

Trusting God  
*“Thou Shalt Not Judge...”*  
Genesis 19:23-29

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**God as Judge**

And so we come to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. There may have been a time when this story was regularly told and preached upon. That is long gone. Why? Because this is about God as Judge.

As Abraham put it in the previous story, “You are the Judge of all the earth.” And God IS the Judge of all the earth. Every week, we bear witness to this in the Apostles Creed when we say, I believe in Jesus Christ...who will come to judge the living and the dead.” So we say we believe in the God who will judge all people, but we downplay this.

I’ve even heard people say something like this: “The God of the Old Testament is judgmental and severe. I believe in the God of the New Testament!” The only problem with that is that there aren’t two God’s one of the Old Testament and one of the New. It’s the same God! Furthermore, those who say this must not have read the New Testament which has a fair amount of God as Judge, too. Listen to this, the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 9:27:

*“Humankind is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,”*

Or listen to these words from Jesus:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (Matthew 23:27)

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? (Matthew 23:33)

I don't have time for the picture of the final judgment in Revelation. The point is that there's as much of God as Judge in the New Testament as the Old.

Let's face it. We're uncomfortable with this whole judgment thing. Especially when we encounter this story: Abraham stands at the place where he and God had their little prayer-session. Before him, as he gazes into the area below him in the valley, he sees the smoke of judgment rising up. Sodom has been destroyed.

Just the day before, he pleaded with God not to bring judgment on Sodom if only 10 righteous people could be found in it. God agreed! But when the angels went into Sodom, it turned out that there were only four who can be rescued – Lot and his family – and they were so messed up that they had to be forced to leave! So God exercised judgment.

God as Judge... This isn't something we're very comfortable with. It's as though we're embarrassed by this kind of story in the Bible. We like the references to God as the God of love, as the savior, as the redeemer. We see evidence, so much evidence, of God's patience and mercy – how God forgives. Then we come to these stories and have a hard time reconciling the love of God and God as the Judge of all the earth. Didn't Jesus say, "Thou shalt not judge?" So why is God judging?

The thought is that this kind of thing is unworthy of God's character – it can paint a picture of a God who is touchy and capricious, who loses his temper and delights in punishing sinners. Furthermore, there is all kinds of evidence throughout history of people who see God in this light exacting the same kind of judgment on others and we want nothing to do with that.

### **And Yet...**

But is there something here that we miss if we don't think and pray it through?

Indeed. I think there is. God is the Judge of all the earth and that's a good thing, not a bad thing when we understand it correctly.

Let me get one part of this clear right away. Neither here nor anywhere else, is God ever presented as one who delights in judgment. Nor does God seek to punish. Neither is God capricious, or touchy, or out of control, like people in our experiences who ARE addicted to rage or judgmentalism. When you look at the actual story, it's clear that God is careful, and not eager for this. It's more a necessary act, not a flippant one.

Let's get one other thing cleared up – God isn't judging Sodom for mere sin or sinfulness alone. We all have that – God brings judgment on Sodom because the city as a whole had crossed over a line into something beyond sin and into wholesale evil. They had crossed over into something that was dangerous for everyone and everything in creation around them.

While we're at it – don't make the mistake of believing that there's one particular sin that is the cause for all this – let the Bible itself interpret what the evil was here:

*"Now this was the sin of Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.<sup>50</sup> They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen."*  
EZE 16:49

We see the seriousness of the way the entire culture of Sodom had crossed over a line with God by this: the whole city – all the people gathered at Lot's house and all of them had a clear design to assault and brutalize the visitors who are under the protection of Lot. We know the visitors are angels, but the people of Sodom see them as things to be abused for sake of pleasure.

The culture of Sodom was so messed up that they dehumanized people and were so turned in on themselves that they were willing to destroy others for fun and sport.

Lot had become so affected by this that he offered his daughters as a substitute for the visitors! Talk about morally confused. Lot and his family are caught up in the evil even as they live in the middle of it as part of God's covenant people.

This was going too far, and God, through the angels decides to act decisively.

**So...**

When we see this more carefully, we can see some things about God as the Judge of all the earth that are good.

- **God alone is Judge** – neither Abraham nor Lot are asked to engage in the work of judgment. Neither are we. When Jesus says you shall not judge, he's not referring to God, he's referring to us. We are never ever to pass judgment on others.
  - There have been times when Christians have thought it was okay to pass this kind of judgment on others and it has never ever been right, and it has never been what God wanted.
  - God can handle the job of judge. You and I can't.
- **God is just** – God is fair. God will judge according to the goodness of which he alone is the source. God can be counted on to be much more fair than we are with ourselves or are with other people.
- **God is protecting, not punishing** – God is protecting the rest of creation and Abraham's family in particular from an evil that could have destroyed his work of redemption.
- **The Judge is also the Savior** – Let's go forward to the cross. The cross of Christ is the judgment seat of God at which God finally judged the sin of the world. The Judge is also the savior. And note the verse in I Peter 3:18-19 that indicates that Jesus went and proclaimed the Gospel of forgiveness to those who had died in judgment before his coming. God is gracious and just, and is the savior, even in the midst of that judgment.

### **A Dream of Justice**

We all long for and dream of justice – of everything one day being set to rights. Of all the loose ends being tied up and fairness extended to all – the powerless and the powerful, the wicked and the innocent – all being brought to a place of setting to rights.

The promise of God is that, one day, the Lord Jesus – the Savior, will take care of this; it will be fair, it will be good, and it will be final. Until that day, the Lord is patient and merciful, but is still the Judge of all the earth. We are never to put ourselves in that role. But we are also not to deny that God knows just how to do it right. The God of all mercy and grace is also the God of justice.

Once there was a teenager in Los Angeles who was in the habit of driving his first car on just enough gas to get where he needed to go. It was a 55 Chevy! What a car! But he only had enough money in his pocket to keep the gauge just above empty. Remember when .75 could buy three gallons of gas? And how three gallons would only get you about 30 miles?

Well, late one night, this teenager was driving on the L.A. Freeway and ran out of gas right at the top of an exit ramp. A car pulled up behind him and an older man in a gray suit with white hair got out and said, “So, you ran out of gas. You know, that’s dangerous! You shouldn’t drive around on empty all the time. You could stall out and get hit.” Then he said, “Come on, I’ll push you into the gas station at the bottom of the exit ramp.” This was accomplished. Then the teenager was pleased and surprised to have the older gentleman then get out of his car and pay for filling his tank up to the brim. A full tank! Then he came over and said. “Listen. I’m a city Judge. This time I’m filling your tank up. But if I ever catch you in my court for running out of gas and getting in an accident – I’ll fine you triple.”

The whole world is accountable to God, who will bring justice either in this life or in the life to come.

Those who have given their life to God in faith will be accountable for how they invest their life here. Those who reject faith in Christ will be held accountable for their rebellion.

Yet the God to whom we are all accountable is the God of all love. That love accepts us where we are, but loves us too much to leave us there.

And he walks with us in grace to bless the world through us.

I know few truths more hopeful than this... It means that our history – your history – is moving toward a goal measured by the purposes of God, who is good.