

## Punishment

The reasons why many people commit acts of wickedness is that those who do such things are not always killed by God immediately. This was lucidly explained by Solomon when he said: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." – Ecclesiastes. 8:11-13.

We can understand from the foregoing that though the days of the wicked may be prolonged, he can never escape the punishment of God.

"His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray." – Proverbs 5:22, 23.

It is a glaring fact that the riches and joys of the wicked are counterfeit and transitory. Instances of this fact have been seen. In Job 20: 4-9, 29, it is written: "Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God."

We can appreciate, therefore, why the people of God are admonished not to envy sinners.

(Proverbs 3:31; 23:17) David the Psalmist said: "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb – Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."

(Psalm 37:1-3, 7) David then went on to speak of his experience in his days, saying: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." – verses 35-37.

## Forgiveness

God does not want the wicked man to die in his wickedness; rather He wants him to put away evil and do righteousness. At it is written: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." – Isaiah. 55:7.

Left to us humans, we may desire that everyone who commits wickedness should be slain at once. But God does not want it so and we should do His wish or will always.

The Almighty knows that not all people are deliberately wicked; there are some who become wicked, not just because they were born wicked, but out of circumstances owing to human frailty or through the influence of the devil and evil men; such ones can repent. And God said: "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? Saith the Lord GOD: and not that he

should return from his ways, and live?" Ezekiel 18:21-23; see also Job 33:27-30.

The point, which is very important, is that the wicked man or sinner must acknowledge and be sorry for his sins before he can obtain the Lord's mercy. His penitence should not be a matter of mere oral declaration but a real change of heart which must be manifest in deeds.

If God is to kill everyone who sins immediately, not a single soul among the descendants of Adam will remain on earth because they are all sinners and it is in order to redeem them from sin Jesus Christ the righteous came to the world to give his life as a ransom. The Psalmist said: "If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." – Psalm 130:3,4.

## **Long-suffering of God**

The reason why God allows wicked people to live is to give them time to realize their faults and repent of their sins so as to be saved. St. Peter in his second epistle testified to this and spoke of the long-suffering of the Almighty God. He stated: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," – 2nd Peter 3:9.

But a wicked man who, in spite of the warning of God through the gospel, proves to be stubborn and does not repent, will be destroyed in the end – Isaiah 1:18-20; Romans 2:5-9; 2 Thessalonians. 2:11,12.

We are not saying that all prosperous persons are wicked. We do know that there are many people who, by dint of hard work and honest labour, are prospered by God and they are in peace. Concerning such blessing of God it is written: "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." – Proverbs 10:22.

Our christian admonition, therefore, is that everyone should take to an honest labour and do righteousness so as to be prospered by the Most High. Let those who have been led into the errors of the wicked turn from their evil ways and show a genuine proof of repentance or contrition by serving god in truth through Jesus Christ our Saviour. The door of salvation is still open to them. Jesus Christ said: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." – Matthew 9:10-13.

What is more, Elihu, explaining how God deals with men, said: "Then He (God) sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge." – Job 36:9-12.

It has been made abundantly clear in this Sermon that God does not bless or prosper wicked people. Any wicked rich man who reads or hears the reading of this Sermon is advised to repent and serve God justly in truth so that he may truly enjoy his wealth and be saved.