

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS SIN? - Part six

Sunday, October 21st, 2012, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1599

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

GOD'S JUDGMENT AND THE FLOW OF HUMAN HISTORY

Speak of judgment to a church congregation and most of our minds go to their default setting. In those rare moments when we think of God's judgment at all, we think of the coming Day of Judgment when Jesus comes again. We think of those passages in Revelation where the books are described as being opened. We think of that great final separation of, in Jesus' words, sheep from goats. We think of heaven and hell. We think of the day of grace and the chance of repentance being over. Certainly there are different theological schemes and timetables for these events, but almost all Christians believe the Bible teaches these things *will* take place.

We will look at all of these events in future studies, but what I want to focus on today is the reality of God's *present* judgment - right now - before we die and before Jesus comes again. I want us to consider God's judgment and the flow of human history. I'm not now talking about the *culmination* of human history, but the *flow* of it here and now. This is where much of God's judgment takes place.

One other thing: I hope, if you currently have a dark and negative opinion of God's judging work in this present world, as though it were somehow beneath God's grace and mercy, that you will come to see true beauty in it. I hope that you will come to see, as the Psalmist said so long ago, that all God's judgments are according to truth and righteousness - **Psalm 119:160** - "**The *sum* of your word is truth, and *every one* of your righteous rules endures forever.**"

What this means is the *sum* of God's work is righteous. And *every one* of God's works is right. And the reason the Psalmist mentions both the *individual acts* of God and the *sum of them taken all together* is you and I usually have to wait until we see all of God's works taken together to have a proper assessment of them. And this is true whether we are thinking of God's *blessings* or God's *judgment*.

Regarding God *blessings* it's true that we won't properly trace what is good for our spiritual well-being if we just measure things by our present comfort - "**...all things work together for good...**" Regarding God's *judgments* it's true in that we usually think we're getting away with sins - especially *small* sins - because we don't see any immediate *consequences* to them. The judgment of God often accumulates in our lives over time, leaving us with the impression that God doesn't notice at all.

1) **OUR OWN FALLEN MINDS ARE NOT RELIABLE INSTRUMENTS FOR MAKING ASSESSMENTS ABOUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF ANY OF GOD'S ACTS OF JUDGMENT**

This can be seen by the fact that we can be equally annoyed both when God's judgments seem too severe and when they seem too slow in coming.

Let's take the second example first:

Psalm 73:12-14 - "**Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. [13] All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. [14] For all the day long *I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.***"

The Psalmist is not an ungodly man. Yet he is certain that God has everything screwed up in His dealings. The wicked *aren't* being judged. They are getting away with murder. And he, the Psalmist, is pure and innocent and prayerful to no avail. He says he starts every morning under the chastening hand of the Lord - **14** - "**For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.**"

But as you read the Psalm you come to realize it wasn't *God* who was beating up the Psalmist. It was the *Psalmist!* He was messing up his own head and heart with self-produced doubts about the fairness of God.

This is truly a terrible way to live life. Everything is morally up-for-grabs in terms of God's justice and fairness. And life is hard-lived when you feel God has it organized against you.

Then you have another group of people who don't like linking a loving God with *any* kind of judgment in this present age. God, they feel is *good*, and a good God doesn't do *bad* things. And they've already reached that verdict in their finite minds - a judging God is a *bad* God. After all, *we're* encouraged to be kind and loving, so surely God must be as good as we are.

So, if you're going to throw the issue into the court of human reason, you will end up with some kind of split decision as to the righteousness of God's judgment in this world. Human reasoning can go either way on this issue, depending on our circumstances and the temper of our heart.

It is of high significance that in heaven, with the perspective of earth fading and the sight of the throne of God vivid, those around the altar, having seen the judgment of God poured out unmixed on this world, never dream of questioning the rightness and beauty of God's judgment - **Revelation 16:7** - "And I heard the altar saying, 'Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!'"

So this is where we must start. We need something solid to stand on. We need revelation. We can't each be left to the meanderings of our minds. Our uninformed opinions, on their own, are no place to begin when studying the doctrine of divine judgment.

2) **GOD DOES ACT UNILATERALLY IN JUDGMENT IN THE PRESENT FLOW OF HISTORY IN THIS WORLD, BUT ALWAYS WITH THE GOAL OF THE GREAT GOOD BEING ACCOMPLISHED.**

This, I believe, is where we come into the meat of the issue of God's present judgment in this fallen world. It is so important that the unpleasantness of the *circumstances* of judgment don't blind our hearts to the *loving heart* of the Judge.

I believe it's because people haven't been taught about God's motive in present acts of judgment that many Christians have come to think of God's *love* and God's *judgment* as two opposite sides of His nature - a kind of Jekyll and Hyde manifestation of God. And they come to love the one while questioning or shying from the other.

Look at some important principles and texts with me:

a) ***God's judgments are never hurried or impulsive.***

Luke 13:6-9 - "And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. [7] And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' [8] And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. [9] Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' "

Underscore that middle portion of **verse 7** - "... And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none....'" Our problem is we only notice when God *acts* in chastening or judgment. We never notice the many years when He merely *waits* in patience for our maturing.

The central message of this story is there is nothing *rash* or *hasty* in God's judgment. While judgment isn't always *avoided*, it is never *rushed*. God looks and labors for fruitfulness. He waits longer than seems reasonable to many. This is what we're meant to see. He exhausts every resource in the pursuit of fruitfulness and redemption in our lives.

b) ***Even God's severe judgments are intended as examples, turning others from wickedness to grace and mercy.***

Consider two of the best known cases of God's judgment being poured out in the Scriptures. One from the Old Testament and one from the New. The case of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is recorded in **Genesis chapter 19**. While we don't have time to read that whole account, there is one very interesting fact that the Scriptures *do* relate as the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is reflected upon after the fact.

Ezekiel 16:46-48 - "And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is Sodom with her daughters. [47] Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. [48] As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done."

Common evangelical legend would say that God judged Sodom and Gomorrah so drastically because they were the most sinful cities ever. The Bible says this is *not* so. Here, in Ezekiel, God warns Judah of coming judgment and says they are *worse* sinners than Sodom or Gomorrah - "...more corrupt than they"(47).

And that makes us all want to ask, "If Sodom and Gomorrah weren't the *most* wicked, why didn't God judge the more wicked cities instead of them? Why did God judge them so severely?"

Peter tells us what God's plan was in judging Sodom and Gomorrah: **2 Peter 2:4-6** - "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; [5] if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; [6] if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...."

God made Sodom and Gomorrah “....**an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly...**”(6). God was removing the temptation of future ungodly people - your neighbors and relatives - to think that He was indifferent to their sin. He doesn't **want** to have to judge them. So Peter says God was supplying an incentive to conviction and righteousness outside the walls of any church. He was planting a warning sign in the pages of history.

“But that still doesn't answer the question about why God judged Sodom and Gomorrah so severely when the Bible says there were other cities more wicked than they. Why did He do that, Pastor Don?”

My only answer is I think it best fits in with God's intention of using Sodom and Gomorrah as public examples to call the careless and the godless to repentance. If God only punishes the **most** wicked for their sins, the lesson people might take is that it is safe to sin **up to that point**. We could always justify ourselves by saying, “Well, I've not sinned to the extent of those **most** godless and wicked so I'm safe from judgment.”

You see, God removes the basis for any wicked person **presuming his own safety** from judgment by making Sodom and Gomorrah examples of His work in this world. **There is always mercy in God's methods.**

If all you knew was the bare story of Sodom and Gomorrah you could judge God as a blood-thirsty brute. It takes the full light of Scripture to grasp what God is doing there and **why** He was doing it. I say it again, there is always mercy in God's methods. He's still out to reach your heart.

This is another example of how important it is to learn the whole flow of Biblical revelation. This, contrary to what many people think, has nothing to do with trying to be the smartest Christians in terms of our theological knowledge. It has to do with knowing God in a way that doesn't **misrepresent** and **misjudge** Him.

And that **matters** to your spiritual growth and ministry. It's **not** just an intellectual matter. This will effect the way you actually **approach** God in worship and in prayer. And it will effect the way your whole life bears **witness** to God in this world, even if you don't **think about it**. That's because people will notice the degree to which you **treasure** your God. They must notice that you treasure your God in all His goodness and perfection more than they value their own idols of wealth and leisure and power and comfort.

More on this next week.