



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 4.12 – The Doctrine of Human Beings and Sin

### The Punishment for Sin

God in His holy justice punishes all sin. Sin can be compared to a debt that is owed to God. When the debt is paid in full, the sin is forgiven. Likewise, when the punishment for sin has been totally carried out, the sin is forgiven. Jesus taught that He Himself came into the world to pay the debt in full. He said: **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). The giving of Jesus’ life was the perfect and total ransom payment to cover for all of human sin. The punishment inflicted on Jesus and totally absorbed by Him was a sufficient punishment to atone for all human sin. He paid the price that no one else could pay. The punishment inflicted on Him was sufficient to obtain forgiveness for all sin.

Any disobedience of God’s law is sin that has to be punished. Therefore, every sinner puts himself under God’s curse by his sin. What hangs over his head is the threat of punishment for his sin, and that punishment is eternal death: separation from all the blessings of God. God directed Moses to divide the Israelites into two camps. One of the camps was to pronounce blessing on those who obey God’s law. The other camp was to pronounce a curse on those who disobey. The concluding curse was: **“Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law”** (Deuteronomy 27:26). The apostle Paul repeated this curse in his letter to the Galatians: **“As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them’”** (Galatians 3:10).

The prophet Isaiah foretold what the Messiah would do to compensate for all human sin. We find the perfect remedy for sin and the punishment sinners deserve in these words: **“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:5-6). Notice that God Himself transferred the total burden of all human sin, along with its punishment, from us sinners to the only sinless One, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. By taking on all human sin and its punishment, He brings us healing. There is peace for us instead of the curse of God hanging over us. Paul wrote to the Galatians: **“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)”** (Galatians 3:13). Notice that Jesus became a curse for us by hanging on the tree of the cross. That is where God punished Him for all human sin. That is where He was wounded, He was bruised, He was chastised, and He was given stripes, for our healing.

All of this is stated very clearly by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians in Rome. He declared: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:23-24). Note that the only way sinners can be justified (declared righteous) by God is through the redemption of Christ, that is, by Jesus’ absorbing the full punishment for all human sin when He was hanging on the cross. Note that as many as have sinned have been declared righteous (justified). As many as have sinned are declared forgiven because Jesus absorbed in His own body the punishment for all sin. This same truth is emphasized by Paul’s comparison between Adam and Jesus Christ. **“As through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life”** (Romans 5:18). Adam’s sin brought about condemnation to all. Christ’s redemption brought about the justification of all, that is, the forgiveness of sin.

Throughout their lives, sinners may think to themselves that they have gotten away with their sin, because God does not immediately punish their sin with eternal death. Through the words of the psalmist Asaph God says to these sinners: **“These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes. Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver”** (Psalm 50:21-22). Our only hope is the One who has delivered us, Jesus Christ. But those who reject this one and only Savior remain under God’s curse and they will face their punishment of eternal death in the world to come. John the Baptist gave us this testimony: **“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”** (John 3:36).

God may partially punish unbelievers for sin even in this life. Punishments of this kind are intended to lead sinners to repentance. The prophet Amos told the Israelites that God sent to them **“cleanness of teeth,” “lack of bread,”** withholding of rain, **“blight and mildew,” “a plague,”** and more; yet in each case God had to tell them: **“Yet you have not returned to Me”** (Amos 4:6-11). If His judgments do not produce repentance, God may inflict on impenitent sinners the greatest of all earthly judgments. He may take away His life-saving word. Amos warned his people: **“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God, ‘that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it’”** (Amos 8:11-12).

There are many persons on earth who thumb their noses at God, so to speak, and pay no attention to anything He says or does. Such persons may become wealthy on earth and they may seem to prosper in every way. But God says: **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”** (Galatians 6:7-8). Therefore, the mighty on earth are warned: **“Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him”** (Psalm 2:12).

Sometimes it may seem that true believers in Christ are being punished here on earth for their sins. But if they cling to Jesus and trust in the punishment He absorbed in their place, they are not under God’s wrath or under any kind of curse. Think of the sufferings God permitted the godly man Job to experience. Yet God was not punishing Job; He was putting Job to the test for Job’s own spiritual growth. In such cases we should speak of God’s discipline or chastisement rather than His punishment, even though outwardly such discipline may look the same as God’s judgments on unbelievers.

The letter to the Hebrews quotes Proverbs 3:1-12 and explains God’s chastening like this: **“You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:5-11).

We find an example of such chastisement for our good in what happened to the Christians at Corinth because of their abuse of the Lord’s Supper. After spelling out what they were doing wrongly, Paul says: **“For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world”** (1 Corinthians 11:30-32). Notice that the purpose of God’s chastisement is not condemnation, but to save us from condemnation.

## Questions

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1. When and how did God punish all human sin?
2. What kind of curse rests on all sinners because of their disobedience?
3. How was this curse removed?
4. On whom does this curse still rest, and why?
5. What does the cross of Calvary have to do with punishment for sin?
6. Prove from Isaiah 53 that our sins have been already punished.
7. Why does not every sinner receive the benefits of Christ's work?
8. Give an outline of the grand comparison between Adam and Jesus Christ.
9. Why does God sometimes send partial judgments on sinners in this life?
10. What was the result of God's judgments on Israel in the days of Amos?
11. What is the greatest of all earthly judgments?
12. What is the difference between God's judgment on unbelievers and His chastisement of believers?
13. What chastisement did God send to the Christians at Corinth? Why?