

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## How do we respond to God's judgement?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How do you feel about God judging you and others?



### Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Heaven and earth can only be fully reunited when all that currently separates us has been destroyed, and we are fully restored. The way the Bible describes this process is judgment. The writer to the Hebrews says that "...people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..." (Hebrews 9:27)



For many people throughout history, God's judgment is something they long for. Jesus promises, "...will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly." (Luke 18:7-8) For many of the victims of history, God's judgment will mean that for the first time their voices will be heard.

Yet the language of judgment and of hell, which Jesus uses more than all the other biblical writers put together, can cause fear and a picture of God which can make people run away from Him. It is fair to ask questions like: How could an all-good God, who IS love torture people in hell eternally? In what way is it loving to keep people alive and burning? It is important to know that even the early Christians wrestled with these questions in various ways – trying to bring together three things:

The good hope that God will deal with evil once and for all. It is just as impossible for light and darkness to coexist as it is for sin to come into God's presence. The revelation that God IS agape love, and that there is no shadow side to Him at all. The necessity and anguish of the cross. The agony of the cross was needed. Jesus experienced the hell of separation from His Father. The longer, deeper, and more intimate the relationship, the more tortuous is any separation. God's love is not sentimentality but expressed through action.

Some Christians, then and now, attempt to hold these ideas together in different ways in order to try and understand what judgment means.

Some believe that God will indeed judge people and fallen spiritual beings through suffering which is eternal and conscious. (Lots of ideas we have inherited from medieval art portray this). They would interpret the images of judgment in the Bible literally.

Some believe that judgment will mean that some will simply cease to exist (known as 'annihilationism' or 'conditional immortality'.) They would emphasise that human beings are not essentially immortal – that can only be a gift. That while the wicked are referred to as, for example, bring “destroyed forever” (Psalm 92:7), this does not have to mean that they are forever being destroyed.

Some believe that all creatures will go through a purifying process which will ultimately mean that everyone will be saved – in the widest sense of the word. (This is known as 'universalism'.) They would emphasise that even though everyone will be judged by the “burning heat of God’s love”, nevertheless, as Paul wrote, the aim will be so that, “their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Corinthians 3: 13-14) While the fruits of our lives may need to be purified, this would not mean our complete end. The fire that lovingly purges all that it can and justly destroys all that it must is the same fire.

Whatever view (s) we have, it is important as disciples that we can hold them in humility and love, and that we hold on to some key ideas about our picture of God, ourselves and others:

**Our picture of God. God IS love.** As we have seen, it is impossible for God to act against His own nature in any way towards us other than through self-sacrificial love – there is no hidden side to Him, or split personality. “...in him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)

It is clear that God doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Thus, whatever understanding we might have of judgment, if there is any way that God could save all, he most certainly would save all. Ultimately our understanding needs to be consistent with our trust in God's character. Do we believe God to be more loving, just, fair and wise than we could ever be?

**Looking towards my own judgement, and that of others.** With all these things in mind, a disciple can look forward to judgment and prepare for it: “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” (2 Peter 3:11) The point of the Bible's many and different images about judgment are less about giving us crystal-clear information about the mechanics of the end of this age so much as inspiring us to live as disciples in the present. Rather than being anxious about those we love who have not yet placed their trust in Christ's sacrifice and victory, we can trust that God will judge them, like us, with love and truth more than we can comprehend.

Discuss: Why is God's judgement good news?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Matthew 25: 31-46 - the parable of the sheep and goats.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of responding to God's judgement.



## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

The Lord reigns forever;  
he has established his throne for judgment.  
He rules the world in righteousness  
and judges the peoples with equity.  
The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.  
Those who know your name trust in you,  
for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.  
Sing the praises of the Lord, enthroned in Zion;  
proclaim among the nations what he has done.  
For he who avenges blood remembers;  
he does not ignore the cries of the afflicted.  
The Lord is known by his acts of justice;  
the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.  
But God will never forget the needy;  
the hope of the afflicted will never perish.



From Psalm 9



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