

The God of Grace¹ and Judgment



SABBATH—JANUARY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Genesis 3; Genesis 6; John 3:17–21; Revelation 14:6, 7.

MEMORY VERSE: “God will judge everything people do. That includes everything they try to hide. He’ll [He will] judge everything, whether it’s [it is] good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: God’s judgment is as important in the Bible as is the theme of salvation. In fact, the two teachings are closely tied together.

A SOLDIER STOOD NEXT TO AN OLD MAN ABOUT TO BE SHOT TO DEATH. The old man was guilty of being the “wrong” race and religion. As the soldier raised his gun, the old man said, “Do you know that there is a God in heaven who sees all this, and who will one day judge you for your actions?”

The soldier then shot the old man dead.

This story is a good example of a secular society. A secular society is one that does not value or practice religion. This society recognizes no higher standard than the rules of the society itself. It is a society that has no sense of who God is or of a law greater than anything human. It is a society where humans take the place of God. It is a society where judgment is guided by one’s own conscience or by fellow humans.

But according to the Bible, the old man was right. There is a God in heaven. He knows all things, and He will bring everything into judgment.

Let us study this important part of God’s character (who God is) and learn that, even in judgment, God shows His wonderful grace.

1. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 22**JUDGMENT DAY
(Revelation 14:6, 7)**

The theme of God's judgment runs through the entire Bible. Judgment is not opposed to salvation or to the gospel. Really, both judgment and salvation are woven together in the Bible from Genesis through Revelation.

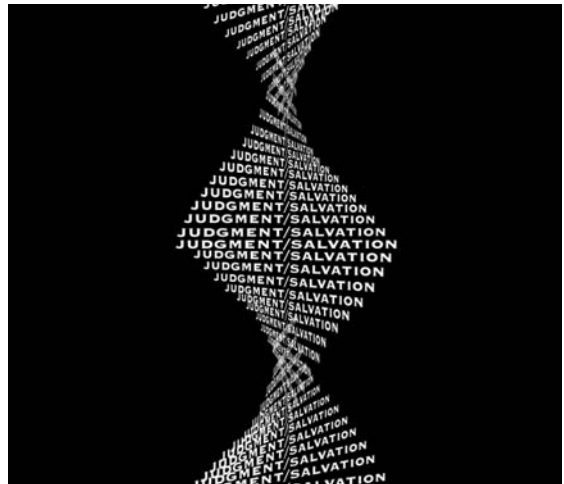
And this is no surprise! Judgment and salvation show twin parts of God's character: His justice and grace. So, we should not separate the idea of judgment from the idea of salvation. And we should not think that God's justice is opposed to His grace either. To think that these things are separate is to rob both of their fullness and ability to work together.

Something else is interesting about the whole topic of judgment in the Bible. Verse for verse, the New Testament talks more about judgment than the Old Testament does.

Read Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 10:30; Matthew 16:27; Revelation 20:12; Revelation 22:12; Matthew 12:36, 37; 1 Peter 4:17; and Revelation 14:6, 7. What are they about? Who is judged? What happens in these judgments? What do these verses teach us about God's judgment and how real it is?

These are just a small sample of the verses that clearly teach judgment. However, many of the clearest

judgment verses appear in the New Testament. This fact certainly does not agree with the idea that judgment is separate from the new-covenant² idea of God's grace. God's grace is also clearly taught in the New Testament. What this should teach us is that we must understand grace and judgment as truths that work together with each other. To separate one from the other is to misunderstand the fullness of the gospel that we studied last week.



Judgment and salvation are woven together from Genesis to Revelation.

MONDAY—JANUARY 23**JUDGMENT AND GRACE IN EDEN
(Genesis 3)**

Before sin, there was no need of grace because there was nothing to forgive, nothing to pardon, nothing to cover. It is the same with judgment. Before sin, there was nothing to judge, nothing to condemn (find guilty), nothing to punish. Both grace

2. covenant—promise or agreement between God and His people.

and judgment arise because of our sin at the Fall.

Read Genesis 3, the story of the Fall. In what ways are both themes, that of judgment and grace, shown here?

Satan succeeded in bringing sin into the world. It changed everything as a result. And as soon as Adam and Eve fell, the Lord came looking for them. He called out, “Where are you?” This question does not mean that the Lord came to accuse them. Instead, it is an invitation from the Lord to the fallen couple to come back to Him as the One who created and loved them. It was a call to them to turn away from Satan and return to their Maker.

Notice, too, what happens. The first few lines from the mouth of God in this fallen world are questions (read Genesis 3:9, 11, 13). Then the first thing God does after He is finished with His questioning is to announce His judgment against Satan. But next, even with His judgment against the serpent, what does God say in verse 15?

Verse 15 is the first gospel promise. As soon as God declares His judgment against Satan, He gives the first message of grace and salvation for sinners. And only then, only after that gospel promise, does God announce His judgments against the woman and the man. Adam and Eve might have fallen, but the first things God gives them are hope and grace. Even before judgment, the promise of grace is given for those who will accept it.

It is too late for Satan. His destruc-

tion is sure to happen. But there, even before the judgments were passed on to the man and the woman, God makes His grace known.

In this way, at the beginning of fallen human history, a relationship between sin, judgment, and God’s grace comes forth. God must judge and give punishment for sin. But the promise of grace is always there, always available for those who will accept it for themselves.

In what ways might the Lord be saying to you, “Where are you?” What are you doing that makes you hide from Him? Why is understanding grace a very important first step in listening to His call to come closer to Him and away from Satan?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 24

THE FLOOD (Genesis 6:14–22)

Critics of the Bible talk a lot about the fact that other civilizations during Bible times also had their own flood stories. They argue that the Bible story is not special or even true. Instead, they say that it is just a copy of some past tale or legend.

On the other hand, those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God believe that these stories are proof that the Flood was real. The Flood happened, and Genesis gives us the true record of it. This story stands opposed to the other flood stories, such as the one that says that gods sent the Flood because humans and

their nightly feasting made too much noise and bothered the gods' sleep. Because of this, the gods became cranky from lack of rest and sent the Flood to punish the humans.

What reason does the Bible story of the Flood in Genesis 6:5 give for the judgment that was to happen soon upon the earth?

The idea of people becoming so evil that they deserved death and destruction should not be that hard to understand. It is especially easy for us to understand this idea today in a world where evil just gets worse and worse. The Christian view of human sinfulness is proven again and again by the evil that happens in the world. It just goes to show that we can do many good deeds, but good works do not make us good. After all, American mobster Al Capone³ loved children. He also was very generous and giving. And he treated his friends kindly. But who would call him a good man?



By building the ark, Noah was giving the world a warning about the coming judgment.

Even with the promise of coming judgment, how is God's grace shown in the Flood story in Genesis 6:14–22? Read also 2 Peter 2:5.

By building the ark, Noah was giving the world a warning about judgment. This means that while the ark was being built, there was still a chance for the world to turn from its evil ways and accept God's salvation. Ellen G. White wrote that "if the people before the Flood had believed the warning and repented [turned away] from their evil actions, the Lord would not have sent the Flood."—Adapted from *Patriarchs [Leaders and Forefathers] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 97. The building of the ark offered an escape from the coming destruction. There was no question that judgment was coming! But until the end, grace was offered to all who would accept it. And then the door of mercy was shut.



Until the Flood came, grace was offered to all who would accept it. And then the door of mercy was shut.

3. Al Capone—a famous gangster in the 1920s who spent some time at Alcatraz prison for his crimes.

How often has God shown His grace to you? More times than you can count, probably. How can you learn to better surrender to that grace and let it change you into the image of Christ?

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 25

CONDEMNATION (BEING FOUND GUILTY) AND GRACE (John 3:17–21)

Almost everyone knows John 3:16. But what comes afterward gives a clearer picture and explains this verse even better.

What does John 3:17–21 say about judgment? About grace? How do these verses show us how grace and judgment work together?

The word translated as “condemn” in verse 17 also means “judge.” Clearly, the meaning here is condemnation (judgment). God has made it clear in many other verses of the Bible that the world will be judged.

Two themes appear in these verses, grace and judgment. They are closely connected (related). Sin, darkness, and evil have brought the need for a God of justice to judge and punish these crimes. But, at the same time, God’s grace offers those who are guilty a way out. And that way out comes by faith in Jesus Christ.

He who believes in Jesus is not condemned (judged). That is what the verses say. It is that simple. Christ’s perfect character (holy life) covers each

believer, so that each believer stands without condemnation (guilt), now and in the judgment.

What reason do the verses in John 3:17–21 give for condemnation?

According to these verses, the condition of sinners is that of condemnation (being judged guilty). That is because all have sinned, and all deserve the death that sin brings. These verses clearly do not teach the idea that, after the Cross, all people were automatically saved. Instead, they teach that after the Cross, the whole guilty world was now offered salvation through the forgiving and cleansing death of Jesus Christ. This death is enough to save every person on earth who accepts it. Yes, everyone stands guilty. But everyone who, through the grace of Christ, accepts the gift offered, stands pardoned, is made righteous (free from guilt), and is saved through Jesus. The condemnation (punishment) that was theirs is canceled because Jesus paid the price for their sins. Those who accept Him stand under the cover of His perfect character.

Just as the idea of condemnation suggests judgment, so does the idea of grace. The idea of grace itself requires the idea of condemnation. So, it is even more important to understand how grace and judgment are connected.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 26

THE HOUR OF HIS JUDGMENT (Matthew 10:26)

When we think about all that is wrong in the world, it is not hard to understand the coming judgment and the idea of condemnation (punishment). One does not have to be a believing Christian to understand that something is horribly wrong with people. Who can fail to realize what a terrible mess we have made of things? Maybe we cry so hard at birth because we know what is coming. A poet wrote, "I cried when I was born and every day shows why." We can understand this feeling because every one of us has been the victim of greedy, selfish, and mean people. But maybe we ourselves have been greedy, selfish, and mean at times too.

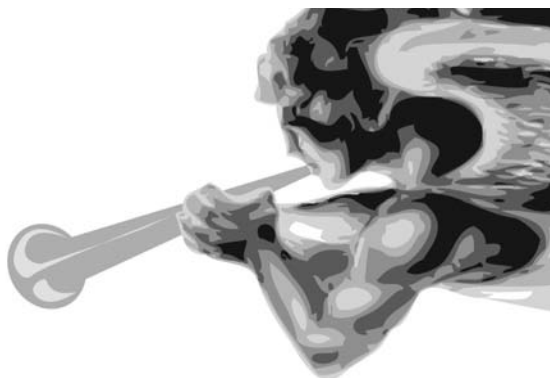
So, if God is just (sinless), who among us would stand innocent before Him? The Lord knows even our secret things, our secret actions (Ecclesiastes 12:14). What chance would even the best among us have on the day of judgment, when all these things will be made known?

But our God is also a God of grace. The whole plan of salvation was established so that every human could be saved from the condemnation that God's justice would require. Without grace, we would all be destroyed by God's justice. As sinners our only hope to be saved from the anger of a sinless God is His love and grace.

Read the first angel's message in Revelation 14:6, 7. How do these verses show the connection (relationship) between God's justice and His grace? What do they have in common with the verses

in Genesis 3 that show the relationship between grace and judgment?

How interesting it is to note that before the angel warns that the "hour of His judgment has come" (NKJV), the angel is preaching the "everlasting gospel." The warning has to come before the judgment. If not, the judgment would condemn (judge and destroy) all people. No one would have a chance because everyone has sinned. All have broken God's law. Here, in the last warning message to the world, God's grace is preached. If not, judgment would condemn (judge and punish) everyone without excusing anyone. Without grace, what message would we have for the world except that God is going to destroy us all and that there is no hope of escape? But we are fortunate (blessed) because God's last warning message to the world begins with the "everlasting gospel."



Before the warning of the final judgment, the first angel of Revelation 14 preaches the gospel.

What part are you playing in helping to spread this message of grace and judgment to others? What more could you do to help spread it? Whatever you are doing, you could be doing more, right?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 27

ADDITIONAL STUDY: How do grace and judgment work together? Here is how Ellen G. White puts it:

“Jesus is begging for the people under His grace. But Satan blames them before God as law-breakers. Satan tries to lead God’s people into doubt. Satan also tries to cause them to lose faith in God, to separate themselves from His love, and to break His law. Then Satan points to the record of their lives and to their character weaknesses, and how unlike Christ they are. He says they have dishonored their Savior. Satan points to all the sins that he has tricked them to do. Because of these, Satan claims them as people under his control.

“Jesus does not excuse their sins. But He shows their repentance [sorrow for sins] and faith. And He claims that they have been forgiven. He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying, I know them by name. I have engraved them [written their names] on the palms of My hands.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War Between Christ and Satan]*, page 484.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① How does the above quote help you to understand the part of grace in the judgment? How does Ellen G. White describe God’s faithful people? Why is that important?

② Imagine standing before God with everything you have ever done, good and bad, laid open to view. How well would you do? Would you be able to stand before God on the basis of your good acts? Do you really think that your acts would be enough to put you in good standing with your Maker? How does your answer help you to understand the need of grace?⁴

③ What is the dangerous spiritual trap of thinking that we do not have to worry about what we do because we are saved by grace? How can you protect yourself from falling into that trap?

④ People sometimes warn us about “cheap grace.” This is when people try to use grace as an excuse to sin. But grace is not cheap—it is free! What examples of the false idea of “cheap grace” can be seen in the Christian world? Or even in our own church?

SUMMARY: God is a God of justice. And justice requires judgment. God is also a God of grace. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we preach the three angels’ messages. So, it is important for us to understand both these truths and what they show us about our God.

4. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.