

The Danger of Delayed Retribution

by Wayne Goff

“Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” *Ecclesiastes 8:11*

Men will try to do something wrong on occasion, and then sit back and see what happens next. If no punishment is forthcoming, then they think they have gotten away with it, and the floodgates open!

In the Old Testament, Divine retribution was often instantaneous! Nadab and Abihu attempted to offer “*profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them*” and fire came out from the Lord and they died before the Lord (Lev. 10:1-2)! The man who dared to pick up sticks on the Sabbath contrary to God’s command was stoned to death (Num. 15:32-36). Achan took from the spoils of Jericho that which had been dedicated to the Lord as the first fruits of Israel’s conquering of Canaan and was stoned to death with his wife and children, and burned with fire (Joshua 7:19-25).

In the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of the proceeds of a sale and lied about how much they had given to the Lord. Both fell down dead, having been struck by God, after hearing that God knew about their evil deed (Acts 5:1-11).

So why does God **not** punish the sins of men immediately today? It would certainly draw a line of demarcation between the godly and the sinful! God certainly **could** strike dead all the evil men, especially those who blaspheme against God’s holy Name! There are undoubtedly many reasons, but let me suggest two:

God Is Longsuffering

God is not worried nor fearful that somehow mankind down here on planet earth is going to defeat Him and overturn His plans for saving the righteous few. He has all eternity to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous — He is not going anywhere! Repeatedly throughout the Bible, God is described as being **longsuffering** with man, not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Man thinks God’s patience, kindness and longsuffering are signs that either (1) He does not exist, or (2) He cannot see what they are doing! Nothing could be further from the truth. Romans 2:4 warns, “*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*” Mankind is not going to “get away” with anything — delay does not mean escape! God does not forget, nor lose count of our deeds. “*But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things*” (Rom. 2:2). Those with hard, impenitent hearts are simply treasuring up for themselves eternal wrath for the Day when God **does** reveal His righteous judgments (Rom. 2:5)!

The wise will take to heart the warnings of God and consider His patience and longsuffering as opportunity to repent! That is exactly what God wants mankind to do (read Ezekiel 33:11)!

God Tests Our Hearts

Another reason why Divine retribution is delayed is to **test man’s heart**. If every transgression of man met with instant death, then there would be a ton of people who would obey God just to live another day! They would be compelled to obey even against their own will. God wants man to serve Him out of love and obedience because they choose to do so. Delaying punishment gives the sinner the chance to repent, and it exposes over a long period of time those who might feign obedience just to survive. Paul spoke of this when he said in 1 Thessalonians 2:4, “*...but God who tests our hearts.*” Life should be considered an experiment with all the various ingredients and choices mixed up in the “test tube” of life. When it all shakes out, God knows the truly righteous and the truly sinful. Reward and punishment are then forthcoming. “*Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds*” (Psalm 7:9). “*Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?*” (Psalm 2:1). Try as they might, men and nations cannot overthrow God. This is my Father’s world, and He is the Ruler yet! Read the rest of Psalm 2:1-12 to see this inspired truth set forth.

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