

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS SIN? - Part four

Sunday, September 30th, 2012, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1595

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THREE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES THAT SHAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THIS WORLD

It is a strong tribute to the mercy of Father God that He has already told us how He will judge the world. Nothing could point more clearly to His kindness and goodness to His creation. If you just want to catch people being bad or ill-prepared you **don't** tell them of coming assessment and judgment. When you **caution** and **warn** of coming judgment it's because you want to bring change, repentance, and transformation. That's why, in the New Testament, the exact **time** of this coming judgment is the only real surprise. The **season and terms** of judgment should be well known.

This week and next we will study **three principles** of how God's judgment will manifest itself. Again, we need to see the heart of God in dispensing this information to us. He has no delight in condemning us. More than anything else, He wants to, in the words of Paul, "**deliver us from the wrath to come**" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). And God does that through His revealed mercy and redemption through Jesus Christ, God the Son.

1) GOD'S JUDGMENT WILL BE ACCORDING TO TRUTH

Psalm 119:160 - "The **sum** of your word is truth, and **every one** of your righteous rules endures forever."

John 12:47-48 - "If anyone **hears** my words and does not **keep** them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. [48] The one who **rejects me** and does not **receive my words** has a judge; **the word that I have spoken** will judge him on the last day.

These words are relevant to us. However intently we are listening to today, you are hearing in this text the **very words** of Jesus. You're listening at this very moment to the very words by which your whole future existence will be judged. Unless, of course, your texting or day-dreaming.

Both these passages teach the same truth in different words. The Psalmist lays the foundation from which all divine judgment comes. He says a mouthful when he says the "**sum**" of God's words is "**truth**." We can't even imagine a Being whose whole way of operating is "truth." In other words, nothing about God's actions is ever clouded - not even in the most microscopic sense - by any other personality trait.

Think of what it means to operate simply on the basis of truth. We, more than we know, decide things on the basis, at least partially, of what will work best in a given situation, or whim, or emotional state, or sentiment. How many people do you know who are banking on God **not** judging them simply because they think it would be **inappropriate** of God to do so.

And we come to these conclusions because, if we're honest at all, we know how often **our** judgments are based on, or at least influenced by, things **other than** sheer truth. In fact, the Scriptures even **use** this tendency of ours as a **contrast** to the way God will judge.

Romans 2:1-2 - "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. [2] We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things."

Please don't miss what's being said in **verse 2**. Paul is highlighting the way we all have two standards of judgment - one for others, and one for ourselves. We quickly **condemn** in others the very same things we **excuse** in ourselves. This is why God allows us to be sinned **against** by others. This gives us a chance to feel how our sinful actions effect God and others. But Paul's main point is our personal judgments are **biased**. They aren't exclusively based on **truth**. And Paul says God hates that and will judge such duplicity.

Or look at our justice system. No one would deny that your chances of pardon or acquittal increase with your capacity to pay a good lawyer. Truth is not the only factor tipping the scales of justice in this fallen world.

But if we're to understand God's heart at all - if we're to gain insight into the nature and terms of God's coming judgment - we will have to learn to alter our bent perspective. We have to learn to see things from the perspective of absolute truth - from **God's** vantage point.

This is not easy for us to do. We pay lip service to too many important truths to our own peril. They say the hardest part of training a seeing eye dog is to teach the dog to "see" from the perspective of the person he will be leading. The dog may only be 30" high. The dog doesn't **need** to go around a high table. He can simply walk under it. But the person the dog is leading may be 6' tall. The dog must be trained to see everything from the perspective of someone much taller than himself.

We need to come to terms with a God who always and only judges in accordance with absolute truth. Like the seeing eye dog in training, we need to learn **now** to take all the bias and sham and show out of our lives. More than anything else, this is what it means to walk in **repentance** before God. Repentance means constantly **seeing** our lives **correcting personal bias**. And it's our constant, humble recognition of just how deep and persistent that personal bias is.

2) GOD'S JUDGMENT WILL BE ACCORDING TO DEEDS

Romans 2:6-8 - "He will render to each one according to his works: [7] to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and *immortality*, he will give eternal life; [8] but for those who are self-seeking and *do not obey the truth*, [especially the truth about Jesus Christ] but *obey unrighteousness*, [notice the emphasis on the heart-set - the *downward direction* of our will and affections] **there will be wrath and fury.**"

These are the kind of verses that give some Christians headaches. What is especially troubling to some is the fact that, quite clearly, these verses teach that both Christians and non-Christians will be judged by their deeds. This is obvious from the way Paul speaks of the deeds of *both* groups of people as they stand before God - those who inherit *eternal life* (7), and those whose end is "*wrath and fury*" (8).

Isn't this "*works*" theology? Whatever happened to being saved by *grace* and "*not by works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9)? I don't mind God judging *sinner*s according to their deeds, but I'm not so crazy about Him judging *me* - a Christian - by my deeds. What are we going to do with these verses?

Actually, the very fact that these verses are confusing to so many is only a reflection on how poorly we are being brought into proper understanding about the very basics of sound doctrine in today's church. The issue needing explanation in these verses isn't salvation by *grace* versus salvation by *works*. The real point of confusion in much of the church is a proper understanding of what saving faith actually is and how it manifests itself.

There is no denying that one can only be saved at all through faith in God's free and marvelous grace revealed in Jesus Christ. We've already referred to the words of Paul in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8-9 - "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**"

What blessed words of hope and promise! But they lead to another question. Did I truly exercise faith - real, genuine, saving faith - in Jesus Christ? On such an important issue I don't want to rely on guess work or moods. How can I *know* faith has been placed in Jesus Christ?

And here's the important point. The Bible doesn't give two or three answers to that question. It only gives one. And it needs to be trumpeted in today's church. It needs to shine like a searchlight through the fog of confusion and false teaching that is so commonly held for the truth. Here it is. ***True faith changes the life.*** True faith isn't *mental agreement*. James says even ***demons believe and tremble.***

And there's that word - "*believe.*" It's the very same word used in other places in the New Testament. "***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.***" So is this the *same kind of belief*?

No. Belief isn't going to church. It isn't having Christian parents. It isn't teaching Sunday School. It's ***abiding in Jesus like a branch abides in a vine. It's walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh.***

Faith always transforms the mind and affections of the one exercising it - ***Titus 2:11-14*** - "***For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.***"

Read those words a hundred times over. Memorize them. Notice the link between the *first* subject dealt with and the *last* subject dealt with. The passage starts out with "***the grace of God***" and the last words in the text are "***good works.***" Is this a mistake?

No. Grace always transforms the recipient of it. There is such a common misunderstanding, usually, I'm sure, very sincerely presented. The idea is that you can accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and then, sometime later on, decide to receive Him as Lord.

That's quite commonly said, but I don't believe it will bear the weight of Scriptural examination. Paul had precisely this subject in mind in the passage from Titus. He is describing this situation exactly. What happens when God's saving grace comes to a convert? That's the issue. And the Holy Spirit, through Paul, says saving grace is the *same* grace as sanctifying grace. Saving grace turns converts into passionate seekers of holiness. You can't *get* saving grace without becoming a lover of holiness and truth. That's what Paul is saying.

O, you can go to church. You can sing in the choir. You can preach sermons. You can play the guitar or drums. But you can't be saved and you can't get to heaven without being a grace-filled seeker of holiness.

I don't like to hear preachers say, "You've received Jesus as Savior. Now you need to receive Him as Lord." I believe this plays into the

false hope and delusion of many people in the church today. I think **A. W. Tozer** was right when he said you can't accept just a part of Jesus. You take the whole package or nothing at all. He doesn't come as just Savior. He comes with saving grace as Lord, or He doesn't come at all, whatever we might want to believe or confess. This is precisely why the Scriptures usually *reverse* our common order of thinking. Over and over again the New Testament speaks of Jesus as "**Our Lord and Savior**, [note the order] **Jesus Christ**."

Forgive me for laboring over this one point, but it is so crucially important. This is why God's judgment is according to our deeds. And this is also why there is nothing contradictory between being judged by deeds and being saved by grace through faith.

I think Jesus Himself labored to make the very same point:

Matthew 7:17-23 - "So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [18] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. [21] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Notice at least two things here. *First*, you can't *make* a tree good just by sticking good fruit on its branches. That's the approach of *morality*. *Second*, you make the *fruit* good by having a *good tree from the inside*. That's regeneration. But notice, if the tree is truly good, you *will* have good fruit!

Nothing could be clearer from these words than this: *no profession of faith of any kind has meaning apart from "doing the will of My Father in heaven"(21)*. The mere *profession* of faith is of no significance to Jesus. Even acts of supernatural manifestation (what we could probably class as part of the "renewal" movement) do not, in themselves, validate a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

The closing words of Jesus need to be pondered deeply - "**Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness"(23)**."

Remember where we're going with all of this. The point here is that, from God's perspective, *deeds* are the standard of judgment, not *profession*. Saving faith, when it's really saving, is also purifying. So, yes, we are saved by grace through faith. But the faith must be genuine. And genuine faith will always manifest itself in actions that are holy and glorifying to God.

One more point. I'm not saying this to put sincere Christians under doubt of their salvation every time they fail God. While striving for perfection, growth comes gradually, never instantly. Remember the words of **Titus 2:11-12** - "**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions....**"

So we are not *unsaved* every time we sin. That's not the issue we're discussing under this point. The issue here is one of *intent* and *desire*. A saved heart *presses toward holiness*. It can do no other. Sin will *grieve* a saved heart. Grace always *strives* toward holiness. It is *drawn* toward the light of God's moral, guiding truth.

The person who *justifies* his sin, who *rests* in sin while claiming to be saved by grace, is only mimicking Christianity. Notice I said the person who *rests* in sin - not the person who resists and struggles *against* sin. Faith in Christ that doesn't find sin unacceptable is nothing more than religious gamesmanship. He is under a fatally dangerous delusion. And the judgment by deeds will expose it.

More on this next week.