

Why You Should Fear God

Psalm 130

The Psalms (no. 13 in the series)

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/why-you-should-fear-god/>

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This document was prepared by Michael Hanna using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Michael know. Thank you!

Message

And so, Lord God, we pray that you would descend upon your sanctuary, you would melt down the old cold heart of stone, and you would fill us as your living temple with your fire? We ask it, Lord God, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Why should you fear God?

Solomon called it the beginning of Wisdom.

Jesus said to his friends, "Yes, I tell you fear him."ⁱ

Video clip from Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*
Universal Pictures (1983)

The General is giving a presentation to a mostly-empty classroom.

General: It's all very well to laugh at the military, but when one considers the meaning of life, it is a struggle between alternative viewpoints of life itself. And without the ability to defend one's own viewpoint against other, perhaps more aggressive ideologies, then reasonableness and moderation could quite simply disappear. That is why we'll always need an Army, and may God strike me down were it to be otherwise.

There is a sound like the firing of a blaster gun and the General is struck by a bolt of blue light, disappearing in a puff of smoke and a shower of sparks. The view shifts to the outside of the building just in time to see the weapon that fired the shot (God's hand from Michelangelo's Creation of Adam fresco in the Sistine Chapel, looking like a cartoonish cutout in the live film) withdrawing upwards into the clouds.

The face of the Sergeant-Major fills the screen as he reprimands his troops:

Sgt-Major: Don't stand there gawping! Like you've never seen the hand o' God before!

"Life is a struggle... that's why we'll always need an army... May God strike me down were it to be otherwise..." [Peter makes an exploding sound]

"Don't stand there gawking like you've never seen the hand of God before!"

I think most people fear God because the hand of God is all powerful. We refer earthquakes, storms and tsunamis as “acts of God,” for no human hand is powerful enough to do such things.

We fear God because he’s powerful and just. And by just we mean, you can’t sneak anything past him; he won’t take any crap, so you better join his team and tithe to the church, or he might smite you like Sodom & roast you like Gomorrah.

After earthquakes, storms and tsunamis, the Angel in the Revelation does say: “Fear God for the hour of his judgment has come.”ⁱⁱ And Jesus did say, “Fear him who is able to destroy both soul [*psyche*] and body in [*Gehenna*] hell.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I think most folks would say:

- Fear God because he’s keeping a record of every sin.
- And because he is Just and so he will Judge.
- And because his Judgment is Eternal Fire.
- Fear God because he might not forgive.

Now listen to Psalm 130

Psalm 130

A song of ascents.

- 1 **Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!**
- 2 **O Lord, hear my voice!**
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!
- 3 **If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,**
O Lord, who could stand?
- 4 **But with you there is forgiveness,**
that you may be feared.

“*With you there is forgiveness...*” so we don’t need to fear. **No**, that’s just the opposite of what it says: “*With you there is forgiveness, that (so that, in order that) you may be feared.*”

Is that like a Bible typo?

Or have we radically, epically, misunderstood forgiveness and fear?

Why would forgiveness make us fear?

[image: picture of Alex]

This is Alex. I met him in 2004 on a trip to Columbia to meet with pastors suffering persecution from Drug Cartels. When he was a new believer, his father was murdered by terrorist guerillas, who would often threaten him and his mother with death. He shared with us how he struggled to understand the gifts of God until he came to realize that God himself, body broken and blood shed, is the gift.

During this time, Alex worked at a banana plantation and road a bus back and forth to his village each day with the other workers. One day a paramilitary group boarded the bus, made everyone lie

face down, and then began shooting each person in the back of the head. Then, they would sever their victim's heads with machetes to make a statement. A bullet passed behind Alex's eyes, blowing one eye out of his skull and damaging the other. Alex told us that he thought he was going to die.

It was then that he remembered: he hadn't told the gunmen about Jesus. So, Alex started to yell, "Jesus loves you! Jesus loves you!"

One of the gunmen screamed, "Shut up!" and swung his machete...but the machete wouldn't go through Alex's neck. The gunman tried, and tried again, but it wouldn't go through and I imagine Alex kept yelling, "Jesus loves you!"

"It must've been the power of God," said Alex.

The gunmen freaked out and they all fled, leaving Alex tied to twenty-five headless corpses.

And Alex stood before us blind, weeping, and body broken as he said, "To love the Lord is everything, and there is nothing else."

Years later Alex went to seminary and began working in a prison. One afternoon he met the man that had tried to kill him. He told the man that he forgave him.

My friend, who knew Alex and was translating, stopped him at that point and said, "Alex, tell everyone how he reacted when you forgave him."

Alex stopped and then said, "He was afraid."

I would imagine that this man had built an entire universe around vengeance, power and fear, but now as he looked at Alex that universe began to crumble. It crumbled in the presence of a greater fear, unspeakable power and an entirely different type of vengeance.

Maybe it wasn't just Alex that said, "I forgive," but a slaughtered lamb standing on a throne.

**4 But with you there is forgiveness [sālah],
that you may be feared.**

According to my lexicon, and I quote:

This verb, together with a few others, such as *bāra'* "to create," is used in Scripture solely of God. *sālah* is used of God's... forgiveness... Never does this word in any of its forms refer to people forgiving each other.^{iv}

It's one thing to be a sinner forgiven by another sinner, but to be forgiven by God is rather different.

Remember how David said, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned...?"

Some think David was being calloused towards Bathsheba and Uriah when he said that. I suspect that he glimpsed a profound truth...and that was that the Lamb of God was in Bathsheba and Uriah. That it wasn't simply their life that he took. It was God's life and now he would experience God's judgment.

He said, “against you, and you only, have I sinned that you would be justified... in your judgment.”^v God’s judgment was forgiveness, but the Son of David died, and the Son of David was born. And I suspect that David died and was born with him. In fact, David’s concept of reality must’ve died and been born with him. He took “*the Life*” and discovered that he was given “*the Life*.”

That was the judgment of God: Forgiveness. In Romans, Paul explains that David sinned, so that God could judge, and David could then glorify God for his judgment...^{vi} As if the Judgment was eternal and the sin just opened David’s eyes to the judgment.

That’s entirely backwards and upside down to us.^{vii} And I suppose it was all rather terrifying for David.

- 3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?**
**4 But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.**^{viii}

“If you O Lord should mark iniquities...” It means “to keep an account,” as if God needed to balance his books. In Psalm 103, David writes, “he does not deal with us according to our sins.” And now it seems he doesn’t even keep a record of sins.

[Peter sings] “*He’s NOT makin’ a list and checking it twice, so he can find out who’s naughty and nice.*”

In 1 Cor. 13:5, Paul writes, “[Love] keeps no record of wrongs.”^{ix} Some Bibles translate that “Love... is not resentful.” But literally Paul writes, “Love does not calculate (*logizomai*) the evil.”

God is Love and his entire commandment is love—it’s everything I’m supposed to do. And Love doesn’t make a list. And yet our entire society, our sociology, psychology and even our definition of Life is built around “*making a list and checking it twice... gonna find out....*”

- That’s why many of us go to church.
- That’s why we want the knowledge of Good and evil.
- That’s how we construct a mental and emotional map of reality.

Think about it: At first, we don’t know what’s bad and have no record of bad or good. We just enjoy the presence of Mom and Dad...as a baby.

But before long we start keeping a record of wrongs. We go to school and everything is about our record of wrongs which determines our record of “rights,” so we can make ourselves good.

- You’re a fourth grader, fifth grader, or sixth grader because of your record
- You know who to eat lunch with because of their record
- You know who is cool and who is a dweeb cause of the record you keep
- You get a job and maybe a wife or husband cause of your record
- You can vote or not vote, drive or not drive because of your record

Our entire judicial system is about knowledge of good and evil, with which we can maintain a record of wrongs, in order to keep ourselves right and safe.

You probably keep a record on everyone you know to keep yourself safe. In fact, you probably manufacture a record even for those you don't know... to keep your ego safe and your view of reality safe.

When you see someone on the street in need of help and you don't want to help, it's helpful to construct a record of their wrongs, and think: "they deserve whatever they've got." When you eat your steak while others are starving, it's tempting to think, that they kind of deserve to be starving—for if they don't deserve to starve, it's hard to justify you and your dinner. It's how I guard my ego... and it's why I get offended.

When someone wins an award with a record of wrongs worse than mine, I say "that's not fair; that's not just." I expect life to be fair, which means, those with the best record should win and those with the worse record... should lose.

We even say things like "Life is a struggle..." like the [General] in the video. In fact, we even suspect that heaven is the survival of the fittest—it's for those that have the least wrongs on their list...which does make you rejoice at the wrongs on your neighbor's list... and you think that's right... right? Rejoicing at wrongs and keeping a list.

Love does not rejoice in the wrong, but rejoices with the Truth.

Paul writes, "Love keeps no record of wrongs..."^x And we think, "Well fine then... that's how Love will get himself crucified..."

Understand? My mental and emotional map is basically the record of wrongs that I have constructed in my head; it's my *psyche*. If God keeps no record of wrongs, and God creates reality, my reality might be an absurd illusion: backwards, upside down, and opposed to my creator—that's a bit frightening. I may have absolutely no justification for the person that I think is "me."

Now you may say, "Oh come on, clearly God marks iniquities and keeps a record of wrong... that's why Christ died... to pay our debt and balance God's books."

Colossians 2:13 · "God made [us] alive with Christ having forgiven all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt which stood against us."

So, it's true that Christ cancelled our record of debt, but if love keeps no record of wrongs, and God is Love, then God didn't write that record of wrongs...

It's true that the dead are judged by deeds recorded in the books in Rev. 20, but maybe God didn't write those books. The lamb also has a book, but it's not a record of wrongs, it's the book of life...

Maybe we wrote the books and the record of debt, and we started writing the day we listened to the snake whisper "Take knowledge of the Good, so you can keep a record of the bad and make yourself in the image of God."

Maybe God didn't write the record...^{xi} Paul writes, "sin is not counted where there is no law..." I think it was the Accuser that suggested taking the law. He suggested it to Adam and Eve so that they would start counting... and start accusing... and start writing the record of wrongs.^{xii}

God surely knows our sins, but he doesn't seem to be interested in counting. Jesus died for our sins, but not because God was counting. Actually, Jesus is the Presence of God, not counting...

2nd Cor. 5:19 God was in Christ “reconciling the world”—not *some* of the world—“to himself, not counting [*logizomai*] their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” That must be the message of not counting.

Since the Reformation some have argued that on the cross Jesus simply balanced God's books, so God wouldn't hate us, but now might love us. It's a rather bizarre idea for several reasons, not least of which is that according to Scripture God doesn't even keep the books.^{xiii} ... or at least a “record of wrongs.”

He doesn't mark iniquities or keep a record of wrongs...But perhaps he does keep something like a record of “rights.” A “wrong” (an evil) is the absence of something.^{xiv} But a “right” (a good) is the presence of God's something, God's life in us.

So maybe God is like the mother of a toddler, that overlooks her child's failure, but celebrates every success in the form of artwork taped to her refrigerator and a scrap book full of memories.

Paul writes that God will “render to each one according to his deeds,”^{xv} yet he goes on to reveal that what God renders is always Grace, not payment.

I don't know if I'm saying all of this correctly, but if forgiveness doesn't simply mean balancing the books, but means to not even keep books—it's no wonder that forgiveness might terrify people like us.

Our record of wrongs is why we think we're right, which is terribly wrong. We think we should fear God because he might not forgive our record of wrongs. And the Psalm tells us to fear God because he does forgive and keeps no record of wrongs.

We think Justice is keeping a record of wrongs and refusing to forgive because you demand payment.

We think Justice is counting sins and not forgiving.

We think Justice is retribution.^{xvi}

Ezekiel 33 has always been terrifying to me. God calls Ezekiel “son of man” and he tells Ezekiel to preach to the people saying, “If you do righteousness all your life and then do unrighteousness, none of your righteousness will count—you will surely die (or surely do die). Yet if you (that is the one that is surely dying) then turn and do right none of your sins will count... and you will surely live (or are surely living).”^{xvii}

None of my good deeds, or what I think are “good deeds,” may count, and none of my bad deeds may count—which means God's judgment is not retributive.

Next verse God says: “your people say, ‘the way of the Lord is not just, when it is their own way that is not just.’”

In three chapters God describes a day when he will “cleanse them of all iniquity,” he will forgive them all, and give them a “new heart” and a “new spirit”—One Heart, pumping One Spirit, in One River of Life—the Life.^{xviii}

Justice is not paying God back—what an asinine illusion!
Justice is not paying God back; justice is God placing his spirit in you and giving you his own heart.

Justice is not getting what you deserve.
Justice is God getting what God deserves... and that's you in the image of Love. And Love keeps no record of wrongs, Love just loves Love.

Justice is not keeping the books.
Justice is the end of all bookkeeping.^{xix}

Justice is not the opposite of forgiveness.
Justice is the forgiveness of God.
Deuteronomy 32:4 · “All his ways are Justice.”

Jesus didn't die so God would love you. He is Love, free Love. He is Grace.
Jesus didn't die so God would love you.
Jesus died so that you would love God. That's Justice.

God is not interested in your record of wrongs...
He just wants you to love Love, and so he gives you his heart: Jesus.

John Winthrop used to tell a story about a poor man who stole wood from his woodpile during one particularly harsh winter. Retributive justice would demand that the poor man pay for all the wood he had stolen and burned. But Winthrop found the man and said, “You may freely take of all the wood in my woodpile.” Then he would tell folks, “Thus I cured this man of stealing.”^{xx} He called that Substantive Justice, and I would imagine that it created a new substance in the heart of that poor man: gratitude for grace.

We didn't just take wood from God's wood pile. I think we took the Life of the Good, who is God, from the tree. In fact, every time you sin, you take the Life from the tree in the garden.

I'm not saying that all sins are simply the same, but that all sins reveal the same poverty of spirit, and all sins result in death, Christ's death and your death. Sin is taking the Life, and you could never pay for the Life, except perhaps with the knowledge that you took the Life—that's called confession. You could never pay for “the life” that is “the Good,” God can only give “the Life,” which is “the Good,” which is himself—and that's called Forgiveness.

The death of Christ on the tree in the garden and his resurrection from the dead in that same garden, is the knowledge of the Good, which is the Life freely given to us.

- It is the revelation of Grace.
- It is vengeance on the heart of stone and the creation of the heart of Mercy.
- It destroys the desire to count and creates the desire to worship.

Justice is not the opposite of forgiveness; it's the revelation of the forgiveness of God.
Forgiveness is heart surgery... open heart surgery.
Nothing is as terrifying to your old nature as the revelation of God's nature.
Forgiveness is the Vengeance of Love.

Years ago, a man at our church loaned me about 20 thousand dollars for the down payment on my house. One day he sat me down and said, “Peter I’m forgiving the debt.”

I said thank you, but it just ripped me apart inside. I’d lay awake trying to convince myself that I really *earned* the 20K. Or I’d imagine ways I would *still pay* the 20K or he’d *expect me to pay* the 20K. I’d lay awake trying to protect my ego. Trying to protect the idea that I built my house.^{xxi}

Imagine if I really believed that I wasn’t just forgiven a house; but forgiven “*me*” and forgiven *all things* with me, including *the very life of God* which I stole from a tree in a garden?

The Justice of God is the Forgiveness of God, and the Forgiveness of God is the Vengeance of God—vengeance upon the arrogant human ego that imagines that it is its own creator.

“Fear him who has the power to destroy body and psyche in Gehenna,” says Jesus. He will destroy your *psyche* in Gehenna or at the foot of his cross. Both are the vengeance of our God.

Isaiah 61:1 · “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” (v.2) “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all”—not some—“who mourn.”

Jesus quoted that in the synagogue at the start of his ministry, but he stopped just short of “the day of vengeance.”^{xxii} Some think that’s because he disagreed with Isaiah. I think it was because he knew they couldn’t yet understand Isaiah, but in three years they would.

“The year of the Lord’s favor” is the Jubilee, the sabbath of the sabbaths, when property was returned, prisoners were set free, and debts were cancelled. “The year of the Lord’s favor” was the cancellation of all records of wrong and the cessation of counting. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

There is no evidence that Israel ever celebrated the Jubilee. I bet they didn’t *because* the Jubilee is an absolute violation of our mental and emotional maps. It’s the violation of the human *Psyche*; it is the vengeance of our God.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God. He proclaimed the Jubilee, and it began with the day of Vengeance...

- It began on the day we took his Life and he gave His Life...
- It began the day he lifted his head on the tree in the garden...
- It began the moment he cried “Father forgive...” and “it is finished.”

That’s Justice; that’s is Forgiveness; that is vengeance on the human ego. That is the revelation of the Good hanging on a tree in a garden.

Psalms 9:7 · “The Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice.”

In the Revelation we saw His throne, and on the throne stood a slaughtered lamb--I think it’s the same slaughtered lamb that showed up in Alex as he said to the man that tried to kill him, “Jesus loves you and I forgive you.”

In the Revelation after the opening of the sixth seal and just before the seventh, John sees every person running from the face of God, which is a slaughtered lamb. They run in fear, for the presence of the lamb is literally the end of their world and their *psyche*—their mental and emotional map.

They run and hide, and the only place to hide is hell, the darkness, the caves, the depths of this earth.^{xxiii}

They hide from their greatest fear, which is also their deepest desire.
They hide from the manifest presence of relentless love.

- We each hide in a fortress, that we think is our self, but is only an illusion.
- We hide in self-justifications, and records of wrongs and imagined rights.
- We hide in a house we think we alone have constructed.
- We hide in that house hanging on to a life that we think is our own.
- We hide from love, longing for love, in a house that turns into hell.

We hide in that house. So maybe it's a blessing that someone might sin against your house. And even more, that you might sin against theirs...

Sin is taking the Life from the house of another; Sin is drawing blood. Love is bleeding the Life into the house of another. Love is giving blood.

"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son"—who is his life—"as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."^{xxiv}

A river of Life flows from the throne and never stops. It does not come in 12-ounce sealed containers that you can store in your barn, buy and sell, or dispense by measure.

Maybe it's a blessing that someone might take the life from you, so you might learn to give the life to them. And maybe it's a blessing that you have taken life from another, so you can see that God is always giving the life to you... when you obviously don't deserve it. For Christ's sake, don't sin, but the fact that you have sinned, might be a great blessing... it might release the river.^{xxv}

Maybe God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all, just like Scripture says.^{xxvi} Maybe God allows all of us to sin, that we might all learn to love.^{xxvii} Maybe we can't learn to love by reading laws in a book, we can only learn to love by watching God bleed for us, and then by bleeding for our neighbor. Maybe God allows each of us to bleed, because we are one body, and unless we learn to bleed one for the other, we will all die, never ever having lived.

Remember what we learned in the Revelation: Life is not the survival of the fittest. Life is the sacrifice of the fittest for all. Life is the dance of Love. To bleed for another is your greatest fear... and your deepest desire.

Psalm 130

A song of ascents.

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

2 O Lord, hear my voice!

**Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!**

The Psalmist is alone in Hell, perhaps he needs forgiveness or needs to forgive.

- 3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?**
- 4 But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.**
- 5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;**

Forgiveness is the Psalmist's greatest fear and his deepest desire. The Word of God is the Word of Love, the revelation of forgiveness.

- 6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.**
- 7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.**

He is relentless Love and it's his Life that your called to bleed.

When one person loves it looks like a man on a cross. When two people love it looks like a good marriage. When all people love it is the Kingdom of God and Body of Christ.

He is the Life, that flows from the throne and through every vessel in his body. To dam the river is death. To bleed the river is to live Life eternal.

- 8 And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.**

Did you notice that the Psalmist refers to Israel as one man? And do you remember that we are each grafted into that man? And do you remember that this is the Body of Christ? And did you notice that all his iniquities will be redeemed?

That means that none of our sins will be wasted. God will use them all, to teach each of us to love. Love is the will to bleed for your neighbor. And when we all love we will all be infinitely happy.

So, don't sin, but be grateful that you have sinned. Don't waste your sin, confess your sin, for it's through your sins that God teaches you of his Love, and gives you his will to love.

Now, I need to say this:

Forgiveness is not liberal or conservative; it's a new creation.

It's the temptation of the Sadducees to tell you that you haven't sinned much, but if you haven't sinned much, you can't be forgiven much. And it's the temptation of the Pharisees to tell you that although you've sinned, you can pay for your sins, which means that you're not forgiven at all.

If you've sinned at all, you can't pay at all, for you've taken the life of Christ. But you've taken the Life of Christ, that God could convince you he gives the life of Christ, which is himself. He is the one thing you fear, and he is the one thing you most desire.

Years ago, the Archbishop of Paris stood in the pulpit of Notre Dame Cathedral and told of three young men that had entered that cathedral 30 years before. They were cynical, self-centered and secretly miserable. Two of them dared the third, to make a bogus confession... just for kicks, and to see if he could con the old priest in the confessional—they made a bet.

The old priest listened to the lies and sensed the arrogance, "He said very well my son. This is your penance: Go to the chapel, stand before the crucifix, look into the face of the crucified Christ and say, 'All this you did for me and I don't give a damn.'"

To win the bet that young man did the penance... or tried.

"All this you did for me and I don't..."

"All this you did for me and I..."

He couldn't finish the sentence, for a dam (or *damn*) of self-righteousness, arrogance, bitterness and pride suddenly began to break... and the blood began to flow.

At that point the Archbishop of Paris telling the story, would lean over the pulpit and say: "Thirty years ago, that lonely young man was me."

You understand: that lonely young man is each of us.

Communion

And so, on the night that he was betrayed by us, Jesus took bread and broke it saying, "this is my body broken for you..." And in the same way, he took the cup, saying, "this is the covenant in my blood, drink of it all of you."

[video clip from *The Passion of the Christ*, showing the nail driven into Jesus' hand as they nail him to the cross.]

Don't just stand their gawking, like you've never seen the hand of God before.

That's the Hand of God. At times it can shake the earth...and consume people, cities, and nations with eternal and unquenchable fire. But it's always bleeding for you.

This is why you fear God, and this is why you will love him. This is how he makes you in his own image. Believe the Gospel.

Benediction

Lord God, I'm just beginning to see. I thought that you were neurotic, God. I thought that you were a neurotic bookkeeper. But I'm starting to see that you are absolute, relentless, unstoppable Grace. Lord, like the song says, when I get a good glimpse of that it scares me. "It was Grace that taught my

heart to fear, and Grace my fears relieved.” And so God I thank you for the things that have happened in the past, and even for those places where I’ve been afraid, but I thank you that perfect love will cast out fear. And the very thing that frightened me most is my deepest desire that you will fulfill, and are fulfilling. It’s in your name, Lord God, that we give you praise. In the name of Jesus, “God is salvation,” amen.

So did you hear it? Isn’t it weird that we sing this all this time, “’twas Grace that taught my heart to fear,” that means forgiveness taught my heart to fear. And forgiveness my fears relieved. And in talking about that, we talk about all kinds of things, like the concept of justice, and around the edges of penal substitutionary atonement. Too many theological concepts for a sermon, but the sermon is online, the manuscript, and I put a whole lot of footnotes in this one. Quotes, illustrations, scripture verses so you can go and wrestle with it.

It’s really offensive to us at first. And yet I think it’s thrilling once we’ve turned around. I was thinking about this this week. Imagine yourself as a young parent, and someone came to you and said in regards to your infant, “hey, I can guarantee you that no one will ever sin against your child for the rest of their life. Do you want that gift?” At first you might say, “well, of course!” But if you thought about it a minute you’d say, “hell no!” Because if no one ever sinned against your child, your child would never learn to love.

And if someone came to you and said, “hey, I can guarantee that your child will never sin,” at first you might say, “that’s wonderful!” But if you thought about it a minute, you’d say, “hell no!” Because that would mean that your child would never learn to be forgiven. They would never learn to receive love.

And you see that scripture tells us that one day all sin will be destroyed. God will destroy it all and we’ll all just love each other in this party that will never stop. But what am I saying? I’m saying don’t sin, but if you’ve experienced sin...has anybody here experienced sin? What I’m saying is don’t waste it. And this is tough, but confess it. The greatest gift you can give to this church is to confess your sins one to another. We’re the priesthood of all believers. And when we learn to bleed for each other, when we learn to speak God’s Grace to each other, we begin to experience the Kingdom of God.

I can’t explain all the details of all the things we go through. I can just reassure you that God is Love. And God is in charge. So give him everything. Entrust him with everything. And believe me: he’ll make all things new. That’s the Gospel. In Jesus’ name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Luke 12:5

ⁱⁱ Revelation 14:7

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 10:28 NKJV

^{iv} Kaiser, W. C. (1999). [1505 מלך](#). R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 626). Chicago: Moody Press.

^v Psalm 51:4

^{vi} Romans 3:3-6

vii We think Judgment is God's response to our sin. Paul seemed to think that Judgment is first, and in fact eternal, and so we sin for God wants us to witness his Judgment.

viii *I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. 9 And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.*
- Jeremiah 33:8-9

See also: 1 Kings 8:32-40, Ezekiel 16:59-64

ix 1 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

x Bruce Larson tells the true story of a Catholic priest living in the Philippines, a much-loved man of God who once carried a secret burden of long-past sin buried deep in his heart. He had committed that sin once, many years before, during his time in seminary. No one else knew of this sin. He had repented of it and he had suffered years of remorse for it, but he still had no peace, no inner joy, no sense of God's forgiveness.

There was a woman in this priest's parish who deeply loved God, and who claimed to have visions in which she spoke with Christ, and He with her. The priest, however, was skeptical of her claims, so to test her visions he said to her, "You say you actually speak directly with Christ in your visions. Let me ask you a favor. The next time you have one of these visions, I want you to ask Him what sin your priest committed while he was in seminary."

The woman agreed and went home. When she returned to the church a few days later, the priest said, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?"

She replied, "Yes, He did."

"And did you ask Him what sin I committed in seminary?"

"Yes, I asked Him."

"Well, what did He say?"

"He said, 'I don't remember.'"

-James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 216.

xi *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.*
- Romans 5:12-13

xii We took the Life of the living Law (knowledge of Good and evil), and God gave the law on tablets of stone... and it revealed that we were already dead... "The Law came in to increase the trespass" (Romans 5:20)

xiii The Doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement, has not always been the predominant view of what Christ accomplished on the cross. Some would argue that it didn't really even exist until the 16th century. In it's crass American and "evangelical" form. It's the idea that God's Justice is retributive justice, and so God killed Jesus to balance the books and feel better about us. Arminians argue that he only did this for those that choose it. Calvinist argue that he only did this for some and so only some will choose.

There are elements to the doctrine that are undoubtably and deeply true, but that idea that Jesus, the good one, appeases God, the bad one is utterly unbiblical. And the idea that God must balance his books is rather problematic if God keeps no record of wrongs.

xiv Theologians refer to this as the "ontological non-subsistence of evil." Evil is not the equal opposite of the Good, but more like the absence of the Good. It's the void in which creation has yet to manifest. Perhaps God keeps no record of it for it is ultimately "nothing." It is "I AM not" in which "I AM" will be revealed. So evil is not so much something that is done, but something that has not been done.

xv Romans 2:6 NKJV

xvi Righteousness, Justice and Vengeance are all based on one root word in New Testament Greek. In this light it becomes obvious that justice is not about settling scores but making things "right."

Dike – can be translated, "right" or "just."

Dikaios is translated "righteous" or "just."

Dikaiousune is usually translated, "righteousness," but also means "justice."

Dikaion means, "make right" and is translated 'justify.'

Ek means “out.”

So **ekdikeyo** means “bring out right” or “justice.” It’s also translated “avenge.”

Ekdikesis is the noun, “making right,” “making justice,” also translated “vengeance.”

The *lex talionis*—“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”—is mentioned in two places in the Old Testament law for Israel: Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20. It was part of civil law for the ancient Israelites, but nowhere is it suggested that this is the whole law or satisfies “Justice.” When my children were little, we employed the *lex talionis*, in small ways—if they slapped, they got slapped. It taught them that their deeds hurt another, but we never assumed it established justice or completed righteousness in the hearts of our children. When the *lex talionis* appears in the New Testament it is on the lips of Jesus as he offers this clarification: God’s justice is not returning a slap to the cheek of another; it’s turning your own cheek to receive another slap (Matthew 5:38).

xvii Ezekiel 33:12-20

xviii Ezekiel 36:22-33

xix Bookkeeping is the only punishable offense in the kingdom of heaven. For in that happy state, the books are ignored forever, and there is only the Book of life. And in that book, nothing stands against you. There are no debt entries that can keep you out of the clutches of the Love that will not let you go. There is no minimum balance below which the grace that finagles all accounts will cancel your credit. And there is, of course, no need for you to show large amounts of black ink, because the only Auditor before whom you must finally stand is the Lamb - and he has gone deaf, dumb, and blind on the cross. The last may be first and the first last, but that’s only for the fun of making the point: everybody is on the payout queue and everybody gets full pay. Nobody is kicked out who wasn’t already in; the only bruised backsides belong to those who insist on butting themselves into outer darkness.

For if the world could have been saved by bookkeeping, it would have been saved by Moses, not Jesus. The law was just fine. And God gave it a good thousand years or so to see if anyone could pass a test like that. But when nobody did - when it became perfectly clear that there was “no one who was righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10; Ps. 14:1-3), that “both Jews and Gentiles alike were all under the power of sin” (Rom. 3:9) - God gave up on salvation by the books. He cancelled everybody’s records in the death of Jesus and rewarded us all, equally and fully, with a new creation in the resurrection of the dead. . . .

The only way to solve the problem of evil is for God to do what in fact he did: to take it out of the world by taking it into himself - down into the forgettery of Jesus’ dead human mind - and to close the books on it forever. That way, the kingdom of heaven is for everybody; hell is reserved onnly for the idiots who insist on keeping nonexistent records in their heads.

- Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*, p. 395-396

xx Alex de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* cited in Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1985) p.29

xxi Remember last week’s Psalm, “unless the Lord builds the house the workmen labor in vain.”

xxii Luke 4:18-19

xxiii Revelation 6:12-17

xxiv 1 John 4:10 NIV

xxv "All things work together for good to them that love God" ([Rom. 8:28](#)). Augustine adds, "even their sins."

- Richard Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, February 7

xxvi Romans 11:32

xxvii Let others complain that the age is wicked; my complaint is that it is wretched, for it lacks passion. Men’s thoughts are thin and flimsy like lace, they are themselves pitiable like the lacemakers. The thoughts of their hearts are too paltry to be sinful. For a worm it might be regarded as a sin to harbor such thought, but not for beings made in the image of God. Their lusts are dull and sluggish, their passions sleepy. They do their duty, these shopkeeping souls, but they clip the coin a trifle . . . they think that even if the Lord keeps ever so careful a set of books, they may still cheat Him a little. Out upon them! This is the reason my soul always turns back to the Old Testament and to Shakespeare. I feel that those who speak there are at least human beings: they hate, they love, they murder their enemies, they curse their descendants throughout all generations, they sin.

- Soren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* trans. by Alexander Dru (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 33.