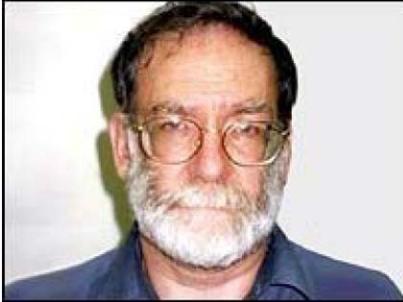




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Escape from justice??



Mass-murderer, Harold Shipman

Some thoughts on the suicide of mass-murderer, Dr. Harold Shipman

The recent reaction, reported widely in the media, to the suicide of Harold Shipman displayed an ignorance of the Word of God that is heart-breaking. How could a nation, so blessed with gospel knowledge, as the theological treasury of our national library shows, come to be so ignorant of the Bible? The lament has been that Shipman has escaped from the rigours of prison into a place of release and ease. There have been expressions of bitter disap-

pointment that he was not stopped from committing suicide

and made to spend the rest of his life in jail. The common assumption appeared to be that he had gone to a place much better than the jail in which he died. What utter folly! Is it not understood that it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment? (Hebrews 9:27). There is no release, no deliverance, no ending of misery for the sinner at death. Rather there is the beginning of eternal sorrows.

The Bible teaches us that the punishment of sin is progressive. The punishment of sin begins when sin is committed. As a wound immediately brings pain, but when untreated the pain intensifies, so it is with sin. There is the smiting of the heart and the pain of conviction. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt, 1 Samuel 24:5. Of course, the degree of pain conveyed to the conscience has a lot to do with the nature of the sin and also the tenderness of the conscience. Many a person has committed murder without any apparent remorse. However, I am inclined to believe that history does show that even the most outwardly hard do suffer the pains of regret at some stage or other during their life.

Conscience

Often the pain of an awakened conscience is induced by the providential visitations and interventions with which the Judge of all the earth deals with the wicked. When a man's sins become a danger to others, God often is pleased to take that sinner away. The story of the judgment of the old world in Noah's day, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and many other similar visitations of judgment demonstrate this. The Bible's record of such events lives on to trouble sinners even to this day.

Death

Furthermore, God's punishment of sin intensifies at death. The story of the rich man, told by the Saviour in Luke 16, shows this. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, verse 23. Death ushered the unsaved rich man into the torments of hell. What a solemn, dreadful truth this is and yet the nation dwells very much under the misapprehension that a mass-murderer, when he commits suicide, goes to some place much better than jail!



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Were it but known, Harold Shipman would give anything to return to that cell from which his suicide took him.

Final judgment

But the punishment of sin has not reached its fulness when the sinner dies and goes to hell. He is undoubtedly in torments but the full sentence of divine justice upon him has yet to be pronounced. That will take place at the final judgment of the wicked. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire," Revelation 20: 11-15. The place of final punishment is the Lake of Fire. There God's judgment will fall upon the sinner to fullest measure.

Salvation

While these truths are clearly revealed in God's Word, so also is the fact that the sinner may escape wrath to come by turning to Christ. Christ stepped into the condemned cell on behalf of His people. All who put their trust in Him benefit from His substitutionary death in the sinner's place and thus escape eternal damnation. God would have sinners know this in order that they might avail themselves of His mercy. There is a way of escape. It is not by suicide but by Christ. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3: 16.