

Explore: Wondering about judgment?

October 17, 2013

The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 3 focuses on John 7:53-8:59.

I remember several years ago, while I was a youth pastor in Austin, working hard to prepare a Bible study for our group. This particular Bible study was about God's judgment. I forget the specific passage of Scripture, but I know I was making an honest attempt at presenting God's wrath in all its glory.

I asked the students the same question presented in our Bible study this week: "Should we fear God's judgment?" One sweet, innocent, young lady said, "If we believe in Jesus, and he forgives all our sins, then we shouldn't really have to worry about the judgment, right?" And with that, our Bible study was just about over.

God will bring his judgment. The Old Testament often refers to this as the "great and terrible" Day of the Lord. From a worldly perspective, it will be awful. We learn from the book of Revelation that Christ will come in judgment to rid the world of evil. He will do this for at least two purposes. First, he will come in wrath because he cannot stand evil. He is completely just and holy, and extinguishing evil will bring him the honor and glory due his name. The other reason for eliminating evil is to prepare a place for his true believers to live free from all the horrors of evil we live with today.

No condemnation

The truth is that we as believers have absolutely no reason to fear judgment. I say this based on Scriptures such as Romans 8:1: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

For followers of Christ, we have moved into a different system all together. We are not judged and condemned. We are accepted as the adopted children of God. When we get out of line, our Father disciplines us because of his great love and for our own good. God's discipline is different from God's wrath. Like the young lady in that Bible study class years ago, we need to realize our eternal love and acceptance by the Father is guaranteed. We did not earn his grace because of our good deeds, and we cannot lose it because of our sin.

What Jesus is talking about in our Scripture this week really is his being the ultimate Judge. He still was working to show the religious leaders his true identity. Frankly, Jesus was growing weary of listening to these people who had set themselves up as jury and judge over God's people. Their judgments were off base for several reasons. They had no authority, no integrity and no real knowledge of the people they were presiding over.

By contrast, God has all the characteristics necessary to be the judge. First, he is the authority. He created this world and the rules of this world. The rules of this world are a direct reflection of his character. His holiness is the standard by which this world will be judged. Jesus Christ is "the truth" (John 14:6). There is no other standard.

God knows all things

Second, God knows all things. This is a very important aspect of God's judgment. God knows all our deep, intimate, personal thoughts. By way of illustration, I recently was talking with some members of our church about discussion boards on websites. Someone made the point that after they read an article on an online news or sports site, they normally read through some of the comments about that story.

Many times these comments are very rude and can border on inappropriate. A thought then hit me during the discussion. We should put

ourselves in God's place for a moment. We get disturbed by a few comments on a website, but God knows all our thoughts. He knows all the thoughts of all people all the time. That is very overwhelming. But one thing is for sure; no one is more qualified to judge the hearts of people than the God who sees all and knows all.

And, third, God judges this world with a purpose. God has his own glory in mind in all the decisions and judgments made. He does not judge just to be mean or in any random fashion. As I mentioned earlier, when he brings his ultimate judgment, it will be in order to rid this world of evil. The people who remain will have made their choice to love God with all their hearts, minds and strength.

I believe, though, we should come back to the original question: Should we fear the judgment? The clear answer is that we have no reason to fear because Jesus Christ already has taken our judgment on himself in the cross. However, that does not mean we have nothing to do in light of God's coming wrath.

First, we should worship the God who is in control of all things. And second, we must tell the world about the good news that is the gospel. God's judgment should cause an urgency within God's people to share their faith.