

How do you feel about the judgment of God? What does the portrayal of God as judge do to your relationship with Him? What rises up in you? Fear? Anger towards God? Indignation that God would be like that? Dismissal – if God is like that you want nothing to do with Him? Disbelief – I refuse to believe in a God who would judge people? Comfort – Thank God He will one day judge?

The passage we're looking at today in Revelation will show us that **God's final judgment unfolds as the Lamb opens the six seals.** Remember the scroll and the seven seals we learned about last week in Revelation 5? But before we can even look at this unfolding of God's judgment I felt it necessary for us to ponder some questions about God's judgment. Why might we struggle with God's judgment? Why can't He just help us make it through life or leave us alone to live our lives? **Many people struggle with God's judgment.** Maybe you do or someone close to you does.

One such person sent their perspective to Christian apologist philosopher William Lane Craig. His name is Matt. He writes "I am a hedonist who lives to be happy and to enjoy life. I have no desire whatsoever to live for anyone or to serve anybody including God himself. My own personal moral standard would say that there is nothing wrong about this and there shouldn't be any punishment. Even my own kind family and other kind people in my life agree.

But according to God's moral standards, my way of life would be sinful and would result in me going to hell. I need to obey his commands and avoid the sins he has mentioned. Accepting Jesus is not enough; I must live a life in the holiness of God rather than my own selfish hedonistic passions.

I cannot possibly love anybody like that. Please do not try to justify how God is all loving, all just, and morally perfect and righteous; it will never convince me that he is.

True love would be those like my family and other kind people in my life. They would never punish me for my way of life in which I don't even harm anybody anyway. I view my own moral standards as righteous and the moral standards of God to be unrighteous and insane. So do skeptics like Richard Dawkins, Sean Carrol and Sam Harris.

How can you blame them? They are not convinced at all that God is holy and morally righteous in the first place. They are fully convinced of the opposite. So how can you possibly blame them?

How can one possibly say that I and these skeptics are worthy of eternal punishment if we weren't convinced of God being holy and morally righteous in the first place? What you are convinced of is not a choice. Rather, it is whatever conclusion your personal honest mindset leads you to when you look at all evidence/arguments from many sides. So my and their honest mindset has led us to God being a moral atrocity. Nothing can convince me otherwise and there is no reason to think that we are at fault and to blame us and condemn us." Signed, Matt from the United States.

He concludes God is unrighteous and insane because of punishment or judgment. This is one example of a person who struggles with God's Judgment. **Why do we struggle with God's judgment?** One reason might be **misapply Jesus' teaching on judging others.** In Matthew 7:1-2, Jesus says "Judge not that you not be judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." Many people wholeheartedly affirm this teaching but then misapply. Jesus commands us to not have a judgmental attitude towards others where you think of yourself as superior to someone else especially in the area of righteousness. We are all sinners. We must not think we're better than another because we don't do their sin. We all sin. Some of us are better at hiding them. Jesus speaks against this judgmental attitude.

But He is not saying that we should never judge in the sense of making a decision between right and wrong – or never give a verdict on what needs to happen after a wrong has been done. Most people seem to agree that there is value in a judicial system – that there needs to be a way to call a lawbreaker to account and enforce sentences. But we get offended when it comes to someone judging us, including God. We can believe it wrong for God to judge us especially when we believe we're not hurting anybody and just going on with our lives like Matt, the letter writer, claimed. Basically, the culture now believes no one has the right to judge me or my lifestyle choices. That includes God.

Like Matt in this article, people might say "who are you God to judge me?" In one sense, it is a valid question. Judging someone else is serious business. But God answers this question throughout the Bible in His commands and character.

We have seen that He is absolutely and completely holy. There is no sin in Him. Holiness by nature requires a response to sin. We might object and say "well it's okay for God to be holy. But why can't He just leave the rest of us alone. Why does He have to do anything about sin?" Would you be okay with a God who didn't do anything about sin?

That would make Him either someone who delights in sin which means He actually isn't holy. Or it would mean He's indifferent to sin. He doesn't really care about it. We might say "well that's okay with me. Live and let live. **We prefer a God who is indifferent to our sin rather than opposed to sin.** As Matt wrote "True love would be those like my family and those other kind people in my life who would never punish me for my way of life in which I don't even harm anybody anyway." That's what we want from God until we're sinned against – until we're wronged and the person who did it got away with it. We show we're not okay with sin when we get angry when someone wrongs us or about some crime that devastates a family. Then we want God to deal with sin and to judge. But we don't want it to happen to us.

So we can't have it both ways. God is either holy and will not tolerate sin including ours or He's indifferent or unholy. **Why does God judge? If God is holy, He must respond to sin. Therefore, an appropriate response is judgment.** Yet we also must keep in mind all God provided to protect us from His judgment. God has shown mercy by withholding the final judgment up to this point. God has provided a way to escape this judgment by sacrificing His own Son. Jesus was slain and by His blood, He ransomed a people for God from every nation. Jesus takes the Judgment of God upon Himself. Those who put their trust on Jesus receive God's mercy instead of His judgment. God continues to be patient and to warn of this coming judgment through a book like Revelation. It's out there for anyone to read at any time. Yet the judgment will one day come. When it happens, no one will be able to charge God with unfairness or lack of notice. So with this perspective on God's judgment, let's go to the text. Revelation 6 answers the question **What will God's final judgment include?** Let's start with verses 1-8.

Revelation 6:1-8 (ESV)

6 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!" **2** And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" **4** And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. **6** And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

⁷When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” ⁸And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

These first verses contain the somewhat famous 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse. Notice it is Jesus Himself, the Lamb, who initiates God's judgment. The Lamb opens one of the seven seals. One of the four living creatures says “Come!” John sees a white horse with a rider who holds a bow. This **rider on a white horse desires conquest**. We're not sure of the rider's identity. Some think it's Christ since He shows up on a white horse in Revelation 19. But everything in this section points to some sort of disaster. Maybe it's the antichrist or an invader. To a first century reader, especially living in one of the seven churches, this image would evoke strong feelings of fear. They lived under the Roman Empire. But there were well-known invaders from the Parthian empire who fought with mounted archers. They swept down in raids against the Roman Empire and its cities.

So this rider may represent an invading army determined to conquer. Notice he receives a victor's crown. He comes out conquering and looking to conquer more. We might see this today if a country built up a massive army and began threatening other nations around them. If you were in their path, you would feel the destabilization of their threats.

Then the second seal is broken. Out comes a red horse whose rider was permitted to take peace from the earth. So this is a **Red Horse** symbolizing **Bloodshed or War**. Notice, the rider is permitted to take peace from the earth. But who does the actual killing? People slay one another. Warring armies could go out to slay each other. Or warring parties of one tribe go after another tribe. When you look at history, a little destabilization can lead to a lot of killing. Back in the 1990's, there was this devastating war in the Balkans of South Eastern Europe. The nation of Yugoslavia broke up into multiple nations. Then all these battles erupted between different ethnic groups. Or there's a destabilizing event in the power structures of the African nation of Rwanda. For 100 days, one tribe goes and slaughters 1 million of another tribe. Humans have proven again and again that war and a willingness to shed blood is not far beneath the surface of our societies.

So the rider on the white horse of conquest is followed by the rider on the red horse of war or bloodshed. Then the third seal is broken. A rider emerges on a black horse carrying balancing scales. This is a very unusual image. Riders never carried balance scales. You assembled a balance scale in the market so you would weigh goods and come to a fair price. But here this rider on a black horse implies balance scales will be needed everywhere.

Why? Verse 6 – John hears a voice from the midst of the living creatures in heaven state “A quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius.” A denarius was one day’s wage. A worker could normally feed his family with one day’s wage. But a quart of wheat only fed one person. So if you had a family of five or six, the voice announces that you will need to pay 5 or 6 times a normal days wage just to feed your family. Can you imagine your grocery bill suddenly going up by 500%? The voice also announces that 3 quarts of barley could be bought for a day’s wage. They used barley to feed their animals. The larger animals required more food than the average human. So you’d maybe need to give them 3 quarts of barley. Yet barley’s price has also inflated to a day’s wage.

So what’s happening? Food is scarce and the prices have gone up dramatically. So the **Black Horse** represents **Famine** which often accompanies conquest and war. Invading armies eat up the food supply or destroy it. Or the population flees and the crops don’t get harvested. Suddenly a lack of food becomes a widespread problem.

But why say “And do not harm the oil and wine,” at the end of verse 6. This command could be the Lamb’s limitation placed on the rider. You are allowed to wreak havoc on wheat and barley crops. But you can’t touch olive trees or vineyards because they take years to grow and develop. You could replant a wheat crop and get a harvest the next year. But you couldn’t just replant olive grove or vineyard. So this may be the Lord limiting the rider which points to God’s sovereignty even over this troubled time.

But the fourth and final rider reveals that these first three seals will have a massive impact on the world’s population. The opening of the fourth seal brings forth a pale horse in verse 8. The word translated pale is actually “chloron” from which we get our word chlorine. It refers the yellowish-green or grayish-green skin color of someone who has died. Therefore, appropriately this horse’s rider is death. So we have a **Pale Horse ridden by Death**. Hades follows the name of the place of the dead in ancient thinking. In Greek mythology, there was actually a god named Hades who ruled over this place. But most ancients thought of Hades as the place and Death as the ruler of Hades. This rider receives permission to strike down a quarter of the earth’s population.

Notice the many ways this will happen. They will kill with the sword which is likely war or people killing people. They will kill with famine like we’ve seen in the third seal. They will kill with pestilence which often follows camps of displaced peoples who live among dead bodies or unclean water supplies. They will kill with wild beasts. We don’t experience wild beast threats very often today. But in some parts of the world, they still pose a threat. In the ancient

world, when the society broke down, the wild beasts gained more freedom to roam and kill. One quarter of the world's population will die. So if there's 7 billion people in world today, that means 1.75 billion would perish. The unleashing of God's judgment so far leads to a devastating, population shattering development.

Yet there's still more to come.

Revelation 6:9-17 - ESV

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. ¹⁰They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” ¹¹Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

¹²When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, ¹³and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. ¹⁴The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. ¹⁵Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

In verse 9, the scene changes location from earth to heaven. John sees under an altar souls slain for the word of God. These are **Martyrs – Christians will be killed because of their faith.** John says he sees souls under the altar. What altar? Well the Israelites believed that the tabernacle and their temple copied the heavenly temple where God dwelled. Both tabernacle and temple contained two altars. One was inside – the altar of incense. One was outside – the altar of offering or sacrifice. Apparently, the priests would pour the blood of the sacrifice under the altar. So in some sense these souls whose blood has been poured out in martyrdom are under God's altar close to Him. They are in heaven.

They cry out for justice. “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Holy & true – a Holy God must respond to sin by judging it. Now what do you think of that plea? It's not very forgiving. Didn't Jesus say “Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing? Didn't Stephen pray the same thing as he was being stoned to death in Acts 7? What's wrong with these martyrs? Well, they may have prayed the “father forgive them” prayer just before they were killed. But now they call out for justice. They portray that desire for justice to be served on those who have committed murder.

They receive an answer. "Rest a little longer until the number of your fellow servants and brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been." The world is hostile towards Christ's people. They've been killing Christians since Christ's time. Christians were slain by Isis for the word of God and the witness they maintained. Remember in Revelation all faithful witness are slain. Jesus Himself; Antipas the faithful witness who was slain in Pergamum; these faithful witnesses in Revelation 6; the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Faithful witness for Christ costs something. Yet God conquers through the self-sacrifice of His people. Yet these must wait and are given white robes until their full number has come in.

Then the sixth seal is broken. This seal brings **The Breakup of the Earth and Universe**. There is a great earthquake which completely destabilizes a region when it happens. The sun turns black as sackcloth and the moon turns red like blood. This is the exact wording used by the prophet Joel who described the Day of the Lord like this. "The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."

But lest we are tempted to dismiss this as nothing more than a solar eclipse and one of those rare blood moons, verse 13 tells us the stars of the sky fell to the earth. Like a fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale, the stars will fall to the earth. One commentator notes that stars couldn't actually fall to earth without completely destroying the earth. If our sun fell onto the earth, it would consume the earth. But John tries to describe some sort of breakup of universe. This continues when he writes "the sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up. Can you imagine no sky – no atmosphere. The cataclysmic events conclude with mountains and islands removed from their place. So the Rockies will somehow be relocated or leveled. Vancouver Island might be moved over to the Atlantic. There is no way anyone in all of the world could be unaware of what was happening.

This is apparent in the response of the people in verse 15. Kings, generals, rich, powerful, everyone, slave and free – another group of 7 – flee to the caves and rocks. That's where people fled when invading armies attacked cities. But they don't go there to ride out the storm. They want to die. They call on the caves and rocks to fall on them. Why? "To hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." By this point, there is no longer any debate about who is the most powerful being in the universe. Notice verse 17 – For the great day of their wrath – the one seated on the throne and the Lamb – has come. Who can stand?" Next time we're in Revelation we are going to find out who can stand.

God's judgment unfolds in the Lamb's breaking of the six seals. **Why does God judge like this?** Why couldn't God just show up one day for a conversation? I could think of a couple of reasons. **God judges like this to reveal the depravity of people's hearts and the justness of His judgment.** I get this from later in Revelation after another vision about God's judgment. Look at how the people on earth respond in Revelation 9:20-21. "The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

If God just showed up for a conversation one day about judgment and then condemned people, there might be a lot of protest and disagreement. After all, they were good citizens just going on with their lives in their civil society. But you find out people's true colors under pressure. They reveal their stubborn and rebellious hearts even after all of these signs.

Perhaps another reason is **to gain the world's attention that the end has come.** The world basically ignored Jesus' first coming. If people can just go on with their ordinary lives when day of the Lord arrives, it's not a very significant day. But when you're getting invaded, AND people are killing each other AND you have to pay 25 dollars for a loaf of bread AND people are dying everywhere from war, plagues, wild animals and famine AND Christians are getting arrested and killed AND there's a massive earthquake AND the sun turns black AND the moon turns red AND the stars are somehow disturbed AND the sky rolls up AND the Rockies get rearranged AND your island moved everyone will know. There will be no doubt. There will be no expert that some news channel will bring on who can explain away what's happening. The Day of Wrath of the one seated on the throne and the Lamb has arrived. We will face our Maker.

But Christians don't have to fear that day. We'll either be gone or protected even if we're killed. We can discuss these possibilities in a Sunday School class I'm planning for after Easter. But how can Christians live today in light of the God's coming judgment. In the tradition of Revelation, with 7 ways this coming judgment can impact our lives today.

How do we live in light of it?

1. **Look forward to God's perfect justice upon the oppressors of history.** Adolf Hitler is not going to get away with anything. Nor will Stalin or any other oppressive leader. Nor will those who committed crimes and got away with them or those who wronged and never repented of it.

2. **Do not grow too comfortable with life in this world.** This world system will destined to pass away. So we must not live our lives as if this is the ultimate life. There's lots of things wrong with our world system. And one day, God will turn it completely upside down. So don't get too comfortable here.
3. **Include the possibility of martyrdom as God's calling upon your life.** The Gospel is worth everything. Are we ready to die for it? We were challenged as a church a few weeks ago by Rob Magwood to release our children and grandchildren to missions. Are we still willing to do that if they might get martyred? Yet the Gospel is worth it.
4. **Rest in God's control over everything even in the midst of suffering.** The Lamb broke the seals. Only under His command and authority could this all happen. The same is true today in the midst of our sufferings and trials.
5. **Experience the freedom to forgive others freely.** You don't have to dedicate your life to getting revenge against those who wronged you or your family. You can release that to the Lord and let Him heal your heart. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay – says the Lord." Romans 12:19.
6. **Share the Gospel with those who don't know Christ before it's too late for them.** If someone you really love doesn't know Christ and you've never talked to them about it, ponder them going through this. Pray and ask the Lord for opportunities and the right approach to make with them.
7. **Let your worship extend to helping those in need.** There is a lot wrong in this world system. But that doesn't mean we become fatalists. We can do our part in our little corner to bring hope, love, mercy and the Gospel to all who need it.

We started today by asking the question "How do you feel about the judgment of God?" I pray that you now have more of a context to think about God's judgment Biblically; to see it as an ultimate good and necessary conclusion to our world's history. Until then, by God's grace, let us continue to walk together faithfully as a community of His people until we're called home or He comes for us.

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/why-are-hedonists-worthy-of-moral-condemnation/>