

Part A, Part B, Part C

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C-3: A Word of Comfort

After all this talk so far about judgment and punishment, it would be easy to get rattled or fearful - and to lose one's perspective about the nature of God. Much of the focus in this study has zeroed in on the “tough love” side of God's nature. But it is well to keep in mind His tender, merciful side:

“As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:13-14) Christ exhorted His followers, “Come to Me... I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light... “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Matthew 11:28-30, Luke 12:32) “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)

When life seems to go awry, there is no need to catastrophize. But this could be a warning signal - that nagging feeling we sense sometimes that something is amiss; and it can be our lifesaver, prodding us towards renewal and getting back on track - now in this life rather than procrastinating it into the next.

But no matter what we think about ourselves or how poorly we may think we've scored, it is helpful to keep in mind that each one of us is loved individually by God; each of us is extraordinary and special to Him.

(Message from Jesus:) You are the reason for My existence. I love you as if you were the only one. You're not lost in a faceless crowd

called humanity. You're not just one of the billions, but you are special and unique to Me. I know and love you as an individual. I died for you personally, so that you could experience My love, so that we could be forever one. ("True Love - Forever Love!", article published during the *Jesus Revolution*)

Some will have to spend time in the outer fringes, in the "detention houses" of the Kingdom... which might even seem like hell in heaven - for a time at least. Yet, knowing how much Christ loves us, His creations, we can be confident that whatever correction some of us may have to endure in the Afterlife will be carried out in a loving atmosphere.

The comparison was made earlier that certain levels in the Kingdom could be like reformatories on Earth - environments where a "tough love" atmosphere is maintained and designed to help wayward teenagers or adults recover from bad habits and ways of thinking. Eventually, they are ready to enter society as responsible citizens; or in this case, to enter the heavenly Kingdom and partake more fully of its blessings and privileges.

Even in this life we may recall such experiences. When we are undergoing a period of re-training, correction, or rehabilitation in our personal lives, it is difficult. But when we know the Lord, we can always sense the comfort of His presence... and the knowledge too that it is *"for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness"* and that *"afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness"* (Hebrews 12:10-11)

And likely, none of us will be exempt from some correction in the Afterlife; we all have things to learn. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."* (2 Corinthians 5:10) But *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* (Revelation 7:17, 21:4)

So these Scriptures about shame and disgrace (and to some extent *"outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth"*) can be applied to God's people. But they are meant as a warning, just as a loving father warns his children against bad behavior and the consequences. This inspires a healthy fear and respect, knowing that our Heavenly Father loves us enough to chastise us when we need it.

"These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may remain in you,

and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11) Jesus said this to His disciples, knowing that their joy would be short-lived if they did not continue to ***“abide in the Vine”*** and let Him do the needed pruning in their lives. (15:4)

In our earthly penal systems, the threat of jail and punishment has deterred many a would-be criminal from wandering down the wrong path. And would not God in His great love also seek to deter His people from unfruitful paths of lethargy and disobedience? He offers them the blessing of chastisement - not to make life difficult, but to make their lives, both now and in the Hereafter, happier and more blessed. ***“Whom the LORD loves He chastens... Now no chastening seems to be joyful... nevertheless , afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”*** (Hebrews 12:6,11)

A little note here about this word ***“chasten”***: As used in both Old and New Testaments, it emphasizes the instruction and training aspect of correction, not just the punishment side of it and can be translated as ***“instruct, teach, correct”***. As with our children when they are naughty, we don't throw them out of the house. We love them, try to correct them, and they remain our beloved children.

But of course, when our children are naughty, then we, as responsible and loving parents, have to discipline (or chasten) them. We make them sit in a corner, deprive them of their privileges or rewards. In other words, we ***“punish”*** them - but the punishment is for a purpose, and the aim is to restore the child to a pattern of good behavior and acceptance into our fellowship.

If we in the earthly realm have the wisdom, capacity, and compassion to properly discipline our naughty children so that they will turn into law-abiding future citizens, how much more is God willing to go to the trouble to discipline His wayward children and bring them into a state of blessedness. ***“As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.”*** (Psalm 103:13)

So even if we have to ***“sit in the corner”*** for awhile and endure ***“shame and everlasting disgrace”***, this need not be as permanent a condition as the English translation would suggest. (And this will be the subject of the

next chapter.) It is “*everlasting*” in that it happens in the Unseen Realm and will last for an unknown period of time. Once we can accept and learn whatever is needed, then God in His mercy will restore us to a state of well-being and peace (even if it seems to take “forever” for that to happen).

Continue to **C-4: What does the Bible Really Mean by “*Everlasting Punishment... Forever and Ever*”?**