

## **Divine Fire and Justice in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians**

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### **The Text**

<sup>1:1</sup> Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; <sup>4</sup> therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. <sup>5</sup> This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. <sup>6</sup> For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup> dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed. (*New American Standard Bible*)

What does this passage mean? It has obvious implications for how we understand hell and the relational demeanor of God for eternity, towards unbelievers. First, we start by comparing various translations.

### **The Meaning of 'apo prosopou': 'Away From' the Presence/Face of the Lord?**

- They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (ESV)
- These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (NASB)
- They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (NIV)
- They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power (NLT)
- These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (NRSV)

### **Or, 'From' the Presence/Face of the Lord?**

- Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (KJV)
- These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (NKJV)
- who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (AKJV)
- These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (KJ21)
- who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (ASV)
- who shall incur the justice of eonian extermination from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength (CLNT)
- They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength (CSB)
- who shall pay the penalty [of] everlasting destruction from [the] presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his might (DARBY)

- who shall be punished with eternal destruction by the presence of the Lord and by the glory of his power (JUB)
- They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his power (NTE)
- who will pay the penalty: eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (WEB)
- who shall suffer justice -- destruction age-during -- from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his strength (YLT)

Two translations based on the Latin Vulgate, which comes from an earlier translation from the Greek:

- Who shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction, from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (Douay-Rheims)
- The presence of the Lord, and the majesty of his power, will condemn them to eternal punishment (Ronald Knox)

So which is it? Does the ‘destruction’ come from being *away from* the presence/face of the Lord? Or does the ‘destruction’ come *from* the presence/face of the Lord? The difference this would make is in articulating the question of, ‘Who wants to be with whom for eternity? Who wants to avoid whom for eternity?’

### Parallel Passage: Revelation 14:9 – 10

In Revelation 14:9 – 10, the presence, not the absence, of Jesus brings divine fire upon the unbelievers. This passage is important because the theological point is made *without* using the preposition ‘apo.’

<sup>9</sup> Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup> he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone **in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.**’

This seems to coordinate well with the appearances of God in the Old Testament where God appeared in fire: the fiery sword stationed outside the garden in Genesis 3:24; the fire of the burning bush in Exodus 3:2; the fire of the pillar that led Israel out of Egypt in Exodus 13:21 – 22; the fire on top of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:18 and 24:17; the fire expressed in the bronze altar of the sanctuary in Exodus 27:1 – 4; the fire of the lamp of the sanctuary in Exodus 27:20, which probably symbolized the burning bush; the fire of the burning coal of Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6:6 – 7; the fire of Malachi’s vision of God as a purifier of precious metals in Malachi 3:1 – 3; etc.

The purpose of divine fire in Paul’s correspondence with the Thessalonians can be ascertained by his description of the return of Jesus as a day dawning with sunlight (1 Th.5:4 – 5). Since the sun was understood to be a fire, the connection between sunlight and fire is implicit but immediate. Paul also describes the Holy Spirit as a fire when he tells them, ‘Do not quench the Spirit’ (1 Th.5:19). The Holy Spirit is given by God to us for our purification and sanctification (1 Th.4:7 – 8), that as we abstain from every form of evil (1 Th.5:12 – 22), we would be desiring, and participating in, what God will do in us when Jesus returns: God will sanctify us completely, so that we would be without blame (1 Th.5:23 – 24). This understanding of the apostle Paul would make him consistent with the prophets of the Old Testament in how they understood God to be a refining fire.<sup>1</sup>

### The Use of the Greek Word ‘apo’: 650 Total Occurrences

ἀπ’ — 126 Occurrences  
ἀφ’ — 42 Occurrences

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<sup>1</sup> For further treatment of the theme of fire in each biblical book, see material that I have drawn together: <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources/fire.htm>, in particular *Hell as the Love of God* for a summary of systematic theology, early church citations, and biblical exegesis

ἀπό — 482 Occurrences

Original Word: ἀπό

Part of Speech: Preposition

Transliteration: apo

Phonetic Spelling: (apo')

Short Definition: from, away from

Definition: from, away from.

For example: 'in order that times of refreshing may come **from the presence of the Lord**' (Acts 3:19)

NASB Translation

after (1), against (4), ago (2), alike\* (1), among (2), **away (3), away\* (1)**, because (9), before\* (1), belonged (1), deserting\* (1), distance (1), **from (602)**, hereafter\* (1), initiative (1), left (1), off (1), once\* (1), since (11), since\* (3), some (1), way (1).

Because the vast majority of occurrences of 'apo' means 'from,' we are on fairly solid ground to coordinate Revelation 14:9 – 10 and 2 Thessalonians 1:9. The fire and destruction come 'from' the presence of Jesus. It may be that some kind of physical separation happens, simply because of the fact that Jesus has a physical human body, and resurrects every human being into a physical human body as well, so where will those human beings go? What will they do? But if God's goal is to make all creation filled with His glory and presence, *and be 'all in all'* (1 Cor.15:28; Eph.1:23; Col.1:16; 3:11), then in some way that is also simultaneously true, the very resurrection bodies each person will have must be an expression of the presence of the Son.

### The Understanding of the Early Church About the Phrase 'apo prosopou'

It is very significant that the two major bishop-theologians from the early church period who comment on this passage directly show that they understand it as meaning 'from the presence of Jesus.'<sup>2</sup>

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130 – 202 AD), was bishop of Lyons from 177 – 202 AD. He was a student of Polycarp of Smyrna, who was a student of the apostle John. Irenaeus was the theologian who wrote the first substantial theological treatise following after the New Testament.

'Inasmuch, then, as in both Testaments there is the same righteousness of God [displayed] when God takes vengeance, in the one case indeed typically, temporarily, and more moderately; but in the other, really, enduringly, and more rigidly: for the fire is eternal, and the wrath of God which shall be revealed from heaven **from the face of our Lord** [2 Thessalonians 1:9] (as David also says, **But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil**, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth [Psalm 34:16] )' (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.28.1)

John Chrysostom (c.349 – 407 AD) was the archbishop of Constantinople from 397 – 407 AD. He is well known for being one of the greatest commentators on Scripture, preachers ('chrysostom' means 'golden-tongued'), and courageous ethicists who regularly challenged the wealthy and the nobility to care for the poor. He is honored by the Eastern Orthodox as one of the three 'Holy Hierarchs.' This honor means that he, along with Basil of Caesarea (c.329 – 379 AD) and Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329 – 390 AD), played pivotal roles in the shaping of Christian theology.

'There are many men, who form good hopes not by abstaining from their sins, but by thinking that hell is not so terrible as it is said to be, but milder than what is threatened, and temporary, not eternal; and about this they philosophize much. But I could show from many reasons, and conclude from the very expressions concerning hell, that it is not only not milder, but much more terrible than is threatened. But I do not now

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<sup>2</sup> For more discussion about the thought of early Christian leaders, see: <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.fire.htm>, in particular *Hell as the Love of God* for a summary of systematic theology, early church citations, and biblical exegesis. For an exploration of their atonement theology, see: <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.atonement.sources-early-church.htm>.

intend to discourse concerning these things. For the fear even from bare words is sufficient, though we do not fully unfold their meaning. But that it is not temporary, hear Paul now saying, concerning those who know not God, and who do not believe in the Gospel, that “they shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction.” How then is that temporary which is everlasting? “**From the face of the Lord,**” he says. What is this? He here wishes to say how easily it might be. For since they were then much puffed up, there is no need, he says, of much trouble; it is enough that God comes and is seen, and all are involved in punishment and vengeance. His coming only to some indeed will be Light, but to others vengeance.’ (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Thessalonians, Homily 3*)

### **What is God’s ‘Retribution’ or ‘Vengeance’ or ‘Justice’?**

These early Christian leaders, thinkers, and preachers attest to teaching 2 Thessalonians 1:9 as ‘from the presence/face of Jesus.’ What is the nature of retribution or vengeance spoken of in 1:8?

#### *The Use of the Word ekdikēsin: 6 Total Occurrences*

2 Thessalonians 1:8 N-AFS

GRK: φλογός διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ

NAS: dealing out retribution to those

KJV: taking vengeance on them that know

INT: of flame awarding vengence on those that not

Luke 18:7 N-AFS

GRK: ποιήσει τὴν ἐκδίκησιν τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν

NAS: bring about justice for His elect

KJV: not God avenge his own elect,

INT: shall execute the avenging of the elect

Luke 18:8 N-AFS

GRK: ποιήσει τὴν ἐκδίκησιν αὐτῶν ἐν

NAS: you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.

KJV: that he will avenge them speedily.

INT: he will execute the avenging of them in

Acts 7:24 N-AFS

GRK: καὶ ἐποίησεν ἐκδίκησιν τῷ καταπονυμένῳ

NAS: him and took vengeance for the oppressed

KJV: [him], and avenged him that was oppressed,

INT: and did vengeance for the [one] being oppressed

2 Corinthians 7:11 N-AFS

GRK: ζῆλον ἀλλὰ ἐκδίκησιν ἐν παντί

NAS: what avenging of wrong! In everything

KJV: yea, [what] revenge! In

INT: zeal but vengence in every [way]

1 Peter 2:14 N-AFS

GRK: πεμπομένοις εἰς ἐκδίκησιν κακοποιῶν ἔπαινον

NAS: as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers

KJV: for the punishment of evildoers,

INT: sent for vengence [on] evildoers praise

#### *The Use of the Word ekdikēsis: 2 Total Occurrences*

Romans 12:19 N-NFS

GRK: γὰρ Ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω

NAS: [of God], for it is written, VENGEANCE IS MINE,  
KJV: it is written, Vengeance [is] mine;  
INT: indeed To me vengeance I will repay

Hebrews 10:30 N-NFS  
GRK: εἰπόντα Ἐμοὶ ἐκδίκησις ἐγὼ ἀνταποδώσω  
NAS: Him who said, VENGEANCE IS MINE,  
KJV: him that hath said, Vengeance [belongeth] unto me,  
INT: having said To me vengeance [belongs] I will repay

#### *The Use of the Word ekdikēseos: 1 Occurrence*

Luke 21:22 N-GFS  
GRK: ὅτι ἡμέραι ἐκδικήσεως αὐταὶ εἰσιν  
NAS: are days of vengeance, so that all things  
KJV: the days of vengeance, that all things  
INT: for days of avenging these are

In this case, the word ‘justice’ is the key concept in all these selections, especially because it is formed by the root *dike*, which is the root of *dikaiosyne* and other words. The Hebrew word *sedeq* for righteousness and justice refer us to God’s *restorative* justice.

From a formal, technical standpoint, restorative justice and retributive justice are similar in that there are consequences for sin in both frameworks. This is central to an understanding of God responding to human beings to hold us accountable for our actions. If we translate *ekdikēsin* using the English word ‘vengeance,’ then the question we must ask is, ‘What is God avenging?’ If we translate *ekdikēsin* using the English word ‘retribution,’ in the sense of ‘disciplinary response to sin,’ then the question we must ask, ‘What is God demanding or doing in response to sin?’

Retributive justice and restorative justice differ in one major respect as they answer those questions. In retributive justice, formally defined, the offended party inflicts pain on the offender that is proportional to the pain or offense received. If God’s justice is thought to be retributive, then the idea of ‘merit’ and ‘demerit’ kicks in. In Lutheran-Calvinist thought, God is an infinite being who takes infinite offense at our sin, seeing each sinful act as an infinite demerit. Therefore, God punishes sin infinitely unless He ‘satisfies’ His own justice. This understanding of divine justice forms the foundation of the atonement theory known as penal substitution.

By contrast, in restorative justice, the idea is that the offended party calls for the offender to undo the damage they have caused. If God’s justice is thought to be restorative, then He is equally offended by our sin, but specifically because we have damaged something He loves: ourselves. His response is to call the offending human beings to undo the damage they caused. Since sin is fundamentally self-harm – a damaging of human nature in a deepening way, as seen in Adam and Eve’s internalization of the desire and power to define good and evil from within themselves instead of leaving that with God, and as seen in Cain’s further damaging of himself when he killed his brother Abel and thereby became unable to cultivate the land – God called Israel to ‘circumcise’ the sinful, unclean aspect of themselves away by pressing His commandments more deeply into their humanity (Dt.10:16). Since we all fail to do that, He provides ‘circumcision of the heart’ Himself (Dt.30:16; Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34; Ezk.36:26 – 36; Ps.51:9 – 11; etc.) in and through Jesus. This understanding of divine justice undergirds the atonement theory that I call medical substitution.

Adonis Vidu notes that the retributive model of pagan (secular) justice had already been offered by the classical Greek pagan tradition. This is seen, for example, in the myth of Hesiod’s Theogeny, where Zeus punished Prometheus and men for giving and receiving fire, which made men capable of technological development, which annoyed Zeus. Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock so that an eagle could rip out his regenerating liver every day in retaliation for this betrayal. Then, to men, Zeus gave women (Pandora and her box) as a source of trouble, in retaliation for causing him trouble. The early Christians, however, refused to ‘contextualize’ Christian faith into this principle of retributive, retaliatory justice. They maintained the vision of Hebraic restorative justice. Vidu notes, therefore:

‘While some would like to trace the doctrine of penal substitution precisely as understood by Calvin all the way back to Athanasius, Irenaeus, or Augustine, this is usually done at the cost of grossly distorting their thought. Nobody in this period gives any thought to the *necessity* of God’s prosecuting his retributive justice as a *condition* of his forgiveness.’<sup>3</sup>

Three decades prior to Vidu’s book, Alister E. McGrath in *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* already explored this issue fairly thoroughly. N.T. Wright says that McGrath’s work is ‘required reading for anyone who wants seriously to engage with’ the language and dogmatic history of justification.<sup>4</sup> McGrath aptly points out that ‘retributive justice’ strictly speaking (Latin *iustitia distributiva*) does not capture the essence of the Hebrew law and the Sinai covenant. McGrath also believes that ‘retributive justice’ should not serve as the background for Paul’s and James’ view of atonement or definition of ‘justification.’ Doing so, in his view, is a category mistake and a linguistic error as we translate Hebrew into Greek and Latin:

‘Although there are many instances where *sedāqa* can be regarded as corresponding to the concept of *iustitia distributiva*, which has come to dominate western thinking on the nature of justice (despite the rival claims of *iustitia commutativa*), there remains a significant number which cannot. A particularly significant illustration of this may be found in the Old Testament attitude to the poor, needy and destitute. As we have noted, *sedāqa* refers to the ‘right order of affairs’ which is violated, at least in part, by the very existence of such unfortunates. God’s *sedāqa* is such that God must deliver them from their plight – and it is this aspect of the Hebrew concept of *sedāqa* which has proved so intractable to those who attempted to interpret it solely as *iustitia distributiva*.’<sup>5</sup>

‘Righteousness’ in Old Testament usage therefore refers, first and foremost, to the relational vision and order God intended as expressed by the covenant community. That vision and order, as the Torah makes clear, includes the relational work that must be done by someone who has been in the wrong, with the full awareness of all parties (e.g. Ex.21:18 – 19, 28 – 36; 22:1 – 14).<sup>6</sup> By analogy, when I accept my child’s apology, I work with that child to undo the damage done, repair relationships, and build the character needed; I most certainly do not pretend that the offense never happened, a sensibility further undergirded by the Psalms, as in the Proverbs, that the Israelites personally develop and grow in the covenant: ‘Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way’ (Ps.25:8; cf. Pss.25:4 – 22; 27:11; 86:11; etc.).

N.T. Wright therefore says:

‘If you want to understand God’s justice in an unjust world, says the prophet Isaiah, this is where you must look. God’s justice is not simply a blind dispersing of rewards for the virtuous and punishments for the wicked, though plenty of those are to be found on the way. God’s justice is a saving, healing, restorative justice, because the God to whom justice belongs is the Creator God who has yet to complete his original plan for creation and whose justice is designed not simply to restore balance to a world out of kilter but to bring glorious completion and fruition the creation, teeming with life and possibility, that he made in the first place. And he remains implacably determined to complete this project through his image-bearing human creatures and, more specifically, through the family of Abraham.’<sup>7</sup>

When Wright comments specifically on the Sinai covenant, he denies that it expresses the principle of retributive justice:

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<sup>3</sup> Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), p.1 – 2

<sup>4</sup> N.T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan, Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p.79

<sup>5</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.11

<sup>6</sup> For an in-depth treatment of Exodus 21 as an example of restorative justice, the Hebrew law court and judge, and its implications for the doctrine of justification, see: <http://nagasawafamily.org/exodus.21.01-36.sg.pdf>. For more resources on restorative vs. retributive justice in theology, see <https://newhumanityinstitute.wordpress.com/2015/09/09/interpreting-jesus-and-atonement-practical-issue-6-is-retributive-justice-the-highest-form-of-justice-does-atonement-theology-impact-our-framework-for-criminal-justice/> and the works listed there; see also <http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/resources.questions.politics.right.criminaljustice.restorativecriminal.htm> for more books and articles

<sup>7</sup> N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p.64; cf. p.73

‘According to some, God gave the law in order to terrify people with the prospect of judgment, so that they would run to the gospel for relief. That appears to make some sense, provided you approach the whole thing from the works-contract point of view. But this is not, however, the sense Paul had in mind.’<sup>8</sup>

### **The Understanding of the Early Church about the Divine Fire and Justice of God**

The early Christians, as indicated by the scholars mentioned above, recognized these factors in their study of Scripture and their understanding of the character of God. They did not say that God has two major attributes, love-mercy-grace on the one hand, and retributive justice-wrath-anger on the other. God’s nature is one of love, but how we experience His love depends on our choices, because our choices shape our natures. Irenaeus of Lyons continues his thought by saying that God is like a singular fragrance, which is received either as a savour of life or a savour of death. And, God is like the singular sun, although how we ultimately experience the sun depends on how we shape our own human nature through our own choices:

3. For the apostle does also say in the Second [Epistle] to the Corinthians: For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them which are saved, and in them which perish: to the one indeed the savour of death unto death, but to the other the savour of life unto life. [2 Corinthians 2:15 – 16] To whom, then, is there the savour of death unto death, unless to those who believe not neither are subject to the Word of God? And who are they that did even then give themselves over to death? Those men, doubtless, who do not believe, nor submit themselves to God. (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.28.3)

1. But, say they, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants. [Exodus 9:35] Those, then, who allege such difficulties, do not read in the Gospel that passage where the Lord replied to the disciples, when they asked Him, Why do You speak unto them in parables?— Because it is given unto you to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven; but to them I speak in parables, that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not hear, understanding they may not understand; in order that the prophecy of Isaiah regarding them may be fulfilled, saying, Make the heart of this people gross and make their ears dull, and blind their eyes. But blessed are your eyes, which see the things that you see; and your ears, which hear what you hear. [Matthew 13:11-16; Isaiah 6:10] *For one and the same God [that blesses others] inflicts blindness upon those who do not believe, but who set Him at naught; just as the sun, which is a creature of His, [acts with regard] to those who, by reason of any weakness of the eyes cannot behold his light; but to those who believe in Him and follow Him, He grants a fuller and greater illumination of mind.* In accordance with this word, therefore, does the apostle say, in the Second [Epistle] to the Corinthians: In whom the this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine [unto them]. [2 Corinthians 4:4] And again, in that to the Romans: And as they did not think fit to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not convenient. [Romans 1:28] Speaking of antichrist, too, he says clearly in the Second to the Thessalonians: And for this cause God shall send them the working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but consented to iniquity. [2 Thessalonians 2:11]’ (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.29.1)

3. If, however, you will not believe in Him, and will flee from His hands, the cause of imperfection shall be in you who did not obey, but not in Him who called [you]. For He commissioned [messengers] to call people to the marriage, but they who did not obey Him deprived themselves of the royal supper. [Matthew 22:3, etc]. The skill of God, therefore, is not defective, for He has power of the stones to raise up children to Abraham; [Matthew 3:9] but *the man who does not obtain it is the cause to himself of his own imperfection. Nor, [in like manner], does the light fail because of those who have blinded themselves; but while it remains the same as ever, those who are [thus] blinded are involved in darkness through their own fault.* The light does never enslave any one by necessity; nor, again, does God exercise compulsion upon any one unwilling to accept the exercise of His skill. Those persons, therefore, who have apostatized from the light given by the Father, and transgressed the law of liberty, have done so through their own fault, since they have been created free agents, and possessed of power over themselves.

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<sup>8</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’ Crucifixion* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2016), p.275

4. But God, foreknowing all things, prepared fit habitations for both, kindly conferring that light which they desire on those who seek after the light of incorruption, and resort to it; but for the despisers and mockers who avoid and turn themselves away from this light, and who do, as it were, blind themselves, He has prepared darkness suitable to persons who oppose the light, and He has inflicted an appropriate punishment upon those who try to avoid being subject to Him. *Submission to God is eternal rest, so that they who shun the light have a place worthy of their flight; and those who fly from eternal rest, have a habitation in accordance with their fleeing.* Now, since all good things are with God, they who by their own determination fly from God, do defraud themselves of all good things; and having been [thus] defrauded of all good things with respect to God, they shall consequently fall under the just judgment of God. *For those persons who shun rest shall justly incur punishment, and those who avoid the light shall justly dwell in darkness.* For as in the case of this temporal light, those who shun it do deliver themselves over to darkness, so that they do themselves become the cause to themselves that they are destitute of light, and do inhabit darkness; and, as I have already observed, the light is not the cause of such an [unhappy] condition of existence to them; so those who fly from the eternal light of God, which contains in itself all good things, are themselves the cause to themselves of their inhabiting eternal darkness, destitute of all good things, having become to themselves the cause of [their consignment to] an abode of that nature. (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 4.39.3 – 4)

John Chrysostom also says the same thing, saying that hell is due to our disordered desires and pleasures in the face of God's demand to be cleansed. Sin even affects our perceptions, where we become addicted to it and call God's cure offered a torment:

'In order then that *we also may extinguish all the furnace of disordered pleasure here, and so escape the hell that is there,* let these each day be our counsels, our cares, and our practice, drawing towards us the favor of God, both by our full purpose concerning good works, and by our frequent prayers. For thus even those things which appear insupportable now, will be most easy, and light, and lovely. Because, so long as we are in our passions, we think virtue rugged and morose and arduous, vice desirable and most pleasing; but if we would stand off from these but a little, then both vice will appear abominable and unsightly, and virtue easy, mild, and much to be desired.' (John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew's Gospel*, Homily 16)

The other two 'Holy Hierarchs' honored with John Chrysostom also agree. Gregory of Nazianzen relates Jesus' atoning work to the purification of his human nature using the motif of fire. This is the essence of medical substitution:

'But, in the character of the Form of a Servant, He condescends to His fellow servants, nay, to His servants, and takes upon Him a strange form, bearing all me and mine in Himself, *that in Himself He may exhaust the bad, as fire does wax, or as the sun does the mists of earth; and that I may partake of His nature by the blending.* Thus He honours obedience by His action, and proves it experimentally by His Passion. For to possess the disposition is not enough, just as it would not be enough for us, unless we also proved it by our acts; for action is the proof of disposition.' (Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 30*, paragraph 6)

Then he says:

'For I know a cleansing fire which Christ came to send upon the earth, [Luke 12:49] and He Himself is anagogically called a Fire. This Fire takes away whatsoever is material and of evil habit; and this He desires to kindle with all speed, for He longs for speed in doing us good, since He gives us even coals of fire to help us. I know also a fire which is not cleansing, but avenging; either that fire of Sodom [Genesis 19:24] which He pours down on all sinners, mingled with brimstone and storms, or that which is prepared for the Devil and his Angels [Matthew 25:41] *or that which proceeds from the face of the Lord, and shall burn up his enemies round about; and one even more fearful still than these, the unquenchable fire which is ranged with the worm that dies not but is eternal for the wicked. For all these belong to the destroying power; though some may prefer even in this place to take a more merciful view of this fire, worthily of Him That chastises.*' (Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oration 40*, paragraph 36)

Basil of Caesarea says that we cannot separate fire from its two effects, enlightening and burning. This is his explanation of how God could have one attribute – purifying love – and yet have two different effects on people:

‘And let no one suppose it to be a thing incredible that the brightness of the light is one thing, and the body which is its material vehicle is another. First, in all composite things, we distinguish substance susceptible of quality, and the quality which it receives. The nature of whiteness is one thing, another is that of the body which is whitened; thus the natures differ which we have just seen reunited by the power of the Creator. And do not tell me that it is impossible to separate them. Even I do not pretend to be able to separate light from the body of the sun; but I maintain that that which we separate in thought, may be separated in reality by the Creator of nature. You cannot, moreover, separate the brightness of fire from the virtue of burning which it possesses; but God, who wished to attract His servant by a wonderful sight, set a fire in the burning bush, which displayed all the brilliancy of flame while its devouring property was dormant. It is that which the Psalmist affirms in saying *The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire. Thus, in the requital which awaits us after this life, a mysterious voice seems to tell us that the double nature of fire will be divided; the just will enjoy its light, and the torment of its heat will be the torture of the wicked.*’ (Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron*, Homily 6.3)