



We can't ignore it - words that are found in no less a place than the 10 commandments: "I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation." (Exodus 20:5). Thomas Jefferson referred to these words as "contrary to every principle of moral judgment."

Suppose there is a woman who loves God with all her heart, mind and soul. She loves her neighbor as she loves herself. She gives of her time and resources for the poor. She selflessly cares for others and with no desire to receive credit or praise. Yet, her great-grandfather was a cruel man who hated both God and his neighbor. Would God punish this woman for the sins of her great-grandfather?

The subject of punishment is one of the most important subjects of all because of the implications about God's character. Does God impose an extrinsic punishment for sin?

While I was in Las Vegas recently I observed hundreds of people lined along "the strip" who were passing out cards that had the picture of a naked woman on one side, on the other a phone number that allowed you to have her delivered to your hotel room. What I found interesting though was a smaller group of individuals passing out cards that said, "Repent and turn from your sins. Otherwise, it's Hell to pay!"

Christians typically describe sinful behaviors as something that should be avoided primarily because God says so and because God will one day punish you for it. In other words, "sin is bad because God doesn't like it." While it's clear that God doesn't like sin, isn't this the case because sin inherently destroys his children?

Imagine that this were the reputation of doctors towards smokers: "What's really bad about smoking is that it angers doctors. Doctors, in their wrath, will cause painful cancer in those who smoke." If that were believed, wouldn't the reputation of doctors be so tarnished they would be the last person a smoker would ever want to see? If this was the settled belief in the world about physicians, it would be an absolute necessity to have a campaign that reaches people with the message, "Smoking Kills, Not Doctors!" And perhaps with a subtitle, "Doctors are there to heal and to help you to stop smoking."

Sadly, that is what has happened to God's reputation in the world. A 2006 study conducted by Baylor University showed that only 23% of individuals believed that God was benevolent or loving.

32% viewed God as authoritarian, 16% as critical, 24% as distant. Someday there should be a global campaign for God. A part of that message might include slogans such as, "Sin Kills"; "God is the Healer, not the Punisher." This Bible study seeks to understand how God punishes.

In the video below, Dr. Brad Cole narrates his powerpoint slide presentation.

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