

God's Justice and Grace

2 Peter 2:4-9 (07/20/14)

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In his book *Christless Christianity*, Michael Horton relates an episode from a TV program which is fiction, but gripping. A retired police officer is dying of cancer in his hospital bed. He is plagued with guilt over allowing an innocent man to be framed and executed. He shares his heart with the hospital chaplain, "How can I even hope for forgiveness?" She tries to console him, "Sometimes it's easier to feel guilty than forgiven." "Which means what?" "Maybe you need a new reason to go on." "I don't want to go on," He cries out. "Can't you see I'm dying? I'm afraid of what comes next." "What do you think that is?" The officer fires back, "You tell me! Is atonement possible? What does God want from me?" She tries to quiet him down with worthless assurances and what this poor dying man describes as "New Age, God-is-love, have-it-your-way (bleep).... I don't have time for this. I want a **real chaplain** who believes in a **real God** and a **real hell**." She again to calm him down, "I know you're upset." To which this poor fellow cries out, "**God, I need someone who will look me in the eye and tell me how to find forgiveness, because I'm running out of time!**"

This is why God hates false teaching and false teachers. They have only false promises and empty assurances, but no answers for the most important issues of life. How can you face God in your guilt? How can you be forgiven? What about final judgment? Is eternal punishment true? How can I escape? Christianized Freudian therapy and psycho-babble never yet brought sinners the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ! Let's read the passage, 2 Peter 2:3b -9.

^{3b}*their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.*

⁴*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;* ⁵*and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;* ⁶*and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter;* ⁷*and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men* ⁸*(for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),* ⁹*then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,*

There are two certainties about God in this passage. He is a God of grace, and He is a God of justice. God is a God of great mercy and grace. The gospel is the good news that comes to us and rescues us from our sin and guilt and damnation. Regardless of the depth of a man or woman's sin, how horribly we have lived, how wretched and wicked we've been, God is ready to forgive the worst of sinners through faith in Christ. Christ shed His blood to make atonement and to bring us to God. This is the good news of divine mercy and grace; what that poor dying man needed to hear.

But there's a second certainty no one wants to face. God is always a God of justice and judgment. Every offence against God's law and character must be paid for. Not one sin escapes judgment. If a man or woman will not submit their hearts to the cross and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, then they will face God in their sin and guilt and pay for it forever! And the severest judgment awaits false teachers who deceive poor lost sinners with their smooth words and false assurances. That's what Peter is talking about in our text. Future judgment is not a myth, and we're all running out of time.

God's Judgment is Certain

How little we hear of God's judgment today. By far the masses of humanity live every day completely ignoring the reality that they will inevitably stand before God at the final judgment. God gives us three remarkable and even shocking examples from history to teach us and warn us about future judgment.

These are monuments of judgment you must not ignore: God's judgment on rebellious angels, on the rebellious world of Noah's day, and on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

God didn't spare the angels who rebelled against Him – v. 4

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment....

Here were celestial, heavenly beings who while right in the very presence of God rebelled against God. When this happened is debatable and here is a hill I definitely would not die on. Several of my favorite commentators like Boice, MacArthur, and S. Lewis Johnson think Peter is referring to Genesis 6 when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men. I don't think so. I've got one heavy hitter on my side here, John Calvin, who wrote, "That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity; and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious." Thanks, John!

No, I think this takes us back to the original angelic revolt in heaven itself. Somehow, at some point, the highest angelic being Lucifer got the idea that he would not bow to the Almighty. He did it his way. He would not kneel, he'd take the blows. That intoxicating feeling of freedom from divine restraint filled the minds of all the angels who followed him, quickly followed by the dread reality that autonomy is ultimately impossible and to rebel against God is the great folly of eternity. God's holy justice shot terror and gloom into their beings, and they knew immediately they would face eternal judgment and torment.

Revelation 12 talks about this satanic plot. Apparently 1/3 of the angels followed Satan. God cast them from their pure and holy place, and Peter says He cast them into hell, the Greek word *tartarus*. In Greek mythology *tartarus* speaks of a place of darkness and gloom for wicked characters. And Peter says God committed them to pits of darkness, or holding places of gloom.

You may wonder if these demons are running around on earth today. Probably. This earthly domain may be their pits of gloom. When Jesus cast that legion of demons out of that crazy guy, they cried out, "Have you come to torment us before the time?" They aren't free. Their hell is always with them. They live in dread of coming certain judgment.

In the tribulation period, according to Revelation 12, Satan unleashes his fury on earth to destroy God's people, but knows he has a short time. In Revelation 20 when Christ returns to earth, an angel throws Satan into the abyss for 1000 years. The end of this judgment is in Revelation 20:10 "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Whatever we don't know for sure, we do know God has cast these rebels from their original position and He will bring eternal judgment on them. He knows where everyone is. They will not escape. Not one.

The second monument of God's certain judgment...

God didn't spare the rebels of Noah's day – v. 5

and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Let's take a sneak peek back into that pre-flood world. How ungodly was it? Genesis 6:5 describes it: *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Just look at this indictment by God on these people.

First, He saw. God is fully aware of what is happening on earth. Imagine what He sees today? The ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he weighs all his paths. Prov. 5:21. What did He see? He saw great wickedness on the earth. It was very open and unashamed wickedness of all sorts, lewdness, immorality, hatred and murder, heartless cruel violence.

What else did He see? He saw right into the secret rooms of every person's mind and heart, his inner motivations and desires. Every intent or motive driving every thought was evil, only evil, and only evil continually. This is man left entirely to himself, without the restraint of God on the heart. We learn here the natural depravity of our own hearts. All have sinned and none do good before God, no, not one. This generation well deserved God's judgment. They had gone astray from the truth of God revealed through people like Enoch and Methusaleh and Noah. They refused to listen to Noah when he preached to them as a dying man to dying men. He warned the world of coming judgment for 120 years (Genesis 6:3). They scoffed and went about their own lives, until the flood came and swept them all away.

"I don't believe in a global flood." You may not, but Jesus did! Luke 17:26-27, "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."

So what have we done with all the evidences of this judgment even on the earth today? Evolution. Millions of years! Our greatest fear today isn't God's judgment. Our great fear today is losing all our videos and pictures and games on our computers. The commercial assures us, "Relax, knowing all your computers are backed up." Imagine if a top level scientist appeared on CNN announcing, "We've discovered we've been wrong about our geological columns and our millions of years. All evidence points to a global catastrophe, a worldwide flood. We have to concede, in the face of the evidence, the Genesis record is accurate, and apparently God did judge the world with a global flood several thousand years ago." Don't hold your breath for that one.

The third monument of God's certain judgment:

God didn't spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah – vv. 6-8

and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),

Did this really happen? Yes. Have they found archeological evidence of these cities being burned from the roofs down? Maybe. Can you see Mrs. Lot solidified as a salt pillar somewhere? No. What do we know for sure? The certainty of God's judgment on these cities.

Here's Jude weighing in, verse 7: *Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.*

"Strange flesh" is homosexual behavior. You probably know the story back in Genesis 19. The moral corruption of these cities got so bad that God went down to judge them. Abraham prayed for God to spare the cities. There weren't even ten godly people in the city. So God's messengers went into Sodom to rescue Lot. Lot invited them to his house, but all the wicked men of the city came banging on Lot's door that night demanding that these two men come out to them to have sex with them. Lot rebukes them and offers them his two daughters. Here's what happened next. Genesis 19:9, *But they said, "Stand aside." Furthermore, they said, "This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge (today he'd be charged with a hate crime); now we will treat you worse than them." So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door.*

Then the two men who were really angels struck the wicked men blind, told Lot the city was about to be judged, and sent Lot out to get his sons-in-law, who merely laughed at him. The next morning the angels rose early and urged Lot and his wife and two daughters to hurry and get out before the judgment would sweep them all away. When they hesitated, the angels grabbed all four of them because of God's compassion and brought them out of the city and commanded them to flee from the wrath to come and not look back! But someone looked back. They pulled Lot's wife out of Sodom, but Sodom was still in her

heart. She looked back and instantly was turned into a pillar of salt. Verse 24 says this, "The Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." In verse 28 Abraham looked toward these cities and saw smoke rising, like the smoke of a furnace. "What about Lot?"

"I don't believe it." Jesus did. Luke 17:28-29, "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all."

"But no one really believes in future judgment. It's just a medieval religious bug-a-boo." That's what the false teachers of our day say! Imagine the people scoffing and laughing at Noah after 120 years and he's finally sitting in his ark waiting for the waters to come. And come they did, destroying every creature outside the ark. Imagine those Sodomites, marching so brazenly, lusting so freely, exhilarated by their sensuality, when the flaming pitch began to fall on them, burning them up alive!

Let these pictures be etched in your mind to remind you of the certainty of coming judgment. No one escapes once it comes. Your only hope is the cross work of Jesus. Flee the wrath to come by racing to the cross of Jesus Christ and bowing your knees to Him as your Lord and Savior! He is the only escape from the coming judgment and eternal punishment. And no one knows when that judgment day will be. Today may be yours. God didn't spare angels and rebels, but here's the most amazing thing of all: God didn't spare His own Son but delivered Him up for sinners! Romans 8:32

God's Grace is Certain

...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.

God's mercy and grace is seen in how He dealt with Noah. How did Noah escape? By faith! Noah didn't deserve rescue, but by faith alone God gave him that same righteousness God gives every sinner who repents and turns to Christ. And then for 120 years Noah preached free grace and mercy and warned his generation to repent of their sins, "The door of the ark is open to those who repent!" Then Noah got into that ark with his wife and three sons and daughters-in-law and God closed the door. All eight were rescued and kept safe inside the ark. Friends, that ark represents Christ. There is only one escape, one rescue from God's judgment on your sins. Are you safely in Christ?

We also see God dealing with Lot in grace and mercy. Lot wasn't much of a believer, was he? Neither are we! We're just as sorry as Lot. But look at how God sees His work of grace in this man's life. Lot pretty much blew it there in Sodom. No one took him seriously when he tried to warn them. And for some reason he even hesitated when the angels told him to flee. But God saw his righteous soul tormented and oppressed day after day by all the wickedness going on around him. His heart wasn't what it should have been, but God had given him a new life, and the evidence was his grief over all the sin around him. What about you? Do you grieve over all the sin and evil and moral depravity displayed so publicly in our world around us?

So What?

God knows how to rescue His people! God made sure Noah was in the boat when the deluge came and Lot was out of town when the fire dropped. Thank God He did not spare His son to rescue us from final judgment.

But God knows how to keep false teachers and ungodly people under punishment for the day of judgment. I wonder if this coming day of judgment has gripped you. There are two final bars of judgment. The first is the cross, where Jesus took the guilt and punishment from Almighty God in our place. That's what that poor guilty dying policeman needed to hear. The second bar of judgment will be the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20. Let's remind our hearts of this future certainty this morning because we're all running out of time.

Revelation 20:11-15, Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the

small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

How can we live another day without making sure our name is in that book of life? We're all running out of time. Only Christ can save us from this coming certain judgment.