

Justice and Mercy



E.J. Waggoner

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Contents

Introduction	4
Justice and Mercy	12
God the Source of all Things	14
Necessity of Agreement with God	15
The Justice of Mercy	16
Giving Men Their Own Way	17
The Fate of the Wicked	19
Everlasting Punishment	20
Unquenchable Fire	20
Eternal Fire	21
God to be All in All	22

Introduction

Forty years after Seventh-day Adventists began to preach the sealing message to the world, the Lord sent a most precious message through elders Waggoner and Jones. This message began in October 1888 and continued for about 7 years. The use of the word *sent* rather than *is sending* in the following quote suggests the message had paused and even stopped.

The Lord in His great mercy **sent** a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. TM 91,92 (1895)

One of the key elements of this message related to the subject of the two covenants.

Since I made the statement last Sabbath that the view of the covenants as it had been taught by Brother Waggoner was truth, it seems that great relief has come to many minds.--Letter 30, 1890, p. 2. (To W. C. White and wife, March 10, 1890.) {9MR 329.3}

But the majority of the church leaders would not accept this precious light.

Night before last I was shown [by the Lord] that evidences in regard to the covenants were clear and convincing. Yourself, [Uriah Smith] Brother B, Brother C, and others **are spending your investigative powers for naught to produce a position on the covenants to vary from the position that Brother [E. J.] Waggoner has presented**. Had you received the true light which shineth, you would not have imitated or gone over the same manner of interpretation and misconstruing the Scriptures as did the Jews. What made them so zealous? Why did they hang on

the words of Christ? **Why did spies follow Him to mark His words that they could repeat and misinterpret and twist in a way to mean that which their own unsanctified minds would make them to mean.** In this way, they deceived the people. They made false issues. They handled those things that they could make a means of clouding and misleading minds.

The covenant question is a clear question and would be received by every candid, unprejudiced mind, but I was brought where the Lord gave me an insight into this matter. **You have turned from plain light because you were afraid that the law question in Galatians would have to be accepted.** As to the law in Galatians, I have no burden and never have had.--Letter 59, 1890, p. 6. (To Uriah Smith, March 8, 1890.) {9MR 329.1}

By 1895 it seemed to be too late for some.

I inquire of those in responsible positions in Battle Creek, What are you doing? **You have turned your back, and not your face, to the Lord.** There needs to be a cleansing of the heart, the feelings, the sympathies, the words, in reference to the most momentous subjects--the Lord God, eternity, truth. What is the message to be given at this time? It is the third angel's message. **But that light which is to fill the whole world with its glory, has been despised by some who claim to believe the present truth.** Be careful how you tread. Take off the shoes from off your feet; for you are on holy ground. Beware how you indulge the attributes of Satan, and pour contempt upon the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. **I know not but some have even now gone too far to return and to repent.** {1888 Study Materials 1334.2} (1895)

Three years earlier, Ellen White wrote these precious words full of expectation:

The time of test is just upon us, for **the loud cry of the third angel has already begun** in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. **This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth.** RH, November 22, 1892 par. 7

Three months after this, A.T. Jones did his famous 1893 sermons which brought much illumination to the message. It opened a deeper understanding of the Sabbath and the gift of the Spirit which attends this holy time.

In creation he could know about Him. In the Sabbath he would know Him, because the Sabbath brings the living presence, the sanctifying presence, the hallowing presence, of Jesus Christ, to the man who observes it indeed. Sermon 20. The Spirit of Christ through the Sabbath, A. T. Jones. March 2, 1893.

Around the same time that Jones began his sermons in the USA, E.J. Waggoner penned the following article in the UK on the subject of justice and mercy. This subject is the natural consequence of the principles that Jones and Waggoner had been teaching about the power of God manifested in creation within the context of the two covenants revealed as two heart conditions rather than two dispensations of time.

In reading this article, I find wonderful confirmation for the things we have been teaching the last seven years. We have challenged the idea that mercy and justice are opposed to each other but rather mercy is the manifestation of justice. Justice is to do the right thing, and the right thing to do is show mercy.

Waggoner builds His case upon the principle that God is the source of all things. These are the principles that we have developed in the book *Identity Wars and Life Matters*. Waggoner uses the same text from Ps 89:14 to express the principles of justice as we have done in the book *Natural Justice and Atonement*. He builds beautifully upon the harmony of justice and mercy

in the subject of the ark of the covenant within the Sanctuary. The mercy seat is upon the law of God in the ark. This is God's throne. Mercy and justice are unified upon the same throne at the same time. Below are some of the most precious statements made by Waggoner in this article which I will summarise here.

We see the harmony of Justice and Mercy:

There is a strange idea prevalent in the world, and even in the professed Christian world, that justice and mercy are opposite qualities, and that they cannot be manifested in the same person at the same time.... This is a most unfortunate idea. It represents God as changeable. But the fact is that He cannot deny Himself, and He changes not.

We see the principle of life only existing in Christ and therefore Christ being the source of every right impulse, switching the commandments from arbitrary commands to promises of God.

Christ, who is the fulness of the Godhead, is the life of everything; He is the force that is manifested in all matter. This being the case, it is evident that the continued existence of all things depends upon their harmony with the will of God, and their submission to it. This is not a mere arbitrary demand on the part of God, He does not require that all things shall be subject to Him, simply to gratify His love of power, as would be the case with man, but because only as all things are dependent on Him can they exist

We see the present Cross:

Yet through the mercy of God, man has existence continued to him. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness." Lam. 3:22. This longsuffering of God is for the salvation of man.

We see some sublime expressions on the justice and mercy of God:

But in this mercy the justice of God appears. He has made man in His own image, with faculties capable of the highest enjoyment, for He has given him the freedom to choose his own way, and has set everything before him.

In this choice there is absolutely no restriction put upon man by the Lord. His strict justice is shown in His not interfering with man's personal right of choice as to what he will have. God knows that only in Him can man find his highest good, and therefore He places Himself before man in the most attractive light, and pleads with him to accept Him; **but He will not intrude His presence where it is not wanted. He will not coerce the will of man.** He has in making man guaranteed to him perfect liberty, and He Himself respects the rights which He has bestowed on man. **To attempt to compel men to accept His ways, perfect though they be, would be to deprive him of that liberty which is inseparable from God;** and so it would be to defeat His own purpose.

This is such an amazing revelation and defines for us God's strict justice. It is not the destroying of man by sheer force, but rather not interfering with man's power to choose without any restrictions being placed upon him. This definition of justice leads naturally to the explanation of the destruction of the wicked.

Such ones are self-condemned. Their condemnation to death is not merely the decision of a Judge, but is the natural result of their own course. They have hated the Lord, have resisted all His advances, and have shown their desire to have nothing to do with Him. Since they positively refuse to live with Him, He has no other alternative but to leave them to themselves; and as they have no means of self-existence, they necessarily suffer destruction.

Waggoner reinforces the point that God does not change in His attitude of feeling towards the lost. It is the wicked who change.

The Lord is goodness itself. He is love. He cannot at any time be any other than He is, and therefore He is just as good to one person as He is to another. He is equally good to everybody and just as good as He can be all the time. Therefore it is not because they have not been drawn by the love of God, that some are destroyed. It is because they have despised that love.

In turning from the Lord, the wicked have no option but to become extinct because God's presence is everywhere and only in Him is there life.

It is evident, therefore, that those who are left to their own choice to be eternally separate from the Lord, have no place left them but utter extinction. There is no place in the universe where men can exist separate from the presence of the Lord.

Waggoner draws the logical conclusion that the destruction of the wicked are the wages which they have worked for. They wanted to be left to themselves and God gives them what they want.

God's mercies endure for ever, even though there are some who will have none of it. In His mercy He bears long with them, but God could not tolerate rebellion for ever in His dominions and be just to His loyal subjects. So in justice no less than mercy to those who willingly yield to His control, He must let the wicked suffer the punishment which they have worked for. Indeed, it would be doing the wicked an injustice not to give them that for which they have so long and diligently laboured. They have taken counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." All their desire has been to be left to themselves and now God gives them their desire. But as there is

no place in the universe where God is not, the only thing for them is extinction.

The sequence of Waggoner's arguments is so precious. I pray the reader will discern the gift that is presented in them. They harmonise beautifully with the words of Ellen White on Justice and the death of the wicked.

The condemning power of Satan would lead him to institute a theory of justice inconsistent with mercy. He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure and without fault. Thus he takes his position on the judgment seat and declares that his counsels are infallible. Here his merciless justice comes in, a counterfeit of justice, abhorrent to God. {CTr 11.4}

Satan will be judged by his own idea of justice. It was his plea that every sin should meet its punishment. If God remitted the punishment, he said, He was not a God of truth or justice. **Satan will meet the judgment which he said God should exercise.** {12MR 413.1}

God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. Every ray of light rejected, every warning despised or unheeded, every passion indulged, every transgression of the law of God, is a seed sown which yields its unfailing harvest. The Spirit of God, persistently resisted, is at last withdrawn from the sinner, and then there is left no power to control the evil passions of the soul, and no protection from the malice and enmity of Satan. The destruction of Jerusalem is a fearful and solemn warning to all who are trifling with the offers of divine grace and resisting the pleadings of divine mercy. Never was there given a more decisive testimony to God's hatred of sin and to the certain punishment that will fall upon the guilty. {GC 36.1}

The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened. To know God is to love Him; His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. {DA 22.1}

May you be blessed as you read this precious article from Waggoner.

Justice and Mercy

There is a strange idea prevalent in the world, and even in the professed Christian world, that justice and mercy are opposite qualities, and that they cannot be manifested in the same person at the same time. We remember a hymn long ago, in praise of “charity,” one line of which said, “Justice hath in thee no part.” This expresses the prevalent idea, that justice is harsh and cruel, and that in order to exercise mercy God has to lay aside His justice, and that when He exercises justice He lays aside mercy.

This is a most unfortunate idea. It represents God as changeable. But the fact is that He cannot deny Himself, and He changes not. “For I am the Lord, I change not.” Mal. 3:6. “Justice and judgment are the habitation [or foundation] of Thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before Thy face.” Ps. 89:14. These are words of the man by whom the Holy Ghost spake. The psalm begins, “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever; with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever; Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens.” And again, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever.” Ps. 136:1. God is from everlasting to everlasting; both justice and mercy are parts of His character; He cannot change; therefore both the justice and the mercy of the Lord must endure for ever, unchanged.

Justice no less than mercy is manifest in the plan of redemption. Thus we read: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Rom. 3:23-26. Here we are told that God does not lay aside His justice in saving men, but in the very act of redemption He displays His justice.

In the tabernacle which the Lord told Moses to build, and the pattern of which He showed him in the mount, the chief article of furniture was the ark. In this ark the tables of the law were placed. The cover of the ark was called the mercy-seat, and upon this cover were the figures of two cherubim, one at each end, facing each other. See Ex. 25:10-21. Of this the Lord said, "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel." Ex. 25:22. "And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims; and He spake unto him." Num. 7:89. From this we learn that as the tabernacle represented the dwelling place of God, corresponding to the temple of God in heaven (see Ex. 25:8; Heb. 9:23,24; Ps. 11:4), so the ark represented the throne of God. Thus the law of God forms the foundation of His throne, yet the throne itself is the seat of mercy. In the throne of God "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Ps. 85:10. His throne is a throne of grace, where we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Heb. 4:16.

But some reader doubtless thinks that we have not yet touched the real question at issue. The following texts are doubtless in his mind: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them." Ps. 103:17,18. "For He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." James 2:13. Doesn't this seem to indicate that God's mercy endures for ever only for those who fear Him, and that there will come a time when His mercy will cease, at least as far as the wicked are concerned? Let us see.

God the Source of all Things

God is the Creator of all things. It is common to say that He created all things from nothing. That is true, in so far as it means that His word formed the worlds where there was nothing; but they really came from His word. His word is filled with His own life; so it is true that all creation came into existence through the very life of God. Everything sprang from Him, so that in the creation of the worlds there is the mystery of reproduction. This idea is given in the words of the Psalmist, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art of God." Ps. 90:1, 2.

Read also the following familiar texts: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; . . . for in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Acts 17:24-29. "For with Thee is the Fountain of Life." Ps. 36:9. "All things come of Thee." 1 Chron. 29:14. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev. 4:11.

Not only has God, through Christ, created all things, but their continued existence depends upon Him alone. We have redemption through the blood of Christ, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." Col. 1:16,17. Christ, who is the fulness of the Godhead, is the life of everything; He is the force that is manifested in all matter.

Necessity of Agreement with God

This being the case, it is evident that the continued existence of all things depends upon their harmony with the will of God, and their submission to it. This is not a mere arbitrary demand on the part of God, He does not require that all things shall be subject to Him, simply to gratify His love of power, as would be the case with man, but because only as all things are dependent on Him can they exist. “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Micah 6:8. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed. Man cannot walk and dwell with God unless they are in union with Him; but their very existence depends upon their union with God. Apart from God there can be no life. It is only in Him that we live, and move, and have our being.

So far as the earth itself is concerned, there is no difficulty. The creation was made subject to vanity, “not willingly.” Rom. 8:20. It is passive in the hands of God, although it is marred with the sins of men. It has been cursed for the sake of man, and for a little season it groans and travails in pain, waiting for the deliverance which will surely come to it. For “the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.” Rom. 8:21. But man has allied himself with Satan and his angels in rebellion against the Almighty. His natural mind is now enmity against God; “for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8:7.

Yet through the mercy of God, man has existence continued to him. “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.” Lam. 3:22. This longsuffering of God is for the salvation of man. Although they have forfeited all claim upon Him, having rebelled against His love, and chosen death, He is loth to leave them, and so has provided means that “His banished be not expelled from Him.” 2 Sam. 14:14. The great love of God is shown in this. He “gave Himself for us.” “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13. “But God

commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5:8. He did this while we were "dead in trespasses and sins," solely "For His great love wherewith He loved us," because He "is rich in mercy." Eph. 2:4,5. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Cor. 5:19. In giving Himself for rebellious men, that thus they might be reconciled to Himself, God shows how greatly He desired that all men should have everlasting life, for as we have seen, only in union with Him is there a life. And this love for men, and the desire that they may have everlasting life, is daily shown in the fact that as an act of grace He keeps rebellious men alive, in order that they may listen to His loving invitation, and be reconciled to Him. He says, "I am inquired of by them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not; I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people, and walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts." Isa. 65:1,2.

The Justice of Mercy

But in this mercy the justice of God appears. He has made man in His own image, with faculties capable of the highest enjoyment, for He has given him the freedom to choose his own way, and has set everything before him. The highest possible enjoyment is found in the most perfect freedom; and this God has given to man, in giving him the utmost liberty to choose whatever he will. **In this choice there is absolutely no restriction put upon man by the Lord. His strict justice is shown in His not interfering with man's personal right of choice as to what he will have. God knows that only in Him can man find his highest good, and therefore He places Himself before man in the most attractive light, and pleads with him to accept Him; but He will not intrude His presence where it is not wanted. He will not coerce the will of man. He has in making man guaranteed to him perfect liberty, and He Himself respects the rights which He has bestowed on man. To attempt to compel men to accept His ways, perfect though they be, would be to**

deprive him of that liberty which is inseparable from God; and so it would be to defeat His own purpose.

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live; that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him; for He is thy life, and the length of thy days; that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.” Deut. 30:19,20. Whoever chooses God will have life; for God Himself is life. When the man has yielded to the persuasion of the Lord, so far as to indicate his preference for Him, then the Lord Himself gladly comes in and supplies all his need. He gives him the power to do right, or rather, He Himself lives His own righteous will in the man. As long as the man continues to yield to God, so long will he have life, even to all eternity. God has promised that He will never forsake the man who puts his trust in Him and therefore that man must continue to live as long as God lives. That man will find that God's plan for him is the very best thing possible for him. In the presence of God there is fulness of joy.

Giving Men Their Own Way

But what of those who will not have Christ to reign over them? What of them who persist in their rebellion against the Lord? Here is the answer: “For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of My counsel; they despised all My reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.” Prov. 1:29-32. They resist the Spirit of the Lord, refusing all its pleadings, until it is useless to strive longer with them. They utterly refuse to have anything to do with the Lord, and so He lets them have their own way, which is destruction. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Prov. 14:12.

Such ones are self-condemned. Their condemnation to death is not merely the decision of a Judge, but is the natural result of their own course. They have hated the Lord, have resisted all His advances, and have shown their desire to have nothing to do with Him. Since they positively refuse to live with Him, He has no other alternative but to leave them to themselves; and as they have no means of self-existence, they necessarily suffer destruction. In addition to that text quoted in the preceding paragraph, which showed this to be the case, read the following:-

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds.” Rom. 2:1-6.

The same love has been bestowed upon the wicked that has been bestowed upon the righteous. It is common for people to say that God has been very good to such and such a person. This is true, but it is not all the truth, and it may convey a wrong impression. **The fact is that the Lord is good to everybody.** “The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works.” Ps. 145:9. **The Lord is goodness itself. He is love. He cannot at any time be any other than He is, and therefore He is just as good to one person as He is to another. He is equally good to everybody and just as good as He can be all the time. Therefore it is not because they have not been drawn by the love of God, that some are destroyed. It is because they have despised that love. Having hardened their hearts against God's love, the more He manifested His love to them, the harder they became.** It is a trite saying that the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay.

The Fate of the Wicked

One question more ought to be considered in this connection, and that is, What is the fate of those who reject the Lord? It is clear enough that it is separation from Him, for that is what they have chosen. They were naturally separated from the Lord by their sins. God, however, would not let them go without an effort to induce them to accept His ways. But their refusal of His kind offers showed their determination to be for ever separated from Him, and He is at last compelled to give them up to their own choice.

Now the question is, Where can they exist separate from God? Read the words of the Psalmist: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." Ps. 139:7-12.

God is everywhere. It is His presence, and that only, that upholds the universe. **It is evident, therefore, that those who are left to their own choice to be eternally separate from the Lord, have no place left them but utter extinction. There is no place in the universe where men can exist separate from the presence of the Lord.** And this is just what the Lord says shall be their fate. "For the day of the Lord is near upon all the heathen; **as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy reward shall return upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon My holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been.**" Obadiah 15, 16. This is reaping the fruit of their own way, namely, rejecting the presence of the Spirit of God.

Everlasting Punishment

“But,” says some reader, “doesn't the Bible say that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment?” Yes, it does say that, Let us read the text. It is the close of our Saviour's great discourse to His disciples just before His crucifixion. Having described the wicked, He says, “And they shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.” Matt. 25:46.

But does that mean that the wicked are to remain alive eternally? Not necessarily. It depends upon what their punishment will be. Now in Rom. 6:23 we have a parallel text. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Then since that is the punishment of the sinners, and they are to go into everlasting punishment, it follows that they go away into everlasting death. That is as plain as words can make it. And it is further corroborated by the inspired statement that the righteous shall have rest “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.” 2 Thess. 1:7-9.

Unquenchable Fire

“But then we are told that the fire that burns the wicked shall not be quenched.” Very true; and the reason why it shall not be quenched is that it is unquenchable. “He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Matt. 3:12. Unquenchable indeed it must be, because it is the fire of the glory of the Lord. When the Lord comes the wicked will be consumed with the Spirit of His mouth, and destroyed with the brightness of His coming. See 2 Thess. 2:8. That fire must exist as long as God exists; but while it is death to the enemies of the Lord, it is light and life to those that love Him. It is as in the case of

ancient Israel; that which was light to the Israelites, was confusion and destruction to the Egyptians.

But the fact that the fire is unquenchable does not show that what is cast into it must exist for ever. Quite the contrary. If a fire breaks out in a building, and the firemen are not able to quench it, the inevitable result is that the building is utterly consumed. So it is with those who shall be cast into the unquenchable fires of the last day. The text says that they shall be “burned up” with unquenchable fire. The wicked are called chaff, indicating the case with which they may be consumed. “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” Mal. 4:1.

Eternal Fire

What has been said about the unquenchable fire has cleared up the trouble that some would have had over the term “eternal fire,” into which the wicked are to be sent. “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Matt. 25:41. As we have already seen, the effect of such a fire must be to utterly consume and destroy every vestige of that which is thrown into it.

But we have given us an example of the effect of the eternal fire. The apostle Jude writes about the judgment reserved for the devil and his angels, together with those who have served him, and presents this likeness: “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” Jude 7. The fire that destroyed the cities is the same fire that will at the last day destroy all the wicked. It is eternal fire, yet notice its effect upon those cities:-

“For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of My people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her.” Lam. 4:6.

God to be All in All

There are other texts that might occur to one, but these are sufficient to show what the Scripture teaches as to the destiny of the wicked. The statements are plain, and there can be no contradiction in the Bible. And now let us once more return to the original thought about the mercy of God in connection with His justice. **His mercy endures even to the midst in the execution of His judgments. “O give thanks to the Lord; for ever. . . . To Him that smote Egypt in their firstborn; for His mercy endureth for ever; . . . to Him which divided the Red sea into parts, for His mercy endureth for ever; and made Israel to pass through the midst of it; for His mercy endureth for ever; but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea; for His mercy endureth for ever.”** Ps. 136:1,10,13-15.

God's mercies endure for ever, even though there are some who will have none of it. In His mercy He bears long with them, but God could not tolerate rebellion for ever in His dominions and be just to His loyal subjects. So in justice no less than mercy to those who willingly yield to His control, He must let the wicked suffer the punishment which they have worked for. Indeed, it would be doing the wicked an injustice not to give them that for which they have so long and diligently laboured. They have taken counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” All their desire has been to be left to themselves and now God gives them their desire. But as there is no place in the universe where God is not, the only thing for them is **extinction. So we read, “For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.”** Ps. 37:9, 10.

Then will be fulfilled the purpose of God, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." Eph. 1:10. Then will Christ have accomplished the purpose for which He ascended to heaven, namely, "that He might fill all things." Eph. 4:10. "And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all." 1 Cor. 15:28. And then from "every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them," will be heard with one voice, "Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever." Rev. 5:13.

Justice and Mercy

In the year of 1893, some of the most precious truth from the 1888 message came to light. Shortly before this time Ellen White wrote

The time of test is just upon us, for **the loud cry of the third angel has already begun** in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. **This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth.** RH, November 22, 1892 par. 7

Building upon the principles of God being the source of all things within the context of the two covenants placed in their right framework, Waggoner presented in 1893 a sequence of reasoning which would open the door to a true understanding of the character of God in His dealing with the wicked.

God has given to man, in giving him the utmost liberty to choose whatever he will. In this choice there is absolutely no restriction put upon man by the Lord. **His strict justice is shown in His not interfering with man's personal right of choice as to what he will have.** God knows that only in Him can man find his highest good, and therefore He places Himself before man in the most attractive light, and pleads with him to accept Him; **but He will not intrude His presence where it is not wanted. He will not coerce the will of man.** He has in making man guaranteed to him perfect liberty, and He Himself respects the rights which He has bestowed on man. To attempt to compel men to accept His ways, perfect though they be, would be to deprive him of that liberty which is inseparable from God; and so it would be to defeat His own purpose. *Present Truth UK*, February 23, 1893

Brethren, this statement is part of the beginning of the latter rain. It is a truth so bright that it will play a key role in sealing the saints with the name of the Father in the foreheads of those who receive it as precious truth.