

# Precepts

The wicked have laid a snare for me, Yet I have not strayed from Your precepts. Psalm 119:110

November 28, 2021

## Fate of the Wicked Part 3: No Future Punishment

In our first two articles in this series we started to consider what the Bible sets forth as the ultimate punishment of the wicked and the unsaved. We examined first the common, traditional view that the wicked and the unsaved will be eternally, consciously tormented in hell and found that this view does not stand up to the test of all Scripture. Next we examined the universalism view that the wicked and the unsaved will nevertheless be somehow finally, eternally redeemed by God and found that this view does not stand up to the test of all Scripture either. Next we will consider the third view of the ultimate punishment of the wicked, which is that their end comes the instant they die with no future punishment whatsoever.

One view which some hold regarding the fate of the wicked says that when they die in this world, that is the end of them. They are never resurrected or returned to life to face any kind of trial or punishment for their iniquitous deeds. In other words, this view does not believe in future punishment at all, nor in the universality of resurrection. According to this view the wicked have already suffered their ultimate penalty by dying at the end of this life, and they will never rise to face any further judgment or punishment.

This view that the wicked dead will never face any further punishment might not be a familiar one to many. Yet for those among Acts 28 dispensationists it should be familiar as this view was purported by Oscar M. Baker, a noted proponent of the Acts 28 dispensational dividing line in the Midwestern United States. Mr. Baker was a follower of Charles Welch in the United Kingdom, who may not have exactly believed what Mr. Baker did but who at least made some statements leading in that same direction. Moreover this is the view that is generally held among the Jehovah's Witnesses. So it is certainly not without its proponents.

This view acknowledges that the soul is not immortal, which we have found through our studies of the subject to be true to the Bible and true to the truth. Yet this view takes this fact and extrapolates from it to teach that there is no future destiny, no judgment or punishment, for anyone but the saved. The unsaved have no future, but came to an end the instant they died and ended this life. Therefore this view must find a purpose for the lake of fire that does not involve the punishment of wicked men. Generally, then, they again make the lake of fire remedial, as the universalists do. Yet unlike the universalists, who would place the wicked in the lake of fire for punishment prior to their ultimate redemption, this view places unfaithful or wicked believers there, rather than unbelievers! By this view, then, believers who have lived an unworthy life are the ones who will be punished in the lake of fire before achieving their final salvation and reward.

Those who support this view run into a difficulty, since the Bible teaches that there is a resurrection both of the just and the unjust. Acts 24:15 makes this clear. **"I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust."** In order to escape such a clear statement, this view must interpret this verse as referring to two different classes of "saved" people: those who were faithful in their walk after salvation and those who were not. Those believers who were

unfaithful in their walk after salvation are made to be the unjust who will be raised according to this verse. Such unfaithful believers will then be punished before their ultimate salvation.

Now we must acknowledge that this view is not entirely wrong. It is true that not all believers are faithful in their walk. We certainly cannot deny this, nor can any of us rightfully deny that we do not always live up to the calling we have received. Yet the Bible is clear that God, the ultimate Judge, will make a determination regarding the service of believers, and whether they have served Him faithfully or not. It speaks clearly of reward for the faithful and loss for the unfaithful. II Timothy 2:12 is one example of this.

**12. If we endure,  
We shall also reign with Him.  
If we deny Him,  
He also will deny us.**

The ultimate test of a believer here is endurance. If we endure in following God, then we can expect to receive the reward of reigning with Him. If we deny Him in our lives, however, we will also be denied the reward of reigning with Him. I Corinthians 3:15 also speaks of loss for those believers who fail to live consistently with the calling they have received.

**15. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

This verse speaks of the judgment of every man's work. The fire of God's judgment will try it. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, yet that loss will not be the loss of his salvation. He will be saved, yet so as through fire. If anyone has had his house destroyed by fire and yet been saved from the fire himself, he will know that to be saved from a fire leaves you alive yet suffering loss. All his goods and possessions that were stored in the house are destroyed. He himself lived, but he suffered great loss. So it is true that there is loss to be experienced by believers who do poor work for the Master. Yet are such unfaithful believers really the "unjust" that Acts 24:15 is talking about?

The Bible clearly sets forth the idea that those who believe in Jesus Christ are made righteous in Him. This is plainly stated in Romans 3:22-23:

**21. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22. even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;**

God makes it clear that the righteousness of God is imputed for all and upon all those who believe. When one believes and is granted the righteousness that God gives freely to all those who believe, he ceases to be the unrighteous person he was before. Now, he is considered righteous in God's sight. Whatever kind of life he lives afterwards, whether it is worthy of what God has done for him or not, in God's sight he is now considered to be righteous. Moreover, no one else could be considered righteous. As God says in the very next verse, "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**" Romans 3:23. Therefore there are none righteous on their own. The only ones who are righteous are those who are in Christ. The only ones who are righteous are those to whom God has imputed righteousness. There are no other righteous ones at all.

This righteousness is entirely apart from the works or the good actions of the one who receives it. Instead, this righteousness is granted by God to all who believe. This is made clear in Romans 4:5-8:

**5. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, 6. just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:**

**7. “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
And whose sins are covered;**

**8. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”**

Thus the righteousness of God comes through faith and is imputed righteousness. There are no works that one can do to earn it. There are no works one can do to deserve it. Instead, one can only be blessed by God with this righteousness imputed to one whose lawless deeds are forgiven and his sins covered. How is it that God can thus impute righteousness to the unrighteous and sinlessness to the sinful? It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as we read in II Corinthians 5:21:

**21. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

In other words God placed our sin on Christ on the cross, God imputed our sin to His account, so that when He died we died and the penalty for our sin was paid for. When He was buried we were buried and our sin and guilt was buried with us in the grave, paying once for all the punishment for our wickedness. When He rose then, we rose too, and now can live in newness of life. Now His righteousness, for Christ is completely righteous and never did the slightest thing wrong, is placed on and imputed to us. We now have the same righteousness by imputation that He has in reality. We have the righteousness of God in Christ. This is the glorious truth Paul proclaims was true of him as well in Philipians 3:9.

**that I may gain Christ 9. and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;**

We do not have a righteousness that comes through keeping the law, through keeping all God’s rules and regulations. That righteousness was never good enough anyway, since we all are sinners no matter how well we keep God’s rules. Paul did keep God’s rules and laws at one time, but now he looked to a righteousness which was not his own but righteousness through faith in Christ. This was the righteousness the apostle Paul was trusting in, and this is the righteousness that those of us who are in Christ trust in as well.

Thus we understand that we who are believers in Christ are the righteous in God’s sight. Yet we need to understand that this means we are the “just” as well. The words “righteous” and “just” are the same word in Greek, the word *dikaiois*. Since, as we have just seen, those of us who believe in Jesus Christ are the righteous, it could hardly be that believers, even those who do not live as they ought to in Christ, could be the “unjust” that Acts 24:15 is speaking of when it says, **15. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.** It just does not make sense that Paul could call believers, who in Christ ARE the just, the “unjust.” This would make them the “unjust just,” which makes no sense. No, apart from Christ there is no true righteousness, and in Christ there is no such thing as being unrighteous. We might live unworthy of what we are in Christ, but we can no longer be unjust. Therefore the just and the unjust whom Paul is speaking of in Acts 24:15 are the saved and the unsaved, not the good saved and the bad saved.

Now those who teach no future punishment for the unsaved insist on the idea that, since the Bible teaches that death is the punishment for sin and since the unsaved have not been justified from their sin, then once they have died that means they have paid the penalty for their sin and they will never be raised from death to be judged any more. But the fact is that

we do not die for our own sins but for the sin of Adam. No person, no matter how good a believer he is or how righteous he is in Christ, is going to avoid dying in Adam, unless the Kingdom of God comes first. Moreover, Christ died to redeem all men from death in Adam, not just the saved. This is what we saw taught in Romans 5:18 which some take to teach universalism, but that we saw is truly talking about universal resurrection. **18. Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.**

The premise of those who teach no future punishment for the unsaved is that Christ's death is only for those who are justified by faith, and therefore that there is no justification to life for the unsaved. Yet Paul's statement in Romans is as universal as Adam's sin. All those who through the offense of the one man were condemned, and that is every last human being who ever lived, those same people are through the righteous act of the one Man Jesus Christ going to be justified from that condemnation and returned to life. All those who die in Adam are going to be raised in Christ. This is taught in the great resurrection chapter of I Corinthians 15.

**I Corinthians 15:22. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**

Those who teach no future punishment for the unsaved recognize the challenge this verse makes to their view. Their attempt to get out of it is to change the order of the words in this verse to make it read this instead, "For as all in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive." Then they say that this means that only those who are "in Christ" shall be made alive, just as only those "in Adam" die. Who are those who are "in Christ"? Only believers can truly claim to be "in Christ." Therefore they say that only believers are going to be made alive.

Yet this truly rewrites the verse. First of all it destroys the parallel, "in Adam all...in Christ all." The idea is that in Adam one thing happens to all, and in Christ another thing happens to the same "all." There are not two different "alls" in mind here. Moreover, while word order in Greek does not necessarily have the same significance or follow the same rules it does in English, that does not mean that word order in Greek is inconsequential and we can change it however we like. The word order in Greek is like this (when one Greek word is represented by more than one English word I have hyphenated them):

Just-as for (in Greek there is a rule that this word "for" can never be the first word in a sentence, even though we would put it first in English) in the Adam all are-dying, even-so also in the Christ all are-made-alive.

The word order in Greek here is significant. It is not all in Christ, but in Christ all. The two "alls" are the same. The same all who are dying in Adam will be made alive in Christ. This is not talking about those who are "in Christ" by faith, as those who believe in no future punishment would like us to believe. Yet though all who die in Adam are going to be raised and made alive in Christ, this does not mean they are automatically saved, for judgment follows all men after death, as Hebrews 9:27 tells us.

**27. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,**

Notice that this does not say that it is appointed to believers to die once but after this the judgment, but that it is appointed for men. This includes both the saved and the unsaved. The unsaved are not through death going to escape ever having to face God in judgment beyond that death. No, they are going to be judged, and that judgment will not all be done while they remain dead. No, they will be raised to face it eventually.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught that even those destined for destruction are nevertheless going to be raised from the dead. He made this clear when He was speaking to His enemies and told them that they would see what they are missing out on, to their great regret. We see this in Luke 13:25-28.

**25. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26. then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27. But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.**

These men are to depart and be thrust out of His kingdom, but before they do they are going to see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets entering into the kingdom of God. This is what the Lord told His enemies who were standing right in front of Him. Yet we know very well that these enemies never saw this in their past lives. The kingdom of God has not come yet two thousand years later, and all these men are dead long since. If they are ever to see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets entering into the kingdom of God while they themselves are being cast out, this will have to be after they are raised from the dead to see it. Without resurrection these words of Christ will never happen. What He told His enemies was untrue if the wicked never rise. So this shows us that they will rise indeed.

The Bible in the book of Revelation speaks clearly of a "second death," which is just what we would expect it to speak of if men like Christ's enemies in Luke are to rise and yet to end in destruction. It speaks first of this reality in Revelation 2:11.

**11. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."**

Here we learn of those who are overcomers during the great tribulation of the book of Revelation and therefore who will not be hurt by the second death. To be hurt by death, of course, means to actually die, for death only hurts those it kills. Thus these overcomers will not die the second death, whereas others will die the second death. We learn more about this second death in Revelation 20:6.

**6. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.**

After teaching about "the first resurrection," (which is actually the first of two in the book of Revelation, though not the first there will ever be,) John tells us that those who rise in the first resurrection will be such as those over whom the second death has no power. When put together with the truth of the second or latter resurrection of the book of Revelation, we realize that the second death does have power over many of those raised in the second resurrection. But regarding this first resurrection, it does not. Yet as far as just what this second death is, we find that out in Revelation 20:14.

**14. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

So we find out that the lake of fire is (or symbolizes) the second death. Yet a more complete look at the section this appears in will show us more details about this: that the second death is actually a death for those who have died and been resurrected, only to die again in this second death.

**11. 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.**

The second death here is in the context of what is often called the “great white throne judgment.”

**12. 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 Hebrew phrase “small and great” means basically every last one, for all men are either small, or we might say common people, or great, or we might say powerful people. So when the dead small and great rise, that means all the dead, every last one of them. That includes men and women, Israelites and non-Israelites, saved and unsaved. Every last one of the dead is raised in this resurrection to stand before the great white throne.

**13. 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.**

Notice again that this is the dead that are given up by the sea and Death and Hades and raised, not just the believing dead.

**14. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.**

So here again we have our verse defining the second death as a death in the lake of fire. But notice that it is those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life who are cast into the lake of fire. What the second death means is that they miss out on life. It does not mean that these are unfaithful believers who are going to be punished in fire for a while until they are properly punished and then they will live along with all the other believers. Those who are involved in the second death do not just have to suffer a while before entering life. No, they have missed out on life altogether. They are dead, and not just dead but destroyed. The last verse we have on the second death is Revelation 21:8, and this gives us even more evidence that those cast into the lake of fire are not unjust believers.

**8. 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.”**

This is a terrible list, and are we to believe that this terrible list describes the bad actions of God’s people, those who will be ultimately saved? If God’s people are believers, how can believers be the “unbelieving”? No, these are the wicked, the unsaved, those who are ultimately lost who reach their end in final destruction in the lake of fire, the second death.

Now if the way we have set it forth is true, if the wicked are raised to be judged and punished and then die again, then this “second death” is similar to the first. The “second death” results in the end of life, in being dead, in the return of the body to the soil and of the spirit to God, in the dissolution of the man whom God made back to his basic elements and the termination of his existence. However, this cannot be if the wicked only die once and are never raised to be judged and punished by a second, final, permanent death. That is why those who teach no future punishment for the wicked make the lake of fire to be just remedial punishment for unfaithful believers. The difference between them and universalists, then, is that universalists believe that unbelievers will suffer in the lake of fire prior to being saved in order to punish them for their sins and ultimately redeem them, whereas those who believe in death with no

future punishment for the unsaved believe that it is believers who will suffer in the lake of fire after being saved. They will suffer there for their unfaithful walk after believing.

Yet it should be clear that, if we accept this view of the lake of fire and the second death, then we are back to having two definitions of “death,” just like the traditionalists. The first death is the end of life, but the second death is not, but rather is suffering punishment for having failed to live a righteous Christian life. Yet by the truths we have learned this makes no sense. The Bible defines death as a return. Yet what “return” is there in a believer suffering punishment in fire for his sins? We did not start out suffering unendingly and then somehow get removed from it to live our lives. There is no return, there is no end of life, about believers suffering in fire. This again redefines death contrary to the Bible.

Not to mention is it proper for us to think that God would treat us, for whom Christ died, whom He claims to love, who are His Own and who are in Christ, by torturing us someday for our sins? Does this not make a mockery of His grace and forgiveness? Does it not make a mockery of His salvation and love? Even if we make those who suffer in the lake of fire to be confined to the unfaithful in Israel, as some have tried to make it since Revelation is focused on Israel, it makes little sense that God would torture the People He loves even for a time before saving them. Did He not promise them to remove their sins from them as far as the east is from the west, Psalm 103:12? Are these sins to be removed by His grace, or only after He tortures them for them first?

This is a sad and grievous error. Surely if it is inappropriate for God to torture His enemies it is even more inappropriate for Him to torture His Own! What kind of a twisting of all reason and degradation of God’s love is this? Surely no one should stoop to such a teaching to rescue his desired belief. This cannot be what the second death is all about.

In conclusion, while we must acknowledge that the Bible does speak of death as the ultimate punishment for sin, yet we also insist that it teaches a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The wicked have not by death managed to escape from ever having to answer for their sins. No, the Scriptures teach that the wicked will have a chance to see with sorrow what they are missing out on and regret it. They will stand before the Great, White Throne and they will be judged for their unbelief and according to their deeds. If they are not among those whose names are written by God in His Book of Life they will suffer the final, irrevocable punishment of the second death. But they will first have to answer for their deeds before the judgment throne of God. The idea that there is no future punishment of the wicked simply does not fit with Scripture.

Nathan C. Johnson

## Letters to Precepts

(On “Fate of the Wicked Part 2: Universalism”)

Letter: Thank you for sending the study on “Universalism.”

*Nathan: You are welcome.*

**Precepts: Universalism in its arguments appeals to the goodness of God.**

Letter: To elaborate slightly, its intent is to appeal to man’s notion of what is good, which in this context means an escape from the consequences of one’s actions, including a refusal to receive the gift of God through faith in His Son. Is this what man considers to be “good?” Apparently the answer is “yes.”

*Nathan: What you say is very true. For the Judge of all the earth not to do justice would in fact not be “good.” It is not just that the wicked do not know any better. Perhaps this is true of some, but for many they do very*

*much know better and yet they do their wicked works anyway. Satan certainly knew better when he rebelled against God, yet he chose the way of rebellion. Many human beings choose the same path. Some the more they know God the more they will hate Him. Straightening them out is simply not possible; the flaw runs too deep.*

*The appeal of universalists to God's goodness to say that He would not torture the wicked for all eternity is accurate as far as it goes. The problem is that universalism is not the only alternative. God has said what justice for sin is: death. He will not fail to enact justice on those who refuse His love and grace.*

**Precepts: ta panta is an idiom meaning “all this” or “all these,” depending on if the context demands a singular or a plural meaning.**

Letter: Thank you for explaining how English translators were stuck when translating Colossians 3:8 and decided to go with the actual meaning of the phrase. Thank you also for explaining what an idiom is and how this understanding fits the usage of this phrase in Scripture.

*Nathan: You are welcome. Colossians 3:8 is just what we need to discover the meaning of this phrase in a place where its meaning is clear. This kind of passage helps us immensely in other passages where its meaning is not so clear. The attempt to make ta panta mean everything in the universe in order to support universalism is an attempt which runs contrary to the facts. Scripture clearly reveals that the end of some is destruction, not salvation. The use of ta panta to argue against this is simply a misunderstanding of the idiomatic phrase.*

*You are welcome for explaining the idiom as well. This too is critical in understanding the phrase ta panta. It is the meaning of the idiomatic phrase, not just the translation of the words, that must be understood.*

**Precepts: I think few would argue against the truth that this is God's will for all believers.**

Letter: I regret that we may very well know many who would disappoint us greatly in this regard. They of course would take the tact that what Scripture says is immoral is not really immoral, or would twist even further in protest that what we “think” Scripture says is not what it really says due to centuries old conspiracy that shifted the meaning of words. Perhaps I should dig up some of my cousin's rantings and send them your way. She has done more than her part to lead many young women astray with her antics.

*Nathan: Well now, that might well be the truth that many would not acknowledge this of those who only claim to be Christians. Of those who truly know and believe God's Word, there should certainly be agreement on this. Many make claims that the reality proves are empty. Those who excuse away Christ's commands prove their lack of love for Him. You are not related to Jesus Christ just because you say you are. As the Lord said, you will know them by their fruits. Those whose fruit is rotten show what kind of people they really are.*

**Precepts: Universal resurrection is confounded with universal salvation, which it is not.**

Letter: Man has his ideas that he wants to be true. Such men who want to be seen as “believing,” read these ideas into Scripture, and having done so, imagine they now have “proof.” Mixing one thing that Scripture says it true with something that Scripture does not say is true is one way of accomplishing this human feat. Let us never cease to consider what we believe in light of what Scripture says, lest we end up shipwrecked like so many others we know.

*Nathan: Universalism is indeed a doctrine that many want to be true, often because of loved ones of theirs who have turned their backs on Jesus Christ. Yet regardless of whether your loved ones believe or not, those who are wicked will meet a final end in destruction. If you happen to love some who are headed for destruction, that does not change the fact that they are headed for destruction. The Bible says far too much about sin leading to death to think that there*



*is no such thing. There are those who will end in destruction, and rightfully so. No perfect situation, no new heavens and new*

*earth, would be safe with such people allowed to still live and inhabit it.*

*Nathan C. Johnson*

*Next issue: We have examined three views of the final fate of the wicked: the eternal, conscious torment view; the universalist view; and the view that the wicked never live again once they have died. We have found that all three of these views fail to ring true when compared to some of the teachings of Scripture. In this article, we examine a fourth view that some put forward as explaining the final, future fate of the wicked: the conditional immortality view. Does this view fit with and explain the teaching of Scripture regarding future punishment?*