

Glimpses of Our God
The God of Grace and Judgment

Lesson #4 for January 28, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Genesis 3; Genesis 6; John 3:17-21; Revelation 14:6-7.

1. This lesson focuses on God's judgment and God's grace or graciousness and how the two are related. God's judgment scares many people. The church has used scare tactics for generations to try to force people to do what it wants them to do. This had become such a pervasive influence that in the 19th century, people dreamed up ways to eliminate God from their thinking so they would not have to face His judgment. Atheism, skepticism, higher criticism, and evolution are all attempts in various ways to escape the judgment of God.
2. But, the Bible makes it very clear that each and every one of us will stand before the judgment seat of God. (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Revelation 20:12,13)
3. When will the judgment take place? Is there more than one judgment? How many of us will be judged? What is the relationship between judgment and grace? What are the criteria for the judgment? How does God decide who is going to be saved and who is not? Does He just weigh the good against the bad? We need to remember that Jesus promised the thief on the cross that he would be saved. (Luke 23:43) What kind of standard could we establish that would allow him in without opening the door to everybody as some believe will happen?
4. Many of our Christian friends are not exactly sure what to do with God's judgment. Since they believe in the immortality of the soul, they believe that each person will be judged at the time of his death, and each will go—or has gone—immediately to his reward. Roman Catholics have a temporary place called purgatory where people can work out some of their problems before being admitted to heaven.
5. To Seventh-day Adventists who believe in the mortality of the soul, it is natural for there to be a pre-advent judgment in which God makes a final decision about whether a person will be saved or lost. But, how can there be a pre-advent judgment if every person has already gone to his reward? How do we explain Romans 3:4? Is God also being judged?
6. How does God's judgment work? Read John 3:17-21; Zechariah 3:1-5; Matthew 25:31-46. Is it clear in your mind who should be excluded from heaven? Do you think you could write a fair set of criteria for the heavenly committee to go by? Is God going to make each decision Himself, personally? Or, are there more beings involved? Is there a jury in this trial? (See Daniel 7:9,10; Revelation 20:4) Some have suggested that there is more than one judgment. Who is being judged in the pre-advent judgment? The church has decided to stop calling it the “investigative judgment”; now, it is called the “pre-advent judgment.” Why the change? Most of our Christian friends believe that a person goes straight to their reward at the time of death. Does that mean that the final judgment for them occurs at the time of death? If that were the case, there could be no “pre-advent judgment” because everyone would already be experiencing his/her reward.
7. What is the relationship between God's justice and His graciousness? Is there some kind of conflict between the idea of a God of justice and a God of salvation? Is God trying to save us?
8. When we talk about God's justice, what do we mean? The word in Greek that is often translated *justification* means “to be set right.” The common word translated as *justice* simply means judgment. In Revelation 19:11, the word translated in some versions as *justice* is actually the word for “righteousness.” When God executes justice, He does what is right.
9. If you take a close look at Scripture, you will discover that there is much more talk about final events and the judgment in the New Testament than there is in the Old Testament. Why do you think that is? There is virtually no talk about judgment occurring in connection with the first coming of Christ.

10. Look at a few of the verses in the Bible that talk about judgment and how it is carried out: Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 10:30; Matthew 12:36,37; 16:27; 25:31-46; Revelation 14:6,7; 20:12; 22:12; 1 Peter 4:17. From these verses we can learn that everyone will be judged according to his/her own deeds. God will reward each one according to what he has done. We will be judged not only by our deeds but also by our words and apparently by our motives. In our day, the hour has come for God to judge. Therefore, we are called upon to worship God. Will God destroy those He judges as evil? (Revelation 14:9-11)
11. It is clear from the Bible that we are saved by our faith, (Acts 16:31) but we are judged by our works. How can that be? Does God look at our deeds or works to decide if we have faith?
12. How does God's judgment work? If we are judged by our deeds (works), does that leave any room for forgiveness or even grace? Doesn't grace suggest that we are not judged by our works, but rather, that some of our works are overlooked? How could the thief on the cross be judged by his works and still enter the kingdom of heaven? What about our motives? Are they considered in the judgment?
13. What is the relationship between forgiveness and judgment? In order to be saved, do we need to make sure that we have asked for forgiveness for each individual sin so that it can be erased from our record so that we can appear before the judgment with a "clean slate"?
14. When does the pre-advent judgment take place? Adventists are unique in their understanding of the 2300-day-year prophecy of Daniel 8 & 9. We believe that the pre-advent judgment began in 1844 and is going on right now. While there will be subsequent reviews of the decisions made at this judgment, (see for example Revelation 20:4) it is at this time when the ultimate fate of each person is being decided. No future changes will be made to the decisions being made right now. When the heavenly court reviews our cases, they do not make any mistakes in judgment.
15. There are five different phases of the "judgment" that take place between 1844 and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth at the third coming of Christ.
 - 1) The pre-advent judgment taking place right now will decide who is to be taken to heaven at the second coming and who will be lost. During this time, the angels and the rest of the beings in the universe are allowed to review the records and agree that God has made the right choices and that some of us are safe to admit to heaven to be their neighbors for the rest of eternity. So, God's decisions are being judged. In that judgment, everything is considered: thoughts, motives, words, actions, etc.
 - 2) An initial "executive judgment" is made at the second coming. The righteous will be either resurrected or translated and taken to heaven; the wicked who are still alive will perish.
 - 3) During the millennium (the millennial judgment), the righteous will be allowed to review all of the records and come to the conclusion that heaven's judgments were completely fair and that God did everything possible for the salvation of each person. (Revelation 20:4; Romans 3:4) Again, God's decisions are being judged—this time by humans instead of the onlooking universe.
 - 4) At the third coming after the New Jerusalem comes down and the Devil prepares his people to attack the city, there will be a panoramic review of the entire great controversy. As they approach the city and prepare to attack, there will appear in the sky a portrayal of the events of the great controversy from beginning to end. Each person will see the part that s/he has played in the great controversy and even the wicked—including Satan—will review every detail of his/her life and realize why s/he is not going to be saved. Each also will agree that without violating his/her freedom, God has done everything possible to save him/her. Thus, even the wicked—including Satan—will bow down and admit that God was right and that He has told the truth in the great controversy. (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10,11; **SR 423-425; GC 666-670**) At that point, God will finally be able to say that He has won His case, and every being in the universe will agree—even the wicked. (Compare Isaiah 33:10-16)
 - 5) Then, the final executive judgment takes place. Having agreed that God was right, the Devil and all his followers from the time he rebelled in heaven until the last sinner to live will admit that

they were wrong. Then, they will die the second death—separation from God. God will clean up the mess (Isaiah 66:24) and eliminate all trace of evil and remake our earth into a new Garden of Eden.

16. Read Genesis 3. What does this chapter tell us about God's judgment? Genesis 3:15 makes it clear that while sin has serious consequences, God's graciousness is apparent almost immediately as He promises victory over the deceiver. What do we learn about God from the few verses that talk about His relationship with Adam and Eve before the fall? What kind of relationship did they have?
17. Within a very short time after Adam and Eve fell by trusting the serpent in the tree and eating the fruit, God promised them eventual triumph over sin in the great controversy. Why wasn't there such a plan for Satan? Even though He knew perfectly well where they were, what was God implying by searching for Adam and Eve and calling out, "Where are you?" "What are you doing?" "Why are you hiding?"
18. One of the most incredible stories about God's judgment on wickedness is the story of the flood in Noah's day. Skeptics of the Bible make a big deal of the fact that there are many—literally hundreds—of flood stories in primitive civilizations around the world and that some of them were written down prior to Moses writing Genesis. They would like us to believe that the biblical flood story came from one of those pagan stories—that the biblical account is nothing more than a myth or legend.
19. By contrast, those of us who believe in the Bible take all those stories as very strong proof that there was, in fact, a worldwide flood sometime in the distant past. Why would flood stories be so pervasive around the world if there had not been a worldwide flood?
20. So, what can we learn about God's judgment from the flood? Read Genesis 6:5. In Noah's day, why did God think it was necessary to wipe out almost the entire human race? What provision did God make for anyone who was willing to listen to Him? (Genesis 6:14-22; 2 Peter 2:5) What would have happened if God had not sent the flood? The way things were going, within a few more years, God would have completely lost contact with the human race! The flood was a rescue mission! God not only made provision to save Noah and his family but also repeatedly invited others to join them. He asked Noah to preach as he built a boat for 120 years. He also made provision to save the animals and birds. As expected, God's graciousness is apparent even in that disaster.
21. Read again John 3:17-21. Does this passage suggest that we judge ourselves? Those who come to the light seem to be saved, and those who turn from the light are lost. Jesus is the Light; and if we are willing to study His life and death, we can discover what we need to know in order to turn our sinful lives around and be saved. God's judgments are always fair; every opportunity possible is given for us to repent and be saved. But, that does not give us permission to ignore God's directions for our lives.
22. How are grace and judgment intertwined? In every way possible, God has warned us about the serious consequences of continuing in sin. He has made provision for everyone to be saved. But, not even God can save sinners in their sins without putting the universe in jeopardy. Love is only possible to those who are truly free. And, God values our freedom so much that He refuses to violate the freedom of those who choose to continually reject His offers.
23. What did John suggest is the reason why some will be lost? What does it mean to refuse to come to the light? Why do some people love darkness rather than light? Based on these verses and considering the fact that we are all sinners, (Romans 3:23) shouldn't we all be condemned? Christian theologians have worked out a complicated system of justification, sanctification, salvation, forgiveness, pardon, redemption, etc. How are all these things related to coming to the light?
24. Consider this: Both grace and condemnation imply judgment. We must be judged in order to be condemned; but under those circumstances, we also need grace or the graciousness of God. If

we are lost, we need to be rescued. We have no way to find our way to heaven on our own! We need not only forgiveness but healing (salvation).

Without grace, we'd all be consumed by God's justice. Our only hope, then, standing before a just God, is grace. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, January 26.

25. It is not really God's justice that would consume us; but rather, it is our sin. (Isaiah 59:2) It is sin that is deadly, and God offers us a way out. But, if we refuse or are too busy or careless to take advantage of God's offer, sin will destroy us.
26. Read Revelation 14:6,7. Why do these verses tell us to fear God? Why do some modern translations say, "Honor God"? If we recognize that the hour of His judgment has come, should we be thankful? Or, fearful? And, how is the judgment related to the "everlasting good news"?
27. Without grace what message would we have for the world other than that God is going to destroy us all and there is no hope of escape? Fortunately, the message we have has the "everlasting gospel" as its foundation. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, January 26)
28. Once again, we need to note that it is not God's justice that will be destroying the wicked, it will be their own sin. We have drunk the poison, and we need healing.
29. For a much deeper understanding of God's judgment, read Zechariah 3:1-5 and "Joshua and the Angel" (PK 582-592) and "Facing Life's Record (The Investigative Judgment)" or "The Pre-Advent Judgment" in GC 479-491. Notice that:
30. Jesus does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of my hands.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.
31. Jesus shows their penitence and faith and claims forgiveness. They are safe to save because they have taken advantage of God's graciousness and followed in the footsteps of Jesus. They have been forgiven and transformed.
32. Try to imagine the judgment scene before God's throne. Read Daniel 7:9,10. Suppose your case is just coming up before the heavenly court. Suppose that an angel were to review your entire life in every detail. After having heard or even seen every detail of your life spelled out before the inhabitants of the universe, could you honestly vote for yourself?
33. Many Christians cling to the idea of God's forgiveness and justification. These are wonderful truths, but we must never allow them to become excuses to continue in sin.
34. Unfortunately, God's graciousness in being willing to save us and His free offer of forgiveness and salvation tempts some people to say: "If it is so easy to be saved, let me continue to sin; and I will come to God later." This is a fatal trap. Later never comes.
35. In the setting of the great controversy, we must recognize that sin started in heaven long before it did here on this earth. Read Revelation 12:1-12; 13:8; Ephesians 1:4,11-12; Matthew 25:34. These verses should make it abundantly clear that God's plan of salvation was in place long before Adam and Eve sinned.
36. God can never win the great controversy by threatening people. If it was possible to scare the "hell" out of people, He would have done it long ago. Consider what happened right after the flood. People living with the full knowledge of what happened built a tower in defiance of God! So, how are people responding to the idea of God's judgment in our day? How are we reacting?

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