

II THESSALONIANS 1:6-10
ETERNAL DESTINIES!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to II Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study through Paul's second letter to the church in Thessalonica! Keep in mind that this church, as well as all those who had come to Christ, were suffering persecution, some more than others.

And for the church in Thessalonica, the fire of persecution was heavy upon them! And because of that we see Paul open up this second letter to this persecuted church with ***ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING!*** And really, that is the focus of II Thessalonians chapter 1.

And in our last study we looked at the topic of ***HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN GROW?*** And I know that this is not easy, but we saw that our faith grows by adding persecution, tribulation, difficulties.

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. New believers must expect their faith to be tried, because this is the way God proves whether or not their decision is genuine. Faith, like a muscle, must be exercised to grow stronger. Tribulation and persecution are God's way to strengthen our faith."

And think about it. How many of us like to exercise? Not many because it is hard, it is painful, it is work! We do like the effects of exercise on our body, on our endurance but it is not fun!

The same is true with our faith and our growing in the Lord. We don't like the tribulation. We don't like the persecution. But we do like the effects of these things on our lives as we get through them and grow in the Lord.

Thus, encouragement is great, it is helpful because it causes us to continue on and not give up. I know with running, that is how it is with me. I look for the encouragement to keep going, to push harder so I can get faster.

And with our faith, we do the same. We look for that encouragement to spur us on, to help us not to give up! And as we move forward, our faith will grow, we will grow as Christians!

Thus, we saw last time that suffering, persecution, tribulation in our lives helps our ***FAITH TO GROW!*** It helps our ***TESTIMONY TO GROW!*** It helps our ***PATIENCE TO GROW!*** And we concluded by looking at how ***SUFFERING MAKES US INTO THE MAN OR WOMAN THAT GOD WANTS US TO BE!***

Now let me also say this. It is easy to lose sight of things when we are in the midst of some very difficult things. So, as Paul explained the importance of difficult situations in our lives, he also wants to give them a correct perspective of things.

I think it is easy to lose that perspective, wondering what in the world is God doing, does He love me, does He care for me, what's the use, it doesn't help. We are going to be dealing with these things this morning so that we do have a correct perspective of things so we don't drop out, we don't stop walking in the faith!

I have called this study ***ETERNAL DESTINES!*** And keep in mind that here in chapter 1 of II Thessalonians the focus is ***ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING***, and that is exactly what Paul is doing by giving these believers the correct perspective on the situation!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in II Thessalonians chapter 1, beginning in verse 6 as we see Paul encourage these believers in Thessalonica who were going through some very tough times in their young Christian lives!

II THESSALONIANS 1**VERSE 6**

Here we see the judgment of God upon those who are coming against His people, you and me.

Now, in saying that, please do not come to the conclusion that we are to be happy that this judgment is coming down upon them. We are not to rejoice in their destruction. I know, there are some who feel, “Good riddance, they are out of the way. They only got what they deserved!”

First of all, the Bible says that God gets no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants them to turn from their wicked ways and live.

Secondly, if you are praying for God to give them what they deserve, let me ask you this. Does God give you what you deserve? Absolutely not. He extends His grace to you and that grace gift is found in Jesus!

Yes, for those who have rejected Him, those who are persecuting His children, they will face His judgment. But we do not rejoice in that.

In fact, we should do everything possible to see these enemies of God come to saving faith that they can escape the judgment of God!

But, when you start speaking of the judgment of God, it is not a popular topic today, even in the church. One writer put it like this. He wrote,

The judgment of God is not a popular topic today. The dogma of our society is *tolerance*. The postmodern outlook argues that all beliefs are valid and no one should judge another because of his or her philosophical ideas. In essence, there is no right or wrong, so everyone's thoughts should be accepted. Of course, when the Christian view is presented, many of these "tolerant" people hypocritically recoil at the thought of having to entertain any kind of biblical view.

To the postmodern mind, God, if He exists at all, must be a God of love, accepting any and every lifestyle. He cannot be a God of judgment, only mercy. Justice cannot be pursued, because that just would not be fair. The topic of this chapter shows how God's Word runs counter to what permeates our present culture. Every Bible believer must take great care to accept the authority of the Scriptures (Matt. 5:17-19; 24:35; John 10:35; 2 Tim. 3:16) and not allow the culture to dictate what he or she believes.

- Mike Stallard, *First & Second Thessalonians*, p. 143

First of all, you cannot pick and choose the attributes of God you like and put aside the ones you don't like. It does not work that way. Yes, God is a God of love but He is also a God of justice and to negate the justice of God would make Him unjust!

Listen again to what Paul said in II Thessalonians 1:4-5, "**so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.**"

God's judgements are right, they are fair, never forget that. Nobody who rejects Jesus is going to be able to stand before God when the judgments are placed upon them and say, "God, that is not fair!" It will be perfect for the sins you have done in your life, not more, not less, but just what you did because you did not appropriate into your life Jesus. The One who paid in full for your sins, took the penalty for your sins, you turned from Him and thus, you stand before God in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags before Him!

Now how does this help me as a believer? Because, all that we face in this life. All the difficulty that comes upon us. All the injustice that we encounter. All the persecution that is perpetrated upon our lives, this is only temporary. In other words, this is as bad as it will ever get. What is ahead for us is good, it is perfect!

On the other hand, the unjust, those who have rejected Jesus as Lord and Savior, they might as well eat, drink and be merry because this is the best it will be for them. Judgment is coming!

Make no mistake about it, God will deal with those who are willfully ignorant of God. Paul spoke of these people in Romans 1:18-32 as he said, **"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed**

animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

The heavens declare the glory of God and for man to deny that God created the heavens and the earth shows that he is suppressing that which he knows to be true. Instead of worshiping God, they end up worshiping the creature or the creation! How crazy is that but they know the complexity of life and since they want to deny God, they have to worship that which God created instead of God Himself and that is what we see.

Also, we see that since they turned from God, God gave them over to uncleanness, lusting after each other, homosexual relationships, vile passions, women lusting after women, a debased mind, doing those things that are not fitting for God’s creation to do!

And we see the list of things that God gave them over to do and don't think God is forcing them to do these things. They have moved away from God and God allows them to deteriorate to the point of evil being the focus of their lives!

God will also deal with those who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus. It is as Jesus said in John 3:36, **“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”**

God has done everything possible to save sinful man, but man refuses to reach out to the hand of Jesus and come to that saving faith and God will not force man to come. It is a choice on his part.

And by God giving man a choice, it shows not only God's love for us, giving us a choice, but our love for God by turning to Him or how we hate Him by rejecting that gift of life that He has given to us in Jesus!

I realize that some don't see this as being fair. They want to do what they want and when they want and no one is going to tell them otherwise. They are getting into heaven because they are good, because of this or because of that! And if God is going to judge them because of that, then they don't want anything to do with an unfair God.

As I have said, God is not unfair, His judgment is completely fair, it is right, it is just because He is holy and there is no darkness in Him at all.

Let me illustrate it like this. Warren Wiersbe wrote,

A Christian doctor had tried to witness to a very moral woman who belonged to a church that denied the need for salvation and the reality of future judgment. “God loves me too much to condemn me,” the patient would reply. “I cannot believe that God would make such a place as a lake of fire.

The woman became ill and the diagnosis was cancer. An operation was necessary. “I wonder if I really should operate,” the doctor said to her in her hospital room. “I really love you too much to cut into you and give you pain.”

“Doctor,” said the patient, “if you really loved me, you would do everything possible to save me. How can you permit this awful thing to remain in my body?”

It was easy then for him to explain that what cancer is to the body, sin is to the world; and both must be dealt with radically and completely. Just as a physician cannot love health without hating disease and dealing with it, so God cannot love righteousness without hating sin and judging it”.

- Warren Wiersbe

Yes, we don’t like God dealing with our lives, but He does so because He loves us and He will do all that it takes for us to come to Him, to grow in Him. But He will not force you. It is your choice.

Now the Bible does say in Deuteronomy 32:35, **“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.”** And we see this quoted in the New Testament, in Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30.

Now let me ask you this. What do you think of when you hear the word, **“vengeance”**? If you are like most people, we look at this word from a human perspective. We think of getting even or even a little ahead of what someone did to us.

I remember when I was a kid there was that movie with Charles Bronson called “Death Wish!” And in the movie his daughter is raped, and I am not sure if she died or was in a coma, but the main character, Charles Bronson, goes after not only those who did this to his daughter but after all bad guys he can find.

And it is a violent movie. What was interesting was the fact that you were cheering for this guy who was getting vengeance on the bad guys. He was killing them left and right and the crowds went wild.

And when it comes to God, many see God responding in that way. You did this to Me, now I am going to get back at you, I am God! But there is a big problem with that concept. It is ***WRONG!***

You see, that is not what the Greek word for “vengeance” is saying. Heibert tells us, “The term does not contain the idea of human revenge but rather denotes infliction of full justice on a criminal, giving him all, but no more, than his guilt deserves.”

You see, in God’s judgment upon the wicked, they will get what they deserve for God’s judgment is fair, it is right!

Now some still wonder how God can be just and still be merciful and forgive sinners. If we are all sinners, then justice must be upon all. That is absolutely true!

Of this, A. W. Tozer writes:

[The] solution for the problem of how God can be just and still justify the unjust is found in the Christian doctrine of redemption. It is that, through the work of Christ in atonement, justice is not violated but satisfied when God spares a sinner. Redemptive theology teaches that mercy does not become effective toward a man until justice has done its work. The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ our Substitute died for us on the cross. However unpleasant this may sound to the ear of the natural man, it has ever been sweet to the ear of faith.

- A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 94

So here, in II Thessalonians 1:6 we see that the unjust will be punished. This persecution, the things we face because of our faith, will come to an end because they will be judged! That is the perspective we need to have.

And we need to understand that it is a righteous thing for God to judge sin and condemn sinners. God is holy and He cannot leave sin unjudged! The problem for most who struggle with this is that they don't understand the holiness of God or the awfulness of sin!

Now, in knowing that you might be thinking, "But what about me? What about all that I am going through. It is not easy. It is hard. I don't know if I can handle it!"

When we are in that condition, and I think we all go through it from time to time, we once again have lost the perspective of the situation. Let's read on and you will see what I mean.

VERSE 7

Here Paul speaks of rest from the persecution, rest from the tribulation that has come upon them and that rest is linked to the return of Jesus. It is His unveiling from heaven and every eye will see Him and He will come with His mighty angels and judge this earth and establish His Kingdom for 1,000 years!

The problem is the here and now. We understand what the future holds but what about now, what about what we are going through! It just doesn't seem fair!

Remember what Jesus said in John 16:33 in regard to the things we face now and where our peace is found. He said, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

And as you look at the history of the church, that is what they have faced and it is what we face today, tribulation from the world!

Our peace is found in Jesus and one day it will be established in this world, but not at this time!

So here, in II Thessalonians 1:7 Paul speaks of our rest when the Lord returns, a rest on this earth when the Millennial Kingdom is established.

There is also a final rest in the new heavens and the new earth as Revelation 21:4 tells us, **“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”**

And what do we have here and now? Do we have to wait until then for rest? The rest that Paul is speaking of here in II Thessalonians is for the future, not now.

As I have said, there is a rest we can enjoy now. Salvation brings us rest from the crushing weight of sin upon our lives.

Paul, in Hebrews 4:9-11 tells us, **“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”**

Thus, don't expect peace on this earth until the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom on this earth. Remember what Jesus said in John 16:33, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

As I have said, for us as Christians, this is the worst it will get. The rest we have in Jesus will be awesome but right now we do have tribulation, we have persecution for our faith, but one day, there will be none!

Now as we look at the world I think we can get down when we see the things that they are getting away with. And let me say this, we are not alone. Asaph, who wrote Psalm 73 struggled with this as well.

Listen to his perspective of things in Psalm 73:1-14 as Asaph tells us, **“Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’ Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.”**

Have you ever felt that way before? You look at the unsaved and it seems that everything is going well for them. They are prideful, arrogant, they have more than they could wish for, they mock God and they have it all!

On the other hand, Asaph saw himself as one who served the Lord, walked according to the things of God and yet he is plagued, he is chastened, what is up with that?

And as you go down that path it is easy to come to the wrong conclusions, as Asaph was doing. He almost stumbled, he almost was tripped up by what he was seeing and he goes on to say, **“If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’ Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me.”** Psalm 73:15-16.

It got so bad for Asaph that he could not even talk about God anymore. He could not figure out why all the bad was happening to him who served God and why all the good was happening to those who were at war with God, did not know him.

Now let me also say this. As we go down this path we begin to exaggerate what is really happening out in the world.

The wicked are not always prosperous. There are poor people and rich people who have rejected the Lord. So that is not true!

In death, it is not always easy for them. I have seen enough people die in my lifetime that the wicked do not die in peace many times.

Trouble, it seems to affect both the wicked and the saved!

And then we look at our own lives and we wonder, “God, how can you do this to me?”

Make no mistake about it, the things we are going through God is using to mold and shape our lives.

For Asaph, how did he get back on track? Listen carefully to how he got a clear perspective of things. In Psalm 73:17 Asaph said, “**Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.**”

He regained a correct perspective of the situation when he went into the house of God where he could worship God and have God speak to him through His Word!

If you have lost perspective of things then you need to get back into the Word of God, spend time in worship with God and you will receive the peace of God in your life. You will have a correct perspective of things.

For the wicked, they are not getting away with anything and we will talk more about that as we read on here in II Thessalonians.

Asaph goes on and explains how overwhelmed he was and then how he found rest in the Lord. In Psalm 73:18-28 Asaph tells us, **“Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, That I may declare all Your works.”**

What a great lesson for us to learn because it is easy to lose perspective of things. He saw that the wicked will not get away with anything, they will be judged. And for those who love the Lord, there is that rest that is found in Him. It is a rest, a peace that surpasses all understanding. It is not an absence of problems but a rest that is found in the Lord to see us through those tough times.

We pass through the valley of the shadow of death as David said in Psalm 23. We don't take up residence there but we pass through those dark, difficult times to get to the plateau where we find rest and refreshment before we go back through the valley once again!

Perspective is everything. D. L. Moody tells us,

It was my sad lot to be in the Chicago fire. As the flames rolled down our streets, destroying everything in their onward march, I saw the great and the honorable, the learned and the wise, fleeing before the fire with the beggar and the thief and the harlot. All were alike. As the flames swept through the city, it was like the judgment day. The Mayor, nor the mighty men, nor the wise men could stop these flames. They were all on a level then, and many who were worth hundreds of thousands were left paupers that night.

When the day of judgment comes there will be no difference. When the Deluge came there was no difference; Noah's ark was worth more than all the world. The day before it was the world's laughingstock, and if it had been put up to auction you could not have gotten anybody to buy it except for firewood. But the Deluge came, and then it was worth more than all the world together. And when the day of judgment comes Christ will be worth more than all this world - more than ten thousand worlds.

- D. L. Moody, Heartwarming Bible Illustrations

Judgment day is coming! Remember in the movie "The Terminator", Arnold said, "I'll be back!" Well folks, the Lord said it long before Arnold did and He is coming back to pour out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world and then He will set-up His Kingdom on this earth where He will rule and reign for 1,000 years!

Is that fair, God judging the world, those that have rejected Him? As I have said, God's judgment is right and it is fair.

You see, people have a choice, to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior and if you do you are cleansed of all your sins. If you reject Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the free gift of God, then you will face His judgment as you stand before God in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags!

You see, all evil will be judged and accounted for, either at the cross or in Hell!

Listen to what Paul says of this coming judgment upon the wicked.

VERSES 7b-9

So here we see the coming judgment for the wicked as the Lord returns and judges those **“who do not know God”** and upon those **“who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

First of all, Paul did not say that God is going to judge those who do not go to church, or those who don't tithe, or those who are not religious.

He says that God is going to judge those who have rejected Him, who refuse to come to Him, those who do not know Him!

There are many who know about Him but they truly don't know Him and it is evident that they don't know Him because they reject His gospel!

You see, the only sin that sends a person to Hell is their rejection of Jesus. I know, what about fornication, stealing, murder, lying, cheating, and-so-on? They will not send you to hell.

Let me explain. Jesus said in John 16:8-11 in speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit, **“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”**

You see, the sin that sends someone to Hell is their rejection of Jesus as their Lord and Savior because the only righteousness that God will accept is the righteousness of Christ.

Thus, Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:21, **“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”**

You see, our righteousness before God is like filthy rags, but by having faith in Jesus, by receiving Him as Lord and Savior the righteousness of Christ is imputed into our lives. If you reject that, then God will judge you!

Now what about all those other things like fornication and-so-on, those other sins? They don't send you to Hell, they only determine the degree of punishment in the Lake of Fire you will have for eternity!

In Revelation 20:11-15, at The Great White Throne Judgment, where God will judge unbelievers for their punishment, we are told, **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

God's judgment is coming and we await that Day for the evil will be removed and the knowledge of the Lord will fill this land!

And I do understand that there are some who don't believe in eternal punishment but listen again to what Paul said in II Thessalonians 1:9, "**These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.**"

One writer summed this idea of "**everlasting destruction**" like this. He wrote,

The apostle depicts the penalty as "eternal destruction" (1:9). "Eternal" (anionion) is the common word used throughout the New Testament in the expression *eternal life* (John 3:15-16; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2; I John 5:11-13). In this passage what is eternal, or of lasting duration, is not life but *destruction*: "Olethros ('destruction') does not refer to annihilation, but to ruination. It does not mean the cessation of existence but rather the loss of all that makes existence worthwhile (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9). The lost will not cease to exist but will experience forever a life of uselessness, hopelessness, emptiness, and meaninglessness, with no value, worth, accomplishment, purpose, goal, or hope. They will be ruined forever."

- Mike Stallard, First & Second Thessalonians, p. 150

This is an eternity apart from God, from His presence, and it is thus, eternal darkness for He is light. D. L. Moody said, "Any human being that goes to hell will be a trespasser there."

In other words, God did not create hell for man but for the devil and his demons. God has done everything possible to save man from his sin, from going there but you must receive that gift by faith!

Judgment is coming but you do not have to be judged! It is truly a choice that each person must make. To come and know God in a personal way by repenting of your sins and asking Jesus to be Lord and Savior of your life. By following His Gospel, which is just submitting your life to Him, obeying His Word which is just the fruit that is born in our lives as we abide in Christ!

And notice how Paul closes this section, with the coming reign of Jesus. Look at what Paul says in II Thessalonians 1:10.

VERSE 10

When who comes? When the Lord Jesus Christ comes, in that Day, He will be glorified by His saints, you and me! All of us who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation will be their honoring Him.

Think about this. As Poole wrote, “To raise up such a number of poor, sinful, despicable worms out of the dust into such a sublime state of glory and dignity, will be admirable.” (Poole)

On the other hand, we have those who have rejected Him, those “**who do not know God**” and those “**who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” And it is “**These [who] shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.**”

Now, many who have rejected Jesus feel that they are good enough to get into heaven. They have not killed anyone and they have helped plenty of people out. The only problem with that is this. Before God, a holy and righteous God, we are not good! None are good, not even one!

That is a tough one for many. Back in the 1980’s there was a bestselling book that dealt with this very issue.

This book, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People” was written by Rabbi Harold Kushner. Rabbi Kushner not only had to deal with tragedies within his own congregation of some 2,500 people, but he experienced it in his own life.

At the age of 3, his son Aaron was diagnosed with a condition called Progeria, which causes rapid aging. This child would look like an old man and would die in his teens which did occur only 2 days after his 14th birthday.

And Rabbi Kushner tried to understand why this was happening. He said, “. . . I was living a more religiously committed life than most people I knew, people who had large, healthy families. . . . If God existed, if He was minimally fair, let alone loving and forgiving, how could He do this to me?”

As he tried to understand why this was happening to him and his family, his perspective of God was becoming more and more distorted. As he saw the pain and suffering of those in his congregation over death and illness, he said that “. . . I find it very hard to tell them that life is fair, that God gives people what they deserve and need. Time after time, I have seen families and even whole communities unite in prayer for the recovery of a sick person, only to have their hopes and prayers mocked. I have seen the wrong people get sick, the wrong people hurt, the wrong people die young.”

Rabbi Kushner’s conclusions to why Job suffered, why he and his family have suffered, and why others suffer, is based upon a humanistic approach and not a Scriptural approach.

He said, “Are you capable of forgiving and loving God even when you have found out that He is not perfect, even when He has let you down and disappointed you by permitting bad luck and sickness and cruelty in His world, and permitting some of those things to happen to you? Can you learn to love and forgive Him despite His limitations, as Job does, and as you once learned to forgive and love your parents even though they were not wise, as strong, or as perfect as you needed them to be?”

The logical conclusion we must come to regarding God is that He is not perfect, He is not always able to help us, He can and will let us down at times, just as our parents have done and will do.

Thus, if God is not fair, that would make Him unrighteous. If He was unrighteous in the things that He does that would make Him a sinner, and thus, like all sinners, we are to forgive God for His failures, for His limitations, just as we forgive man for his failures and limitations.

There is so much wrong with that kind of thinking but when we find ourselves in difficult situations, it is amazing the conclusions we can come to that are not accurate!

To say that we are on equal levels with God is a tragic and big mistake. In Genesis 1:1 it does not say that “In the beginning *MAN* created the heavens and the earth.” But that God did the creating. He brought into existence something out of nothing, something that was previously not even in existence. Only God can create something out of nothing.

So, first of all, God is the creator and we are part of His creation. We must have the correct perspective first of all or we will be all messed up like Rabbi Kushner is.

Secondly, we can come up with all kinds of wrong conclusions about God if we base our perspective on humanistic ideas or feelings, like I have said.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told to draw our conclusions of God by our own feelings. You must go back to His guide book that shows us His true character, the Bible!

First of all, is God a holy and righteous God? Let’s see what His Word has to say and draw our conclusions from the truth instead of what man’s heart has to say.

First, listen to what John has to say about God in I John 1:5. He says, “**This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.**”

John is sharing with us the message he saw and heard from Jesus, that God is pure, that He is holy and you can't find any darkness in Him at all because *He is LIGHT!*

But sometimes it seems His actions are unfair. Again, let's go back to the Word of God and see what it says about the things that God does, are they fair or unfair?

In Psalm 145:17 we read, "**The LORD is righteous in all His ways, Gracious in all His works.**"

You mean to tell me that a child born with a birth defect, or a mom who dies of cancer, or a father who is killed by a drunk driver, is fair? I don't understand all the ways of God, nor does God expect me to understand them.

He only asks that we trust in Him. That we don't try to obtain a clear picture of Him by looking out into the world that He once created but now has been corrupted by sin. Thus, we can only go back to His Word, which gives us a clear picture of who God is, that all His actions are righteous, they are just. Even in His judgment of the wicked who will go into everlasting punishment apart from Him, He is just.

You see, there are no good people, just a good God who loves us and died for us so that we can live with Him. Sin separated us from God but Jesus came and paid in full the penalty for our sins so that His righteousness has been imputed into our lives by faith!

And if our righteousness has to be equal to the righteousness of Christ to get into heaven, to come before the Lord and fellowship with Him, which it does, we will never make it on our own!

Even in Job 4:17 we read, "**Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker?**"

Interesting point. If God is perfect, holy, and righteous, can we be better than that? The answer is obviously “No we can’t!” We can’t even come close to God’s holiness, perfection, righteousness.

Even Jesus made that point when the rich young ruler came by and called Him “**good teacher.**” Jesus responded by saying to this young man, “**Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.**”

Matthew 19:17.

Yes, Jesus is good because He is God! The point being, ***WE ARE NOT!*** As Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “**For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.**”

Paul has shown us the two ways a man can go and it is up to the individual which way he chooses.

Yes, the unjust will be punished for their sin and their treatment of God’s people.

Yes, the just will find rest when the Lord comes back but until then, there is tribulation in this world that has come upon believers, but our rest is in Him!

Yes, there is a coming day of judgment. That should spur us on to share our faith so that the unjust will become the just in Christ!

And there is coming a day when Jesus Christ will rule and reign from Jerusalem and we will glorify Him for all He has done!

This shows the difference between one destined for judgment and one destined for glory. The difference is belief in the message Paul preached (our testimony), the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I close this morning, let me share this story with you. We are told,

Did you hear about the boy who failed all his college work? He wired his mother: “Failed everything; Prepare Papa.” His mother wired back, “Papa prepared; Prepare yourself.”

This is the message a lot of us need in view of the coming judgment. God is prepared. We need to prepare ourselves!

- A Treasury of Bible Illustrations

Make no mistake about it. Today is the day of salvation. And when you die, the day of salvation is over and there won't be any more chances to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

That is why Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5:11, “**Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.**”

The Living Bible puts this verse like this, “**It is because of this solemn fear of the Lord, which is ever present in our minds, that we work so hard to win others. God knows our hearts, that they are pure in this matter, and I hope that, deep within, you really know it too.**”

May we as Christians not harden our hearts to the lost but share the love of Christ with them. Yes, they don't deserve it, but neither did we and look at the grace and mercy of God towards us. May we extend that to the lost to see them come into the Kingdom of God!

And for those who don't know Jesus, are not born again, don't pass this day up. Judgment is coming and are you prepared to meet your Maker?