

God's Judgment

Grace and Truth—part 10

June 25, 2023

DAY 1: Isn't hell and a good God implausible?

1. God's judgment and hell makes Christianity implausible to today's younger skeptics.
2. Objections to Christianity used to be intellectual questions. Now, the objections are ethical in nature.
3. Last week we looked at the goodness of God and the need for God's good moral law. God gives us a moral ethic which He expects us to follow. This flies right in the face of individual autonomy and expressive individualism. Skeptics say, "WE MAKE THE RULES, not God."
4. But the next domino is even more shocking to young skeptics. Not only is there a moral law but God will hold us accountable to it. His moral law is not just a set of suggestions. They are demanded of us. And, one day, we will all give an account to God for our failure to meet those demands.
Hebrews 9:27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.
5. Today's skeptics either ignore the idea of judgment or just dismiss it as implausible. You hear people talk about nearly every deceased person at a funeral, "I'm sure he is in a better place." Jesus didn't assume this of anyone.

How can a God who judges be good?

The church's wrong responses...

6. In my older generation, Christians have made two errors when speaking with skeptics. Either, we have tried to scare you with a threat of eternal judgment or we have chickened out by not saying anything about hell. We have feared your rejection more than fearing your destiny.
7. The gospel prioritizes the salvation and rescue of people who are on the road to judgment. While one should fear the possibility of hell, God has made a way for to not happen to anyone!
8. God hates sin because sin ends up being so destructive to people and relationships.
9. On one hand, of course we'd rather not believe in a God of justice, but that is because we have not thought through what our world would be like without justice.
10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

Day 2: The issue of judgment from a human perspective

1. We should remind ourselves at how often we want judgment when someone has wronged us, even in the seemingly smallest of daily occurrences.

2. Had anyone cut in front of you in a line, recently? What rises us up in you? Disneyland had to come up with a new policy regarding folks cutting in line. Why is that a problem? Because enough people have been angered. You intuitively know, people are doing something unjust.

3. The moment I get irritated at someone who treats me wrongly, and demand some kind of justice, I cannot claim to object at God's judgment for injustice. When I get angry I condemn myself. If I say it is wrong when someone harms me, I must ask, "Have I harmed others?"

Romans 2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

4. I cannot expect others to treat me rightly or wrongly, and not expect to be exempt from judgment when I fail to do what's right toward another. I can't have it both ways.

5. We all judge others. We cannot help from doing so. In demanding justice, we deserve our condemnation. We all fall short of what we have demanded of others.

6. Imagine there is no such thing as divine judgment. Instead, you come up with your own moral code. You decide what is just and unjust. Fast forward to just after your death. You now face your own judgment day. The standard of right and wrong isn't God's standard; it's yours. How would you stand? Anybody with an inch of self-awareness would have to admit that they would not pass their own standard of justice.

7. We all fall short of what we have demanded of others. We are trapped. Either justice is a thing or it is not. If it is not a thing, then quit demanding right actions from others. Quit insisting that others treat you better, and that there is something morally wrong when others don't treat you as you insist they do.

8. Do you see the dilemma? It's impossible to do. You, and everybody, lives with a sense of right and wrong. This is patently obvious when you are the one being wronged. What is wrong should not happen and should stop.

9. Here's the dilemma. You have broken your own standards repeatedly, and deserve judgment.

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?

Day 3: But won't God just overlook wrongs? Isn't He love?

Romans 2: 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

1. We judge the world and then tell God He can't judge the world? We go about our day, making judgments about right and wrong, and requiring justice be done, and then tell God He can't do the same thing with people?

1 John 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

2. Yes, God is love, but what does love mean? It is because God is love that He is righteously angry over injustice.

3. **Indifference** is **not** love. Indifference to wrong is the opposite of love. Anger is appropriate when wrong is done to someone. This is not hatred.

4. There is an anger that is appropriate when people are hurt. When you hear about child sexual abuse, indifference by the parents and the district attorney is repulsive. To just overlook the perpetrator is evil. Indifference is not a characteristic of love. Indifference is a deficiency of love!

5. God's love is pure, unadulterated love. God loves His creation. He loves His people, infinitely more than we can imagine. Indifference is off the table with God. Every human transgression is a violation of His love, a violation of ourselves, and a violation of others. He is not indifferent to any of that.

We cannot equate a loving God with an indifferent God.

6. Instead, with a righteous God, we should tremble when we consider we have harmed what God loves.

7. The love of God and the justice of God mandate a word our world hates—hell. We'll look at this on DAY 5.

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: God is perfectly just in His judgment

1. In our own American law, we all agree on three determining factors when it comes to judgment.

a. First, the severity of the events. Running a red light is not considered or punished like homicide. But this is more complicated than we imagine. Why? God judges us, not just on our behavior, but on the intentions of our hearts. Lust is embryonic of adultery. Hatred is embryonic of murder. Lust and hatred in our hearts may not be immediately outwardly damaging to others, but they are damaging to ourselves, and eventually to others.

b. Second, repeat offenders. Levels of judgment go up for repeat offenders. From God's point of views, we are all repeat offenders of His ways and laws.

c. Third, we recognize the worth and value of the victim. If you step on a bug, no one's calling the police. But we are angry when someone mistreats a dog. When someone mistreats a person, there is another elevated indignation. When someone abuses a child, there is a deeper sense of outrage and the drive for justice.

2. We justified slavery by devaluing black people as less than human. Abolitionists led the anti-slavery movement. How? By claiming the human value of black people. You can't treat a human like an animal. The value of the one sinned against matters, which takes us back to God.

3. God is the highest value in all of existence! He is not a sinner, not a rebel, not curved on Himself, not unloving, not unfaithful, not self-centered, but utterly the opposite of all that. Yet, we sin against Him with the same thought as we swat a fly away.

4. Using our own standards of justice and punishment, what does

a. Breaking not man's law, but God's law,

b. With consistent repetition of the highest offenses

c. Against the highest value in all of existence deserve?

5. From a human point of view, hell may make little sense to you, but from a God-centered point of view, it should stop us in our tracks.

6. Justice is real. Every day we acknowledge it and demand it. That's because God is just.

7. God is just and God is love. Both the justice and love of God requires Him not to excuse with indifference the countless injustices we have committed. That is not love. Someday, we all stand before our Maker.

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 5: What is hell?

1. Skeptics will sometimes say of God and hell, “It’s just too much, too extreme.”
2. One point of irony of this objection. Our current culture created something we call cancel culture, which mercilessly metes out lifetime retribution for one social media “offense.” People have lost their jobs, livelihood, career, reputation, and good name over one social media post to which more than half the country would agree.
3. We are extreme in our judgments, but God is not extreme. He is perfectly just.
4. The love of God and the justice of God, qualities we share with God, form the framework to understand hell.
5. When skeptics think of hell, they are undoubtedly swayed by Dante’s *Inferno*. Apocalyptic language is used, not with *defining* language but with *imagery* language. Biblical writers used apocalyptic language to describe things we cannot comprehend or understand.
6. The ideas behind apocalyptic language are to be faced. Hell is not a place of literal flames, but it is literally that bad.
7. Hell is a place of torment, but not of physical torment. It is the torment of pride on steroids, of our self-centeredness having none of God’s loving restraints, of being utterly incapable of loving anyone else, etc.

“Hell is the handing over to ourselves
the destiny of our own choosing.” – C.S. Lewis

8. The seeds of hell have already begun in us in one sense. We are determined to live lives our way instead of God’s way. That is the central seed that germinates and grows in us. Hell slowly grows inside our ever-hardening hearts. We can see on earth the devastation of those who indulge that hardness. Continue to indulge the desires that produce that hardness, and you’ll discover you are on the path to personal devastation, to personal ruin, and to relational ruin.
9. As addictions grows, as self-centeredness grows. As expectations of others grows, they always lead to personal ruin. This is not the agony of living in physical flames, but it is the agony of living with an ever-growing selfishness, unfettered. Hell is the place where you can no longer damage someone else, harm them, argue with them, threaten them, hurt them, etc.
10. As selfishness grows, it always leads toward the town of ruin. It is the inevitable destruction of our personhood, all the while blaming others for our pain, and at the same time tightening our grip on our presumed autonomy and desires.
11. You can choose to not believe any of this. “I don’t believe that will face judgment.” That’s eternally risky, but it’s also intellectually dishonest. You live with justice every day, not as something we made up but as something real and deep in you.
12. What strikes you about today’s devotional?