

**The Heart of God//Justice from Genesis to Revelation
Part Eleven – The Good News of God’s Final Judgment**

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“Justice is the joy of the world put right.” - *N.T. Wright*

I. God’s Final Judgment is Good News Because God is Good.

Judgment, at root, means “decision making.” Like, a coach or parent may say to a group of young people who are going out for the evening: “Just use your good judgment.” Like, “use your brain.” “Make good choices.”

That’s *judgement*. It’s deciding about what’s right and wrong. And what is best to do about it.

God’s Judgment is Good News because God is good. And God sees the whole picture, so God’s “decisions” take into account so many angles that we cannot see.

Excurses One: The Existence of God Question

The question of “evil” often just raises the whole “is God even there?” question.

The Yale Law professor, Arthur Leff, who is himself an atheist, argues that whenever we say “that’s wrong,” the real question is, “says who?” He argues that unless there is an outside Judge – an objective Intelligence who calls “evil” evil, and goodness “good” – any attempt to say something is unjust, or evil is just the preferences of a person or of a society. He concludes his essay on morality and the law with these words:

“As things stand now everything is up for grabs. Nevertheless:

Napalming babies is bad.

Starving the poor is wicked.

Buying and selling each other is depraved....

There is in the world such a thing as evil. All together now – sez who? God help us!”

- As quoted in Art Lindsley “Faith and the Problem of Evil and Suffering,” in *Belief* ed. Francis Collins

Prof Arthur Leff openly admits that *either* we can believe in our sense that there is evil and there is good...love...justice – or we can be free of God. But we can’t have it both ways. Now, there is an honest atheist.

The Oxford professor of literature, C.S. Lewis came upon that same problem. He realized his atheism was too simplistic, so he changed his premise. Because he believed there was such a thing as “evil” and “good” and so he also came to believe that there must be a God.

And we see the goodness of God with particular clarity, when we look at his love for us poured out on the cross.

Romans 12:14-21

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” – Romans 12:14-21

Excurses Two: The Character of God Question

How does God’s love square with the idea of God’s wrath?

If you had a friend or relative who was hurting themselves with an addiction or self-destructive behavior; to confront them and to feel angry about how they are hurting themselves does not contradict our love for them. In fact, the greater our love for someone, the greater our potential for anger at what is destructive in their lives.

Becky Pippert said it like this: “Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference [like, I just don’t care] God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer...which is eating the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.”

- Becky Pippert, *Hope Has its Reasons*

The idea that God is opposed to evil, and injustice and oppression is evidence that God *is good*. Only a God who would oppose oppression and violence and evil is worthy of our worship.

Miroslav Volf is a professor at Yale University who comes from Croatia – who has seen great violence in the Balkans before moving the US where he teaches. Speaking about God’s judgment and wrath, he argues along these lines: **The idea of judgment day is a tool for peacemaking.**

When we know that God is going to hold everyone accountable for what they do, it keeps you from picking up the sword and perpetuates the cycles of violence because you can trust that God will offer a just judgment in the end. See, trusting that God will judge all evil is the only thing that keeps us from feeling we need to. He writes:

“If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worship...The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God.” – Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*

II. God's Final Judgement is Good News Because Human Justice is Often Flawed and Insufficient

We actually want good, fair, and right judgment by God. Darrel Johnson has argued that **you want God's judgment because you want your actions to matter. And you want the actions of others to matter.** Paul says this about final judgment:

"So, we make it our goal to please him [God], whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." – 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

The good God, who can see everything clearly – not just 'hidden actions,' but our very hearts, the intentions behind what we do – the good God makes good judgments. And he sees what you've done for the good of others and will honour that. And he sees where you've been mistreated, and in his goodness, he will deal with that too.

Practically: How do we not seek vengeance?

"Do not repay evil for evil." "Do not take revenge." "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." – Romans 12

- 1) **By taking the good news of God's love for you in Jesus into your own heart.** Paul says earlier in Romans that we were once "enemies of God", but that God has come for us in Jesus to make us his friends; that "while you were still sinners – still living as enemies of God – Christ died for you." (Rom 5:8). Knowing that Jesus gave up his life to forgive us and make us his, that humbles us so deeply. I can't strut around with a sense of smug self-righteousness. **God's graciousness pulls the judgementalism right out of us.**
- 2) **By believing in final judgment,** knowing that every person will "receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." God, the good and just Judge, will deal with each of us perfectly.

If I didn't believe in God's final judgment, I would feel the need to take vengeance for myself. But I'd never be satisfied. Not really. And I wouldn't become the kind of person I really want to be. I'd constantly be reacting out of bitterness.

But because God sees, we can leave that thing we've suffered at God's feet. Look what Paul himself does when he's suffered: "Alexander, the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message." – 2 Timothy 4:14

Trust God. Take appropriate steps to have good boundaries. But no seeking vengeance.

- 3) **By knowing that God's judgment does come – at least partially – in this life too.** In Romans 1 we read about God's wrath as God "handing people over" to the natural, in-built consequences of their actions. There are times in the Scriptures where God does intervene to put an end to evil and violence through circumstances.

III. God's Final Judgement is Good News Because God Will Put the World Right

"Then I saw "a new heavens and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." – Revelation 21:1.

That line "no more sea" is confusing, if not disappointing. But we have to understand that "the sea" was a powerful symbol in the ancient world as the source of chaos, disorder and evil. He's not saying there will be no "oceans" in God's new creation, but that there will be no more *evil*. No possibility of it. And that's good news.

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling is now among the people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" – Revelation 21:3-5

We Keep Working for Justice

We can earnestly pursue justice in the here and now because we know God wins in the end. And that means we win in the end. Whatever good things we are working for in this world, one day they will finally and fully be realized.

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."
– 1 Corinthians 15:58

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

When you hear the phrase “God’s judgment” what comes to mind? Why do you think that is?

Did you find it surprising to think of final judgment as “Good News”? Why?

Dig In

1. Read **Romans 12:14-21**. Compare this to the example we see in Paul’s own life with regards to Alexander, the metalworker in **2 Timothy 4:14-15**. What stands out to you about Paul instructions and his personal example?
2. What aspects of these instructions or examples do you find most challenging?
3. In the message, we looked at the idea that in order to embrace this way of “non-retaliation” there are at least three pieces we need: 1) embracing the gospel for ourselves; 2) believing in final judgment – that God *will* have vengeance; and 3) knowing that God does meet out a certain amount of his just judgment in the present as well (for two examples see Acts 5:1-11; 12:19-24). Which of these do you need to particularly remind yourself of this week?
4. As we finish up the series on God’s justice through the scriptures, what are some of the key elements that encourage you to be a person who purses justice?

Pray

Take time to thank God for the good news that he will have the final say. Ask God for his help and wisdom in any situations where you may be tempted to struggle with “pay back.” Pray that we as a church would keep aiming to pursue justice in ways that accord with God’s will and ways!