

Are there DEGREES OF PUNISHMENT for the LOST?

An outline study

- 1A. The first phase of the judicial process is to establish guilt. This takes place during one's life. He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). There is no difference in guilt!
 - 1B. All sin is against God (Psa. 51:4), and hence of infinite importance.
 - 2B. "He that offends in one point is guilty of all" (James 2:10).
 - 3B. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22b, 23).

- 2A. The second phase of the judicial process is to determine the extent and the seriousness of the offense. This takes place at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:12). This is only for those who have been judged guilty under phase one -- because they have not believed. (For the believer there is no judgment ahead -- John 5:24; Rom. 8:1). There is a difference in the extent and seriousness of men's sins.
 - 1B. Some sins are greater than others. "He who delivered me [Christ] up to you [Pilate] has the greater sin" (John 19:11).
 - 2B. Some sins deserve greater punishment than others. "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who trampled under foot the Son of God?" (Heb. 10:28, 29 -- NASB).

- 3A. The third phase of the judicial process is to set a penalty. This also takes place at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:13). There will be differences in the punishment of the lost.
 - 1B. Because God's judgments are righteous (Rev. 16:4 - 7).
 - 2B. Because God will judge them "according to their works" (1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:12, 13).
 - 1C. The meaning of "according to their works" is seen in Revelation 18:4 - 8. What Babylon actually did to men is to be the basis for what men will do to her.
 - 2C. "According to their works" does not mean, "according to the good works they were trusting in, as has been suggested, (Matt. 12:36; Rom. 2:2, 8; 2 Tim. 4:14. See also Psa. 28:4; Jer. 25:14; etc.).
 - 3C. This principle must apply to judgment after death as well as to judgment in this life (as in Ezek. 7:8; 24:14; etc. See a concordance under "according"), for some are judged partly in this life, but others only in the next (Job 21:23, 25, 30 and Psa. 73:12 - 19). Therefore, if there were a basic difference in the two types of judgment, it would be unfair to one or the other.
 - 3B. Because of the principles underlying God's judgments.
 - 1C. Wrath is greater as more, and more, sins are committed (Rom. 2:5, 6).
 - 2C. Wrath is greater for those who had greater knowledge (Rom. 2:12).

3C. Punishment is greater for more serious sins (Heb. 10:29).

4A. What will the differences in penalty be?

1B. Not being incarcerated in different places. All unbelievers will go to Hades at death and into the Lake of Fire after their final hearing (Rev. 20:14, 15).

2B. Not the length of their imprisonment, for it will be forever for all unbelievers (2 Thess. 1:8, 9; Heb. 6:2).

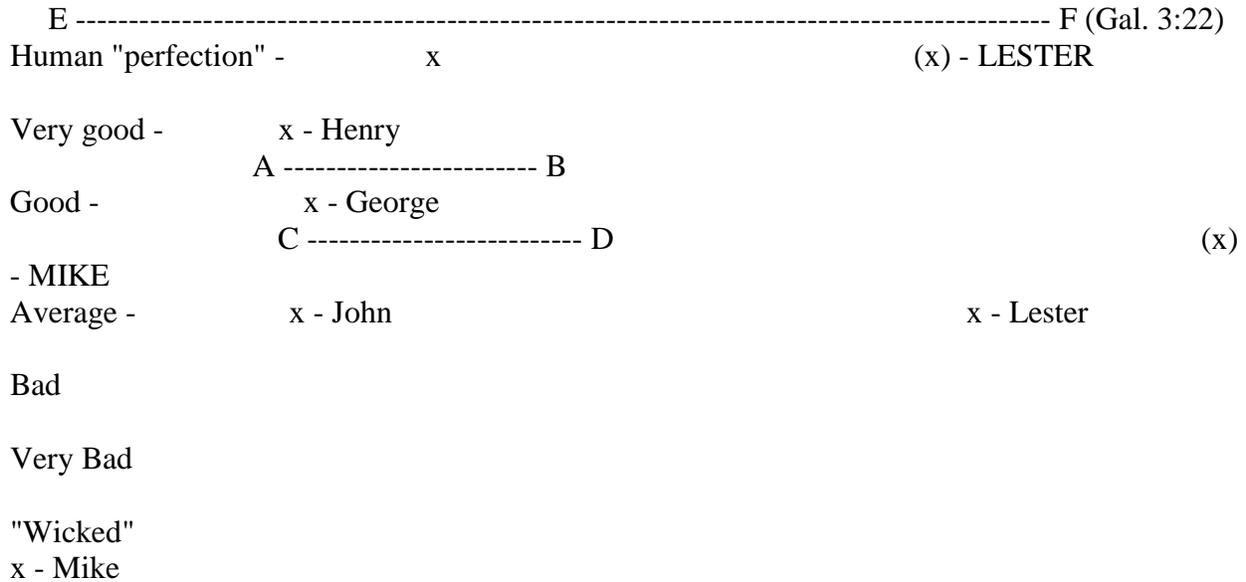
3 B. Therefore the difference must be in the degree or intensity of the punishment. Just how this will be accomplished is not revealed.

CHART PRESENTATION.

The perfect righteousness and glorious graciousness of God's ways with men can be seen more clearly if we portray them on a chart in the form of a graph. On the chart we will represent individuals with an "x". Their location vertically will indicate the character of their lives as established by their works, whether good or bad -- as indicated on the left margin. Fictitious names will be given to some of the men indicated so we can more easily follow the chart.

Figure one.

Divine PERFECTION (Rom. 3:23).



If salvation depends on men's works (unless all are saved, which Satan would like to have us believe -- Gen. 3:4), then a line must be drawn somewhere horizontally (as A ----- B), to divide between the "good" and the "bad." ALL above the line so drawn would go to heaven. But no matter where the line would be drawn, there would be those who were almost exactly the same -- but who would be parted by the line, one going to heaven and the other to hell. George would say, "Henry is just a very little better than I am. Why should he go to heaven and I go to

hell?" If the line were drawn lower (as C ----- D), to let George into heaven, then John would have the same complaint as he looked at George.

Not only that, but Henry would then be saved by works. If God saved George at all He would have to save him by grace, for he does not have enough works (with the line at A _____ B) and it cannot be partly works and partly grace (Rom. 11:6). Henry would then say, "Why is George going to get there without works? I had to **WORK** to get to heaven! It isn't fair for him to get there without works -- just by believing." And he would be right!

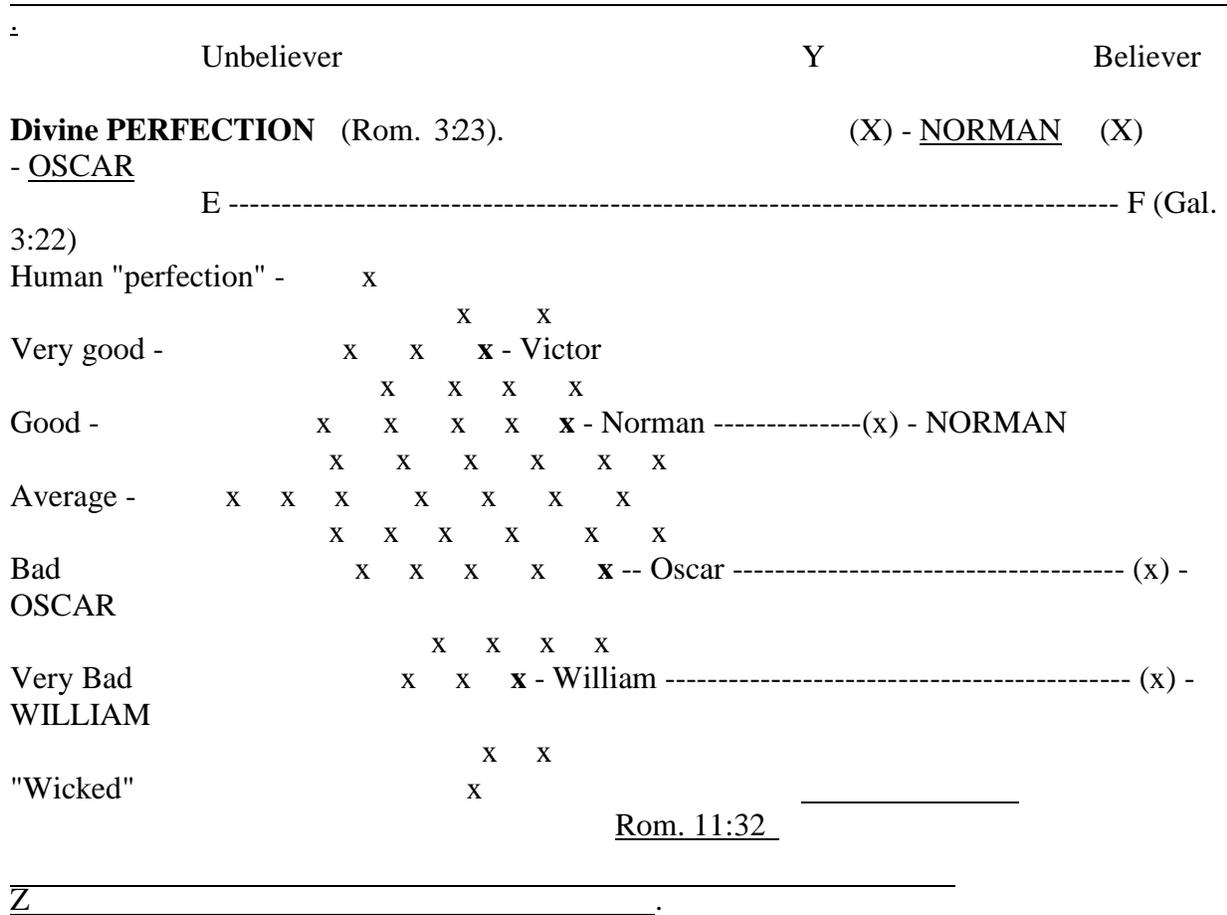
But God draws the line far above the best of man's goodness at E ----- F. This means that all are now on the same side of the line. There can no longer be any arguments about differences between people for "there is no difference, for all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23).

However, this leaves all men on the wrong side of the line, on their way to hell. Even if, as with LESTER or MIKE, some improve their lives and become "better men" -- full of good works -- they still fall short of God's standard and are lost.

Why did God set the line at this unattainable level? He did it purposely to "shut up" all men under sin so He could introduce an entirely new way to divide between men. "But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal. 3:22 NASB).

God again "shuts up" (the same expression in the Greek) all men (classes them together), this time as unbelievers (Rom. 11:32a). The new line on the chart must be drawn vertically this time (as Y ----- Z in figure two).

Figure two.



This still leaves all men lost however, for Rom. 11:32a tells us, "For God hath concluded [shut up] all in unbelief." However the very purpose of grouping all men together in unbelief was "that He might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32b). Any man, good or bad (as Norman or Oscar), can move into the believing side of the picture in a moment of time (NORMAN or OSCAR). He still is below the line of required righteousness as far as his day by day life is concerned but, because of Christ's work on the Cross, his sins are now paid for. Also, he is given a new kind of righteousness -- the righteousness of God by faith --, which puts him above the line as God sees him (NORMAN or OSCAR). Even though he is still where he was before in the eyes of men, he is at the level of **Divine PERFECTION** before God.

The unbeliever (Victor) is lost even though he is "very good," and the believer (WILLIAM) is saved even though he is "very bad." Does it, then, make any difference how a man lives? To find an answer to this important question consider Figure Three.

Figure three.

Unbeliever <u>No reward</u> (Matt. 7:22, 23) (Rom. 8:1) --- But a difference in <u>punishment</u> <u>rewards</u> (2 Cor. 5:10)	Y	Believer <u>No punishment</u> --- But a difference in
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Divine PERFECTION (Rom. 3:23).

E ----- F (Gal. 3:22)

Human "perfection" -	x	(x) - PETER	(x) - RODGER
		x x	
(x) - <u>SAMUEL</u>			
Very good -	x	x	x
(x) - TOM			
		x x x x	x - Roger
Good -	x	x	x
		x x	x - Peter
		x x x x	x x
Average -	x	x	x
		x x x x	x x
Bad	x	x	x
		x x x x	x - Samuel ----- x - SAMUEL
x - Tom		x x x x	
Very Bad		x x x	
		x x	
"Wicked"		x - Hitler	_____

Rom. 11:32

Z

How a man lives does not save him, but it is important to both sinner and saint that he live as good a life as he can.

The unbeliever will not be rewarded for any "good works." The men mentioned in Matt. 7:22, 23 found this out. They listed their "good works" and discovered that God considered them all as "iniquity," because they were done in unbelief (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 14:23), and then

received judgment, not rewards.

However the intensity of the sinner's punishment does depend upon his works. The unsaved man (Peter) who has sincerely tried to be "good" (PETER) will not suffer like the wicked man (Hitler).

We should notice that during this life the unbeliever may receive temporal rewards for living a good life. Christ pointed out that the unbelieving Jewish leaders received a reward for their religious life and prayers -- the admiration and respect of others. But He also made it clear there would be no further reward for them later (Matt. 6:2, 5).

Chart number three teaches us clearly what our ministry among the unsaved should be. We should not merely try to get unbelievers to live a better life -- to move up on the chart (as with PETER). This will not save them. Moral improvement of the unsaved results in less punishment, true, but it also brings self-righteousness, a false sense of security and no salvation or reward from God. They will probably be better neighbors, but will still be lost. As a matter of fact, they may be even harder to reach for Christ. For instance "Peter," after he has become a "better man" (PETER), could be so pleased with his progress that he will not be able to see himself as a sinner needing a Savior. It is not that we, in any way, approve of their sinful lives, but we present a new life, not a challenge to improve the old one, as their only hope of being the men they ought to be.

We must not try to move them up on the chart, but over, as with "Samuel." Once he has moved over and come to Christ, just as he is (SAMUEL), then he can start moving up (SAMUEL). Then God will begin working in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21). Then his works will not be dead works, as with "PETER," but the good works which God before ordained that he should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Some believers, like "Tom," begin their Christian lives with evil habits that require a lot of attention. Others, like "Rodger," may already have high ideals. But they, too, must grow in grace after they are saved.

Surely the rewards are not for where one begins his Christian life on the chart, but where he arrives later. "Tom" begins with more temptations and problems than "Rodger," but he also has more opportunity for growth, and may have a more dramatic change in his life -- at least at first. There is more room for all of us to go up on the chart, by His grace and through His power, than any of us realize.

We have been speaking much about the "chart," but remember it is to the Word of God upon which the chart rests that we are to go for our doctrine and practice. If the chart helps us to visualize what the Word has to say, praise the Lord. If not, then forget the chart and go to the Word of God itself.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove

what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 15:58 -- NKJV).

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33 -- NKJV).

William P Heath, from the book "Help in Hard Places."

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