

# Adult School of Ministry

Lesson for Sunday, August 15, 2021

**God's Love and Judgment:** God's judgment is governed by His love and mercy.

Scriptures: Psalms 86:15-16; Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 John 4:7-10; Exodus 20:4-6; Psalms 37:37-38; Revelation 20:11-15, 22:12-16; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalms 7:10-11; Matthew 13:41-43; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9.

The Lesson Overview: A common question that arises in conversations about the Christian faith is about God's judgment. People wonder why a loving God will also act in judgment against evildoing. This lesson addresses this question by beginning with the affirmation of God's love and mercy. These qualities of God govern His judgment. This lesson examines the righteousness of God's judgment, as well as, why God judges. This topic necessarily emphasizes that because God is righteous, His will is for righteousness to prevail everywhere, in all people. Therefore, God provides for people to be made righteous by trust in Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord.

Historical Background: In this lesson, we observe that the concepts of love and justice, derived from faith in God, have a long history in the Christian and Jewish traditions, rooted in the Biblical revelation of God, His nature, and His will. In the Old Testament, God's love and judgment are understood in the context of God's covenant relationship with Israel, and His love for all people. In the New Testament, God's love and justice are understood in the context of God giving His eternally begotten Son, Jesus, to be the Savior of the World. Thus, love, justice, and mercy are not merely abstract ideas but practical realities experienced by people in relation to God, who is loving, just, and merciful.

## Lesson Outline:

1. God is Merciful and Loving: Ps. 86:15-16; Eph. 2:4-5; 1 Jn. 4:7-10.
  - A. God's Faithfulness, Ps. 86:15-16.
  - B. Testimonies of God's Love and Mercy, Eph. 2:4-5; 1 Jn. 4:7-10.
2. God's Righteous and Perfect Judgment: Ex. 20:4-6; Ps. 37:37-38; Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12-16.
  - A. Choices and Consequences, Ex. 20:4-6; Ps. 37:37-38.
  - B. The Final Judgment, Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12-16.
3. Why Does a Loving God Judge? Deut. 32:4; Ps. 7:10-11; Matt. 13:41-43; Heb. 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9.

- A. Because God Is Faithful, Deut. 32:4; Ps. 7:10-11.
- B. Because God Is Holy, Matt. 13:41-43; Heb. 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9.

Discussing the Lesson:

1. God Is Merciful and Loving: Psalms 86:15-16; Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 John 4:7-10.

A. God's Faithfulness, Ps. 86:15-16.

- 1) Often in the Psalms, the authors reminded themselves of God's faithfulness in the past when appealing to God for help in the present. Such is the case with Psalm 86.
- 2) The Psalmist David began with a plea for God's help, vv. 1-7, praised God for His greatness, vv. 8-13, stated the current crisis, v. 14, and closed with a recollection of God's faithfulness and a repetition of the plea for help, vv. 15-17.
- 3) David did not remind God of His faithfulness because God needed to be reminded, but because David needed to remind himself of this. Remembering God's faithfulness strengthens our faith that God will hear and help us again.
- 4) Such a faithful God will not forget nor forsake His people. God's faithfulness is captured in the statement that God is "full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth", v. 15.

B. Testimonies of God's Love and Mercy, Eph. 2:4-6; 1 Jn. 4:7-10.

- 1) God's people have always testified of God's faithful love and mercy. These testimonies are found throughout the Bible, and in countless prayers, poems, hymns, and songs.
- 2) When we experience God's goodness, we feel compelled by gratitude to Him to reflect on His faithfulness and to praise Him for His love and mercy.
- 3) The passage in Ephesians 2:4-5 is a succinct statement of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Though many stories in Scripture inspire us, the revelation of the love and mercy of God in Jesus Christ is the most profound.
- 4) God's own Son dying for our sins, to save us from sin, was the supreme expression of God's love for us. This demonstration of God's love led the Apostle John to write, "God is love", 1 Jn. 4:8.
- 5) To say, "God is love," means love is the essence of His existence. Of course, we would not say, "Love is God," because that would convey an idea that cannot be true. However, it is right to say, "Love is of God", 1 Jn. 4:7; and therefore, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love", v. 8.
- 6) God is so identified by His love that we can describe Him as His Love. Love comes from Him, which means He is love. The point is that, God is the source of love, and to know God is to know love.

- 7) For John, this love had a concrete expression in the self-sacrificing person of Jesus. The Greek term for love used here is the well-known *agape*. In the New Testament, this is the love by which God acts to redeem people from sin, even at great personal cost.
  - 8) It is the love God fosters among His own children. It imparts such a warm regard for the other, that one chooses the good of the other, even at one's own personal expense.
  - 9) The Apostle Paul points out that God's love manifest in Jesus has shown up in our own lives because God is "rich in mercy, for [because of] His great love wherewith He loved us", Eph. 2:4.
  - 10) Notice how Paul piles up notions of abundance, mercy, and love upon love. The word *agape* shows up again, and is linked with mercy. The wealth of God's love and mercy are evident in that God initiated our redemption, because "we were dead in sins", v. 5 and could not raise ourselves to life.
  - 11) Therefore, God moved with a powerful love to make us alive with Christ. This is grace: "by grace ye are saved", v. 5.
  - 12) Some people imagine God is a domineering, angry killjoy eager to disappoint people and ruin their lives. Others go to the opposite extreme and imagine God is a universal warmth and goodness that makes things work out for them.
  - 13) Neither of these ideas about God is Biblical. The one true and living God has revealed Himself, His nature, and His will in the Holy Scriptures, the Bible.
  - 14) This is the only God we need to know, because there are no other gods. The God of the Bible is merciful and loving by nature, and all of His actions toward us are governed by His love.
  - 15) Because God is loving, He is merciful to all, and mingles mercy with judgment. This is the God we believe in, live for by faith, and know by experience to be loving and merciful.
2. God's Righteous and Perfect Judgment: Exodus 20:4-6; Psalms 37:37-38; Revelation 20:11-15; 22:12-16.
- A. Choices and Consequences, Ex. 20:4-6; Ps. 37:37-38.
- 1) The Exodus passage here is from the Ten Commandments and prohibits idolatry (the worship of other gods), because God is "jealous", Ex. 20:5, meaning that He requires our undivided devotion to Him.
  - 2) To say that God is jealous might be surprising. However, who would be surprised at a husband and wife being jealous, if his or her spouse entered into a sexual relationship outside of their marriage? God applies that same principle to Himself. Fidelity between God and His people is like that between a husband and wife.

- 3) God's warning that the consequences of sin will be visited on those who hate Him to the third and fourth generation, Ex. 20:5, may seem unfair, especially in light of God's promise to judge each person for his or her own sins, and not the sins of parents, Ez. 18:1-4, 19-20.
- 4) First, we need to understand that God does not hold any individual accountable for the sins of any other individual. With that truth in mind, God's warning about the consequences of sin persisting to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him means God will continue judging the sinfulness of people as long as it persists.
- 5) Tragically, when people hate God by their attitude, words, and deeds, they set in motion consequences of evil that can easily pass to the third and fourth generations of their descendants.
- 6) The consequences of sin can continue because the children of those who hate God are likely to be enemies of God. Also, when people hate God by their evil-doing, they set in motion social consequences of their hatred. For example, the social consequences of slavery in America certainly extended to the third and fourth generations.
- 7) However, we need to remember that God has promised to show His mercy to every person who chooses to love Him and keep His commandments, Ex. 20:6, regardless of the sins their parents and ancestors may have committed.
- 8) God saves people from the destructive cycle of sin and its consequences. This is the reason why the psalmist (David) directed his hearers to consider "the end" of the righteous and the wicked, Ps. 37:37-38, and to choose to be blessed with the righteous.

B. The Final Judgment, Rev. 20:11-15, 22:12-16.

- 1) The scene in Revelation 20:11-15 is a vision of the Great and Final Judgment of the ungodly (those who died in their sins, unrepentant and unsaved).
- 2) A natural question is, why must there be a judgment of the ungodly at the end of this age (this world)? Because the ongoing consequences in this world of each ungodly life will not be fully known until the end of the age.
- 3) The message in Revelation 22:12-16 is about the different everlasting destinies awaiting those redeemed by Christ and the unsaved. While eternal life is a gift by grace, Christ will reward the good works of those saved by grace, v. 12 (compare with Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).
- 4) Those redeemed by Christ will be given entrance as citizens of the New Jerusalem to all the delights of everlasting life, Rev. 22:14, but the ungodly will be excluded forever from that blessed and holy place, v. 15.

- 5) As Christians we live always with hope, knowing we are cleansed from our sins and have through Jesus Christ the gift of eternal life. Still, the Biblical vision of the Final Judgment should remind us of three truths:
    - a) First, every worldly power will be brought under God's judgment. Let us beware therefore of aligning ourselves with the evil power structures of this age.
    - b) Second, let us not lose heart when we see the wicked prosper. Remember their end, and do not be tempted to follow them.
    - c) Finally, the reality of God's judgment should motivate us to make known the Gospel of redemption through Jesus Christ, to influence as many as will to be saved.
3. Why Does a Loving God Judge? Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalms 7:10-11; Matthew 13:41-43; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9.
- A. Because God is Faithful, Deut. 32:4; Ps. 7:10-11.
    - 1) Many can be heard to say, "How can a loving God also be a judging God?" They think God's love and justice are at odds with each other, but this is not so. Love can be defined simply as willing and acting for the good of others. Justice can be defined simply as doing what is right and giving to each person what is due.
    - 2) Rather than standing in opposition to one another, love and justice work together. Justice is motivated by love, because love, like justice, requires that what is right and due each person be done.
    - 3) God is both loving and just because He is faithful to Himself (His own nature and character) and faithful to His people.
  - B. Because God is Holy, Matt. 13:41-43; Heb. 12:14; 2 Peter 3:9.
    - 1) The God of Israel was the only "god" in the ancient world who identified Himself as holy, and required of His people that they be holy, 1 Peter 1:15-16; Leviticus 11:44).
    - 2) God is perfect in holiness, which means there is no evil, no sin, in Him, and God grants no tolerance for sin and evil to exist anywhere or in any person.
    - 3) God is the Judge of sin and sinners because He is holy, Matt. 13:41-43, and His will is for all people to be holy, Heb. 12:14. So God, who is holy, can have holy people who will love and obey Him, it is His will that no person should perish in sin, 2 Peter 3:9. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ to be the Savior of sinners.
    - 4) In considering the love and justice of God, let us take a moment to examine whether or not we are embracing a Biblical view of His love and justice.
    - 5) Genuine love cannot be accommodation and permissive of evil. Genuine justice cannot be vindictive and spiteful, but must be truthful, fair, and impartial.

- 6) Love and justice work together in the rendering of God's judgment. We also ought to take care that we do not mistake God's patience for permissiveness. He works patiently to bring people to repentance, thus making His goodness known, 2 Peter 3:9.
- 7) As believers in Christ, let us make the most of God's patience by being witnesses of our Lord Jesus.

Call to Discipleship: One of the many spiritual disciplines of the Christian life is that of having an appropriate fear of the righteous judgment of God, Acts 9:31. Where there is no fear of God, every evil can and will abound. But a wholesome fear of God is the beginning of the knowledge and wisdom that leads to everlasting life, Proverbs 1:7; 9:10.

Ministry in Action: When you encounter people who think they are suffering under God's judgment, tell them of God's great love through Christ, which is their salvation from God's judgment.