

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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“How Could a Faithful God...?”

Among the teachings of Scripture that are sometimes questioned by religious people is the *reality of Hell*. The question might be asked, “How could a faithful God allow people He has created to be tormented for eternity?”

Upon sincere examination of His Word, the better question is, “how could a faithful God *not* do this?”

The word “faithful” has multiple definitions, but generally refers to one who is *trustworthy* (see *Strong G4103*). A faithful individual is one who can be depended on to keep his word.

Scripture is full of proof that no one's promises can be depended on more than God's.

Consider the generation of Israelites who entered Canaan. After this generation was taught the Law by Moses, they were promised great rewards if they were obedient to the Law (**Deut. 28:1-14**). They were *also* promised harsh *punishment* if they were *disobedient* (**Deut. 28:15-68**).

The remainder of the Old Testament shows how a *faithful* God followed up on these promises.

Joshua 6 and 7 shows the contrast between God rewarding the Israelites for their obedience (fall of Jericho) and punishing Israel for disobedience (failure to defeat the men of Ai).

This trend continues throughout the Old Testament with the generations that followed.

God did not “back track” on His promise to

reward Jacob's descendants when they were faithful, but He also held fast to His promise to *punish* them when they were not.

While God's punishment was often temporal in nature throughout the Old Testament, the key punishment we are warned about in the New Testament is the *eternal* torment of Hell.

Such punishment involves eternity with “*the devil and his angels*” (**Matt. 25:41**). Hell is described as a place of “*everlasting punishment*” (**Matt. 25:46**). It's a place where there is a “*fire that never shall be quenched*” (**Mark 9:45**). It is further described as a “*furnace of fire*” where “*there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*” (**Matt. 13:50**).

The one who refuses to believe this truth is not standing up for the faithfulness of God. He is denying it. Our faithful God keeps His promises, including His warnings of judgment against disobedience.

The surety of Hell does not demean the surety of Heaven though. The reasons we can trust that Hell is real are the same reasons we can trust that Heaven is real. “Fire and brimstone” warnings are not intended to discourage, but to promote full surrender to God.

God promises that those who choose to surrender to Him will be blessed with eternal comfort in His presence with the righteous of all ages. His faithfulness *assures* that this promise will be kept.

A faithful God will follow through with *all* that He has promised. This is a wonderful comfort for the obedient, but it is also cause for taking His warnings of punishment seriously.

“Fleeting Pleasures of Sin”

Hebrews 11:24-25 says, “*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,*”

The *ESV* refers to the pleasures Moses rejected as the “*fleeting pleasures of sin.*” Sin’s ultimate consequences are lasting, but its pleasure is not.

Consider the description of strong drink given in **Proverbs 23:31-32**: *Don’t look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. In the end, it bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper.*

This is the nature of sin. It may look enticing, promising fun, pleasure, and satisfaction. Yet its end is destructive.

Even in a temporal sense, sin often produces hardships, as **Proverbs 23** alludes to. More significantly though, sin leads to eternal destruction for those who choose this path. The temporary pleasure sin yields is not at all worth spending eternity in hell.

Living for sin’s fleeting pleasures is foolish. We must, like Moses, see through Satan’s deception and realize that sin “*bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper*” in the end. May we realize this and choose to turn from sin and toward God.

Knowing the Shepherd’s Voice

John 10:2-4: *But one who enters in [the sheep fold] by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*

These verses show us two ways in which Jesus, as our Shepherd, leads us. One is by going before us (His example). The other is by His voice (through His Word). As Jesus said, “*the sheep listen to [the shepherd’s] voice.*”

While sheep follow the voice of the true shepherd, the sheep “*will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don’t know the voice of strangers*” (**John 10:5**).

To be spiritually safe and secure, we must, like literal sheep, distinguish the voice of the true shepherd from that of false shepherds. In other words, we must discern between *Christ’s* doctrine, as taught in Scripture, and *false* doctrine.

Such discernment requires persistent study, and approaching Scripture with a “*good and honest heart*” (**Luke 8:15**). It involves hungering and thirsting for righteousness (**Matt. 5:6**), with a sincere desire to know and do what pleases God. May we have such a zeal for the Word of our perfect Shepherd and Guide.

-Michael Hickox (all articles)

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