

January Questions and Answers

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Over the past two months, we have allowed single questions to take up our question and answer session. During this lesson, we will get back to answering more than one. In fact, we have three questions to deal with.

Discussion:

- I. Are there degrees of punishment in hell and reward in heaven?
 - A. We will first address degrees of punishment? Will a person receive greater punishment for worse sin? I believe the answer to that question is, “No” and “Yes.” Allow me to explain.
 1. Despite our concept of lesser and greater sins, the Bible does not rank sin. While some sins have a greater impact in our world – serial murder versus a little white lie, every sin has the exact same impact spiritually on our souls.
 - a. **Romans 3:23** says we have all sinned, falling short of God's glory. The issue is not how sins compare to one another but how they compare to God's glory. Every sin falls short.
 - b. **Isaiah 59:1-3** says our sins separate us from God, whether they are the sins of shedding blood or the sins of telling lies and muttering perversity.
 - c. **Romans 6:23** says the wages of every sin is death. Whether we have lied or murdered, we have become worthy of death.
 2. However, the scriptures indicate that some will endure a greater punishment than others. But this difference is not based on how awful we believe the sin to be, but on the extent of the person's knowledge. Notice the following passages.
 - a. **II Peter 2:20-22** declares it would be better for a person to never know the way of righteousness than to have known it and abandoned it.
 - b. **Luke 12:47-48** indicates our punishment will be based on our knowledge. To him who knew but did not obey, many stripes will be given. But few stripes will be given to him who sinned but was unaware. The key for us is that whether we knew or did not know, we will still be punished. I do not want to be in even the coolest spot in hell. Do you?
 - B. Are there degrees of reward in heaven?
 1. To answer this question, we need to consider what allows any of us to go to heaven? Do any of us earn the reward of heaven? Absolutely not. We enter heaven by God's grace through Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). None of us has any reason to boast (**Romans 4:1-4**). According to **Luke 17:7-10**, when we have done everything we ought to have done, we can only claim to be unprofitable servants. We all enter heaven by the same grace. Since it is by grace for all of us, none of us can expect a greater reward than any other.
 2. Do not believe that means you may be a lazy, non-growing Christian. **II Peter 1:5-11** demonstrates that we must diligently grow in Christ to receive the kingdom of God. If we are lazy, half-hearted, uncommitted, non-growing Christians we will not receive the same reward as our brethren. We will receive the greatest number of stripes because we knew better but did not grow (**Luke 12:47-48**).
- II. What does it mean that Michael the archangel did not bring a reviling accusation against the devil in **Jude 8-9**?
 - A. As Jude wrote to warn faithful Christians to keep an eye out for certain men who would creep into the church secretly, turning God's grace into a cloak for immorality and in reality denying the Father and the Son (**Jude 4-5**), he used Michael the archangel as an example of proper behavior. One of the main problems sinners have is not understanding the meaning of authority (I am not speaking about establishing biblical authority, but rather of the concepts of positions of authority). Just as the angels of **Jude 6** and Korah of **Jude 11** did not understand what it meant to be under someone else's authority, people who want to sin despise true authority and make themselves out to be the only authority.
 - B. Michael the archangel stands as a stark contrast to this. Consider who Michael is – not only an angel, but an archangel, that is, a ruling angel. Michael himself is in a position of authority among the angels. However, he has a very clear understanding of the limits of his authority. The term for “reviling” is *blasphemia* which means “blasphemy, verbal abuse against someone

which denotes the very worst type of slander ...”¹ The term for “accusation” is *krisis* which means a “decision ...; by extension, a tribunal; by implication, justice ... accusation, condemnation, damnation, judgment.”² Despite how much Michael may have wanted to pronounce some kind of judgment against Satan, he knew that was not his place. God is the judge. God is the avenger. God is the punisher.

- C. That is not to say that Michael had no authority to declare that Satan was wrong and would be judged. In fact, that is exactly what he did, pointing out that God would rebuke Satan, charging and judging Him for his evil.
- D. The point of Michael’s example is that we must recognize our place in the scheme of authority. We are not the judges, God is. We cannot pronounce judgment on anyone, God does that. All we can do is exactly what Michael did. We can point people to what God has said He will do. We can let people see God’s Word. If they reject and despise it, then while we do not dispense the official judgment that condemns people to hell, we must certainly let them know that the Lord will rebuke them. Remember, they do not need us to judge them, Jesus’ word, which they have rejected, judges them (**John 12:48**).

III. What kind of distressing spirit did God send Saul (**I Samuel 16:14-15, 23**)?

- A. This passage has caused consternation among Christians because the King James translated the phrase “evil spirit.” The immediate conclusion is that God sent a spiritual being to cause problems for Saul, but what is disconcerting is that He used an evil one.
- B. However, as the New King James translates this passage the question is a little easier for us. The “spirit” is not evil in the sense of morally wrong, demonic and satanic. Rather, it is evil in the sense that it is distressing. It does not cause good things, but negative things. Thus, God did not use evil, wicked, sinful means to reach His ends. Instead, He caused Saul to be distressed.
- C. Going further, however, are we actually seeing a picture of God sending a spiritual being to harass Saul? The term translated “spirit” (*ruwach*) is used in numerous ways throughout scripture. Certainly, in **I Kings 22:21**, it was used to describe a spiritual being. In **Genesis 1:2**, it referred directly to the Holy Spirit. In **Genesis 7:15**, to the breath of life. In **Genesis 8:1**, it is a wind. In **Genesis 26:35**, it referred to the mind of Isaac and Rebekah. In **Genesis 41:8**, it spoke of the inner part of a man and it was troubled. In **Exodus 28:3**, it spoke of a tabernacle worker having a spirit of wisdom. In **Numbers 5:14**, it referred to a spirit of jealousy. In **Numbers 14:24**, it spoke of Caleb having a different spirit than the other spies. In **I Samuel 1:15**, Hannah had a sorrowful spirit. With all these possibilities, we would certainly be amiss to simply assume God sent a spiritual being to Saul.
- D. This text is making a play on words. God’s Spirit was no longer with Saul as it had been in the past (**I Samuel 10:10; 11:6**). Instead, Saul was plagued with a distressed or evil spirit. Instead of having the comfort, strength and peace that comes with being supported by God, Saul had the anguish and anxiety that comes with being abandoned by God. I believe the text is claiming that Saul was dealing with bouts of depression.
- E. I have two reasons for this. The first is textual. That is, in **Judges 9:23**, the same terms are used for “evil spirit” (KJV). There the term clearly refers to the mindset that Abimelech and the men of Shechem had toward one another. The second is contextual. According to **I Samuel 16:23**, Saul could overcome his distressing spirit through music. If the distressing spirit was a spirit inhabiting Saul, he could not overcome it through these means but would need to have a miraculous intervention. I am mindful of the time that the disciples tried to remove a spirit from a man and failed, Jesus said it would only be removed by prayer and fasting (**Matthew 17:21**).

Conclusion:

I certainly hope this has been helpful to you. Please, remember that you can submit questions at any time by filling out the form on the phone table by my office and placing it in the appropriate box.

¹ Zodhiates, Spiros, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, 1993, p 341.

² Strong, James, *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” Hendrickson Pub., Peabody, MA, p 43.