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**Core Seminar**

**Two Ways to Live**

**Class 3: Judgment—God’s Response to Our Rebellion**

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**PRAYER**

**I. Introduction**

Welcome to week 3 of the Two Ways to Live class! As we begin, we want to restate the main purposes of this class. First, that the content of the gospel, that is, the message of Christianity, would be solidified in each of our minds. Second, that this process would equip us to be more bold and more accurate as we share this message with others.

There is nothing special or magical about this Two Ways to Live tract. It’s simply a faithful presentation of the gospel and is based on God’s Word in the Bible. It should be our desire to clearly proclaim this gospel message to the glory of God and for the eternal good of those who hear and accept it. And so we use Two Ways to Live as a tool that will help us clarify the basic elements, or the essence, of the gospel.

**II. Review**

Now before we begin with Cell 3 of 6 of our tract, we want to briefly review Cells 1 & 2, which we discussed in the prior two weeks. Repetition will help us to get these ideas firmly planted in our minds. What was the first theme of the gospel that we discussed in Cell 1? [*We were introduced to God, the loving Ruler and Creator. In His vast wisdom and might, God created all that exists. All things were made by Him and for Him, including humans made in His image, and this means that He has creator rights on our lives. He lovingly made us to display His image as we rule the world under His guidance and protection*.]. Would someone either recite or read the verse in Revelation 4:11 that corresponds to this idea? Now, would someone attempt to draw the picture that we used to fit with this truth?



Who can remember what we discussed last week in Cell 2? [*We learned that we rejected God as our ruler by trying to run life our own way without him. We acknowledged that, as we look at the world around us, this wonderful, Utopian-sounding image is far from reality. Selfishness, hatred, wars, death, poverty, disease, starvation, and countless other evils and imperfections mar mankind. What went wrong? Everything went wrong when humans, beginning with Adam and continuing in everyone in history up through you and me, rejected God’s good plan. We resented God’s claim of authority over us, and we chose to ignore and disobey His commands. All of us are thereby rebels against God, and our rebellion, our sin, accounts for the mess we’ve made of our lives, our society, and the world.*] Would someone either recite or read the verses in Romans 3:10-12 that corresponds to this idea? Now, would someone draw the picture that we used to fit with this truth?



***Has anyone used Two Ways to Live to share the gospel with someone this past week? How’d it go?***

**III. Judgment: God’s Response to our Rebellion**

So we see that our sin has ruined the world that God gave us to rule. And what’s even more, our rebellion against God makes us deserving of His righteous judgment. This judgment by God is another important aspect of the gospel. It also happens to be the next cell in the Two Ways to Live tract.

The biblical support that is given for God’s judgment is Hebrews 9:27. Would someone please read that verse found on your handout? [“**Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment**.”] This is the verse that we would like for you to commit to memory to help you in explaining the gospel.

Additional biblical support can also be found in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. Would someone please read that verse, which is also found on your handout? [“**[God] will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power**.”]

This judgment can be pictured like this. *(Draw picture)*



**A. The Consequences of Our Sin**

Now before we discuss in detail about the punishment we’ve brought upon ourselves for our rebellion to God, we should note one thing. Scripture is clear in the passages we just read and many other passages that our opportunity to turn from our rebellion to God is gone when we die—there is no second chance. Not for you, not for me, not for your family, not for your friends. This is why Scripture pleads with unbelievers that ***today*** is the day of salvation. God’s patience will one day come to an end. He won’t let us rebel forever.

**1. Death**

Last week we read about the Fall of Man when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God promised beforehand that this would result in their death, and He confirmed it afterwards in Genesis 3:19: **“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.”**

The curse of death was not limited to Adam and Eve but applies to us today because we are their offspring and carry their sinful nature with us. We read in Romans 5:12 that **“sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”** Physical death is the consequence for our sin. God created life, and in response to our sin, He takes life away.

**2. Judgment**

Yet physical death is not the full or final consequence of our rebellion. As we read earlier in Hebrews 9:27, after death comes judgment. This judgment is something we would be right to dread. Because we’re guilty in our sin, and there is no question but that God will judge us that way.

But this raises a question. What will this judgment look like?

Would someone please read what Jesus says in 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.”**

“Fiery furnace…weeping and gnashing of teeth”…it doesn’t get much more vivid than that. Listen to some of Jesus’ words from Matthew 25:31-46: **“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 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.”**

By the way, if you’ve ever heard someone say that only the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and judgment, I don’t know how they can say that and read this. Jesus talked a lot about judgment. And notice that the punishment he warns us about is eternal. This reality stretches our minds, and the concept can be difficult for Christians to accept along with their unbelieving friends.

**B. The Offense of God’s Wrath**

***So what are some objections that might hinder you or others from accepting the biblical promises of God’s judgment?*** [*1) Violates God’s love; 2) Makes God cruel; 3) Too harsh; 4) Eternal punishment doesn’t fit the temporal crime*]

We don’t like this idea of God’s judgment, do we? Many argue that God’s love should preclude Him from judging those He loves. George Barna’s research group found that 76% of Americans believe in heaven and 71% surprisingly believe in hell.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, only 32% of those who believed that hell exists believe hell to be a real place of torment and suffering for people’s souls after death. But the most telling statistic is that only one-half of 1% of all Americans expect to go to hell upon their death.

The wrath of God is difficult for sinful man to stomach. Many people will go along with you and agree that there is a God, however they may imagine him. You will also find some people admitting that they’re sinners, to whatever extent. But when you go the next step and say that we also deserve God’s wrath and eternal punishment for our sins, that’s going too far. This is where the gospel becomes offensive to our pride.

It’s true that from a purely human perspective God’s eternal judgment of sinners can seem at best harsh and even absurd. But it’s important that all of our ideas about God be shaped by God’s Word, not our own intuition or feelings.

***Did any of you struggle with this in the process of becoming a Christian? How did you get past it?***

***[If you as the teacher have a good example of trying to explain this to a non-Christian, this would be a great place to share that story.]***

**Other Questions or Comments?**

**C. The Character of God**

OK—well, there are two ways we can talk about this. We can sheepishly explain the judgment of God as if we’re embarrassed by it—or even as if God’s embarrassed by it. “Well, I’ve got to tell you about this because my core seminar teacher said it’s part of sharing the gospel.” Or we can communicate God’s judgment as good and right, no matter how terrible it might be for us as sinners. As you can imagine, I’m suggesting the second of those two. And to do that, we want to briefly walk through God’s character as revealed in Scripture.

**1. God’s Sovereignty**

The first attribute is God’s sovereignty. Any time we struggle to accept a difficult truth that God has clearly revealed, it’s important to remember that God is God, and He can do whatever He wants. This may seem commonplace to some, but if we recognize God’s role as Creator and Ruler, we know that He has the right to do whatever He deems best.

So how does this fit with God’s judgment? Well, it means we approach the topic of God’s wrath with a posture of humility. We must not say, “If God is like this, then I want nothing to do with Him.” Such statements attempt to put God at our mercy, as though we’re the ones judging Him. But He determines what is right and good—we don’t.

**2. God’s Holiness**

Second, and probably more important, is the matter of God’s holiness. God’s holiness means that He is perfect, pure, and is separate from all that isn’t. His holiness means that He detests sin and demands purity in His moral creatures.

The bible has plenty to say regarding God’s holiness:

* **1 Samuel 2:2** – “There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”
* **Habakkuk 1:13** – “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.”

Because God is holy, He does not tolerate wrong. He will punish sin, no exceptions. When we fail to see how holy God is, we underestimate the seriousness of our sin. A low view of God results in a low view of sin. A low view of sin results in a low view of the need to punish that sin. Instead, when we grasp the weight of God’s holiness – and that itself is a good thing – we can begin to understand why God punishes sin. If he didn’t punish sin, He would cease to be holy.

**3. God’s Justice**

Closely tied to our understanding of God’s holiness is our appreciation for God’s justice. God is a good and perfect judge. Just as it would be wrong for a human judge to let the guilty go free, God wouldn’t be just to let our rebellion go unpunished. Psalm 9:7-8 says, **“The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice.”**

It’s easy for us to recognize that justice is good when applied to the worst of criminals. Few people would argue that a Hitler should be pardoned for his cruel acts to humans. But friends, we need to remember that God has far higher standards than we have – He’s perfect. Our sin against Him as our Creator is far more serious than Hitler’s sin against mankind. Our problem is not that God is the judge; we just don’t like him being *our* judge.

One author gives a helpful reminder that God’s judgment is good and not cruel. He says, **“In God’s condemnation of the wicked to hell, we can trust God because in His judgment and wrath, there is no cruelty in his actions. 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.”[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Sometimes we misunderstand God’s justice because we assume too much of His mercy. Our brother R.C. Sproul gives a good illustration of this in his book, *The Holiness of God*. He writes,

**“Our tendency to take grace for granted was driven home to me while teaching college students. I had the assignment of teaching a freshman Old Testament course to 250 students at a Christian college. On the first day of class I went over the course assignments carefully…This course required three short papers. I explained to the students that the first paper was due on my desk by noon the last day of September. No extensions were to be given…If the paper was not turned in on time, the student would receive an F for the assignment…On the last day of September …Twenty-five students stood quaking in terror, full of remorse…I bowed to their pleas for mercy. “All right,” I said. “I’ll give you a break this time. But, remember, the next assignment is due the last day of October.”…Then came the last day of October. Fifty students came empty-handed…Once more I relented. I said, “OK, but this is the last time. If you are late for the next paper, it will be an F.”…Can you guess what happened on the last day of November? Right…[A hundred students] strolled into the lecture hall utterly unconcerned…I picked up my lethal black grade book and began taking down names…I marked…F in the book. The students reacted with unmitigated fury. They howled in protest, screaming, “That’s not fair!” I looked at one of the howling students, “Lavery! You think it’s not fair?” “No,” he growled in response. “I see. It’s justice you want? I seem to recall that you were late with your paper the last time. If you insist upon justice you will certainly get it. I’ll not only give you an F for this assignment, but I’ll change your last grade to the F you so richly deserved.” The student was stunned. He had no more arguments to make.”[[3]](#footnote-3)**

Like these students we sometimes think that we *deserve* more grace. But of course, grace is by definition grace something we don’t deserve. God gives justice to some and mercy to others, but injustice to none.

**4. God’s Love**

The last attribute of God is God’s love. But this doesn’t seem right – God is love, right? If He’s love, then how can He be wrathful? Aren’t they mutually exclusive?

Okay, we’re getting into deep theological waters here. But it’s important for us to take a moment to consider this because 1) we need to understand how God’s love fits with his judgment and 2) in your evangelism, you will likely come across this question.

So think of three ways in which God’s punishment of sin is a loving act:

1. We need to ask the question, God’s love *of whom?* God loves his holiness and his purity, doesn’t he? What better thing could he love, after all? God’s punishment is loving of himself, which is the greatest thing he could love (2 Peter 3:8-9).
2. The threat of it is loving toward sinners. God doesn’t simply punish sin; for thousands of years he has *warned* us of this impending punishment so that we would turn from our sin and to Christ.
3. Punishment of sin is loving toward those who have been sinned against (including himself). Unless God detests evil and its effects, He cannot be loving. It’s fundamentally loving for God to oppose sin, and it would be unloving for Him not to.

God’s wrath stems from a deep and powerful love. God is against sin because He’s for us, and ultimately for His own glory.

If we have problems understanding how love and judgment fit together, then we must look to the cross where God’s wrath and God’s love were realized in Christ Jesus. This will be our topic next week, Lord willing.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Questions or Comments?**

**IV. Implications for Evangelism**

So after reflecting on God’s role as a good Judge, what are some implications for us as we share the gospel? ***How should God’s judgment of sinners affect our evangelism?*** [*1)* *Sense of urgency; 2) Humility—we too deserve God’s wrath; 3) Take advantage of daily conversations regarding justice and fairness; 4) When asked how we’re doing, reply “Better than I deserve”]*

***[Have the class pair off and practice cells 1-3 of Two Ways to Live.]***

**V. Conclusion**

So let’s briefly summarize what we’ve learned today. God’s holy and just response to our rebellion, to our sin, is first death, then judgment, then eternal division. That division is into two eternal groupings: one to heaven and everlasting life worshipping God, and the other to everlasting ruin in hell.

This is a difficult but crucial component of the gospel message. We can proclaim that “Jesus Saves,” but the world would be right to ask, “From what?” They need to understand that Jesus is powerful to save us from the eternal punishment that we all deserve at the hands of a holy God. Only when they catch a glimpse of God’s justice will they appreciate His mercy.

**PRAYER**

**APPENDIX A**

**Reconciling God’s Love and God’s Wrath**

Nothing is impossible about love and wrath being directed at the same person at the same time. We can see something of this when we look at the relationship of a parent and a child. When a child disobeys, in love the parent disciplines the child to teach them to obey so that it will go well with them.

God’s wrath is not like human wrath, which is oftentimes irrational, impatient, and malicious.

**How does hell glorify God?**

By sending people to hell, God upholds his word and shows himself to be truthful, faithful, and just. For God to show mercy, he must also punish sin. Hell also glorifies God by showing how great of a God he is that those who rebel receive the greatest punishment for eternity. Hell shows God’s power against the wicked and vindicates the righteous. Finally, it shows the greatness of what Jesus did by saving those destined for hell.

1. Research was done in 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R.C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, p. 161-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Some good writings on this topic can be found in D.A. Carson’s *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* and J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*. Also, Tim Challies blog post on September 12, 2011 at [www.challies.com](http://www.challies.com) provides a good comment on Michael Wittmer’s book, *Don’t Stop Believing*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)