

God's Glory in Judgement

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Introduction

Many people today try to avoid the subject of God's judgement. Some speak only of God's love and do not mention judgement at all. Yet the Bible speaks clearly about both. Scripture does not hide the truth that God judges sin. Instead, it shows that judgement is part of God's holy character. God's judgement is neither cruel nor unfair. It reflects both His justice and His love.

The Nature of God's Judgement

God's judgement flows from His holiness. Because God is perfectly holy, He cannot ignore sin. He must judge. Sometimes God shows His judgement in time, here on earth, expressing His displeasure at sin and injustice (Deuteronomy 9:5; Psalm 9:16; Psalm 37:28; Proverbs 11:5; and Isaiah 32:16, 17).

But the Bible also teaches that a final judgement is coming, at the end of time. Jesus Christ Himself will judge all people (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:27-29; Romans 2:5-11; Hebrews 9:27; and Revelation 20:11-15).

The Display of God's Glory

Every person will stand before God on that day of final judgment, and God will show His glory in two ways.

First, His holiness and justice will be seen when sin is judged, and those who do not believe are eternally punished (Jude 5-7).

Second, God's mercy will be seen in saving sinners from destruction and his grace in welcoming believers into eternal life. Even believers will appear before Christ, for we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ (Romans 14:10), and every work will be brought into judgement (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

But for those who trust in Christ, this judgement will not bring condemnation. The Lord Jesus has already taken the punishment for their sins. Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Because Christ has died for sinners, God's justice has already been satisfied.

Living in Light of God's Judgement

Knowing that God will judge sin should shape how we think and live today.

First, it motivates us to holiness

Christians know that they will one day stand before Christ. Because of this, we should seek to live holy lives. We should fight against sin and desire to please the Lord. The apostle Paul looked forward to "the crown of righteousness," which the Lord will give on that day (2 Timothy 4:8).

Second, it encourages us in suffering

Believers suffer injustice in this world; evil people seem to prosper while the righteous struggle (see Psalms 37, 47, 49). Yet God will set all things right at the final judgement. Christians are called to live by faith, knowing that no sin will remain hidden and no act of faithfulness will be forgotten. This truth offers comfort to those who suffer.

Third, it cultivates love for the lost

The coming judgement should also give us a deep concern for those who do not know Christ. Many people around us are not ready to meet God. As pastors and teachers of the Word, we must warn people with love and patience. The Bible also reminds teachers that they will give an account for their work in this regard (James 3:1; Hebrews 13:17).

TEACHING MODULE

Use these five discussions to explore a single connected theme: how God's holiness, justice, love, and grace are revealed in judgement and in Christ. Select the questions that best suit the time available. The teacher should prepare thoroughly in advance and be comfortable with the notes.

1. Why a Holy God Judges Sin

Why must a holy God judge sin? What would it say about God if He permanently ignored sin?

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: In pairs, make a three-link chain: God's holiness -> sin -> judgement. Explain each link in one sentence.

2. Justice and Love Together

How can God be both mercy and just when He judges sin? Why must we keep both truths together?

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: Make two short lists headed "mercy" and "Justice". Under each heading, write two ways God shows that quality.

3. God's Glory in Judgement

How will final judgement display God's glory through both justice and mercy?

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: Draw two arrows from God's glory. Label one Justice and the other Grace. Add two lessons beneath each arrow.

4. Christ Bears Judgement

How does Christ's death satisfy God's justice and remove condemnation from those who trust Him?

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: Using Romans 8:1, explain this sequence in your own words: human sin -> God's just judgement -> Christ's substitution -> no condemnation in Christ.

5. Living in Light of Judgement

How should future judgement shape a Christian's fight against sin and concern for people who do not know Christ?

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: Choose one everyday temptation and one conversation with an unbeliever. Describe a holy and loving response in each situation.

Additional Reading: Three Parts of the Final Judgement

Taken from Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology. Edited by the Krapf Project and available in Part 6, Section 2, "General Eschatology," on the Krapf Project resource website.

We should distinguish three parts of the final judgement:

The examination of the case (each person's life)

God will consider the complete facts of every person's life, including their actions, thoughts, motives, and hidden intentions. Scripture pictures this as the opening of books (Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12). Malachi 3:16 also speaks of a "book of remembrance" before God. This language is probably symbolic. Human judges consult laws and written records when deciding a case, but God does not need literal books because He already knows everything perfectly. Some interpreters give each book a particular meaning, but we should be careful not to press the symbolism too far.

The public announcement of the verdict

God will publicly announce His judgement. Romans 2:5 describes this as the day when God's righteous judgement will be revealed. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, everyone must appear before Christ's judgement seat. The verdict will not be a private matter known only to the individual. It will be made known publicly, at least to everyone directly concerned. Through this public judgement, God's perfect justice and saving grace will be clearly displayed.

The carrying out of the verdict

God will then carry out His judgement. The righteous will enter everlasting blessedness, while the wicked will enter everlasting misery. Christ will separate humanity into these two groups, just as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Matthew 25:32-46).