am sure if we had had enough time he could have said, "Yes, I know when God was talking to me. I know when God was warning me. I know how close I came." Then God sent me all the way to Africa to meet him and talk to him. And God will do that for you. Look around. Do you think that you have pushed God too far? Have I gone too far? Well, just be careful that you have not.

A man asked a preacher about God and sin. He said, "What about God and sin?" And the preacher said, "He's agin' it." God is against sin, is He not? Why does God warn you to stay away from things? Why does he allow things to happen that shake you up and get your attention? Why does he do that? He warns you because sin is poison. It kills you. It destroys you. It is never good. I do not care if it is fun.

Eventually, it is not. Eventually you are sorry you did it. I know the stuff I have done that I am sorry. That is the truth.

What about the correction of God? How was it in the Old Testament? We talked about it said, I am a God and I am tired of this and this is what is going to happen. Do we have any examples in the Old Testament of people who should have even punished their children the right way, they did not and what happened? In fact, we have two great stories of that. The first one is King David. King David wrote the book of Psalms. He did so much good. He is one of the heroes of the Bible. But one of the little known facts about David is that he did not discipline his children. He did not punish them. He did not correct them. He did not do it. And what happened to those boys? Most of them did really bad things. One of them, Absalom, was so beautiful and handsome. When he walked in the room everybody noticed him.

The Bible says David could not correct him. Why do you think he could not? Have you ever thought about that? I think maybe he felt so guilty over his start with Bathsheba so he thought, who am I to tell him anything? He should have said, I learned my lesson and I am going to make sure my children do not make the same mistake. He was a great warrior. He knew God's rules. He knew what God wanted. He carried that out against all of God's enemies, but he would not do it with his own children. Am I talking about being very harsh with your children? Absolutely not. I am talking about God's kind of discipline and how God punishes. Who else in the Old Testament was not disciplined the right way? Sampson. Do you remember that story? That little couple wanted a child so badly and they got Sampson. He was handsome and had this long hair that was so beautiful. Somewhere along the way, he started being attracted to the wrong kind of girl. He liked those wild girls. He liked those girls that were living over there in that other town. Hey, let's go check them out. He got sucked by a woman named Delilah. It cost him everything. It cost him his eyesight. His eyes were put out by his enemies. There was a tremendous punishment for his sin. However, he repented. Have you ever read the end of that? It is in the book of Judges. If you read that, Sampson said, "Oh, Lord, I am so sorry would you give me one more chance to destroy your enemies, the Philistines?" God gave him his strength back and he did it. God still had vengeance on His enemies.

We want to be able to judge like God does. I want to tell you something about how I have seen God do it. Maybe you have a different story. But I have seen this with people. It is like God warns you and you hear it, but you do not want to quit. There is this circle of grace that God has. But because of your choice, and only because of your choice, the circle gets a little smaller and there is not as much grace. You keep doing your stuff, and God comes to you and he warns you again. You still do not want to quit. The circle gets smaller. Each time it gets smaller until it gets to the place in Proverbs where it says, there is a place where that is it. A man is broken and he will never be what he was before. I think that we can see that. I think we can see it with some of the evangelists in recent years who have sinned and God had warned them.

How does God judge? I want you to get a balanced view of God. I want you to understand there is a God of mercy, compassion, tenderness and love for you. But there is a God that has rules. He has set up the rules for this world whether anybody believes it or not. In fact, the way the world is going in the last days before Jesus comes back it says there will be a great falling away from God. It says that people will have sexual sin and say, "What's wrong with that?" It says they will lie, cheat and steal. It will be like in the days of Lot, which was Sodom and Gomorrah. It will be like in the days of Noah where people were marrying, going about their business and there was that crazy guy building that boat. He was saying it was going to rain and it had never rained. God was warning, warning, warning and they did not listen; and that circle was getting smaller and smaller.

Look at Hebrews 12:6 in your Bible. "My dear child, do not shrug off God's discipline. But do not be crushed by it either. It is the child he loves that he disciplines." We are like that as parents. I can remember going to a conference on raising children when I was a young mother. And I went up to this man that was teaching on disciplining your children and he said, he was telling us how to do it. And I went up and I said, "Could I ask you a question? I am having a real hard time when I have to spank my child. It just kills me. Just tears me up." He said, "What's your goal?" I said, "What?" He said, "Well, what's your goal?" I said, "Well, really good children." He said, "Then keep your eye on your goal." And that is good.

For the young mothers watching this show, I want to give you a real quick way of disciplining your children. When your children are doing something over and over and over, it is easier to break that stuff in them when they are young than when they are older. Just sit down with them, eye to eye, and say, "I

do not want you doing this. When you do this in the future, I will discipline you. Do you understand?" Make sure they understand. Then they will go do something and do it again. You sit them down, and it needs to be eye to eye, and you need to say, "What did you do?" They do not want to tell you because they know if they tell you, they are going to get in trouble. "What did you do?" And, finally, they will tell you. "And what did I tell you I was going to do if you did that?" Waaaa. And they tell you, whatever it was you said. Spank them, whatever. And then you spank them. It is hard, yes, but the Proverb that I had to go by was, "Discipline your son in his youth and do not let your soul spare for his crime". So you spank them. When you get through, whatever your discipline was for them, you put your arms around them and you love them. You say, "I love you when you are good, and I love you when you are bad. I love you, but I want you to be a good boy. That is why this is like this." One time when my son was about four years old, he was in the bathtub. I heard him in there and I said, "What's wrong." He said, "I was just thinking about how you said that thing about how you love me; that you love me when I am bad, and you love me when I am good. Well, I still wish you did not love me so much." I thought that was really funny. But, I have good kids.

If God is going to discipline you, and if He has a method to it, what is the method? How does he do it? First of all, you need to know he has a definite purpose in why He is doing it. What is it? Is it to get you to listen better? Is it to get you to be obedient quicker? Is it to get you to turn from ways that you are so sure your right? What is it? Maybe it is even a family sin that is been passed down generation after generation. Your family does it so much that everybody in your family does it. So, it is just there and you think its part of life. Another part of how God does it is that it will produce growth in you. Read Hebrews. It produces a quiet growth in grace, in your character. It says it in James, too. But there is another thing, it is necessary for promotion. One day recently, I was kind of griping to the Lord, "Lord, the devil's just doing this. I know this is the devil just driving me crazy." I heard the Lord say to me, "You better learn how to handle it or you cannot go up higher." Now that was a little, tiny correction. See, God sends those tiny corrections. If you are sensitive and listening, you do not have to have a big correction.

In Hebrews 12:7 it says that God is educating you. That is why you must never drop out. He is treating you as dear children. This trouble you are in isn't punishment, its training; the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents would leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? Now that is a good question, is it not? Because have you ever seen irresponsible parents and they do not discipline their children? And you think, oh my goodness, somebody needs to get ahold of that kid. Well, that is what it is. Here is another scripture, Hebrews 12:10, think about how God is doing what is best for us. He is training us to live God's holy best. At the time, discipline is not much fun. Now that is an understatement. It always feels like it is going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off. It pays off handsomely. For it is the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God. In fact, if you do not see God's discipline going on in your life, do you really belong to God? You may think you are fine because you are going to church, doing all this stuff and He does not seem to get mad at you. You need to be checking up. Maybe you are not a real Christian. Maybe you are just kidding yourself.

How are the ways that God sends these warnings to you? One way is the leaders over you see things that you cannot see in yourself. Another way you get warnings is from your friends. Do you have really good friends who will speak truth into your life? You know they love you and they are not after you. They may tell you something that you need to deal with. Bosses, co-workers, even the heathen can correct you. That is what tickles me is when some person who does not know God, says something to you; and in your heart you think, that is God talking to me. I know it is.

There is another way you can learn where you do not have to go through that. Punishment that sin brings from watching foolish people and what happens to them when they do foolish things. You can learn that way, where you do not even have to go through it yourself. How does it make you feel when God disciplines you? Pain, embarrassment, dismay; makes you want to withdraw, suck your thumb and feel depressed. You have to be careful so that you do not get angry, defensive and want to blame others. Do not pull others down with you and say, "Well, they're doing it, too. Do something about them." God said, "No, I am talking to you." You wish it had not happened, but what should you do in this situation to stop all of this? Get honest. Admit, you are right, God, I am wrong. I repent. You know you can just drop to your knees in the middle of your kitchen and say, "I repent."

You can praise God that He loves you enough to do it. You can thank God that He did it. Now that is a hard thing to do. Thank you, God. But when you see that quiet growth and character afterwards or that change in your life or you are out of that horrible sin thing you were involved in, you can thank God that

He did it. So take it seriously. You can feel those nudges. Make up your mind; I am going to change. I am going to change. And you can. You can. Listen to the voice of God today. He is talking to you.

#### QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. Why did God punish people in the Old Testament?
2. In what manner does God punish? What attributes do you see in Scripture?
3. What does God do before He punishes people?
4. How are God's warnings sent to us?
5. What should your response be to punishment from God?
6. What does God's punishment produce in you?
7. Why is God's punishment necessary?

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