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We're ready now to resume our study in Malachi. We're looking at chapter two, verse 17, and God's declaration to his covenant people is you've worn me out with your talk. How have we worn you out? By saying everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.

I do not have to remind you of the warnings we have in the New Testament about woe to those who call evil good and good evil. And the day is coming when judgment is gonna begin at the house of God. The ax is laid at the root of the trees and so on.

But here are people who like in the days of Peter, where is the promise of his coming? All things go on as they always have. I think you're full of old tennis shoes when you say the Lord is returning. And these people say, I think you're full of old tennis shoes when you say God is a God of judgment.

Keep in mind now that this is two or three generations back from captivity, and they've already forgotten the lessons of the captivity. The God of judgment who sent them into captivity, you could imagine the liberal press of the day would be spinning that as well. You know, that they just made some political mistakes and some economic bad decisions.

And that's why they ended up getting taken captive and so on. If they had been more friendly, if they had had worked harder at diplomacy with the Babylonians and had just invited them in and welcomed them, they probably never would have been taken captive. It was their hubris and being stuck up about the righteousness of God or some such thing.

They would have made up some story to explain it all away, just as we have today. Well, what puts the lie to this? I really, this is one of those cases we've seen in the past where I think the chapter division is unfortunate here. If it was me, I would have found a different place to divide it.

There is no such chapter division in the original copy of Malachi. And what we have here is the answer to this charge. You have wearied God by saying, where is this God of justice? I think God is looking at all of us, even though we're doing evil and he thinks we're good.

We're good. We're okay. I'm okay.

You're okay. This God of justice nonsense has to go. Let me read you just a little bit more from the current crop of those who say such things.

There is a guy who, his name is Jeremy Myers, and he has a website called Redeeming God. Now, if you and I had a website called Redeeming God, we would flesh it out with explanations and scriptural meaningful perspectives on God, our Redeemer, the Redeemer God, right? God is a redeeming God. He is God's Redeemer on this website.

The subtitle here, Redeeming God, liberating you from bad ideas about God. I'm going to

redeem your faulty understanding of what God is like. So this article is called Why God Never Punishes Sin.

Hopefully the lightning storms have passed. Why God Never Punishes Sin by Jeremy Myers. In Christian circles, we often hear, and by the way, I'm not picking on Jeremy Myers here.

If you want to look this up and read it for yourself, I'm giving you the name. I'm not picking on him. He is representative.

He is one in a sea of faces and names who espouse, promote, teach, encourage, and support this notion. He's just hapless victim number one tonight, but I'm not picking on him as an individual. I think he's misguided, misled, mistaken, and any other number of words that start with M-I-S, but here's what he said.

In this post and the next post, we will look at four reasons why I think God does not punish. Does he discipline? Yes. Does he judge? Of course, but punish? No.

Number one, the Bible never teaches that God quote, punishes sin. Now without going any further, what's your response? Just your gut off the top of your head, resident average Bible knowledge, does God punish sin in the Bible? Have you ever heard of the Assyrian invasion? Have you ever heard of the, say, Babylonian captivity? Have you ever heard of the Canaanites coming in and taking everything the Israelites tried to grow and accomplish in the days of the judges? Have you ever heard of the ground opening and swallowing up those who were trying to offer strange fire before the Lord, fire coming out from the altar and incinerating them? Have you ever heard God, through Moses, sending out the Levites to kill their brethren who refused to come out and support God? Have you ever heard of that generation that dropped in the wilderness and didn't enter the land of promise because they were faithless and disobedient? I mean, would you say that not being allowed to enter the promised land was a punishment for sin or was it just a consequence of sin? By sinning, you just somehow, your legs got too short no matter how many steps you took. You couldn't make it to the promised land.

The sin is just a leg shrinker. I just couldn't take enough steps. I died before I could get there because my legs were too short.

It's like the reverse of Pinocchio's nose. The more you sin, the shorter your legs get. You just can't make it from Egypt to the promised land.

I mean, come on. Anyway, so his, before I even read this, I'm dubious that he's gonna be able to pull this thing across the finish line. The Bible never teaches that God punishes sin.

Little thing called the lake of fire. Anyway, yes, yes, you may be able to find verses in your preferred English translation, which says that God, quote, punishes sin. But I agree with many others who say there is none of these words in the Hebrew or Greek that should be translated as punishment.

These words instead should be translated as discipline or judgment because I say so. I'm gonna translate it differently because I don't like it to say punishment. For example, in some translations of Exodus 20, verse five, to which please turn.

By the way, this is one of your pieces of resident Bible knowledge. What's the love chapter? First Corinthians, what is it? First Corinthians 13. What's the faith chapter? By faith, all of these guys.

Hebrews chapter 11. Where are the 10 commandments in the Old Testament? Exodus chapter 20. You should know this off the top of your head.

Where are the 10 commandments? Exodus chapter 20. This is gonna be Exodus chapter 20, verse five. For example, in some translations of Exodus chapter 20, soon as he says that, you say, well, I'm gonna be on Sinai listening to the 10 commandments.

We're also gonna find a parallel a bit later on in Exodus, but this is Exodus chapter 20. So God has said, I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.

Shall not make for yourself a carved image. Verse five, you shall not bow down to them nor serve them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. Exodus 20, verse five.

I visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me. Here's what Jeremy says here. God punishes children for the iniquity of their parents.

This sounds terribly unjust. Why should children get punished for something their parents did? But if we understand the Hebrew terms used here and other similar references as discipline or judgment, we can begin to make a little more sense of these passages. My preference is judgment.

So Exodus 20, verse five, says that God judges children for the iniquity of their parents. This doesn't sound much better than punish until we realize that judgment is not always negative. Judgment is not always negative.

Though judgment carries negative connotations in our minds, the biblical concept of judgment is not always negative. Judgment is little more than deciding or announcing a verdict. In a trial, a judge makes a judgment.

Sometimes his judgment is in favor of the plaintiff and sometimes not. But whether, quote, punishment is meted out or not, when a judge makes a judgment, he or she is simply making a decision about a case. So it might be best to think of judgment as making a decision.

So if we stop there and go back to Exodus 20, verse five, "You shall not bow down to these idols nor serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, making a decision about the

iniquity of the fathers upon the children." I mean, does that, A, make sense, and B, help any? Well, we'll continue. "God judges the righteous and the wicked, meaning he hears their case and decides what to do in each case. In this way, a judgment can be a good judgment, a granting of relief to one who has been treated unfairly.

In judging children for the sins of their parents, God is making wise and loving decisions about how to treat children based on the poor decisions of their parents. So for example, in the Mosaic law, a parent might get their family into debt or slavery, but God set up the Israelite economy in such a way so that every so often all debts are canceled, all land reverts to the original owners. In this way, God is making sure that children do not suffer for the poor decisions of their parents.

In these cases, God is making a judgment in favor of the children. That is a better way of understanding Exodus chapter 20, verse five." Where is the God of judgment in that case? Oh, he's actually, his judgment isn't to produce any punishment. It is to, he's gonna actually benefit them.

He's gonna liberate them from the consequences of their bad decisions. Well, here's my problem with that. Turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 18, because the Israelites themselves did not understand Exodus 20 that way.

Ezekiel chapter 20, I'm sorry, chapter 18. The word of the Lord came to me again saying, what do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? In other words, what do you mean when you're saying it was the fathers who sinned, but the children are suffering the penalty? As I live, says the Lord God, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine.

The soul of the father, as well as the soul of the son is mine. The soul who sins shall die. But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right, if he has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted up his eyes to the idols in the house of Israel, remember the context in Exodus chapter 20, thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. You shall not bow down to them nor worship them for I am a jealous God. And in the context of practicing idolatry, I will visit the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.

What's the rest? Of them that hate me. Of generations two, three, and four who continue in idolatry. Remember Gideon breaking down the idols that his father had set up.

You know, other than the lamps and pitchers, he goes and breaks down the family idol altar. Jerubbaal, remember that? Does that whole thing? He breaks the pattern. He breaks the generational curse there.

Four generations of idolaters in Israel and God would cut that line off. That's what Exodus

chapter 20, verse five means. I will keep track of the sins of the fathers as I look at the second, third, and fourth generations of those who hate me.

Four generations in a row, I will cut them off. But I will have mercy to a thousand generations of those who have any kind of positive response and don't repeat the iniquities of the fathers. And God calls them out, not because he's changing his mind or his policy in Ezekiel.

And I think I taught it that way way back because that's how I was taught. But I have learned that God denounces these Proverbs just as he's doing at the end of Malachi chapter two. And he says, you're tiring me out, misquoting me, misunderstanding me, mischaracterizing me as a God who smiles on wickedness and doesn't judge evil.

You're wearing me out. And it's the same thing here. They misapplied Exodus chapter 20, verse five.

And I think there's also maybe 34, seven or somewhere that that idea is repeated, the four generation curse. So look at Ezekiel 18, as I live, this is 18 three, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. He doesn't say you'll no longer quote this scripture out of Exodus.

He says, this is a tradition of men. You're teaching his doctrines, the traditions of men. Stop using this proverb.

Your words are wearing me out. Misquoting, mischaracterizing, misinterpreting, misrepresenting, which is another way of saying deceiving. Let no man deceive you about the word of the Lord.

All souls are mine, the soul of the father, the soul of the son, the soul who sins shall die. If a man does what is lawful and right, if he's just, if he's not eaten on the mountains, hasn't lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor's wife, ring a bell, treachery to the wife of your youth in Malachi chapter two, has not defiled his neighbor's wife, has not approached a woman during her impurity, if he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has kept faith, kept covenant, keeps his word, expresses integrity, has robbed no one by violence, has given his bread to the hungry, covered the naked with clothing. Remember the criteria at the sheep and goats judgment? When I was naked, you clothed me.

When I was sick and in prison, you visited me. When I was naked, when I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me to drink.

Same thing here, given bread to the hungry, covered the naked with clothing, have not exacted usury nor taken any increase, withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man, keeping faith, keeping covenant, integrity. If he has walked in my statutes and kept my judgments faithfully, he is just, he shall surely live. Doesn't matter what his daddy did.

Doesn't matter what his grandpa did. His soul is mine, God says. I will judge him and he will live or die based on what I see in him.

The fourth generation curse applies to a line. If you've got essentially a great-grandpa, a grandpa, a father, and a son who have established a family tradition of idolatry in Israel, God will destroy that line out from Israel. This is a God who punishes wickedness.

That's a punishment. You have no posterity in Israel. Your land is gonna be absorbed by others in the clan who are not idolaters.

Look at verse 10. If he begets a son who is a robber or a shedder of blood who does any of these things and does none of those duties, but has eaten on the mountains, defiled his neighbor's wife, oppresses the poor and needy, robs by violence, doesn't restore a pledge, lifts his eyes to the idols, commits abominations, exacts usury, takes increase, shall he then live? He shall not live. If he has done any of these abominations, he shall surely die.

His blood shall be upon him. If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, I'm in 1814 of Ezekiel. Write it down.

If, however, he begets a son who sees the sins which his father has done and considers, but does not do likewise, who has not eaten on the mountains, lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, doesn't defile his neighbor's wife, doesn't oppress anyone, doesn't withhold a pledge, doesn't rob by violence, gives his bread to the hungry, covers the naked with clothing, has withdrawn his hand from the poor, not received usury or increase, but has executed my judgments, walked in my statutes, he shall not die for the iniquity of his father. He shall surely live. As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence and did what is not good among the people, he shall die for his iniquity.

Yet you say, verse 19, why should the son not bear the guilt of the father? Because the son has done what is lawful and right and has kept all my statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. By extension, if a Moabite or an Ammonite or an Edomite or another descendant of the Amorites, the Canaanites, comes to Israel and does what is right in the eyes of the Lord, that behavior obviates heredity. Do you see the principle here? Doesn't matter what your daddy did, doesn't matter what your daddy was, doesn't matter where your daddy came from.

It matters what you choose to do, given the opportunity to love and serve the Lord. That is what defines us always. God will not hold heredity against someone who is asking and seeking and knocking.

God will not hold the sins of the past, even our own sins. God doesn't hold history against those who are actively seeking him. Look at King David, he made some serious mistakes.

Abraham made some serious mistakes. Jacob made some serious mistakes. You got people throughout scripture who made serious mistakes.

Peter made one of the most serious mistakes you can think of in denying the Lord. But there is repentance, there is restoration, there is return to fellowship, opportunity and blessing for those who recognize and confess their sins, who claim God's cleansing grace. God is not gonna say, well, sorry, your daddy was a rascal, so out you go.

Or your daddy was an Edomite or an Amorite, and so out you go. You ladies and children, get the hints, I'm with Ezra and Nehemiah on this, sorry, no. Or Shekiniah, the guy who kind of planted that bad idea.

So you can read the rest of this in Ezekiel chapter 18, but we wanna get back to Malachi. Malachi chapter three, verse one now, because pretend there's no chapter break here. Pretend like you just closed that up and this is verse 18 of chapter two.

You've wearied the Lord in that you say, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, including me. The things I do, I'm good in the sight of the Lord. And where's the God of judgment? I'm not getting judged, he's not gonna judge me.

God says, behold, I send my messenger. There is no break between these verses. You say, where's the God of justice? God says, watch, pay attention, look.

Where's the God of justice? I'll tell you where the God of justice is. Behold, I send my messenger, he will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek, where is he? Well, guess what? He's coming. This is really not a happy angels in the sky chorus of positive music in the background statement.

God is throwing these people's words that have wearied him back in their face. You say, where is the God of justice? Where's the God of judgment? I'll tell you where he is. I'm gonna send my messenger to prepare my way before me and the Lord whom you seek, the God of justice, will come suddenly to his temple, the messenger of the covenant.

Remember how many times we circled covenant back in the first two chapters? His covenant with Levi, his covenant with Judah, the God of the covenant, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, this is pure sarcasm. He has spent two chapters telling them how much they despise, ignore, and obviate the covenant. They care nothing for the covenant.

They care nothing for the table that represents the covenant. They care nothing for the relationships that are to reflect loyalty and love in marriage in the horizontal plane, mirroring and reflecting loyalty and love in the vertical direction. They care nothing for the covenant.

That's God's indictment of the Levites and Judah. It was chapter two, verse four. You shall know that I have sent this commandment to you that my covenant with Levi may continue, which you are despising and deteriorating.

The thing is disintegrating before my eyes. You look at 2.11, Judah has dealt treacherously. Abomination has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem.

Judah has profaned the Lord's holy covenant. There's a covenant between Judah and God. There's a covenant between Judah and Judah's wife, the wife of his youth, whoever that may be.

May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, the man who does this, being awake and aware, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts. The Lord cutting off from the tents of Jacob, the man who does this. I think you could safely categorize that as a punishment, kicking you out of the congregation of the righteous.

These people, have they ever read Psalm one? Blessed is the man who doesn't do these bad things, but the man who does will be like a shrub in the desert and will not see good when it comes. That's a punishment and it is from God. God ensures that that happens.

It's not just an accidental consequence. God will cut these people off from the tents of Jacob. God is going to judge and punishment will follow.

There is loss. The very scripture we saw about building on the foundation with wood, hay and stubble, the man is gonna suffer loss. He'll be saved, yet so as by fire, he'll show up naked with nothing.

Who lit the fire? Why didn't God just let him have his little house of wood, hay and stubble to live in? Why did God send fire at all? The man didn't accidentally drop a cigarette and burn his house down. He didn't fall asleep smoking in bed and suddenly he's got nothing. Well, that's your fault, shouldn't have been smoking.

The fire of judgment comes from God. Our God is a consuming fire. People today wanna say, where is the God of judgment? Anytime you think you see that scripture, that's somebody who wasn't really speaking for God.

I shudder at the fate of believers who twist, distort and deceive fellow believers with concepts like that. Concepts of human or satanic origin, have God's really said? Heaven help those who espouse and promote and try to live by those socially conscious, social justice, socially woke, human efforts at humanly defined goodness instead of God's goodness. You make an idol out of social change, make an idol out of self and letting people be whatever they wanna be.

Well, I woke up this morning and decided I was a penguin and I want everybody to use penguin pronouns for me and treat me as a penguin and throw fish to me and give me a little top hat and a cane and I'm gonna dance like a penguin. And I expect everybody to acknowledge my penguin-ness. And there are believers who say, this is righteousness.

This is love for others to affirm them, to never judge, to never... Stop there, we'll see if you come back. So, behold Malachi 3.1, I send my messenger, he will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek, whom you shed tears on the altar, he's gonna talk about here pretty soon, will suddenly come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. And this is almost in quotes.

You know, you claim to delight in the Lord, but they don't. If they delighted in him, they would bring the proper sacrifices. They would honor him.

God says, where's my honor? Where's my fear? Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. This is the answer to the question at the end of verse 17. Where is the God of justice? God says, I'm coming.

Are you going to be ready? Are you going to be prepared? Look at verse two, who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. How does a refiner and purifier of silver do his job? Does he say, well, you know, if you're not pure silver, you're just never gonna make it into being a ring or a ornament of jewelry or a bracelet or an earring.

I'm just gonna let the impurities just be their own consequence. I'll just keep looking around until I can find a little nugget of pure silver and use that. Silver is always amalgamated with other stuff.

These precious metals almost always had to be refined to get, you know, how often do they find a pure nugget of gold or silver? Rare, rare, rare. They're in museums when you find them like that. And a refiner lights a fire and he takes the ore or the metal bearing glob and he purposely heats it.

The refiner does it. The refiner applies the fire to the metal bearing lump. He is an active agent and this is God.

He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify. Now notice here, we're looking at verse three and we're looking at verse four.

What were the two covenants that he talked about in chapter two? Who were the representative elements for worship, which is the Godward side and lateral horizontal relationships pictured in marriage? Who were the two sons of Jacob that were mentioned? Who are they? Who represents the priests? Levi. Who represents the people of Judah and Jerusalem? Little hint there. Judah, right? Judah has dealt treacherously with the wife of his youth.

His horizontal relationships are characterized by treachery. Levi's vertical relationship of operating and establishing valid worship in Israel is corrupt and despicable. Covenant with Levi.

In order to save it, God's gonna have to purify. In order to save his covenant promises with Judah, he's gonna have to refine them. So look at verse three and verse four here.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi, purge them as gold and silver that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. You see the link back to chapter two and chapter one, these polluted sacrifices, the despised table.

You wouldn't even give it to the heathen governor and yet you're bringing it to God. God's

gonna purify Levi so that they will once again operate the vertical relationship for the nation of Israel with integrity and with righteousness that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. Now look at verse four.

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord as in the days of old, as in former years, and I will come near you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans. Exploiting, taking advantage, and in some cases by dissolving these legitimate marriages with foreign wives and sending away the wives and turning them into widows and turning the children into orphans.

I will be a swift witness against those who exploit widows and orphans and against those who turn away an alien, turn away a foreigner. This is how I know we're on the right track looking at these marriages and connecting back to Ezra and Nehemiah. God says you're turning away the aliens, making these ladies into widows and these children into orphans.

I will be a witness against you in judgment. Why? Because they do not fear me. Where is my fear if I'm a master? Where is my honor if I am a husband and I'm a father? They do not fear me says the Lord of hosts for I am the Lord, I do not change.

That's the only reason you are not consumed, oh, sons of Jacob. Yet from the days of your fathers, you have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you.

Who is the initiator in this recovery? Calvinists don't wanna come to this verse. You, Jacob, return to me, and when you do, I will then return to you. You start holding up your end of the covenant again, and I will once again hold up my end, God says, but the onus is on you.

The decision is yours to make. If you do not return to me, the flip side of this coin, I will not return to you. Why do you think there's no glory cloud in the Holy of Holies, even though the temple is now standing? They've not really returned to God.

They didn't really hear the message of Haggai and Zachariah build the temple because you covet, you desire, you love the presence of the God of the covenant. And if you build it, he will come. They built it under duress, they built it obstinately, they built it reluctantly, they built it carelessly.

There was infighting, there was politics. They made sure their own houses were built, but they cared nothing for the house of the Lord. They finally got it built, but their heart wasn't in it.

Return to me and I will, that there will not be enough room to receive it. God is the active agent in punishment and in blessing, in cursing and in benefit. God is the active agent.

Anybody who asks the question, where are you getting this idea of a God of judgment? Doesn't know God and hasn't understood Malachi for certain. Well, we need to understand this as well.

What is our application? As goes the nation, so goes us.

We need to remember this vertical relationship, the Levitical priesthood idea. We are our own priests under Jesus Christ, our high priest after the order of Melchizedek. We offer sacrifices of praise.

We offer ourselves living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. Don't be bringing a lame, blind, corrupt, diseased sacrifice that people wouldn't even want to be around. People couldn't even count on you.

People couldn't find you trustworthy. People couldn't believe what you say. Why would you come before God and offer yourself for his service when people don't even find you worthy? Your governor wouldn't even hire you for his staff.

You can't be relied upon. You say you're gonna do a thing or be somewhere and you're not. Your word is no good.

Your character is flawed. Can't trust you around possessions. Can't trust you around people.

Can't trust you around this or that or the other. We ought to be holy and acceptable to God. This is a reasonable service.

We should not be conformed to the world. We should be transformed by the renewing of our minds, washing of water by the word, presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We have to cultivate that every day if we are to enter into the holy place by a new and living way, open to us through the veil of Christ's flesh, torn for us.

Hebrews chapter 10. Do you dare walk into the presence of God to make a request to bring an offering? And it's corrupt, it's defiled. We haven't cleansed our hands.

We haven't purged ourselves. We haven't washed to be clean. That's the Levi covenant.

What is the Judah covenant? How are we treating one another? Love the Lord your God. We just saw this in Matthew from the lips of the Lord Jesus and love one another, love your neighbor. Are we sacrificial towards self and beneficial toward others? What are we doing trying to go before God when we are not practicing the covenant of Judah because we are treacherous? We do not look out for one another.

We don't clothe the naked. We don't feed the hungry. We're not looking out for the interests of others ahead of our own interests.

We're not outward looking. We're subjective. We're, woe is me.

Why isn't it better for me? I'm not being treated well. I'm not doing well. I'm not, where's my blessings? We can make direct application of the attitude that prevailed in Judah post captivity in the days of Malachi and the attitude of so many believers today in the church who are all in it

for, how do I feel? What joy am I getting out of this? I wanna be entertained.

I wanna be amused. I wanna be stimulated. I, I, me, me, the unholy Trinity of me, myself and I, it's idolatry.

Think about that in the context of chapter two and chapter three and the soon return of God. The messenger has been sent. Malachi is my messenger.

This messenger talks to us because God in the person of Christ is going to be here before long, whether it is death or the rapture. Are we ready? Are we sanctified? Are we, are we prepared for the refiner's fire? If we would refine ourselves, we would not need to be refined. I want to walk it.

Purge me with hyssop so I can be clean. Break up the rocks in my soul. I don't want to be stony soil.

God will always answer that prayer in the affirmative with help. He knows we're made out of dirt and we need divine enablement and he will grant it to those who ask. And that should be our prayer.

Let's close here with a word of prayer. Father, thank you for this wonderful passage, for its convicting power, for its illuminating presence in our hearts. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will take it and shine a strong light on those areas where we need to purge out the old leaven.

We need to stop doing things that disqualify us from blessing and qualify us instead for cursing and for judgment. We want to be made clean. We want to be washed white as snow.

We pray that you will enable us to see how that can be accomplished in our individual lives so that when we come together, we can speak the truth to one another in love and be a light shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation to others who are looking for the light of your life, your grace, your saving power through the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.