

GRBC
2 Ways to Live
Week 3 - Judgment

Class Overview / Review

As Christians, we profess to know the best news the world can ever hear, news that frees us to love and be loved by the only Creator and Lord of the universe. Not only do we have knowledge of this news, but we're also called to share it. We're to, in the words of *1 Pet. 3:15*, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

And yet, many of us realize that we are not prepared, or at least we could always be more prepared, and so 2 Ways to Live is designed to help us know how to faithfully share the gospel in a clear and concise manner. But not only does 2 Ways to Live help us learn how to share the gospel, but even more fundamentally, it's a basic catechism of the Christian faith. Our relativistic culture encourages us to adopt a watered-down version of Christianity. A Christianity where, "A God without wrath brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross." (H. Richard Niebuhr). So believing in Christ is fine, so long as it's not exclusive, so long as it's not offensive with talk of sin and depravity, so long as it focuses on personal experience, on telling "my side of the story." In such a culture, this class gives us a basic theological framework of the gospel amidst the many false alternatives we face. And as we go through it together, I hope you find yourself refreshed and encouraged as you're reminded that there is nothing like the power of the gospel, nothing so amazing as the love and grace of God in Christ.

To review for a moment (me draw on the board), in week 1 we looked at *God as the loving ruler of the world*. He is King, but not a king who is corrupted by his power, but a king who always does what is best for his subjects. He also *made the world*, fashioning it as a potter fashions clay, and *he made us rulers of the world under him*. He created man in his image, to enjoy his creation, care for it, and supervise it under his good authority. Rev. 4:11, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

This sounds rather perfect, but of course we know that everything is not perfect either with us or with the world. There is a problem. And who can tell me what the Scripture tells us is the world's greatest problem? [Draw on Board: Man in Rebellion – The problem is that each and every one of us *has rejected our loving ruler and creator by trying to run life our own way without him*. We have set ourselves apart as our own God. In our pride and selfishness we will determine what is right and wrong, what we will and will not do. In short, we are in rebellion against God. Our hearts are bent on insurrection. We are at war with God, at enmity with Him. And the nature of this rebellion is what the Bible calls *sin*. But, this rebellion has caused massive disorder, and *we fail to rule ourselves, society and the world*. Rom. 3:10-12, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away."]

We noted last week that this concept of sin and rebellion could be difficult to communicate in today's pluralistic culture. So I would like to refer you three books: Will Metzger's *To Tell the Truth*, Mack Stiles' *Speaking of Jesus*, and our pastor Mark's chapter "Communicating Sin in a Postmodern Word" in *Telling the Truth*, edited by DA Carson.

Judgment

It comes as no surprise that if sin is difficult to communicate in today's postmodern culture, so is the concept of divine judgment. The mantra of today's society is no longer, "Go and sin no more," but, "If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone (at her)" John 8:7. In other words, who are you to judge another? It's not your place or your business to judge. And so we've very conveniently and rather thoughtlessly placed these restrictions upon God. People make the excuse, "He made me, and I can't help sinning, so he'll understand." Or people say, "God is love, he's not about judgment, and he's certainly not about a cruel and harsh hell."

This was illustrated well in a *Newsweek* article from 2002 (Aug. 12, 2002). According to their poll, 76% of Americans believe in heaven. And yet they also noted, interestingly enough that just a fraction of those believed in hell. Barna research, also from 2002 (see *Modern Reformation*, June 2002), records that less than 30% of Americans believe in an actual place of judgment. Even among Christians there is an increasing reluctance to speak to the judgment of God. And yet we're reminded that Jesus spoke more of hell than heaven, and was quick to give warning of coming judgment.

Now it won't really matter if you are just bantering with your non-Christian friends about what they think about the reality, or lack of reality of God's judgment and your belief that God's judgment against mankind's rebellion is true. Because friends, you are not the authority on Truth, and neither is your friend. God is the authority on Truth and that which He chooses to reveal to us in the Bible is and defines that which is True. So let us turn to the Scriptures and see what God says He will do in response to man's rebellion.

So what will God do about our rebellion? (Assign three people with 3 following verses)

Genesis 3:19 – This is God's response to the first rebellion in human history. And in response to this first act of rebellion, God responded to Adam and Eve with the curse in this verse (have somebody read) "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." Then in **Romans 6:23** (have somebody read)– "For the wages of sin is death..." God's just payment, that which we rightfully earn because our sin is death. Lastly, in **Romans 5:12** (have somebody read) – "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."

So one clear consequence of our rebellion is **death**. Just as God has created life, so in response to our sin he has taken life away.

What else does the Bible teach about our rebellion? (Assign 3 people the verses)

According to **Romans 14:10** (have somebody read) – “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written, ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me, every tongue will confess to God.’” So who will stand before God’s judgment seat? Everyone, no one will escape. That is why we read in Hebrews 10:31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

We also learn from **Romans 2:6** (have somebody read), “God will give to each person according to what he has done.” And because what we have done is rebelled against God and have sinned, our sin is what God will judge us according to.

And from **Hebrews 9:27** (have somebody read), “... man is destined to die once, and after that face judgment...”. Friends, there is no second chance. Not for you, not for your friends. That is why Scripture always pleads with the non-Christian that TODAY is the day of salvation.

So whereas our rebellion results in death, it also ensures our **judgment**. And this judgment is based upon what we have done. It is based upon our *sin*. This is an important and crucial point. The Bible’s principle concern on that dreadful Day of Judgment is not whether or not one has heard the Gospel, but what will be done about our sin. Ignorance is no excuse. As Paul says in Romans 2:6, “All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law.” We still perish, because the issue at stake is sin.

And the reason sin is such a serious issue is because of WHO God is. God is utterly Holy, perfect, unblemished, and spotless. Sin is anti-God. It is against the very essence and nature of who God is. That is why sin is such a serious issue. So let us quickly look through some passages of Scripture where God reveals His character. (Choose people to read the passages)

Leviticus 11:44-45, Joshua 24:19, 1 Samuel 2:2, Psalm 99:5-9, Isaiah 6:1-3, Habakkuk 1:13, Matthew 5:48, Revelation 4:8

So God is Holy. Yet, many people find this Truth of God’s Holiness and thus His need to judge sin so hard. I think this is because they only focus on some attributes of God, such as God’s love or mercy or patience. So they point to:

Exodus 34:5-7, God says, “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. [And they stop right there pointing to all these Truths about God and His character. But, if we read the next sentence, God also declares,] Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

Therefore, while it is true that God is loving, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, and forgiving. BUT, because God is a Holy, Holy, Holy God, He cannot leave the guilty unpunished. He cannot overlook sin.

That is why the cross is so sweet. Because at the cross, God’s attributes shine forth in perfect union in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s love and mercy were perfectly

displayed in Christ’s sacrifice. And God’s justice and holiness were vindicated in Christ’s holy and perfect life sacrificed and substituted for sinners.

So on that day when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, the question is, will we stand as one who has chosen to bear our sin alone before a holy and righteous God, or has it been born by Christ in our stead as we repent of our sin and trust in Him alone?

So we have seen that our rebellion rightfully and justly leads to death and judgment. Naturally, this raises the question:

What does this judgment look like?

Jesus speaks of our judgment in these terms...(have read) *Matthew 13:47-50* - “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it upon the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Or consider (me read) *Matthew 25:31-42* - “All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats... Then he will say to those on the left, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

We see here that those who are judged are separated into two groups: those who are cast out of God’s presence forever, and those who receive eternal life. And notice that this judgment is eternal; there is no second chance. It is both a physical and a spiritual death. Interestingly enough, notice that these graphic passages came from Jesus. Jesus speaks more clearly and more often of hell than any other in the New Testament.

PRACTICE

So thus far we have covered cells 1-3 of the 2 Ways to Live Gospel outline. And now, as we last week, it is practice time. I would like us to practice sharing the Gospel with each other in a short and concise manner. Then, I would like us to give each other feedback and encouragement. Then, we’ll come back and field any questions you may have. So please choose a partner next to you and take 3 minutes to share the Gospel and then switch. Now if you here and you are not a Christian, when it is your turn, please feel free to use that time to ask your partner any questions about the Gospel that you may have.

Now take 1 minute quickly to provide 1 comment of encouragement and 1 comment for improvement to your partner.

Do you have **any questions** that you think would be helpful and edifying for the group?

Summary

So to summarize, God's response to our rebellion, to our sin, is first death, then judgment, then eternal division into two groups – one to heaven and everlasting life worshipping God, and the other to everlasting ruin in hell.

This is no doubt a difficult message, but it is crucial to the Gospel. As we close, I would like to leave you with some helpful tips when communicating God's judgment...

1. The fact that God judges should both bring comfort, and fear. Comfort in the sense that any loving, caring and just God must hate and punish sin. Consider the premeditated murder of the innocent; if God was indifferent, if he did not punish sin, we would clearly not say he is a loving, fair and just God. Yet at the same time, God's hatred and punishment of sin should create great discomfort in us. For we understand that we, because of our own sins, will stand under the judgment of God as well. And if God, by his very holy nature can have no fellowship with sin, than he can have no fellowship with us either. The problem is not that we don't like the fact that God is judge; we just don't like him being our judge!
2. Hell is not simply a symbol of separation from God. To be separated from God is no great concern to the impenitent person. That, in fact, is what they want. Their problem in hell will not be separation from God, it will be the presence of God that will torment them. In hell, God will be present in the fullness of his divine wrath. He will be there to exercise his just punishment of the damned. (RC Sproul, Essential Truths of the Christian Faith)
3. In this life, we can take comfort in God's condemnation of the wicked to hell because there is no cruelty in his actions. God does not judge because he is thirsty for revenge. God's motive in judgment is justice, not revenge. Cruelty involves inflicting a punishment that is more severe or harsh than the crime. God is perfectly just; he is not cruel. No innocent person will ever suffer at his hand. If we have a hard time understanding his justice, the problem is not his but ours. It is our inability to understand the depth of our sin before a perfectly holy and righteous God. (RC Sproul, Essential Truths of the Christian Faith)