

WILL GOD ALLOW OUR DISOBEDIENCE AND IDOLATRY TO GO UNPUNISHED?

ANSWER: No, every sin against the sovereignty, holiness, and goodness of God and his righteous law. God is righteously angry with our sins and will punish them both in his just judgement both in this life, and in the life to come.

Bible Passage: Ephesians 5:5–14

Memory Verse: Ephesians 5:5-6

Big Idea: God will judge and punish all those who sin against him.

Virtue: Awe

LEADER'S NOTES:

Many people today live lives that are inconsistent with God's Word and God's standards. It may appear that these people are enjoying great lives; they are living the way they want to with idols occupying the place of God. We may wonder how people get away with living this way. Does God allow it? Are there no consequences for disobeying God? The apparent lack of consequences may be attractive for some. This question will help us understand that God hates sin and idolatry and that he has clearly stated in the Bible that he will judge and punish all those who turn away from him. This lesson aims to help us have a greater understanding of how God will deal with those who disobey him and encourage us to be concerned for those who have not yet responded to the gospel.

Things to remember:

- This will be a difficult and worrying topic for some, particularly if they have family and friends who are not Christians. People will be anxious to talk about what God's punishment is like.
- Wisdom must be employed when explaining the concepts of justice, judgment, and punishment. Be careful to reinforce the understanding that God is a just judge.
- The world will think that the idea of eternal punishment is nonsense.

Question 17 Review: What is Idolatry?

Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.

INTRODUCTION TO QUESTION 18

Play or read a news clip for the group from your phone or iPad, and ask them to decide if the criminal should be punished.

Ask the group why they think that the criminal should be punished.

Ask them if they've ever been punished for anything.

Ask them if they think the punishment was justified.

Explain to the group that in both cases, punishment was imposed because a law has been broken.

Introduce Question 18: "Will God allow our disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished?" Remind the group that God hates sin and idolatry, and explain that this question will help us to understand what God is going to do about all the sin and idolatry in his world. Acknowledge that sometimes it seems as if God is not doing anything, and that he's letting people get away with disobedience and idolatry, but reassure them that God will do something about it.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Throughout history, all over the world and right up to the present day, the practice of punishment has been observed. Those who have been caught committing crimes have always been punished. We generally like the idea of justice, except sometimes when it's applied to ourselves. Understand that because we are made in the image of a just God, it makes sense that we are people who like to see justice prevail.

God is indeed just and that the Bible clearly states that he will punish those who disobey him and those who worship idols. Of course, God looks at the heart, and so he is the only person who can fully know the disobedience and idolatry that a person is guilty of.

Although many people think they're getting away with living godless and idolatrous lives, that isn't actually the case. God is watching and will punish every sin against his sovereignty, holiness, and goodness.

READ: Ephesians 5:5-14

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5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

7 Therefore do not become partners with them;

8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.

13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,

14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Paul is encouraging the Ephesian Christians to live in a way that is consistent with being members of God's family. He is encouraging them to put off the old lifestyle and put on the new. He is exhorting them to live holy lives that are glorifying to God, and one of the ways he does that is by explaining to them the certainty of judgment and punishment.

When Paul says in verse 5, "For you may be sure of this," basically he's saying, "Make no mistake, guys, this is definitely going to happen. No one who is living a life that is ignoring God and loving idols will escape God's anger and judgment."

Explain that Paul says to his readers, "Don't let anyone tell you otherwise," because he knows that some people will say that there is no God. Others will say, "Oh, don't worry. God is a God of love, and therefore he will not judge or punish anyone. Surely everyone will go to spend eternity with God in heaven." Paul warns that this is simply not true! At the end of verse 6, Paul says God's wrath will come on those who are disobedient.

These verses in Ephesians 5 contain a clear warning. Those who have put their trust in Christ, however, can be grateful for the great exchange that occurred when we received salvation through Jesus. We received Jesus's righteousness and became right with God. Jesus took all our sin into his own body and bore the wrath of God on our behalf. In response, we should sing of gratitude in our lives, and we should be battling against idolatry and disobedience. Paul reminds us in the next few

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verses that, as Christians, we must live as members of God's family, as children of light. That means our lives should shine with goodness and righteousness and truth.

God's ultimate judgment will occur at the end of history. At that time he will punish all those who have sinned against him and have denied the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The final punishment will be eternal separation from God and eternal punishment.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

(Allow for several answers within your group before reading the provided response.)

- 1. When will the judgment happen?** The final judgment will be at the end of history when Jesus returns.
- 2. What will the punishment be?** The punishment will be separation from God. We will learn more about this in Question 28.
- 3. What will happen to those who aren't Christians?** Only God really knows and understands where people stand in relation to him, but that those who have lived as if he isn't there will experience eternity without him.

More to consider:

Is your understanding of God big enough?
Are you filled with awe when you consider the greatness of God?
How might you use the world's love of justice as a way to speak about the justice of God?

VIRTUE VISION: Joy

Reflect on the character of God as revealed through this lesson. Think about the enormity of the punishment that is owed for even one sin against a perfectly holy God.

If you were taken before a judge as a guilty party, what sort of emotion would you feel?

What sort of emotion do you feel when you picture yourself before God himself?

Focus on God's power and justice. Remind yourself that the more we learn about God's character, the more we will be filled with awe of him.

Memory Verse

"For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

(Eph. 5 :5-6)