

# TRUTH

“... Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

December 2024

## THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

This year, each of our front-page articles has focused on some aspect of God. We have highlighted God’s *power*, His *knowledge*, His *righteousness*, His *love*, His *longsuffering*, His *compassion*, His *wrath*, His *Son*, His *gospel*, His *church*, His *salvation*, and now finally, His *judgment*.

We will use the message of Romans 2 as the basis of our study of God’s judgment. In the last verse of Romans 1, we read about the judgment of God (1:32), and that theme flows into chapter two. We want to observe ten truths about God’s judgment which are revealed in the first half of Romans 2.

➤ God’s judgment is “*according to truth*” (Romans 2:2). That should not surprise us, because He is called a God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). His word is truth (John 17:17), and that truth will be the standard for judgment in the last day (John 12:48).

➤ God’s judgment is inescapable, as this question makes clear: “*And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?*” (2:3). With no exceptions, as humans we “*must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:10). In view of that coming judgment, coupled with motivation from God’s goodness, all men need to humble themselves and repent (Romans 2:4).

➤ The judgment of God will be righteous. The Bible calls it “*the righteous judgment of God*” (2:5; 1:32). Jehovah is righteous in all His ways (Psalm 145:17), including the manner in which He views activities now and the way He will judge mankind on “*the day of judgment*” (2 Peter 3:7; Acts 17:31).

➤ Our Lord’s judgment will reveal His wrath on some, as the day of judgment is pictured as “*the day of wrath*” (Romans 2:5). For the unholy and unprepared, God’s judgment is a day of wrath (Zephaniah 1:14,15). Yes, for great masses of folks, there is a sad day coming — a day when they will face God’s wrath.

➤ The judgment of God will be universal, as it is written that He “*will render to each one according to his deeds*” (2:6). Yes, the Lord will “*judge the world*” (Acts 17:31). All nations will be gathered in judgment before the Lord of glory (Matthew 25:31,32).

➤ God’s judgment will be done on an individual

basis. Again, He will render to each one “*according to his deeds*” (2:6). In another context in this same letter, Paul reminded the saints of God in Rome, “*So then each of us shall give account of himself to God*” (14:12). When we stand in judgment before the great I AM, it will not matter how our parents behaved in this life. Our personal judgment will have nothing to do with anyone else; it will be individual accountability.

➤ The judgment of God will result in a separation of humanity. Some will receive wrath, indignation, tribulation, and anguish (2:5,8,9). They have a hard and impenitent heart (2:5). The bottom line: they do not obey the truth (2:8), but instead do evil and fail to repent (2:9). As a result, such people will be separated from the Lord forever (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

On the other hand, for others the Lord’s judgment will be a day of rejoicing, glory, honor, and peace (2:7,10). They will receive eternal life (2:7). Why? Because they continue to do what is good in God’s sight (2:7,10), which means they persevere and keep on obeying His truth (Galatians 5:7). Following judgment, the righteous and unrighteous will be separated from one another eternally (Matthew 25:46).

➤ Our Lord’s judgment will be impartial, “*For there is no partiality with God*” (2:11). In some cases, human juries and human judges show favoritism, but the God of heaven is a God of fairness, so His judgment will be one hundred per cent impartial.

➤ In His judgment, God will deal with matters which humans consider to be secret: “*in the day when God will judge the secrets of men . . .*” (2:16). Some actions go unseen by other men, and some words are unheard by others. Some humans excel at pretending to be someone whom they are not. With the Lord, though, there are no hidden or secret matters. He sees, hears, and knows everything about us (Hebrews 4:13).

➤ Finally, God will carry out judgment via Jesus. “. . . *God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ*” (2:16). “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*” (John 5:22). My friend, do more than *learn* about God’s judgment. *Prepare* for it. How? Obey Jesus so your sins can be washed away by the blood of the Lamb!

-- Roger D. Campbell

## TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 32-34

These are three rich, thought-provoking chapters of the Scriptures! The setting: the Israelites were still at Mount Sinai. In this study, let us focus on some facts, historical events, and teachings which stand out as we examine this section.

32:1-9 – The golden calf incident was a disaster from beginning to end. It reminds us that when folks know God’s will, that is no guarantee that they always will make good choices. Before they constructed the golden calf, God already had spoken the Ten Commandments. Israel knew that worshipping images was wrong, but they did it anyway.

In this case, Aaron failed as a leader. He was the high priest of God’s holy nation, yet he allowed others to persuade him to make a dumb decision. Leaders, do not allow pressure from vocal people to corrupt your thinking and cause you to embrace or tolerate sin.

32:17,18 – A future leader first learned to serve. It was Joshua who met Moses when he came down off the mountain. Joshua was Moses’ helper in a number of ways. Moses mentored him, preparing him to lead at a later time. God’s leaders must know how to serve.

32:21 – Moses’ courage was on display. When his elder brother messed up, Moses did not try to sweep it under the rug or in any way show partiality in dealing with Aaron’s transgression. Instead, Moses told Aaron to his face that what he had done was to commit a great sin. Wrong is still wrong, regardless of who is involved in violating God’s will.

32:22-24 – Aaron, the finger-pointer – Rather than confess his wrongdoing with a penitent spirit, Aaron’s response to Moses’ rebuke was to blame “the people” for the rebellious spirit which Aaron, too, displayed in the golden calf affair. When we mess up, we need to admit it, learn from it, and move on. Pointing a finger at others does nothing to bring us closer to the Lord.

32:32,33 – God has a special book. He wrote it, and it has names in it. The words of both Moses and Jehovah indicate that people can be blotted out of this book. According to the Lord, “*Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book*” (32:33). Elsewhere in the Bible, God’s book is called “*the book of life*” (Philippians 4:3).

32:35 – An undeniable reality of life is that choices have consequences. Most importantly, Israel’s choice did not please the Lord: “*So the LORD plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made*” (32:35). Moses told the people that they had “*sinned a great sin*” (32:30), a sin that cost about three thousand people their lives (32:28).

33:14,19 – A reassuring promise from the Lord God, that He would go with the Israelites as they

marched toward and entered Canaan. God declared, “*And I will send My Angel before you . . .*” (33:2). He also promised, “*My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest*” (33:14), adding, “. . . *I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*” (33:19). God’s pledge to care for Israel was a strong, comforting message. It was a *conditional* promise.

34:1-4 – Repetition of previous action – At God’s instruction, Moses again made two tables of stone for the Ten Commandments, and he returned to the mountain to commune with the Lord. Moses stayed on the mount for forty days and nights, going without bread and water during that time (34:28).

34:6,7 – Insight into Jehovah’s character – The unchanging God of heaven (Malachi 3:6) described Himself as being merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy, and forgiving. He also proclaimed that His name is “*Jealous*” (34:14). As “*a jealous God*” (34:14), He is unwilling to share with any others the devotion that should be given only to Him.

34:11-17 – How should the Israelites deal with the inhabitants of Canaan? To carry out God’s justice on the wicked Canaanites and to preserve Israel’s holiness, He charged Israel not to make a covenant with the Canaanites. Instead, Israel was to destroy the altars and images of Canaan, and they were forbidden, for spiritual reasons, to have their children attach themselves to those who dwelt in Canaan.

34:23,24 – God’s providence during three annual feasts – Jehovah detailed the three feasts which the Israelite males were required to keep each year: Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Ingathering (34:18,22). But what about the Israelites’ property and families when they left their homes for several days at a time to travel and keep the feasts? God’s promise was, “. . . *neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD . . .*” (34:24). God basically said, “Do what is right in My sight and I will bless you. Do not fret and worry. Do not wring your hands and say, ‘But what if . . .?’ Just do what I tell you and it will work out.” Christians, are we listening? When God’s people put Him first, He takes care of them . . . every time!

34:27,28,32 – The Lord communicated to Israel via Moses. As the mediator between God and Israel, Moses was charged to write the words that God said to him on the mount, then Moses spoke to the Israelites “*as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai*” (34:32).

-- Roger D. Campbell

## Overcoming Recurring Sins

Slavery can be a controversial topic among people. Most of the world agrees that it is a practice that should be condemned. Yet, it is interesting that the imagery of slavery is how the apostle Paul describes our war with sin. Paul would write, *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts”* (Romans 6:12). Despite Paul’s encouragement, and sometimes despite our best efforts, we struggle to overcome sin. And it can be especially frustrating when it is the same sin that constantly drags us down. How can we overcome recurring sins?

First, **we must turn to God.** *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalm 46:1). There is no other place to turn when we struggle with sin. A hymn written in 1940 by J.B. Coats is titled “Where Could I Go?” and the answer is given at the end of the chorus: “Where could I go but to the Lord?”

It would help to further this point by saying that we turn to God when we speak to Him in prayer and when we listen to Him in reading His word. God does not override our free will in any way to help us, but He has spoken to us through the word of God, the Bible. Peter would write that, *“...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...”* (2 Peter 1:3). This verse is telling us that we have help to guide us through any of the various sins with which a person might struggle.

Second, **we should turn to other people.** This is another gift from God, in that He saw fit for the church to be our support system. The church is made up of many different people who have various talents and abilities, but who also struggle with various sins. It can be uncomfortable for us to talk about our sins with other people. But that is exactly what we should do, so that we can have help from fellow Christians.

Third, **we should take actions** that will help us avoid sin. It is worth saying at this juncture that simply thinking positively and hoping we will do better is not enough. We must take action. For example, we can watch for warning signs and temptations. Then we can avoid those situations. We can set up boundaries that prevent us from getting close to sin.

*“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness”* (1 Timothy 6:11). Recurring sins can be difficult to overcome, but with God, others, and firm action, we can do just that!

-- Joel Danley

## What is the difference between an evangelist and a pastor?

The words “evangelist” and “pastor” both are found in the Bible. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8), as was Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5). In the English New Testament, the sole instance in which we read the term “pastor(s)” is in Ephesians 4:11.

**Roles** – Jesus *“gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11,12). Evangelists and pastors are saints who have a hand in equipping and edifying God’s church. In this passage, since pastors and evangelists are listed separately, it is clear that they are not the same people and do not have the same roles.

**Definitions** – The word “evangelist” is from the Greek word “euangelistes,” which denotes one who proclaims the gospel/good tidings. Timothy was charged to preach the word of God (2 Timothy 4:2), then in the next breath, so to speak, he was told to *“do the work of an evangelist”* (4:5). Thus, an evangelist is one who preaches the word. He is a gospel preacher.

The word “pastor” comes from a different Greek word (“poimen”). It refers to a shepherd, one who tends flocks. When Jesus called Himself *“the good Shepherd”* (John 10:11), He used that Greek word “poimen.” In Ephesians 4:11, the term “pastors” is not explained. What do we learn from other Bible passages? In the church, the Christians who have the duty of shepherding the flock of God are called elders (1 Peter 5:1-3) or overseers/bishops (Acts 20:17,28). Thus, in God’s scheme pastors, elders, bishops, shepherds, and overseers are the same group of men. Biblically speaking, pastors are elders, not preachers.

**Qualifications** – The God-given requirements for those who serve as church pastors are set forth in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Such a detailed list of character and life traits are not given for one who works as an evangelist. An evangelist must be a good example for others (1 Timothy 4:12), have the knowledge, ability, and courage to proclaim the truth (1 Timothy 4:11), and be gentle, patient, and humble in his dealings with others (2 Timothy 2:24,25).

**Authority** – Evangelists have the authority to teach and command others to follow what God says (1 Timothy 4:11), as well as the right to *“rebuke with all authority”* (Titus 2:15). Multiple pastors who shepherd a local church, however, have the authority to *oversee* and *rule over* it (1 Peter 5:1,2). Evangelists do not have such authority. Think on these things.

-- Roger D. Campbell

## THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

Responding to complaints that He received sinners and ate with them (Luke 15:1,2), Jesus gave three parables: the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15:3-32). The emphasis of these parables is the desire of God for and rejoicing in heaven **when lost people return to their God** (see Luke 15:7,10,22-32). Our focus in this article is Jesus' parable of the lost son. Though the elder son's attitude makes for a great study of its own, our study will consider the younger son only (Luke 15:11-24). Four key words summarize the parable.

**(1) Rebellion (15:12).** The young man has a good home and a good life but is dissatisfied and wants to leave. Perhaps he did not like his father's rules and wanted to be on his own and be able to do things "his way." Maybe he had heard about the far country and the "high life" to be enjoyed there. So, he asks for his portion of the inheritance. Note his words, "Give me." It is difficult to think of two words that describe rebellion and selfishness better than those. The father, though surely hurt by the request, complies.

**(2) Recklessness (15:13).** Once the boy has his inheritance, he quickly packs up and goes to the far country, where he recklessly "*wasted his possessions with prodigal living.*" The boy probably had many friends while he had inheritance money, and he likely partook of whatever he saw and wanted. Here is a young man who has lost his senses and direction. He spent his entire inheritance, and the text seems to imply this was in a very short period of time. Now, the young man has nothing. What reckless waste!

**(3) Remorse (15:14-16).** When the boy had "*spent all,*" a famine came. Far from having prepared for such an unforeseen event, the young man has wasted all and has nothing left. His "friends" are gone, and he finds himself miserable and alone. He is compelled to get a job feeding pigs (an utterly abominable job for a Jewish boy), but he is unable to share even in the pigs' fare! The boy has lost his senses. He had a good life and a promising future but finds himself in a pig's pen! It was not supposed to be like this, and now he is filled with great remorse. Thankfully, the young man's story does not end here.

**(4) Return (15:17-24).** Verse 17 begins, "*But when he came to himself...*" He was not "himself" previously; he was not thinking properly. Now, the boy begins to remember his father's house, how even the servants have ample provisions, and he begins to think of an apology/speech to make to his father, in the hopes that he will be accepted back as a hired servant. The boy's attitude has changed now. His words are no longer, "Give me," but, rather, "*Make me*

*like one of your hired servants.*" The boy then leaves for home, where he knows he has a father who loves him and wants what is truly best for him. The father obviously had been hoping for this moment, for the text says, "*But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*" The boy hardly has started his apology before his father interrupts, telling the servants to put a robe, ring, and sandals on his son (signs of sonship) and to prepare for a celebration, exclaiming, "*For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*" The son, hoping to find even a servant's place back at home, instead finds he is accepted fully by the father and restored to full sonship, with all its rights and privileges! This part of the parable ends with the beautiful words, "*And they began to be merry.*"

What are a few lessons for us within this parable?

- The father in the parable is a picture of God, and the prodigal son is a picture of those who have wandered away from God.
- As the son's father allowed his boy to leave, God allows humans freedom to choose, whether to stay with Him, to leave, or (as with the prodigal son) to come back home.
- The far country is a picture of sin's effects. Sin promises so much but delivers so little, leaving one destitute, miserable, and alone.
- "Coming home" begins with thinking and realizing the abundance of the Father's house.
- "Coming home" requires a change of attitude. "*Give me*" must be replaced with, "*Make me like one of your hired servants.*"
- "Coming home" requires action. It is not enough to think of and long for home. We must leave the "far country" and come home.
- God longs to welcome sinners back home. The father **ran** to meet his returning son. When the boy's attitude changed and he came home in penitence, he found forgiveness, full and free.
- When God's children come home, the whole family of God—in heaven and on earth—is called upon to celebrate!

Whether we are "at home" or "in the far country," may we never forget how the Father longs for sinners to come home and receive restoration and forgiveness!

-- Chad Dollahite

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