

We know that God is love.

**1 John 4:8** "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

That is what we should believe, and what we want to believe. Yet, certain disturbing statements are difficult to harmonise with this God of love. One of them is His use of tormenting fire in the final destruction of the wicked.

**Revelation 20:7** "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, **20:8** And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. **20:9** And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. **20:10** And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. **20:14** And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **20:15** And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

This picture is even more disturbing:

"The wicked receive their recompense in the earth... They 'shall be stubble and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts'... Some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days. All are punished 'according to their deeds'... (Satan's) punishment is to be far greater than that of those whom he has deceived. After all have perished who fell by his deceptions, he is still to live and suffer on." **{Great Controversy, Page 673}**

How do you harmonise this with a God of love? Some inspired statements help.

"God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself. **{Christ's Object Lessons, Page 84.4}**

**Romans 6:23** "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

God is the giver of life. Revelation 20 itself also helps. It calls this fiery destruction the second death. In all Scripture there is only one description of a person in the throes of the second death. That person is Christ. What killed Him? Fire from God out of heaven? A lake of fire? If He died any other death than the death that the sinner is to die, He did not die our death. And yet there is no fire mentioned in His death.

The description of Christ's suffering is a picture of mental agony. What Christ gave expression to while He was dying on the cross was mental anguish.

**Matthew 27:46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? **27:47** Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. **27:48** And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. **27:49** The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. **27:50** Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost."

"It was not bodily suffering which so quickly ended the life of Christ upon the cross, it was the crushing weight of the sins of the world and the sense of the Father's wrath that broke His heart." **{Ellen G. White, "The Suffering of Christ," The Bible Student's Library, No. 4, April 1889}**

"Christ's keenest anguish was the sense of His father's displeasure. Because of this, His mental agony was of such intensity that man can have but a faint conception of it... Many have suffered death by slow tortures; others have suffered death by crucifixion. In what does the death of God's dear Son differ from these?... If the sufferings of Christ consisted in physical pain alone, then His death was no more painful than that of some of the martyrs... The sins of the world, ... the sense of his Father's wrath,...crushed His soul,...brought despair." **{Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 2, Pages 2 213, 214}**

"And now the Lord of glory was dying, a ransom for the race ... but His suffering was from the sense of the malignity of sin... So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt." **{Desire of Ages, Pages 752, 753}**

These statements indicate that that which killed Christ occurred in the mind. It was mental anguish; agony that originated in thought processes. The destroying agony was not caused by the physical body's being destroyed on the cross, or because the physical body was being burned by fire. If this is the only description, and it is, of the second death of a human being, then it ought to say something to us. The death of man is not brought about by what we usually think of as a lake of fire. To go a little bit further, there are statements that indicate that Christ's death was like the death of man as a sinner. Which then says, "All right, we've taken a look at what killed Him." That which ended His life should be the cause of the final death of the sinner.

"Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race." **{Desire of Ages, Page 753}**

That would be after the close of probation, wouldn't it?

"This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequence of man's sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression." **{Desire of Ages, Page 686}**

He did endure the wrath of God, He did feel God's displeasure at sin. He felt it not because of the spikes that were driven through His hands. He felt it because of the mental torture and the mental anguish He was experiencing.

Soul sorrow can bring death. Christ Himself said on the way to Gethsemane.

**Matthew 26:38** "Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me."

What is it, then, that actually destroys man in the second death? I suggest to you that we could express it in one word: "glory." God's glory destroys man in the second death.

"Like Israel of old the wicked destroy themselves; they fall by their iniquity. By a life of sin, they have placed themselves so out of harmony with God, their natures have become so debased with evil, that the manifestation of His glory is to them a consuming fire." **{Great Controversy, Page 37}**

What is the word? Fire! How can the manifestation of His glory, His character, cause degrees of suffering and finally bring death?

"Now Christ again appears to the view of his enemies. Far above the city, upon a foundation of burnished gold, is a throne, high and lifted up. Upon this throne sits the Son of God, and around him are the subjects of his kingdom. The power and majesty of Christ no language can describe, no pen portray. The glory of the Eternal Father is enshrouding his Son. The brightness of his presence fills the city of God, and flows out beyond the gates, flooding the whole earth with its radiance." **{Great Controversy, Page 664.3}**

"As soon as the books of record are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have ever committed. They see just where their feet diverged from the path of purity and holiness, just how far pride and

rebellion have carried them in the violation of the law of God. The seductive temptations which they encouraged by indulgence in sin, the blessings perverted, the messengers of God despised, the warnings rejected, the waves of mercy beaten back by the stubborn, unrepentant heart,—all appear as if written in letters of fire." **{Great Controversy, Page 666.1}**

Now the suffering begins. The conscience is becoming sensitized. It may have been hardened, it may have been seared, but seeing every act in its true light begins to stir it. And the pain of conscience is the most difficult to endure. Notice the description in the same paragraph that talks about becoming conscious of every sin. "...all appear (that is, all the sins) as if written with letters of fire." The sins burn into their consciousness as with letters of fire. That is mental agony!

*"The awful spectacle appears just as it was. Satan, his angels, and his subjects have no power to turn from the picture of their own work. Each actor recalls the part which he performed. Herod, who slew the innocent children of Bethlehem that he might destroy the King of Israel; the base Herodias, upon whose guilty soul rests the blood of John the Baptist; the weak, time-serving Pilate; the mocking soldiers; the priests and rulers and the maddened throng who cried, 'His blood be on us, and our children'—all behold the enormity of their guilt. They vainly seek to hide from the divine majesty of His countenance, outshining the glory of the sun, while the redeemed cast their crowns at the Saviour's feet, exclaiming, 'He died for me!'"* **{Great Controversy, Page 667.2}**

The awfulness of their sin slowly sinks in. Guilt and despair rise to a level that cannot be endured. Then the wicked die the same death that Christ died. It is a death caused by mental agony. The purer the conscience in this life, the more quickly the blessed relief of death will occur then. It will not take so long to fully sensitize it to the awfulness of sin. The redeemed do not have to endure that suffering! They "throw their crowns at the Saviour's feet exclaiming, "He died for me!"

What a picture of a loving God! Is there a literal fire in Revelation 20? Yes, that literal fire consumes the bodies of sinners already dead; killed by mental anguish and suffering. It rids the earth of every trace of sin. It melts the elements of the earth with fervent heat. The earth is purified. As the SOP says:

*"God destroys no man. Everyone who is destroyed will have destroyed himself."* **{Christ's Object Lessons, Page 84.4}**

In Hebrews 2:9 we read that "Jesus ... by the grace of God should taste death for every man." How is it that Jesus tasted death for every man? Ellen White says, "Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race." *{Desire of Ages, Page 753}*. What is this "anguish"?

If we want to know the anguish Jesus experienced, we should look into His face as He died crying, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1). Then, as we look to the face of the Father, we see that He was right there by His Son; "... neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard." (Ps. 22:24).

"God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed ... in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence." *{Desire of Ages, Page 753}*.

In that darkness Christ could not sense the abiding presence of His Father, just as the wicked in the end will not be able to sense the Father's presence due to their disbelief in His everlasting mercy. They, as did Christ, will sense they are forsaken. And as we wrongly "did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted", the wicked in the end will wrongly believe they are "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." (Is. 53:4).

For more info, see the book:

### ***End of the Wicked***

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