



2 Corinthians 5:9-11
We Will Be Judged

Summary: We know we face the judgment of a holy God; therefore, we aim to live well and persuade others while trusting Christ.

Sometimes you come to church and you listen to the pastor speak, but you're not really sure: what is he saying, and how does this apply to me? That's because everyone's life is a little different and we all have different things we're facing but there's only one God – so, sometimes the sermon doesn't really speak to your current circumstances but it absolutely nails the person behind you. And the next week it doesn't hit them so hard, but it feels like the pastor was reading your email while preparing for the sermon. That happens – not the reading your email part – but the fact that some sermons hit a little closer to home than others.

This week though, I can guarantee, the stuff we cover will touch everyone - because we're dealing with something everyone will face – the judgment of God. It's some heavy stuff, not the kind of thing most people choose to think or talk about, but it's important so today we're going to dive in deep.

I'll get right to the point and ask – are you ready to face God's judgment?

Are you ready to die? I mean, right now.

Don't get too weirded out – I don't have anything particular in mind, but I know this, we think death is out there somewhere, off in the distance, we're not sure when, or where, but it rarely ever seems like something here and now.

And yet, how many people get advance notice of their death? Accidents happen. Disease happens. Violence, whether criminal or terrorist happens. On the roads, at work, in our schools and movie theaters, at church. I told you all, this is heavy stuff, but death is coming for each of us – and you probably won't know when.

So, are you ready? Are you ready right now, with no additional preparation, to face God and endure His holy inspection of your life?

Or, let me ask it like this: if you knew you had five days to live, what would you need to do to prepare?

And to make it easy, let's say your life insurance is good and you've taken care of all the details of a will and final wishes. Just consider your relationships and the condition of your soul – are you ready, right now, to face God? And if not, what do you need to do? I'm not

trying to scare anyone, but I am trying to prepare you for reality – the day will come when each of us will face the judgment of God. Alone. Are you ready?

Read the passage with me:

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. **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.

If I could sum all that up for you, I'd say it like this: We know we face the judgment of a holy God, therefore we aim to live well and persuade others while trusting Christ.

So, I want to do two things with the remainder of our time together this morning – I want to try to understand this judgment we face and how we should live in light of it.

First, the judge and the judgment.

You might have noticed, Paul says he is motivated by knowledge of **the terror of the Lord**. Your Bible might say the fear of the Lord. The original Greek word underneath our English translations is *phobos* from which we get phobia. So, yes, it does mean a **fear of the Lord**.

And that's an odd thing to think about, isn't it? We often think of God as love. God is soft and cuddly like a big teddy bear. God is a warm hug. God is kind, maybe even a little mushy and soft in our minds. But not in Scripture. Scripture presents God as both merciful and terrible - awesome, worthy of holy fear and reverence. Jesus is both the Lamb of God and the Lion of Judah. We need to hold on to both of those ideas and live in the tension between the two.

How do we do that? Well, consider this – when a man or woman stands before a judge, they are not usually afraid of him or her physically. She may be sitting there, quietly, with a black robe, it's hard to know exactly how tall she is, how strong she is, it's not her physicality that intimidates – it's the power of her judgment. What will happen when she renders the verdict? She doesn't have to raise her voice or shake her fist or engage in any kind of theatrics or hysterics, her judgment alone is enough to cause terror.

Now, to be clear, I think it is good that we think of God as someone we can approach, we spent months in Hebrews learning exactly that: we are able to approach a holy God. But, I think we're weak in our understanding of the holiness and righteousness and purity of God, I think we have gained a sense of approachability and familiarity and lost a sense of solemn awe. And I really do think it's a loss.

We often ask how could a good God let bad things happen? But we almost never ask, how could a holy God allow sinners to keep rebelling and defying Him?

So, let's consider the judgement of God. We're going to look at a lot of Scripture as we do because I want you to know two things – one, all this talk about judgement comes from God. It's all in the Bible. Pastors and preachers and parents didn't make this stuff up to control or persuade people. And number two, God has a *lot* to say about the subject.

If you're taking notes the first thing I'll point out is that the judgment of God is dreadful. According to **Hebrews 10:31** *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

The Old Testament prophets refer to the day of God's judgment as the **day of the LORD**. Zephaniah for example, describes it like this:

Zephaniah 1:14 *The great day of the LORD is near;
It is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter;
There the mighty men shall cry out.*

*15 That day is a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,*

*16 A day of trumpet and alarm
Against the fortified cities
And against the high towers.*

*17 "I will bring distress upon men,
And they shall walk like blind men,
Because they have sinned against the LORD;
Their blood shall be poured out like dust,
And their flesh like refuse."*

*18 Neither their silver nor their gold
Shall be able to deliver them
In the day of the LORD's wrath;
But the whole land shall be devoured
By the fire of His jealousy,
For He will make speedy riddance
Of all those who dwell in the land.*

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the day of God's judgement like this:

Isaiah 9:9 *Behold, the day of the LORD comes,
Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,
To lay the land desolate;*

And He will destroy its sinners from it.
10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations
Will not give their light;
The sun will be darkened in its going forth,
And the moon will not cause its light to shine.

11 "I will punish the world for *its* evil,
And the wicked for their iniquity;
I will halt the arrogance of the proud,
And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

In the book of Revelation, we read:

Revelation 6:15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Over and over, we get the message: God's judgment is inescapable and irresistible and for the guilty and rebellious, it is terrifying.

It is also certain.

Sometimes people will ask, well where is this promise of His coming? Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? Where is this judgment? And they think that just because it hasn't happened yet, it's not going to happen. Scripture tells us He could come back at any time, and we need to be ready for that, but every hour, every day, every year He waits, allows more people time to repent and be saved.

2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Think of the people you know that would not have been saved if Jesus came back five years ago. Think of the people that *would not* be saved if He came back this afternoon. He is patient on purpose. But, never mistake His patience for His permission. He's not endorsing behavior, or signaling that it's not that big of deal, He's giving us room to confess and repent and be saved from judgment.

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

The universe is full of meaning and justice. You really will reap what you sow. Justice will finally come. It may come slowly, but it will come. And when it does it will be terrible and inescapable. There will no talking your way out of anything or explaining it away. That can be bad news if you're guilty, but also tremendously comforting if you've been wronged because no one will ultimately get away with anything. Righteous and truth will prevail.

It's been a few years, but when my kids were little, they loved to go to Great Wolf Lodge. It's an indoor water park surrounded by a hotel. And right in the middle of the park, the central feature is a big fort like structure that you can climb to access the water slides. And at the top of the fort is a huge bucket constantly filling with water.



At first, you don't notice it, there's no indication of what's happening. But then, as the water rises closer and closer to the top, you start to hear something like a bell ring every couple of seconds and then, suddenly, the bucket tips and 1000 gallons of water comes pouring out on anyone standing below.



It's pretty impressive, and a lot of fun to stand under, because it's just water. But that idea of something slowly filling and finally being poured out with tremendous power reminds us what we read about God's judgment in Romans where Paul says:

Romans 2:5 [that] in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who *"will render to each one according to his deeds"*

Imagine each of your sins provoking a drop-of-water sized wrath. They keep pouring into the bucket of God's patience, and it doesn't seem like anything's happening. The bucket quietly receiving drop after drop. But there's no hole in the bucket. No place for things to leak out. It's all being stored up and one day it will be poured out.

As someone who has stood on the floor as 1000 gallons of water pours out, let me tell you: that is not where you want to be when the wrath of God is poured out and a righteous God *"renders to each one according to his deeds."*

But, as someone who has confessed his sins and turned to Christ for salvation, let me tell you that is exactly where Jesus stood for us as He hung from the cross and endured the wrath of God in our place (1 Thes 1:10).

You see, you have to understand that God is both just and merciful. Because He is a God of justice, He cannot just let your sins go. He can't just wake up one morning in a really good God-mood and decide, ah, you know all that stuff we needed to talk about, all the stuff you've done that was wrong and you knew it, well, forget about it, just come here and give me a hug!

No. He can't do that. That's not justice.

Proverbs 17:15 says it is an abomination to justify the wicked and condemn the just.

How would you feel if someone who had done you wrong, stolen money from your aging parents, or harmed your child, how would you feel if that person was just forgiven, the judge was having a good day, said, ah, let's just let this one go.

You wouldn't stand for it. You would be outraged. You want there to be justice in this world. Something deep within you cries out for it and knows that it's right.

This is why the suffering of Christ on the cross is so important – it fulfills both the justice and the mercy of God. The wrath of God against your sin, against my sin, every one of them, great and small, is stored up like drops of water in a 1000 gallon bucket. But instead of God pouring them out on you, Jesus says, I'll stand in your place and take it for you.

Both justice and mercy collide at the cross.

And now, for those who have turned to Christ for freedom and forgiveness, there is no need to fear the coming day of judgment – to the contrary, as we read in

1 John 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Now think of what we have seen this morning – the day of judgment comes, the day of God's wrath, and according to Revelation 6 the most powerful men and women in the world are crying out looking for a way to hide and escape, and you, little old you, have boldness and confidence, no reason to fear, no reason to hide, you know you are safe, *because* you know you are saved. Every single one of your sins is covered by the holy suffering of Christ.

As a Christian you will still face a judgment, after all, that's what Paul says motivates him, back in 2 Corinthians 5. But it's a different kind of judgment, it's an examination of what you have done with your salvation. How have you lived for Christ? What have you done that is commendable?

Paul describes it like this in 1 Corinthians 3 – the foundation of our lives is Jesus, that's the slab. But now what are you going to build on top of it? He contrasts the idea of building with combustible, temporary things like wood, hay, or straw with using precious gems and minerals like gold, silver and costly stones.

And here's the hard truth for our church, here's the hard truth for City Gates. I know most of us in here aren't all that worried about the eternal judgment we saw this morning. I know many of you have put your faith in Christ, you trust in Him for your salvation, you have every reason to believe you will escape the wrath that is to come.

But I'm not so sure we're ready to face the judgment for what we've built with Christ as the foundation of our lives.

We read in:

1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. **11** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **13** each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. **14** If anyone's work which he has built *on it* endures, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Many of you have read this passage before, this isn't new. You know you face a judgment, but because Christ is the foundation of your life, you are saved. Good. But does anything else endure? Does anything else remain after passing through the fire of God's judgment?

Is there anything left to show for how you have spent your life?

Church, here's why this is so hard for me – I think you're really smart people, really accomplished people, and even if you don't think that much of yourself, you know – you've done some pretty amazing things, been some pretty amazing places, been part of some pretty cool teams. Most of you have been to good schools and have good jobs and you're generally good people.

But in the eyes of Christ, *does it really matter*? Is the stuff on your resume, your C.V., the stuff of your daily life, is it made of gold, silver, and precious stones, or is it all wood, hay, and straw? Is the stuff we're killing ourselves over really going to matter for eternity?

Maybe. Maybe you're doing it right. Maybe you're going to work or school each day, saying, "God, I'm, here for You. You brought here. You gave me this position and opportunity, now please give me the wisdom, the courage, the strength, and the skill to do this well" and you walk out each night saying, "God, thank you for the chance to serve You here, with these people."

Maybe that's you. But for most of us, most of us who are here each Sunday, most of us who show up at home group or Bible Study, or serve in ministry, it's still really, really, easy to have Jesus as the foundation of our lives but spend our days filling our hands with wood, hay, and straw instead of gold, silver, and precious stones. It's really, really easy to get distracted by all the stuff around us and not make the connection between what we're doing and Who we should ultimately be serving. We have nothing to fear in the judgment of our souls, but what do we have to show for the examination of our lives?

Paul says,

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. **10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

He knows he has been called as an apostle. It's his mission to spread the gospel and start churches. To, as he says, **persuade** people to trust in Christ. That might not be your mission, at least not in that way. But is it still your aim to be **well pleasing** to God?

Is that your ambition? Is that your intent? In the place where He has called you to serve? In the role He has given you? Near the people He has placed with you?

Two questions to drive this home, and we'll close. First, do you know it's possible? More than that, it's actually what God wants of you – to serve Him, as a teacher, an administrator, an HR specialist, a lawyer, a speech pathologist, a home inspector, a pilot or a homeschooling mom. Do you know that you can do that, to the glory of God? Do you believe, that God wants to accompany you wherever you go? Do you know He wants to be a part of your Tuesday morning and your Thursday night and not just meet you here on Sundays? Do you know He wants to give you the gifts of the Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit in you day by day?

That's my first question – do you know it's possible to **make it your aim to be well-pleasing to God**.

Here's my second: if you know it's possible, *is it still your aim*? Or have you lost sight of that goal? Have you gotten distracted by other things? Jesus is still the foundation of your life. You're going to escape His wrath in judgement. And you're very busy, yes, your calendar is full, and your to-do list is long – but what are you building with and who are you building for? Is it still **gold, silver, and precious stones**, or is it **wood, hay, and straw**? If you were to die today and all your life's accomplishments were to pass through the fire – what would remain?

You see, at the end of the day, the question we all need to ask is – what is our **aim** in life? What is the thing we are chasing? There are hundred thousand ways to get it wrong, and only one way to get it right – to surrender to Jesus, to make it our life's aim to serve the One who gave Himself for us.

I hope you are able to say yes, I have made it my aim to be well pleasing to God, and when I fall short, I come to Him in the name of Jesus and I ask for forgiveness and then I ask for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in my life for help. I hope you are judging and evaluating yourself in these things before we meet the judgment of our righteous and holy God because tomorrow is promised to no one, but eternity is. May yours be filled with the pleasure of God, and never His wrath. Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 5:9-11 We Will Be Judged

Summary: We know we face the judgment of a holy God, therefore we aim to live well and persuade others while trusting Christ.

- Are there times when you come to church and the message doesn't really speak to you? What do you do then?
 - Have there also been times when you felt like the message was directed especially to you?
- Do you often think about your death? Is it helpful to think of such things? Why or why not?
 - Are you ready to die? What would you need to do if you knew you had five days to prepare?
- What does the terror of the Lord, or the fear of the Lord, mean to you? How can it be helpful? How might it be harmful to focus on too much? How do you keep a balanced view of God as both righteous and holy and gentle and loving?
 - Which way do you typically think of God?
- How do you react to the idea of God's judgment? Does it seem fair to you, or harsh? Why is it something many people prefer not to think or talk about?
- What is good about God delaying His judgment? What is the down-side?
- Is there any reason for a Christian to fear the wrath of God?
- What are some of the ways, and reasons, why people who have Jesus as the foundation of their lives, might build with wood, hay, and straw? What are some of the ways and reasons they would build with gold, silver, and precious stones?
- What have you made the aim of your life? Has that been an intentional decision or something you settled into? Are you confident that you are still on track?
 - What are some of the challenges of making it your aim to be well-pleasing to God in your daily life? What are some areas you have discovered it's a natural fit?
- What would you say to someone who was not sure they're ready to face the judgment of God?