

Does God punish?

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**A excerpt from the book "Ascesis, the Mother of
Sanctification"**

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"Why does God punish?"

To this persistent and curious question, posed by those who are not aware, we would like to give a brief reply based on the Holy Bible and the Fathers.

The God-designed creation of Man included self-government in his choices and his decision-making, and the element of freedom in his personality. The divine will and the decision that "*God did not create death, nor does He delight in the perdition of the living*" (Wisdom of Solomon 1:13) convince us that punishment or condemnation were not an issue from the very beginning. God demanded of His creatures, He "commanded" (given that they originated from Him and cannot exist and function without Him, as causal entities) that they be dependent on Him, Who is the initial Cause. This commandment - or, better still, the advice - given by God was not an imposition and a demand per se, but a counsel for Man's logical use of his life's natural limitations. If Man had followed that counsel, there would have been a prolongation of the laws of existence for beings.

The underlying cause therefore of the anomaly was the irrational thought, decision, choice and utilization of rights by the causal entity, Man, to detach himself from the ever-living Cause - God - as a result of which, he rendered himself mortal. It was by his own actions that Man tumbled into the status of death and has thereafter suffered all the consequences of mortality and corruption, which have infiltrated the whole of human nature. Apart from his material aspect, Man also suffered a debacle and losses in his spiritual world. Apart from the pains, the fear and the sorrows, he also acquired a "*mentality inclined towards wickedness*" from the moment of his birth. His entire world, and the treasure of his logical majesty (the "*image of and likeness of*") were overturned thunderously, and unfortunately, the "*originally-created beauty*" thereafter "*associated itself to the mindless beasts*" - if not "*to the demons*" - and "*resembled them*" (Psalms).

From this point on is where the consequences of idiotic autonomy begin, which lead to a calamitous ending. Having severed himself from the Cause of eternal life, Man, that inferior particle, has remained a pitiful victim of complete perversion, in whom the light and the prudence of logic has been extinguished.

The first symptom was Man revolting against himself and against his Maker and Creator.

That bizarre monster of perversion, the devil, extinguished the light of logic by proposing desire in lieu of dependence, and in the place of order and concord, seizing and lying, and instead of good behaviour, egotism and hatred.

Now captive, post-Fall Man in his irrationality is unable to act justly and be prudent, either as a person or as a community. He has become rebellious and a dangerous, destructive factor to Creation's harmony.

The benevolent providence and condescension of the Logos-God made provision for a full recovery from this perversion, but it was not imposed by force upon the human personality. Given that Man earned corruption and death through his own erroneous choice of autonomy, he must likewise voluntarily return to logic and his natural dependence on the first Cause - God - in order to rediscover the life and the incorruptibility that he had forfeited.

That is why God "demands" obedience and dependence from His

creations. Dependence is not the authoritative imposition of the Creator, but an ontological and existential necessity for the creations. Without it, the life and the existence of beings is interrupted. Dependence on the first Beginning and Cause is therefore a natural law and condition for the existence and the composition of all beings.

Man has refused the practice of restoration that was suggested by the renovator and saviour God; he has stubbornly persisted - perhaps still weak from his captivity - in the law and the system of the irrational, and is **thus fashioning his own condemnation.**

The benevolent providence of God with His presence among us has not only extinguished the first guilt, but has rewarded with an excess of Grace all those who desire to be healed and return to their original state. However, the severe disfiguration that the "image and likeness of" has undergone, forces towards a tendency and a movement towards the worse; there, Man's intellect which has been stripped of divine illumination and enlightenment, becomes either bestial or demonic. But with His incarnation, the all-benevolent Saviour and Redeemer proved that fallen Man has not been deprived of his will and the right to choose; subsequently, he is able to find his health once again and achieve his regeneration, because the Saviour has restored the Grace that Man lost with his Fall. And not only that! Our Saviour, Christ the Lord, has even chosen us "*unto adoption*" and has given us such treasures, "*which even the angels desire to gaze upon*" (1 Pet. 1:12).

Our Lord, as the saviour of our fallen nature, proved in practice with His life that He has supplemented our ailing and our weakness and has in fact returned Man to an even higher place than his pre-Fall place and condition. Subsequently, contemporary Man can recover his personality, return to the "image and likeness of", but also reach way above that, since "*to those who have received Him, He gave them the power to become children of God*" (John 1:12). And as proven by the millions of heroes of our faith, who had pursued and emulated His all-virtuous lifestyle, "*the works that I do, ye shall also do, and shall do even greater ones than those*" (cmp. John 14:12).

When Man rediscovers the worth of his god-semblance, he will hear from his Redeemer that "*wherever I am, that is where my servant will be*" (John 12:26), therefore there is **no** issue of judgment and punishment. **Punishment of course exists, but it is outside and far away from God and is for the demons,**

who are voluntarily malicious.

God does not punish people who remain with Him, upholding the rules of their personality and their nature. Instead, He rewards them with adoption and renders them inheritors of His eternal reign.

Those who are "sent away" by God to "*hell, which has been prepared for the devil*" are those who have **personally willed** to be cut off from the natural conditions and laws of their nature. They are the ones who have stubbornly persisted in the irrational condition and the way of life of beasts and demons, and who have persisted throughout their lives in absolute perversion, while refusing to correct themselves through repentance.

God, being fully aware of mankind's weakness and its ease in lapsing, has given them the element of repentance, which can be prolonged throughout their lifetime. Those who do lapse and succumb to the folly of irrationality, are enabled to mend their error by returning to the basis of their true destination. There are many examples, both from within the Bible as well as from people's lives, wherein the mending and the return to the rules of morality and the godly way of living have been proven true, through repentance, which was how those who had momentarily strayed and distanced themselves from the path of piety had succeeded in acquiring blessedness and divine shelter. Unfortunately, however, most people have remained incorrigible or even completely lapsed, thus rendering themselves examples of apostasy and of falling away from the way of life of God.

On the matter of salvation, there are unfortunately in circulation by the so-called "churches" of the west a number of assorted teachings that are rife with fallacies which distort the Orthodox Christian teaching. Man's salvation - as divine revelation informs us - is **not** Man's riddance of a miserable situation or position and his removal to a "better place" or a "more blissful environment".

The epicenter of Man's goal is his re-attainment of Man's original place: the "image and the likeness of". The main objective of the incarnation of God the Logos was His personal union with mankind. **That is why our Fathers, as genuine bearers of this characteristic, spoke of and projected Theanthropism* as the true objective of the Faith.**

The words: «...*You, Father, are within Me and I am within You.... and the glory that You gave Me, I have give given to them, so*

that they might be one, just as We are one - I within them, and You within Me...» (John 17:21-23) and also justifiably the words «*...to those who have received Him, He gave them the power to become children of God...»* (John 1:12) reveal precisely the aforementioned fact, which is the quintessence of Christianity. And it is not too bold a statement to say that **if theanthropism were not the main objective and purpose of the Christian faith, then attendance and sacrifice for its sake would have been worthless.**

In previous chapters of the book, we stressed the significance of comprehensive ascesis as a necessary means to regain whatever we lost. We noted that the cause of fragmentation of Man's personality was his own perverted mentality following his departure from God, which now «*leans towards mischievous things*». Without therapy, Man is struggling in vain. Our Saviour, as a physician, has given us in practice the method of balancing out the problem. Without needing to, He Himself observed comprehensive ascesis and the fighting spirit, in order to convince our stubbornness that without toiling and struggling, we cannot re-gather what we had scattered. When Man applies himself, with struggles, to resisting the law of perversion and irrationality which characterize an impassioned life and thus bring himself back to the basis of his original created status, he will be rightly entitled to the union and the cohabitation in eternity with his Creator.

In His Archpriest prayer, the Lord clearly designated coexistence and eternal residence along with mankind: «*...I desire that wherever I am, they shall also be...»* (John 17:24). Our Lord had very aptly challenged us to emulate Him - as His own kindred - by saying: «*...Become ye holy, for I am holy*» (1 Peter 1:16).

Consequently, God does not actually condemn those who disfigured themselves and have discarded the conditions and the laws of logical nature by pursuing bestial and demonic behaviour. It was they who cut themselves off from the laws of logic and dignity. Albeit divine benevolence tolerates the straying of sinners and re-accepts them if they repent and return, they themselves have chosen to not be susceptible to repentance and a change in their corrupt life and beliefs. It is through their own choice that they have preferred and selected the life of perversion, crime and hatred and have enforced it - spiritually - to the death! How, therefore, is God "judging"

them, if they themselves have preferred malice and perversion, through their own opinion, decision and enforcement? Wouldn't it be unjust, if they were to be unwillingly placed in a situation that was contrary to their own will and preference?

There is of course the absolute justice of God, which metes out to each person his just deserts, based on his works and his preferences.

In the present lifetime, the friends and the lovers of the works of evil and crime have been prevailing. They have been imposing themselves on moral and meticulous people. They have been abusing and killing them. Millions have been slaughtered by the devil's workers, and in fact without having actually done anything to deserve it, but simply because they believed in the truth and upheld the rules of morality and dignity. So, what is your opinion? Should they also partake of the bliss and the serenity of kindness and love?

According to the Scriptures, the situation after death is **static*** and subsequently, whatever one has become in this lifetime will remain so, for all eternity. Therefore, all those who have departed from this life as criminals and irrationally minded will remain in the condition that they themselves have shown preference to and persisted in living, therefore it will be impossible for them to live alongside the benevolent and peace-loving workers of kindness and love.

Consequently, God does NOT judge mankind; He merely makes accommodations accordingly, for whatever each one of us prefers to bring along with him for eternity. Therefore, behold, now is the time for each one of us to prepare his own future!

* "**Theanthropism** (n.) A state of being God and man. In Orthodoxy deification can be achieved by the unification with God's uncreated energies but not with His essence which is inaccessible to human nature, thus opposing idolatry and pan/polytheism"

***_OOD_ note:** To those who are familiar with Orthodox dogmatics, it is obvious here that with the word "**static**", the Elder is NOT referring to the **progress** that the righteous will be attaining throughout eternity, or the unjust in their

unjustness; he is actually referring to the (then) unalterable state of Man's intentions. Because after death, repentance is not an option for the sinner, just as there will be no lapsing for those who were on the path of repentance, enlightenment and deification (theosis).

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