

One of the top values in our world today is non-judgmentalism. It has become a core value in schools, workplaces, public policy and government. As far as I understand it, to be non-judgmental means to accept, respect and affirm another person's values, lifestyle, culture, language and background. No criticism is allowed. One dictionary definition defines non-judgmental as "avoiding moral judgments." Another defines it as "someone or something that doesn't express an opinion." It is when a person does not judge the behavior of others and is open-minded about different people and ideas.

Now there is certainly some validity to being non-judgmental. Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 7 "Judge not lest you be judged." It is the famous passage of a person who doesn't notice the log of sin in their own eye compared to the speck of sin in someone else's eye. Jesus speaks against thinking ourselves morally superior to anyone, He constantly challenged the social structures that elevated some as more important than others because of profession, race or gender.

But Jesus would fail today's standards of being non-judgmental. He made all kinds of moral judgments. He harshly exposed hypocrisy in proud people like some Pharisees. He gently rebuked those in obvious sin like the woman at the well but also offered love and salvation. Jesus would also fail the criteria of not expressing an opinion on behavior. When Peter took Jesus aside to tell him he would never go to the cross, Jesus did not remain silent. He did not say "I will take that into consideration." He said, "Get behind me Satan." That sounds like a pretty significant moral judgement. So where are you at when it comes to the value of judgement?

I raise this issue to get us thinking about our own attitude and belief about it. If you are 25 and younger, you have been schooled in this culture's definition of non-judgmentalism. I agree that being judgemental is bad, but is judgement bad? As we approach the end of Revelation. The last chapters talk a lot about God's judgment. If we completely buy the culture's expectation of non-judgmentalism, then we will automatically have a problem with God and what He does here. Maybe you have already experienced that tension and discomfort with some of what God does in Revelation.

So we need to deal with this. We need to think hard about what God reveals of Himself in Judgment and how this challenges some of our culturally accepted expectations of non-judgment. We need to think about the possibility that judging can be good. When we step back we may also realize we still make moral judgments. We still have courts and law enforcement. We still think there is right and wrong. Ultimately we crave for deep, true, and perfect justice. So today

this text calls us to ask what does God reveal about Himself as He judges. Then we will think about what kind of lives we can live in light of it.

Revelation 15-16 (ESV)

15 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

²And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,

O Lord God the Almighty!

Just and true are your ways,

O King of the nations!

⁴Who will not fear, O Lord,

and glorify your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come

and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

⁵After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, ⁸and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

²So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

³The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

⁴The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,

for you brought these judgments.

⁶For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”

⁷ And I heard the altar saying,

“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!”

⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

¹² The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. ¹³ And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. ¹⁴ For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ¹⁵ (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) ¹⁶ And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” ¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. ²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

John sees another sign in heaven. Seven angels somehow carry or hold 7 plagues. He declares that these are the last. This is indeed the final judgment. It will finish the wrath of God. Then John sees a sea of glass which is the transparent pavement that surrounds God’s throne. People stand beside the sea of glass who have conquered the beast and its image. They have resisted getting the mark. They have remained faithful to God. They also hold harps.

So they also sing a song. I say “also” because we saw last week the 144000 singing a song in Revelation 14. If you’ve been with us in Revelation for a while, you know there’s a lot of singing. John tells us these sang the song of Moses and the Lamb. God delivered Israel through Moses who led them out of Egypt. They sang a victory song when the Egyptian

army drowned in the Red Sea. The Lamb is Jesus who we met as a lamb back in Revelation 5. The Lamb showed up last week in Revelation 14 standing on Mount Zion with the 144000.

The song contains phrases found throughout the Old Testament. It celebrates God's greatness and uniqueness. It also declares God's justness and truth in carrying out judgment. In fact, this judgment will lead to people recognizing the all-powerful strength of the Lord.

After the song ends, John sees the sanctuary of heaven open. The sanctuary reminds us of the tent of Israel in the wilderness wanderings. Out from this tent come the 7 angels with the 7 plagues. They wear pure, bright linen with golden sashes around their chests. Their clothes could remind us of that worn by priests. They were supposed to be pure and their clothing represented their purity. Jesus also wore a golden sash around his chest in John's vision of him back in Revelation 1. So these angels show connection to the divine while somehow carrying these plagues.

Then one of the four living creatures approaches each angel. We met these creatures in Revelation 4. They are likely a high order of angels who surround God's throne. They carry out his will while watching the world. One of them gives each angel a golden bowl full of God's wrath. Since the angels carry the plagues and the bowls have God's wrath, the angels may mix the plague with the wrath of God symbolizing that God carries out His wrath through the plague. The angels will pour out the contents of their wrath to bring God's judgment.

Then the sanctuary fills with smoke from God's glory. This reminds us of other times when God's glory or smoke filled His earthly house. No one could enter it because it was so overwhelming. Then a loud voice from the temple or sanctuary commands the angels to go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls with the plagues of God's wrath. These plagues resemble some of the plagues that fell upon the Egyptians during Moses' time. They also resemble the 7 trumpets back in Revelation 8. But there are some significant differences. In both the Egyptian plagues and the 7 trumpets, the first plagues don't directly affect people. They are general events that indirectly affect people. But the seven bowls directly affect those who worshipped the beast and received the mark. These bowls also differ in intensity. Remember the 7 trumpets affected one third of everything they struck? But here it is total destruction. There is no escape and no more opportunity for repentance.

So the angels pour out their bowls. The first causes harmful and painful sores on the people who worshipped the beast. The second pours its bowl into the sea. The entire ocean becomes like the blood of a corpse. Everything in the sea dies. The third angel pours out his bowl on all fresh water. It also turns to blood.

Then an angel of the waters makes a declaration about God. The Jews believed there were specific angels over parts of creation. Well this angel over the water declares that the Lord is Just and His judgements are fair. He cites a specific example of fairness. Some who rejected God shed the blood of saints and prophets. Now they only have blood to drink because all water had been turned to blood.

The fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun. It is allowed to scorch people with fire. They are scorched with fierce heat. But instead of crying “unfair” or “injustice,” they curse the name of God. They do not repent or give him glory.

The fifth angel pours out his bowl on the center of power in the beast’s kingdom. When you can assault the throne room of an enemy, you have defeated him. You are in his capital. You’ve breached His palace. You have exposed his weakness. The bowl results in darkness consuming the beast’s reign perhaps indicating his decline in power. Yet people who worshipped the beast do not turn to God. They continue to curse God and do not repent.

The sixth angel pours out his bowl which results in drying up the Euphrates River. It marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. It served as a natural defensive barrier against eastern invaders. But the river dries up and now the way is paved for the kings of the east to march across and join in battle.

Then the dragon, beast and false prophet all open their mouths. Out come frog looking creatures which are actually demons. They go out to stir up kings of the earth by performing signs. These kings will assemble for a battle against God on this great day of God the Almighty.

Suddenly Jesus speaks and declares a blessing on those who remain vigilant. They remain faithful to God through all this strife. They will be ready when that day arrives. Finally, the 7th angel pours out his bowl. As this happens, a voice from heaven declares “It is done.” The seventh bowl wreaks permanent, cataclysmic, comprehensive judgment on the enemies of God.

A great earthquake splits the great city or world system opposed to God into 3 pieces. The earthquake causes a major planetary disturbance where islands flee and mountains disappear. No one will be able to dismiss this event as

some normal seismic rumbling. A tremendous hail storm follows the great earthquake. It throws down fatal sized hail stones down on the people. Any direct hit on a person likely leads to instant death. Yet survivors continue to curse God.

What do the 7 bowls of final judgment reveal about God?

One - God is holy as He Judges. All human judges have flaws. No human judge is perfect. Yet God is holy. He is perfectly pure and without sin. He is set apart and unlike any being in the universe even as He judges. So in 15:4, those standing beside the glass sea declare “You alone are holy.” And the angel over the waters declares in 16:5, “Just are you, O Holy One.” So we must think of God’s judgment and justice in a completely different category from human justice. God’s holiness requires perfect justice which leads us to the second discovery about God.

Two - God’s judgments are just. If God is holy, He must judge justly. There can be no hint of unfairness or injustice in Him. We see this both declared and illustrated. The harpists by God’s throne declare “Just and true are your ways” in 15:3. “Your righteous acts have been revealed” in 15:4. The angel over the water declares “Just are you, for you have brought these judgments” in 16:5. And speaking of those who shed blood and now must drink blood, the angels say “It is what they deserve.”

But God’s just judgments are not only declared but displayed. What is the common response of the people who fall under this judgment? Do they cry “unfair; unjust?” No. They curse God revealing their continuing rebellion against Him and thereby the justness of this final judgment. In 16:19, God remembers Babylon the great and all the injustice she has committed against others. Last week in Revelation 14:8, we saw that Babylon made all the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality.” So in 16:19, God makes Babylon drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.”

The seven bowls also reveal to us number 3. **Three – God is sovereign over the final judgment.** The events at the end do not surprise God nor is it like a chain reaction of something that human beings initiated. God rules and reigns over this judgment. Notice the seven angels come out of God’s sanctuary like they are being sent. One of the four living creatures closest to God gives them their golden bowls. God reigns over the sun and allows it to emit greater heat to scorch the people. God sovereignly sends an angel into the beast’s throne room to plunge that kingdom into darkness. God makes a great river that has never dried up in history dry up for His purposes.

The seven bowls of God’s wrath also reveal that God will bring all things to an end in His time. **Four – God will end world history with the final judgment.** When John sees the sign of seven angels in 15:1 he declares “with these the

wrath of God is finished.” God’s wrath will be spent. Justice will be served. Everything wrong will be made right. When the 7th angel pours out his bowl in 16:17 a voice from the temple makes a three word statement. It is close to a very important three word statement by Jesus. Jesus said “It is finished,” The voice says “It is done.” God’s plan reaches completion. His wrath against evil finishes. His kingdom fully comes.

The 7 bowls also reveal that **God’s final judgment will be all-inclusive**. No one will be left out. *Every* person who bore the mark will be struck with harmful and painful sores. *Every* living thing in the sea dies. *All* rivers and waters become blood. *Every* person bearing the mark is scorched by the sun. The *entire* kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness. The Euphrates River *completely* dries up. *Every* island flees in the 7th bowl. *Not one* mountain can be found.

So how might we live in the light of God’s holy, just, sovereign, final and comprehensive judgment?

We can live **Satisfied** for the Final Judgment satisfies our inward need for justice in the world. We are assured that ultimately God’s universe is fair. God is in control and keeps accurate records to render just judgment. No one who mistreated or abused you and got away with it will get away with it. Colossians 3:25 states “For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality.”

We can live **Forgiving** lives. The final judgment enables us to forgive others freely. It is not up to us to take revenge on others who have wronged us. So often, human revenge goes beyond what might be just. It creates a cycle of revenge. But Romans 12:19 states “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”

We can live **Motivated** lives. Righteous living will result in rewards at the final judgment. Jesus said in Matthew 6:20, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

We can live **Evangelistic** lives. The final judgment reveals decisions people make in this life will affect their eternal destiny. It is right for us to feel for them – like the Lord – Ezekiel 33:11 – Turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”

We can live **Hopeful** lives. Just as Jesus declared “It is finished from the cross,” we can hope for the day when “it is done.” One day the sorrows and sufferings and injustice of this life will be over! We will live in a new world of justice, joy, peace and righteousness. So we have an eternal hope to look forward to.

We can live **Thankful** lives. The angel over the waters declared that those who shed the blood of the prophets and saint will receive “what they deserve.” But we won’t. We deserve what they deserve. But we won’t get what we deserve because we’re covered by Christ’s blood and His sacrifice. So every day is a day to rejoice in the grace and mercy of God who ensures we won’t get what we really deserve on the day of Judgment.

We can live **Watchful** lives. “Behold, I am coming like a thief,” says Jesus. Blessed is the one who stays awake.” Every day we keep plugging along in our walk with God and pursuing a deeper relationship with Him we live watchful lives.

So which one of these is God calling you to embrace more fully today? Which one have you been neglecting or missing? Which one have you forgotten that you desperately need to taste in light of God’s holy, just, sovereign, final and comprehensive judgment? Will you please reflect on that and respond to God in prayer now?