

The Wrath of God the Judge

God's Judgment Today

Many people think that God only judged in the Old Testament times, but after Jesus came, He no longer judges people, but Scripture points to the contrary. His judgment is an Old Testament reality *and* a New Testament one. In fact it is actually intensified, as Jesus is declared as the Judge of the world. Since there is confusion about God being Judge, it would be most helpful to describe what His judgment looks like and how it matches with the Bible tells us about Him.

The heart of the justice which expresses God's nature is retribution, the rendering to persons what they have deserved; for this is the essence of the judge's task. To reward good with good, and evil with evil, is natural to God. (Packer p.142)

It is also commonly thought that judgment does not match God's character, but clearly J.I. Packer and passages from the entire Bible dispute this sentiment.¹

Moral indifference would be an imperfection in God, not a perfection. But not to judge the world would be to show moral indifference. The final proof that God is a perfect moral Being, not indifferent to questions of right and wrong, is the fact that he has committed himself to judge the world. (Packer p.143)

The character of God is the guarantee that all wrongs will be righted someday; when "the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom 2:5) arrives, retribution will be exact, and no problems of cosmic unfairness will remain to haunt us. God is the Judge, so justice will be done. (Packer p.143)

God's final judgment stresses man's accountability and the certainty that justice will finally triumph over all the wrongs which are part and parcel of life here and now. The former gives a dignity to the humblest action, the latter brings calmness and assurance to those in the thick of battle. This doctrine gives meaning to life...Judgment protects the idea of the triumph of God and of good. It is unthinkable that the present conflict between good and evil should last throughout eternity. Judgment means that evil will be disposed of authoritatively, decisively, finally. Judgment means that in the end God's will will be perfectly done. (Packer p. 144)

¹ Examples of judgment and wrath in the New Testament: Matt 21:43-44, 1 Thess. 2:14-16, Acts 5:1-10, Acts 12:21-23, Acts 13:8-11, 1 Cor. 11:29-3

Verses pointing to Jesus as Judge: James 5:9, 1 Pet 4:5, 2 Tim 4:8, Acts 10:42, Acts 17:31, Rom 2:16, John 5:22, 27-29

God's Wrath is the Result of God's Judgment

Because judgment is not contrary to God's character He judges the world and will judge it once and for all on the "day of wrath" and because sin is in the world, His wrath is the necessary response. It is the punishment of sin, the "active manifestation of His hatred of irreligion and moral evil" (Packer p. 154). His wrath will be poured out.

Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him. But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness. (Nahum 1:6-8 ESV)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Romans 1:18 ESV)

God's Judgment and Wrath and Us

Because God is fully righteous, He must and will punish every sin. Every sin will be accounted for. This is not overly harsh because wrath is something that we choose for ourselves and as our Creator, He can do as He wills.

God's wrath in the Bible is something which people choose for themselves. Before hell is an experience inflicted by God, it is a state for which a person himself opts by retreating from the light which God shines in his heart to lead him to himself. (Packer p. 152)

[The results of God's wrath] are not arbitrary inflictions; they represent, rather, a conscious growing into the state in which one has chosen to be. The unbeliever has preferred to be by himself, without God, defying god, having God against him, and he shall have his preference. ... The essence of God's action in wrath is to give men what they choose, in all its implications: nothing more, and equally nothing less. (Packer p. 153)

As our Maker, he owns us, and as our Owner, he has a right to dispose of us. He has, therefore, a right to make laws for us and to reward us according to whether or not we keep them... He is both Lawgiver and Judge (Packer p.141)

A result of this reality is that we will be judged by our works. What we do will be the weights in which we will be measured. But we all have fallen short of God's standard. We are hopeless to save ourselves.

He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. (Romans 2:6-11 ESV)

None is righteous, no, not one; (Romans 3:10 ESV)

But there is hope. There is hope because God is withholding judgment for He is slow to anger and delights in love.

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. (Nahum 1:2-3 ESV)

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. (Micah 7:18 ESV)

But more than that there is hope in Jesus. All that God's wrath is, was poured out on Him because he took our sins, though being fully righteous, died the death of an unrighteous man, the death that those who are in Him deserved.

It is not that one way of acting was meritorious while the other was not, but that from these actions it could be seen whether there was love to Christ, the love that springs from faith, in the heart. (Packer p.145)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (Romans 3:23-25 ESV)

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ... For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
(Romans 5:9 ESV) (Romans 5:1-2,6,9 ESV)

What Scripture and Packer point out is that faith alone brings salvation, not works, which are reflections of our heart's true desires. From our actions it can be seen whether we truly love Christ and by faith, recognize and honor Him.

Run from him now, and you will meet him as Judge then-and without hope. Seek him now, and you will find him (for "he that seeketh findeth"), and you will then discover that you are looking forward to that future meeting with joy, knowing that there is now "no condemnations for those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1). (Packer p.147)