

# God's Judgment Upon the Church

By Tom Hill

**Bible Text:** Isaiah 59:1-2

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Mankind rejects the idea of the wrath of God against sin. They say that it does not fit God's character.

They distinguish between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. The tribal God of the Old Testament was indeed an angry God, vengeful and punishing of sin.

But, they say, that description of God conflicts with the One they find in the New Testament. He is a God of love, compassion, and mercy.

Consequently, they hold no fear of God today for their sins. They show no concern for their transgressions against God.

The Church of Jesus Christ and believers reject this belief today, too. They show little concern for their transgressions against God and His discipline against sin.

This conclusion reveals itself in two ways: the diminution of sin and the elimination of God's punishment against sin.

Believers diminish the significance and presence of sin in their lives in several fashions. Because it has become an abomination to Christians, they deny its reality in their behavior.

To many believers, it insults them to even suggest that sin lies at the doors of their lives. So it has become nonexistent to numerous Christians.

Other believers defend their sinfulness and that of others. They explain apparent offenses as the product of psychological or emotional distresses.

In addition, Christians excuse sinful behavior as the result of medical problems or the ever-reliable reliance upon "my constitution." "That's just the way I am," they say.

Further, believers today defeat the naming of sin by denouncing past taboos as from another culture and time.

Besides that, believers define it in new terms. They call it a mistake or error. If all else fails, Christians eliminate the concept of the chastisement of God against sin in believers.

In support of their contention, they indicate the attributes of God that suggest relief of penalty.

For example, they:

1. rely upon the grace of God and His compassion.
2. rest upon the forgiveness of God for sin.
3. recount Scripture references that seem to indicate that God does not judge the child of God (a favorite reference comes from Romans 8.1).

For these reasons, believers today conclude that they can sin without punishment, penalty, or harm from God.

Despite these claims, however, sin always has its consequences. As a result, the Church of Jesus Christ and Christians suffer the consequences of their unbelief.

1. The Church lacks spiritual power and God's manifest presence.
2. Mankind is deified, and they deny glory to God. Their Christianity centers upon self, not God.
3. They degrade the death of Christ, which saves sinners from their sins.
4. They grieve and quench the Holy Spirit, so He withdraws His presence and power from them.

This erroneous doctrine reveals an ignorance of God's word or a rejection of the Bible's plain teaching. In either case, it causes unbelief and disobedience. It exposes the drastic need for spiritual revival in the Church and in believers.

The Church and the followers of Christ face a crossroads. They can continue to follow a fallacy, with its certain ruin, or they can correct their path with repentance unto spiritual renewal.

The cure will come as the result from an examination of the Scriptures for the truth followed by belief and obedience to it.

Virtually every book of the Bible discloses the truth concerning this important issue. God has not changed. He does, indeed, serve punishment upon believers for their evil actions.

One passage in particular confirms this truth. It is recorded in Isaiah 59:1-2:

“Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: {2} But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”

From this passage, I want to examine some particular absolute truths about God's discipline and punishment of sin and how it applies to the Church of Jesus Christ and your life today.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will clarify for you the truth, convict you of its need in your life, and correct you to bring a spiritual revival in you.

I pray that it will lead to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life that will revolutionize and transform you.

### **The objects of punishment**

God first issued this message to His chosen people, Israel. It plainly identifies God's anger and discipline against the Church in the Old Testament.

They had chosen a path of evil and rejected God. They made idols like unto their neighbors' idols and worshipped them.

In the midst of their sinful practices, they continued to fast and to seek God. They tried to mix their offenses with true worship.

The evil behavior of God's people caused Him to judge them for it. True to His nature, He punished them for their sin, as He always does.

This passage gives a picture of God's response to the New Testament Church, too. He directed this correction to His people, not the heathen.

In like manner, the New Testament reveals God's reproof of believers. Consider the Lord's letters to His people recorded in Revelation 2-3.

In these two chapters, John set down the Lord's evaluation to seven churches. In five of them, He clearly identified their evil and issued severe warnings of pending punishment. They could avoid it only by repentance from their sin.

In addition, recall Hebrews 12. This chapter, from verses 3-13, describes God's chastening of His children. Indeed, God does punish His chosen people for their sin.

Granted it does not include eternal condemnation. The substitutionary death of Christ on the cross paid that penalty for His people. Yet, He metes out punishment for believers' unbelief and disobedience, too.

Sadly, many Christians reject this truth. Without a doubt they suffer punishment as a result. Others endure it out of ignorance. In either case, the believer can find relief in the blood of Jesus Christ, the Advocate (1 John 2.1).

## **The cause of punishment**

Another reading of the passage in Isaiah will identify the cause of God's punishment of believers' sins. He mentioned two different kinds of failures.

First, He cited their iniquities. This type of evil describes perversion or crooked behavior. It results from a purposeful distortion of the heart from right to wrong.

Second, God disclosed their sins. As you may know, the word "sins" has its roots in archery. It simply means to miss the mark.

It, then, describes evil behavior as small as a false step in faith or practice and as large as departure from the path of duty and right.

With these two words, God includes every sin from A to Z. It encompasses simple sins, even those done ignorantly. It consists of more severe evil behavior, deliberately practiced. He finds no sin acceptable, no matter how innocent it seems.

These two words clearly identify God's attitude toward sin. He does not condone it. Evil practices anger Him, including those by believers.

## **The kinds of punishment**

Now take notice of the manner of God's punishment for the unbelief and disobedience of His people. The passage identifies four distinct penalties for their evil.

First, He said,

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save..."

This statement says that God withdrew from them. Because of their sins, they experienced attacks from enemies that they could not repel. They fell prey to their enemies who afflicted them.

In their distress, they longed for God's mighty intervention on their behalf. But it did not come.

In mocking charge against God, some of His people blamed Him for His inadequacy. He could no longer exert feats of strength, they reasoned.

His power had waned. Or worse yet, they believed that it no longer applied to them. "He can't or doesn't act that way any longer," they charged.

Still others, who believed that He could save them, cried out to Him for help. But He gave them none.

To these conditions, God responds with His explanation. He has not changed. He is still omnipotent. He does not have a withered arm, nor has He ceased acting in power.

He can still defend His own, avenge their enemies, and bring salvation. He can rescue, deliver, and preserve His people. His ability has not declined nor ceased.

Their sins prevented His acting on their behalf with His mighty power. He withheld His omnipotence from them as a punishment for their sin.

He held back His defense. He removed His protection, and left them to their own abilities, mentally, emotionally, and physically. God refrained from intervening on their behalf.

Many believers today encounter this same condition. Although they desperately need God's power on their behalf, they do not experience it.

They seek it in vain for the same reasons that the children of God in Isaiah's time lacked it: iniquity and sin in their lives.

Second, the prophet reminded them,

“...neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”

He disregarded their prayers. He refused to listen to their cries. He rejected the calls for help from His people and ignored them. He closed His ears to them. In their defeat and despair, God's people had accused Him of deafness. Since He did not answer their pleas, He must have become dull of hearing.

They concluded that He simply did not answer prayer any more. In fact, however, God had not become deaf but rejecting.

Isaiah told them that God's disdain for their prayers resulted from their sin. His failure to answer came not from a lack of interest or inability. Nor had He ceased answering prayer. The prophet identified the root of the problem, their iniquities and sins against God.

Unanswered prayer plagues Christians today, too. The failure to repent from sin gives rise to God's silence. As in Isaiah's day, God disregards the prayers of His chosen ones because of the presence of iniquity and evil in believers' lives.

Third, their sins separated them from fellowship with God. God was divided from His people. It did not mean that God had suddenly lost His omnipresence.

David answered this dilemma in Psalms 139:7-12:

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? {8} If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in

hell, behold, thou art there. {9} If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; {10} Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. {11} If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. {12} Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”

True, God's presence is everywhere. Yet, He does not manifest and reveal Himself everywhere and on every occasion.

Simply stated, sin breached the fellowship between God and His chosen people. Frequently, He withdrew His manifest presence from the Children of Israel because of their evil practices.

The New Testament confirms this truth. On the Road to Emmaus after His resurrection, Jesus kept the two travelers from recognizing Him (Luke 24.16). Again, in 1 John 1.5-7, the Holy Spirit reveals that God Who is light cannot fellowship with darkness.

Believers assume that His omnipresence guarantees His manifest presence. It does not.

That is why the Scriptures warn Christians against grieving, quenching, and resisting the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4.30; 1 Thessalonians 5.19; Acts 7.51).

The lack of God's manifest presence characterizes the Church of Jesus Christ today, perhaps even your life. Sin breaches the fellowship between God and His Church.

The presence of unconfessed sin permeates the Body of Christ and produces an anemic and apathetic Church.

We lack His supernatural authority and ability. Like the Israelites, we explain His absence by saying He does not act that way any more. When in reality, our sins and iniquities have separated us from His manifest presence.

Fourth, God hid His face from them. The statement in Isaiah 59.2 literal describes one who places a veil over his head to conceal his face.

In preparation of their entry into the Promised Land, God had warned the Children of Israel that He would hide His face from them, if they turned away from Him into sin (Deuteronomy 31.17-18; 32.30).

More than once He did exactly what He had promised. The reign of evil kings in Judah and Israel and their ultimate banishment to Babylon confirms it. Their constant problems with their enemies as recorded in Judges verify it, too.

He did not turn His face back to them until they repented. When they turned from their evil ways, He turned His face toward them again.

In like manner today, God has turned His face from the Church because of Her sins. The signs of self-dependence arise everywhere.

1. The increased dependence upon mechanisms, methods, and manpower illustrate it.
2. The lukewarm Church fights for survival.
3. Spiritual weakness and Biblical relativity characterize the current Church.

He will not turn His face toward His people until we repent.

How will you respond to these truths? You can reaffirm them; reject them; or ignore them.

I pray that God's Spirit will apply them to you today. I pray that you will find relief through Christ's blood by repentance from sin. He will revive and transform your life.