

Sermon: JUDGMENT

Why does God judge the people God created and loves? If God is a loving God, why does God judge God's people so harshly?

It is true. God's judgment can be shocking. From the Bible, we know of the brutal events of judgment, such as the destruction of the Canaanites, a global flood, the exile of Israel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the fall of the Babylonians. All were ordained by God.

In the book of the Prophet Amos, God told the nation of Israel, "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword. I filled your nostrils

with the stench of death in your camps.” (Amos 4:10)

When we hear these words, we struggle to reconcile a loving God with one who judges and punishes, especially one who judges and punishes God’s own people. We cast our own judgment. “How dare God do that! God is so wrong and unloving!” We judge God for the way God judges us.

God’s actions are undeniable and right there in black and white, printed in the pages of the Bible. I urge you to not explain away or soften the judgment of God, no matter how harsh and brutal. Do not excuse God; allow the character of God to stand up to our questioning.

Before we cast God in the role of angry punisher, let's ask some questions.

Who is the judge behind the judgment? When you hear the word “judgment,” what comes to mind? A high-profile court case decided by a jury? A disapproving family member with impossibly high standards? In today's environment, the word judgment carries some extremely negative connotations. We typically go out of our way to avoid being labeled as judgmental.

But the Bible does not cast us in the role of the ultimate judge. That role is reserved exclusively for God.

So, before we ask our questions of why does God judge this

way, we have to begin by asking, “Who is God?”

God is not a human jury, weighed down by preconceived notions of justice or flexible standards of fairness. God is not the disapproving family member who judges others in order to elevate himself or herself. God is divinely free, free from the hindrances of our human failures. God’s judgement is God’s, not ours.

So, our understanding of God’s judgment must be grounded in the very attributes of who God is. An attribute is something that is true about God. From the Bible, we know that God is self-existent, immutable, infinite, eternal, self-sufficient, omniscient, wise, omnipresent transcendent, faithful, steadfast,

good, just, merciful, gracious,
loving, holy and sovereign.

God is all these and more and simultaneously, all at the same time. If we truly seek to understand God's judgment, we must unpack the character of the judge, of God. God's judgment is God's and God's alone. It is not our judgment.

Is judgment really a part of God's character? In exploring God's character, we must separate God's actions from God's attributes. Judgment and wrath are not considered attributes of God. They are not necessarily fundamental elements of God's character. But, in the face of injustice, a just God casts judgment. Confronted by unholiness, a holy God responds.

God's responses are never random. In God's judgment, God remains fully faithful, merciful, gracious and loving. God is fully God in every moment, even in judging.

True to God's character, God delivers justice for the poor and needy. God even extends mercy to the guilty.

In every ounce of rendering judgment, God calls to God's people to return. God's character never wavers. God wants us to come back, to return to God.

We may accept that God's character is perfect, but we do struggle when God's judgment feels extreme. Why does God

judge the very people God
claims to love?

On the surface, we may believe that a God without judgment is a God of love. But when we really consider all the evils of the world, no one wants a God who simply looks the other way.

No one wants a God who casts the victim aside and looks at the perpetrator and says, “I need you to be a little nicer.” That is not loving or fair.

When we see the evils of the world, we want justice. We want a God who is both gracious and just. A God who judges evil even while offering grace to the perpetrators. We want loving justice and we want love that is just.

As humans, we are too flawed to do what we want of God. We are too flawed to offer a perfect blend of love and justice. It is impossible. Only God can accomplish it.

And in God's mercy, God did accomplish justice with Jesus' death on the cross. The cross is where this whole issue of judgment, mercy and accountability comes to a conclusion.

God's ultimate judgment for humanity's evil rained down. But it rained down not on us, but on God in the person of Jesus. In that moment God was condemned that we might be set free. God dies so we might live.

God's perfect love and perfect justice collided, resulting in eternal grace for all who believe.

So perhaps God is challenging us to ask a new question. Instead of asking, "Why does God judge the people God loves?" maybe we should ask, "Can I trust the One who judges?"

That question forces us to reflect on God's full character and encourages us to honestly seek to know God. We discover that only God can deliver true justice. And God does so in perfect love.