

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRISTIANS SIN? - Part seven

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GOD'S JUDGMENT AND THE FLOW OF HUMAN HISTORY (continued)

In our last study in this series we were considering two key ideas as we started unpacking the revelation of God's judgment in the flow of human history. The *first* was ***our own fallen minds are not reliable instruments for making assessments about the righteousness of any of God's acts of judgment***. Our minds are both too *finite* - bound by tiny slices of time and perspective - and too *self-centered* - inclined to personal happiness and comfort - to be reliable instruments for measuring God's actions from a wide, wise understanding.

The *second* point about God's judgment and the flow of human history was ***God does act unilaterally in judgment in the present flow of history in this world, but always with the goal of His greatest good being accomplished***. And it was under this second point that I said that, a) ***God's judgments are never hurried or impulsive***. We considered the way Jesus labored to make this point in the parable of the barren fig tree. The master's command to have it removed looks harsh unless it's considered against the backdrop of his waiting three years running for any indication of fruitfulness (Luke 13:6-9).

Then we considered, b) ***even God's severe judgments are intended as examples, turning others from wickedness to grace and mercy***. Peter makes this point so clearly in 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....***"

So we're reminded that in the flow of history in this present world even God's firm hand of judgment has the texture of grace in it. It follows after much patient waiting for repentance and it serves as an example to keep others from the unseen, future damage that sin always brings.

And it is under this second point that I want to consider another example in the New Testament:

Acts 5:1-10 - "But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, [2] and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. [3] But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? [4] While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." [5] When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. [6] The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. [7] After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. [8] And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." [9] But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." [10] Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband."

Like Sodom and Gomorrah, here we see a strong picture of God's judgment being poured out. The sin exposed is that of ***hypocrisy and sham and dishonesty*** in the practice of worship and congregational life. We all know that God doesn't ***approve*** of these things. But that's not the issue here. The issue here is what are the ***consequences*** of ignoring what we know is right in our worship? What ***difference*** does it make when we don't please the Lord in these things - when we push past the promptings of the Holy Spirit?

Look at what happened as a ***result*** of God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira - Acts 5:11-14 - "And ***great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things***. [12] Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. [13] None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. [14] And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women...."

This is exactly the kind of reaction Peter said the message of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah would have on its hearers. This is the mercy of God being made manifest in His acts of judgment in this world.

3) PEOPLE CAN BE JUDGED BY GOD TEMPORALLY IN THIS PRESENT AGE - SOMETIMES VERY SEVERELY - AND YET NOT BE ETERNALLY LOST

There are several passages we could look at, but let's consider what is perhaps the best known:

1 Corinthians 11:28-32 - "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, ***we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.***"

These are some of the richest words on the subject of divine judgment in the entire Bible. No wonder Paul encouraged their consideration at least as often as we come to the Lord's Table in our corporate worship. Strikingly, we are reminded of God's judgment at

the very point where we celebrate the most potent proof of His mercy and grace. And the reason is we need to know God's grace can easily take forms we don't relish. These words are custom tailored to remove false thinking about God's judgment in this present age. Consider two important thoughts:

- a) ***God's judgment is never given merely to assert His divine muscle. It is never intended as a bare threat.***

The word "**judgment**" in Paul's passage is "**diekrinomen.**" It literally means to "**distinguish**" or to "**separate.**" He uses this word very carefully in **verse 31** - "**But if we judged (or discerned) ourselves truly, we would not be judged.**"

In other words, if we only learned, as God's children, to **distinguish** between what we see of our own sin and rebellion in our lives and what we **ought to be** when we come before the Lord, we would see the fulfillment of the Biblical, healing purpose of much of God's chastening hand in our lives.

Paul sees God's message of judgment at the Table, not simply as something to be **feared**, or as a divine display of **temper**, but as a loving **incentive to holiness and self-examination.** That's the spirit of God's message of judgment.

- b) ***This earthly judgment of the Lord is not the same thing as eternal damnation.***

This is made very clear in **verse 32** - "**But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**"

Paul says, "Yes, we Christians do experience God's judgment." He **calls** it God's judgment in **verse 32** - "**But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**" "But," says Paul, "this judgment, even when it is severe in its manifestation, like the taking of our physical life, isn't to bring about eternal damnation, but to **keep us** from experiencing that kind of condemnation along with the world!"

We need to constantly remember this. God can't be properly understood if His passion for our purity and separation from the world is forgotten. Paul tell us God doesn't necessarily remove divine, saving grace from our lives just because we come under His judgment in this world. The purpose of judgment is always to **keep** us from being condemned along with the world.

4) **THE KIND OF JUDGMENT WE SHOULD FEAR THE MOST**

I am constantly amazed that Christians can get all worked up about passages like those mentioning Ananias and Sapphira, and the words we just read from the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, and yet not breathe a word about the most severe judgment recorded in the pages of Scriptures.

I'd like to consider Romans chapter one in closing. Here are some of the strongest words of caution in the whole Bible:

Romans 1:18-22 - "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools...."**

These verses describe the **end result** of God's judgment. But there is a very important phrase that describes the **process** of judgment that **brought about** this end condition. This one key phrase is all important when we consider the manifestation of God's judgment in this present age. It is repeated three times for great emphasis. Please consider this phrase with great care and attention today. Here are the verses where this phrase is found:

Romans 1:24 - "**Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...."**

Understand what's being said here. God lets their inward desires **override** the authority and power of His Word and the voice of His Holy Spirit in their conscience. He leaves them to do what they want in a numb inner peace.

Romans 1:26 - "**For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature;**

Same idea. God stops arguing with their inward inclinations.

Romans 1:28 - "**And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."**

Note, "**debased mind.**" This is slightly different from the previous two texts. God finally removes their own ability to analyze and measure

their own misery. Their wisdom control center is shut down. **"God gave them up...."** Very silently, very gradually, almost imperceptibly, a line was crossed. Nothing checked their rebellion anymore. They didn't feel the weight of their sin. They didn't blush anymore. They had no sense of shame.

This is judgment indeed - when God **leaves**. Pray every day your soul never reaches this horrible state. This is surely what David had in mind when he uttered his famous prayer - **Psalm 51:11** - **"Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me."**

It is a terrible thing to sin and grieve the heart of God. It is never easy to humble your own mind and repent of sin. But always remember, it is far **more** terrible to sin and inwardly feel God doesn't even care anymore.

You think about these things when you're a pastor. Every pastor knows what it's like to preach to hard hearts over a long period of time. I've seen the same faces looking cold and indifferent to precious spiritual truth. What will reach these people? I fear for some of them. Mister, your pride isn't important enough to keep you from the altar. Teenager, young adult, there's not a friend on earth that's worth reaching this horrible condition. You can't turn your spiritual appetite on and off at will. You can fiddle with spiritual things too long.

Always see God's grace in His judgment. The one thing you never want from God is His **indifference**. In this age where we spend our lives even His painful voice and ways have much mercy in them. Listen now, even if His voice and way seems difficult. His voice, patient or stern always has more grace in it than His silence.