

In Christianity God is both a God of love and of justice. Many people struggle with this. They believe that a loving God can't be a judging God.

"How can a God of love be also a God Who is filled with wrath and anger? If he is loving and perfect... He should forgive and accept everyone. He shouldn't get angry."

But let me encourage you... as we get ready to study our passage this morning – which deals with God's coming judgment – to think how **YOU** feel when you see someone ravaged by unwise actions or relationships. ... Have you ever known the victim of a school-yard bully...? Or an at-home victim of child abuse... or spouse abuse? ... Do **you** respond with benign tolerance...? ... I certainly hope not.

(LISTEN!) . . . Anger isn't the opposite of love. Indifference is. God **IS** a God of love – and this means that He is **not** indifferent. ... (And) God's anger... as He judges... is not a cranky intolerance. ... It is (rather) His settled opposition to what hurts us. It is His opposition to the cancer . . . which is eating out the insides of the human race... whom He loves with His whole being.

We see in our passage today that God's wrath flows from His love and delight in His creation. ... He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying peace and integrity. ... Today... I would like to show you that the Christian doctrine of the judgment day... is full of God's incredible **grace**.

Judgment day tells us that no sacrifice... (no matter how small)... no act of kindness... defending the weak... sacrifice to restore a sense of justice...

no sacrifice you make that nobody ever sees... goes unnoticed. To be honest... very often it seems that many of our acts of kindness go for nothing. They're forgotten. They're never seen. They have no impact. They make no difference at all.

The deepest desire of our hearts is to know that when we do those things... those things count. The doctrine of judgment day says they **do**. They count forever. They're never forgotten.

If there *isn't* anybody like Jesus... (if there is no Judge)... nothing ever means a thing. ... **Your** sacrifices mean nothing. ... And neither do the hidden actions of a child-abusing father... in his home and out of the public eye. No one sees. Your death and his death means nothing at all. Your life (as well as his) is just one more life.

Philosophers like Nietzsche... Bertrand Russell... Jean Paul Sartre... and others who are regarded as the "great thinkers" of the world... thought that were doing us all a big favor... as they got rid of judgment day. But it only brings horrible news... despair... and tragedy. ... It is bad news that comes when you lose judgment day!

The wickedness... injustice... oppressions... and deceptions of men **demand** a day of judgment. ... BUT... quite **apart** from well recognized atrocities... like the holocausts; ... quite apart from wars and the ruthless wickedness of international terror and organized crime ... there are countless examples of lust... greed... hatred... and lies - that are a regular element of everyday life for millions of people.

Lives are blasted... homes are divided... and people are cheated. ... A drunk driver causes an accident... people are killed or maimed... and the

courts simply slap his wrists and excuse him. ... A young man seduces a young girl... abandons her to her shame... laughs... and seeks new conquests. ... Someone drops some dope into a friend's drink deliberately to hook him on drugs... the friend is ruined. ... A husband contracts some foul sexual disease and gives it to his wife. ... Children are taught God-denying... soul-destroying... and life-ruining philosophies in school while the government applauds. ... Socialism is touted as a "good thing" for our country... flagrant voter fraud runs rampant... and the news and social media stifles truth. ... The list is endless!

By far... the majority of wrongs are never righted in this life. Our sense of justice... tells us that there **has** to be a Day of Judgment. ... Let's go now to our passage... and see that there is!

2 Thes 1:6-10

Last week we ended our study in 2nd Thessalonians with verse 5... (just above where we began today.) ... In verse 5... Paul mentions the rewards that the Thessalonian believers would receive... for enduring all of the persecution they were going through. They will experience the coming Kingdom of God and because of their demonstrated worthiness... they will be part of God's righteous administration. **They** will be rewarded. ... **But for those who were persecuting them**... we pick up with the verses that I just read.

What kind of a future does the unbeliever face? ... Look at the dramatic words Paul used to describe it: tribulation... vengeance... flaming fire... punishment... and everlasting destruction. ... The Christ-rejecting world will receive from God exactly what it gave to God's people! ... When God pays

back... He often pays in kind. There is what we might call “the law of compensation” that we find through Biblical history.

Pharaoh tried to drown all the male babies born to the Jews... and his own army was drowned in the Red Sea. ... Haman plotted to wipe out the Jews... and he and his own sons were wiped out. ... The advisers of King Darius forced him to arrest Daniel and throw him into a lions’ den... but later they themselves were thrown to the lions. ... The unbelieving Jewish leaders who sacrificed Christ in order to save the nation... in 70 A.D. saw Jerusalem destroyed and their nation scattered for 2,000 years.

The doom described in our passage here... is terrible beyond all thought.

2 Thes 1:8

Elsewhere... the Holy Spirit reminds us that “*our God is a consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29). ... When Nadab and Abihu (the sons of Aaron) presumed to approach God... using “strange fire” (in other words... fire other than that which the Lord had commanded them to use) – Lev. 10:2 says - “*there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died there before the LORD.*” ... When Elijah demonstrated to apostate Israel the folly of Baal worship... he did so spectacularly on Mount Carmel. In response to his prayer... “*The fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench*” (1 Kings 18:38). ... When wicked King Ahaziah sent soldiers to arrest Elijah the prophet... Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume them (2 Kings 1:9–15). - Fire is one of the weapons in God’s hand.

The enemies of God and of His people... are having their little day now. But another day is coming... and it is already on the way: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven [*He is coming from His home*] with his mighty angels.. in flaming fire... inflicting vengeance.

The word *vengeance* must not be confused with *revenge*. ... The purpose of vengeance... is to satisfy God's holy law. ... The purpose of revenge is to pacify a personal grudge. ... (LISTEN!) ... God does not hold a grudge against lost sinners. ... Quite the contrary! ... He sent His Son to die for them... and He pleads with them to return to Him. ... But if sinners prefer being those who (as verse 8 says) "do not know God... and ... who do not obey the Gospel" - there is nothing left for God to do but judge them.

And God is not like the courts of our land which (today) seem to have great difficulty in giving forth righteous judgment. ... God's judgment is faultless... it is perfect justice. ... When He judges... it will be correct. ... No crooked lawyer will be able to make any deals with God to favor judgment for a client. God judges according to righteousness. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... let's take a look at this from the perspective of Paul's original readers of this letter... who were being severely persecuted. ... He is speaking to the Thessalonian Christians. He says, "*You know what? There are people out there who are killing your wives and daughters and husbands. There are people out there who are plundering your homes and your businesses. There are people out there who are really, really doing horrible, terrible things to you.*" ... And what does Paul say? He says, "**God** is the judge."

But do you realize all that this means? ... Not only will there be TRUE justice served... but this should make you the most patient... most forgiving... most gentle people possible.... (if you really believe it.)

(NOW)... You and I need to decide whether we believe it to be true... as well. ... Because what God is saying is, "*You don't have to be the judge because there is indeed a Perfect One... and nothing gets by Him!*" ... If you don't believe in the doctrine of judgment day... then let me tell you what will inevitably happen. ... You will take on the role yourself... and... it will kill you. ... It will eat you up inside – because you do not have the power to administer the justice that you want.

Some people (even Christians) can't get past what other people have done to them... because they haven't received the good news of judgment day. If that is you... you may *believe* it in some kind of general way... but you don't fully understand. ... It hasn't really passed into you. You haven't thought it out... you haven't reflected. ... If you're not patient with life... and if you're not gracious to people... you need to do some more thinking about the doctrine of judgment day. Your only other option is put on your futile robes of justice... and shrivel up into a ball of bitterness and cynicism. ... You won't be able to get past what people have done to you.

What Paul is saying to the Thessalonians... is "God is Judge - get over it." Jesus sees. He sees even more than you do. They have offended Him more than they have offended you. He has the power to administer justice. You don't. Don't try to be the judge. ... If he's the Judge... you don't have to be." Do you see? ... The doctrine of judgment day is filled with good news.

And speaking of “good news”... look again with me at verse 10.

2 Thes. 1:10

This is saying that... on that day... **we** will glow... **we** will blaze... we will radiate with the very glory of Jesus Christ. ... John Stott, who wrote a commentary on 2 Thessalonians... says... “*Think of a filament in the middle of a bulb.*” ... Inside the bulb it’s in a particular atmosphere... and then the electric current comes through and it glows and blazes. In a similar way... we will glow in Christ’s environment.

Why? ... Because we’re marveling at Him. ... He comes to be glorified *and* (these are connected) **to be marveled AT**. ... In fact... because of the way this is worded... (“*glorified in His saints and to be marveled at*”) ... I think this is telling us that He will be glorified in us - **because** we marvel.

It’s the marveling that’s the transforming. ... ONCE we fully comprehend that we were going to be judged... but Jesus took our judgment... we won’t just marvel. We will marvel in a transforming way. We’re going to glow! ... We will marvel at what He has done... and that’s what transforms.

Many believers have already started to marvel.

I heard of a Salvation Army street meeting. ... There was a man who was giving a testimony of what Jesus Christ had done for him... and there was a heckler on the edge of that crowd. ... The heckler shouted to the man who was giving a testimony: “*Would you shut up? You’re just dreaming—just dreaming.*”

He felt a tug at his coattail... and a little girl was there... and said, “*Sir, that’s my daddy up there.*” She continued:

“Let me tell you about my daddy. My daddy used to be a drunkard. My daddy spent his paycheck mostly on whiskey. Our house was a terrible place to live. My daddy would come home, and beat up my mommy. We didn’t have enough food to eat. I didn’t even have shoes to wear to school. Our home was terrible. My mother would cry all day long. But then, my daddy got saved, and my daddy’s life has been changed. My daddy doesn’t spend his paycheck on liquor anymore. Do you see these shoes? Daddy bought these shoes. Do you see this dress? Daddy bought this dress. See that woman over there? That’s my mama. Look at her. See how happy she is? Mister, if my daddy’s dreaming, don’t wake him up.” Amen? “If my daddy’s dreaming, don’t wake him up.”

Jesus will be glorified because of His transforming love in our hearts... and in our lives. ... Just think of the people who will be there... swept up to meet the Lord Jesus Christ. Who will be in that crowd? ... Well... there will be people there who were blind... and Jesus opened their eyes. ... There will be people there who were stubborn and rebellious and defiant... people who hated God... and shook their fists in His face... but yet they were conquered by His love... and changed into saints. They will be there.

There will be people there who were sexually perverted... and former drug addicts... and thieves... and murderers. ... They will be there - bright shining as the sun... with their sins forever gone — not one hint of it left. Can you imagine that crowd? Those who were in deep dark sin—all of that gone — transformed... now morally perfect... now without spot... without wrinkle... transformed by the grace of God... and that will give Him glory.

How did these people get transformed? Verse 10 says - “*All who have believed.*” ... It doesn’t say, “*All who gave their money to church.*” ... It

doesn't say, "*All who cleaned themselves up and lived good, righteous, holy lives.*" It doesn't say, "*All who died a martyr somewhere.*" ... It says "*all who believed.*"

Isn't that something? ... Aren't you glad God didn't say, "*Everybody who wants to be saved, run around the block?*" ... That sounds simple enough; but some little crippled children can't run. ... Aren't you glad God didn't say, "*Everybody who wants to be saved, read a chapter of the Bible.*" That sounds simple enough; but some can't read. ... Aren't you glad God didn't say, "*Everybody who wants to be saved, give \$50.*" Some don't have \$50.

But there's one thing that anybody and everybody **can** do... and that is "*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" ... And when He comes... He's going to come to be glorified in everyone who has believed.

If you don't believe in the judgment day... the love of God will only be an abstract concept to you. It will not be a marvelous thing. It will not shock you. It will not amaze you – **AND THEREFORE IT WILL NOT TRANSFORM YOU!**

This is why Paul followed with this prayer...

2 Thes. 1:11-12

Paul says "*to this end we pray for you...*" Pray what for them? (Verse 12)... ULTIMATELY - For the name of the Lord Jesus to be glorified in them NOW... not simply at Christ's return.

He prays in the present tense. He says, "*We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" ... The grammar and the

context indicate Paul is saying this marveling and transformation is not just reserved for the final day. It's *completed* in the final day. But it begins now. You can begin to radiate now. You can begin to glow now.

How do you do it? By commanding yourself to be a better person? No, you marvel. ... Are you worried? ... Well you might put on a religious face and piously tell yourself: "*Well worry is a lack of faith*" – **or** - you can marvel your worry away. ... You can marvel until you begin to glow. What do I mean? You look at Jesus and you say, "*Wait a minute. If He would do that for me... is He going to neglect me? If He would do that for me... is he going to jerk me around? ... If He would do that for me, can I not trust Him in this area?*" This is what I mean by marvel at Him.

You can tell yourself... "*I need to have more faith; I shouldn't be so anxious,*" or you can marvel yourself... and you can find the marveling is what glorifies you in Him and Him in you. ... His character comes in. ... It radiates. ... You begin to blaze with it. It will only be a partial blaze (compared to His return)... but it will blaze.

Let me give you one more. Are you irritated with somebody... just cold and irritated and impatient with people? ... You can just work on yourself. You can say, "*I'm a Christian, and I should be a better person. I should be more friendly.*" ... Or you can marvel yourself into warmth and compassion and welcoming.

How do you do that? It's very simple. You have to look at what Jesus has done. The angels are longing to look into it. The angels love to look into it. You say, "*How in the world can I treat these people this way when God has given what He has given to me? ... How in the world? Of course they're*

irritating people. I was an irritating person. ... Of course they're not being very nice to me. ... I wasn't being very nice to God. ... Look at what God has done for me."

I pray that God is convicting you and I to marvel at Him much more than we do now. ... And we have good reason to marvel at His coming judgment. We need to marvel at His holy nature... and let it change us.

With that... I'll close with a question that Oswald Chambers asks...

Am I becoming more and more in love with God as a holy God, or with the conception of an amiable being who says, "*Oh, well, sin doesn't matter much.*"?