

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS SIN? - Part two

Sunday, September 16th, 2012, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1591

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

STUDYING DIVINE JUDGMENT - DOESN'T IT JUST DEPRESS US? (Continued)

In the *second* point of last week's teaching we starting drilling down into this principle:

2) **UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES OF DIVINE JUDGMENT SHOULD HAVE PRACTICAL AND PRECIOUS RESULTS IN OUR WALK WITH THE LORD IN THIS PRESENT AGE**

I said it would be a terrible mistake to think of this topic as *morbid*, or as though it were somehow beneath New Testament believers or unworthy of the greatness of Father God. *We* do not get to decide what the content of God's revelation of Himself should be. The job of *God* is taken. God has taken on that role in His revelation to us in the Scriptures. Our task is to humble ourselves under what He has revealed. We must shape our brains around God's self-revelation rather than conforming it of our own value judgments.

Then I said the subject of divine judgment is becoming increasingly intolerable in an age where truth must be made palatable before we will digest it. It's easy for the church to become like small babies - simply spitting out whatever doesn't suit our liking in God's diet of revealed truth. But there is something *precious*, something worth *cherishing*, in the truth of God as Judge.

At that point we starting studying *four Biblical reasons* for embracing the Biblical doctrine of divine judgment:

The *first* was *only a Biblically sustained belief in the reality of future divine judgment will sharpen our love for the lost* - John 3:36 - "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son *shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*"

The *second* reason was *Only a Biblically sustained belief in the reality of divine judgment will orient the soul of the redeemed to high praise and passionate thanksgiving as we worship the Lord from the standpoint of redemption accomplished on our behalf* - 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 - "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*"

These Christians contemplated and relished a particular future delivering act that would be accomplished by Jesus. He would be the One to *deliver them from the wrath to come*. This is the *same* wrath John said *remained* on the disobedient in our first text. And the point here is the doctrine of divine judgment is directly related to the worship and praise of the redeemed. Worship fueled by nothing but the Golden Rule will be shallow, cold, and sappy.

Now on to the *third* and *fourth* reasons for keeping the doctrine of future divine judgment alive in our minds, our worship, and our church:

c) **Only a Biblically sustained belief in the doctrine of divine judgment affirms the proper balance of the love of God with the justice of God:**

Romans 3:24-26 - "...and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation [not *expiation*] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was *to show* God's *righteousness*, because in his divine forbearance he had *passed over former sins*. [26] It was *to show* [note - this is the *second* time Paul uses the word "show." There is something made obvious in the cross about God's character that we wouldn't know otherwise] his *righteousness* at the *present time*, so that he might be *just* and the *justifier* [not order of terms here] of the one who has faith in Jesus."

There is something important in the last phrase of verse 26 - "...It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Notice the *order* of the accomplishments of redemption. The *first* thing secured in the event of the cross of Jesus is the *justice* of God. The *second* thing secured is the *forgiveness of our sins*. In other words, *did Christ die for us or for God the Father?* And if I give any other answer than "*both*," I haven't understood things fully and correctly.

"Well, Pastor Don, I don't like this very much. I have always heard preachers say God thought of *me* when Jesus was on the cross. Are you telling me He didn't love me as much as I thought?"

Listen, I'm not saying anything of the kind. God *did* think of you, and me, and every other sinner yet to be, when Jesus was on the cross. We could never even comprehend the love God has for us. But there's another very important issue that is frequently lost sight of. The issue here isn't just *how does the cross of Jesus demonstrate God's love for me*. An equally important

question is, ***“How does the cross of Jesus secure my love for God?”***

This is the profound issue. And the way the cross secures **my** love for **God** is it **reveals** (shows) Him as a **holy** God and a **just** God even while showing mercy to people who don't deserve it - to people who have **earned** punishment.

Trying to love God's **forgiveness** without the underlying bedrock foundation of His absolute **justice** of the atoning death of Christ on the cross reduces God's love to a flimsy sentiment. OK. He forgave me **this** time. But how do I know I haven't reached my limit? Will I still have sure pardon the **next** time I sin? How can I **know** this for certain? Without the justice of God revealed in His dealing with my sin on the cross, I never know for sure when I'll run out of luck. And that **reduces** my love for God in the long run.

People cannot love injustice for long. Remember the O.J. trial? Or better still, if your son or daughter was murdered by a maniac at night, and the judge and jury had conclusive proof of his guilt, would you be pleased if the judge were merely merciful? Would you be pleased if the judge said, ***“I know you're absolutely guilty - even by your own confession. But I'm feeling generous today. There's no punishment. Go home and try not to let this sort of thing happen again.”***

Imagine the outrage at such a decision. We can't love injustice, even in this corrupt, fallen world. We only are drawn to injustice when **we're** the ones getting away with wickedness. But on the broad societal scale we **all** hate injustice.

Now consider again the atoning work of the cross. The cross of Jesus does two important things at the same time. It reveals God's love for me. And it secures my love for Him. Only as God is faithful to judge sin - judge it in the body of His own Son on the cross - is God's justice displayed and glorified in a way that draws out my love for Him.

The church will be in deep trouble if this powerful pair of redemptive truths is ignored or separated. Because we know our own sin and our own need, we tend to use God's love to **cancel out** His justice. Again, God frequently gets made over in our own image. But the love of God and the justice of God in judging sin are co-joined twins that can never survive separation. Only the doctrine of divine judgment can sustain the beauty of the Biblical God of righteousness before this fallen world.

d) ***Only a Biblically sustained belief in the doctrine of divine judgment will serve as an incentive to perseverance in righteousness:***

There are some very important words from the Scriptures to consider:

2 Corinthians 5:9-11 - “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. [11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.”

I'm sure there are Christians who read these words of Paul and don't see anything really beautiful in them. I'm sure there are Christians who see Paul's evident consideration of his future time of judgment before Christ as a rather **morbid** and **legalistic** motive for any kind of truly spiritual endeavor in this world. Surely we should do what we do for the Lord because we **love** the Lord, not because we **fear** the Lord.

I can't tell you how mistaken I think this spin on Paul really is. Deep at the core of this passage, if we only have the eyes to see it, is a beautiful picture of Paul's love for Christ. And I want to close this message trying to lift your sights to see it with me. Paul's **love** for the Lord is a love that is pruned and nourished and nurtured into an even richer love by his **fear** of the Lord.

Perhaps the simplest illustration is the love I had for my own earthly father. I did love my dad. I loved him, not because he always let me do my own thing, but because he taught me to appreciate what was right and best in life. And sometimes these were very painful, unpleasant times of schooling.

There were times in my dealings with my father, who was quite strict, when I could relate to Paul's mention of the **fear of the Lord and being immediately ushered into eternity and the judgment seat of Christ!** Those weren't pleasant times. But they were times when my love for my father was **sharpened and formed into maturity**. I loved my father **because** he had the power and authority to force me to think of what was right when I wanted to go in another direction entirely.

And, because my love for my father was a love **shaped** by times of judgment, my love for him had a healthy element of respect in it that kept me from making the same mistakes over and over again. So my love for **him** was shaped by his love for **me**. My love for him had **respect** because his love for me had more than mere **indulgence** of foolishness.

Or, think back to the illustration I used earlier about the parents who had their child murdered in the night. Remember how the

judge let the criminal off in the name of kindness? I said then that the parents would never love a judge like that. We all instinctively love justice. Of course, the one person who **would** love the judge in that illustration would be the murderer.

Or would he? Think again. What this murderer would love is his **freedom**. He would love **getting off the hook**. But his love isn't really a love for the **judge**, or a healthy love for **justice**. No, his experience in court hadn't **taught** him to love any of those things. In fact, almost certainly, he will be back in court again soon enough because his heart never was trained to love justice itself.

Why? Why would his character remain unchanged? Because his love wasn't tempered and sharpened by a healthy fear. He loved **himself**, not the **judge**. Ask any school teacher or police officer what it's like to deal with people who have absolutely no fear of those who work over them. Those kinds of students or citizens always self-destruct.

Now quickly back to our text: **2 Corinthians 5:10-11** - "**So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. [10] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. [11] Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience** [Paul means the believers in Corinth *knew in their hearts* the love Paul had for Christ and for them was genuine]."

When Paul says he knows the "**fear of the Lord**" he doesn't just mean he knows **about** this fear. He means he **feels** this fear. Not in a way that cancels out his **love** for the Lord, but in a way that makes his love for the Lord a **careful** love - a fear that keeps his love for the Lord from turning into **lazy presumption and mere sentiment**.

Remember where we are. Our final point was, only a belief in divine judgment fosters **perseverance in the pursuit of righteousness in this world**. Not because such a fear of God is the **opposite** of love for God, but because fear of God purifies and deepens our love for the majestic, mighty, righteous God who truly is, rather than the self-made God who pampers our fallen desires.

Please, please, don't pack away the doctrine of divine judgment in some suitcase in the back of your mind. There's more spiritual nourishment here than you could ever imagine. And, if you don't know Jesus Christ this morning, remember that God's first love is **redeeming**, not **judging**. That's why, unlike a teacher who delights in catching students with a surprise exam, He **tells** us of the wrath to come. He's not willing that any should perish. Come to the Savior now.