

Winter 2023 Newsletter
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THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS OF GOD

"I will praise thee with uprightness of heart when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments." -- Psalm 119:7

The righteous judgment of God—is it a good thing or a bad thing? For most of our Christian friends, the righteous judgment of God if not a bad thing, is at least a cause for anxiety. The prevalent theology has taught them “there’s going to be judgment and punishment and hell for the wicked.” After all, doesn’t the scripture in 2 Thess. 1:5-8 call it the “**righteous judgment of God** ...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, **in flaming fire taking vengeance** on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with **everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.” This sure sounds bad! **But is this portrayal of God’s judgments a true reflection of God according to the scriptures?**

Translators of the Bible have generally treated the judgments of God as bad, things to be feared. The original manuscripts were written in Hebrew or Greek, and a little later, in Latin. Still later, translations into the common languages began to become available but not before a definite theological impression had been made on the translators, and damnation for unbelievers had become in-grained in the minds of most Christians.

One passage of scripture (John 5:22-30, *King James Version*) clearly illustrates the influence of orthodoxy on the

translators. The following are the words of Jesus: in verse 22, he says, “**For the Father judgeth no man, but had committed all judgment unto the Son.**” ... (24) “**He that heareth my word...shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life.**” ... (27) The Father “**hath given him authority to execute judgment**” ... (30) “**as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just**” ... (29) “**they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.**” All the highlighted words come from Strong’s word, #2920, *krisis*, which is defined by Professor Strong as (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*) “**for or against, a tribunal, justice.**” In verses 22 and 30 the words “judgeth” and “judge,” are from #2919 which is the verb form of #2920.

Why was such a word as “damnation” used in verse 29? Why was it thought necessary to use a word that was so totally inconsistent with the idea of “a decision for or against” as seen in every other use of the word in the context? [Modern versions use “condemnation” which conveys much the same thought as “damnation” to the reader’s mind.] The difference is rooted in theology. The historian Will Durant put the matter this way: “Centuries of barbarism, insecurity, and war had to intervene before man could defile his God with attributes of undying vengeance and inexhaustible cruelty.” (Durant, Will, *The Age of Faith*, p.1073)

If any should feel justified to determine that anyone is unworthy of life and surely a candidate for destruction, it should be remembered that God's judgment is not like man's. Jesus told us that God **loves** his enemies and if we want to be his children, **we** must also love our enemies and bless them as God does. (Matt. 5:43-48)

In our fallen and sinful condition, we are prone to think ourselves safe because we go to church and profess Christianity. We can easily fall into that snare of self-righteousness that was demonstrated by the Pharisees in Jesus' day. The Pharisees and rulers of Israel thought themselves "good" in God's eyes and the "publicans and sinners" unworthy of salvation. Do good church-going people have the right to feel righteous so they do not also fit into the description, "they that have done evil...?" (John 5:29; Rom. 3:9-20) Sadly, the scriptures tell us, "**All** have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) Man might feel himself righteous, but "There is **none righteous**, no not one." (Rom. 3:10) "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isa. 64:6). "...death passed upon **all** men, for that **all have sinned**." (Rom. 5:12) So, **who can be saved?** (Matt. 9:25; Luke 18:26)

Thankfully, God's judgments are not like those of man. God knows our weaknesses and makes provision for us. (Psa. 103:14,6-9) He is ready to forgive: "Let the wicked forsake his way, ... let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him ... **for he will abundantly pardon**. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. (Isa 55:7,8) "I am merciful, saith the LORD, and **I will not keep anger forever** (Jer. 3:12) How ironic that this God, who declared a time limit to his anger, has had the stigma of "eternal torment" hung about his neck.

God pronounced the death sentence on Adam and his progeny, and God is also the originator of the plan of salvation for mankind. (John 3:16; 9:4; 10:25-29; 16:25-27; 1 Tim.2:3,4; Gen. 3:14,15) The human race was spreading out and becoming more numerous as God had decreed. (Gen. 1:28) The time had come to begin revealing his plan. By an astounding demonstration of faith, the patriarch Abraham was willing to slay his son Isaac just as God would one day give his son, Jesus, as the ransom for mankind. (Gen. 22:1-18; 1 Tim. 2:5,6) James says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Jas. 2:23) God told Abraham, "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, ... And **in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;**

because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Gen.22:16-18)

God cannot lie. (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18) God told the children of Israel, "the Lord your God has **chosen you** to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth, but it is because the **Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.**"(Deut. 7:6-9) "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, **the faithful God** who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations," (Deut. 7:9) But what happens to those who do not love him and do not keep his commandments?

Israel was just such a wayward child. Their delinquency is openly recorded in the Bible, yet, even after centuries of lapses into various idolatries, God remained steadfast like a loving parent—blessing when Israel was faithful and applying corrections when they strayed. "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers, you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts." (Mal 3:6,7)

When the nation rejected their Messiah, the ultimate punishment on them was administered—they were scattered throughout the world. (Lev. 26:38) The love and constancy of God are shown by the fact that Israel is once again in their land after 2000 years of exile. Has the nation returned to God? Not yet, but God is patient and knows that they will. "Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear." (Isa. 65:24)

In Amos 3:2, God told Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Although the Gentile nations were left out of God's considerations for a time, after Israel's rejection of their Messiah, God turned to the Gentiles to take from among them a "people for his name." (Acts 15:14-17) Peter tells us that although "Once you [Gentiles] were **not** a people but now **you are God's people**. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:10, *ESV*)

In his message to the Athenians Paul said, "and the times of this ignorance [when they knew not God] God **winked at** [he did not hold them responsible] but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:26-30) The commission given by Jesus to his apostles was, "**Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.**" (Mark 16:15) "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our savior who

desires **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth". (1 Timothy 2:3, 4) Salvation comes first so they can learn. Have you ever considered how many lives were lost world-wide before the Christian era? Although God specially blessed Israel and great men of faith lived then (see Hebrews 11) none were able to call upon Jesus before he came, and most of the world since Christ came have died in ignorance of "the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved."

Jesus sent forth his apostles to preach the gospel. The essence of the "gospel" message is found in the words of Jesus— **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."** (John 3:16,17)

The word "gospel" defines itself. It comes from the Greek word *euaggelion*,--Strong's #2098, which means "good tidings." A related word in the Greek is Str.#2097, *euangelizo*, meaning **"a good message,"** that is, the gospel." Jesus himself went about all Judea, teaching in their synagogues, and **preaching the gospel of the kingdom.** (Matt. 4:23; 9:36; Luke 7:22; 20:1; 4:18; Mark 13:10) The fact that the people flocked to him is good evidence that Jesus was speaking words of blessedness. (John 7:43-46)

The declaration of Jesus and the testimony of the holy Apostles is that **God is love.** (1 John 4:8, 16; John 3:16; Eph. 2:4; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; Deut. 7:9; Acts 8:25; 14:7) If God were an avenging deity, as is taught in the creeds of many churches, would he have sent as his representative Jesus who declared, **"learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."** (Matt.11:29) Would he not rather have chosen one like an Alexander, or a Caesar?

While God was carefully nurturing the people of Israel, the Gentile nations were left to themselves. They were neither blessed nor cursed by God except if they were in danger of degrading themselves beyond recovery. For example, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because their wickedness had become so great they would be unrecoverable if left to continue as they were. However, Jesus indicated they would return in the resurrection and would be in a better place than those who sinned against greater knowledge. **"... And you, Capernaum,...I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.**(Matt. 11:21-24; Ezek. 16:2,55-63)

The Apostles had warned, there would arise "false teachers" who would bring "damnable heresies" into the church. (2 Pet.

2:1; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7; Acts 20:29) After their deaths, Christianity was left to grow in the midst of a world saturated with Greek mythology. Lacking the guidance of the Apostles, various ideologies arose which succeeded in elevating Satan's lie, "thou shalt not surely die." (Gen. 3:4) Designing men found an opportunity for prominence in the churches and by "baby steps" led the early church farther and farther away from a clear appreciation of God's love and plan for Adam's children.

As ambitious men gained positions of power and control in the church, it was determined that the God of love taught by Jesus and the Apostles, did not engender enough terror to hold the peasants in the pews, so they began to transform God into an object of fear. During the two thousand years of the Christian era, this terror was magnified and impressed on the minds of the people until it is ever ready to insert itself as a baseline thought. Therefore, the love of God dimmed, and the terror of God took its place, and the "gospel" message was transformed into the "bad news" of man's guilt. God's love could not satisfy man's vengeance. (Rom. 12:19-21)

Does 2 Thess.1:4-9 really talk about punishment and fiery torments?. **"Flaming fire"** is descriptive of the appearance of the angels, as in Psa. 104:4; Ex. 3:2; Heb. 1:7; and Rev. 1:14. (Verse divisions and punctuation were not in the original manuscripts. They were added later according to the translator's bias.) The punishment stated is **"eternal destruction," not torment, destruction away** from the presence of the Lord—Second death (Rev. 20:14,15; 21:8; 1 Cor. 15:25,26) The Apostle Paul learned that the brethren had been experiencing persecutions for the gospel's sake. Paul comforted them by the assurance that the **righteous judgment** of God was their worthiness to share in the kingdom for which they were suffering, not punishment.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

(1 John 4:9,10)

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