

# *God's Judgment ... ... Love in Action*



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## About the front cover

The photo on the front cover shows a condemned building being destroyed. Someone made a judgment about that building – that it was moldy, old, deteriorated, unsafe, and worthy only of being destroyed. But it was destroyed only with a plan to build a new, better building -- one that is good and safe and beautiful, and can serve the purpose of its creator with excellence.

This is what God has done for the human race that he loves so much. All people everywhere during all ages have fallen into ruin and have become less than they were intended to be by God, their creator. In His love, God declared (judged) mankind to be less than all they were meant to be, so he took action – because that is what love does. He came to this world, himself, as a humble carpenter some 2000 years ago, showed us who he is and what love is, joined us in our destruction (death) by dying with us and for us. But his love did not stop there, he raised from the dead, bringing all humanity with him into life.

This was the Creator's plan from eternity past, long before he ever created any of us. In the resurrection, everyone will be a "new building" that will last forever, never again to be destroyed or condemned. It is what the New Testament calls the "old man" (or old person) -- our fallen sinful nature -- that is destroyed.

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## **Introduction**

My study into “judgment” in the New Testament has been, by far, the most difficult and time-consuming. It has been in progress for several years now, and has required all of my past training and preparation to wrestle successfully with the unique difficulties this subject presents.

It is very clear that God brings judgment on all people (including believers), and with the commonly held negative perception of “judgment”, there is a natural tension between our view of judgment and our instinctive sense of the love, mercy, and grace of God that is so clearly heralded in all of the Biblical writings.

The struggle exists in determining how these two very opposite aspects of God work together to preserve both his holiness and justice, and also his love and mercy. It has been my personal conclusion that judgment must be understood in terms of his love and mercy, and not the other way around. The reasons for this are (1) the greater context of the Bible, by far, emphasizes the later over the former, and (2) God is identified as “Love”, not just “loving” but identified as actually being what love is. This is an essential characteristic of his being. Other attributes of God are not presented in this way. But the attributes of God cannot be divided or separated either. All of them must always be taken together. (3) Repeatedly in nearly all narratives, accounts, prophesy, and letters of encouragement, the theme is that “mercy triumphs over judgment.” It is explicitly stated as such in one instance, but it is also always the underlying truth in all of God’s (and Jesus’s) dealings with people. As a result, I look for and expect to find in judgment a good, loving, merciful (but also holy and just) purpose on the part of God. This not only seems reasonable but something demanded by the very nature of God when everything is considered.

## **Judgment is Good**

The photo on the front cover shows a condemned building being destroyed. Someone made a judgment about that building – that it was moldy, old, deteriorated, unsafe, and worthy only of being destroyed. But it was destroyed only with a plan to build a new, better building -- one that is good and safe and beautiful, and can serve the purpose of its creator with excellence.

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mankind to be less than all they were meant to be, so he took action – because that is what love does.

He came to this world, himself, as a humble carpenter some 2000 years ago, showed us who he is and what love is, joined us in our destruction (death) by dying *with* us and *for* us. But his love did not stop there, he raised from the dead, bringing all humanity with him into life. This was the Creator’s plan from eternity past, long before he ever created any of us. In the resurrection, everyone will be a “new building” that will last forever, never again to be destroyed or condemned. It is what the New Testament calls the “old man” (or old person) -- our fallen sinful nature -- that is destroyed.

But until that day when God judges us (everyone), here on earth, within time itself, we are all still struggling with the sins that he has saved us from eternally on the cross. God’s judgment is His love in action because love *is* action (not just claims and feelings). Love always acts in the best interest of the one it loves. God’s love actually shines in judgment, because in judgment God acts in the best interest of the world He loves. Through judgment he disciplines, corrects, and punishes us, but always in love. He never over or under does any of this. It is always exactly what we need to eventually bring everyone into full reconciliation with himself, which fully completes the salvation he accomplished on the cross for everyone.

## **What Judgment Is**

Through judgment God demonstrates to us – sometimes in severity – what right and wrong is, drawing us to Himself in loving judgment. This is exactly what we do with our children. We love them unconditionally and would give our life for them, if ever required to do so just as God did for us. When we punish our children (who are made in our own likeness) we do so in love. Our goal is never to abandon them, annihilate them, or torment them for wrong-doing, no matter how bad they have been. We “judge” them, in that we make a determination about their right and wrong behavior in any given situation, then we take action to correct them – even via punishment that fits the offense – because we love them. This is all true of God concerning us as well.

Generally, “Judgment” is assessing a situation accurately, determining what is right and wrong in it, and deciding what benefit or punishment should be imposed. For example, when a human judge judges, he or she hears the evidence, evaluates a situation concerning those involved, then decides who is right and wrong, to what degree, and what is to be done to bring about justice (make things right).

Judging is a huge responsibility – one that no human judge will ever do in perfect equity and free from error. Even the best judge can only make the best ruling he or she can make, flawed and limited as it might be, to keep life and society in some kind of decent order.

## **Judgment Belongs to God**

No wonder God tells us not to judge others in areas of their personal lives! When we set ourselves up as the judge of others we attempt (falsely and without authority) to determine right and wrong for them. Such judgment of others is far beyond our moral, mental, and emotional capability. It is clearly “above our pay grade.” This is why God says very clearly to leave all judgment of others to Him since he is the only one who has the authority, wisdom, and pure motive (of love) to judge accurately.

What are we to do, then, when we see someone doing what we believe is wrong? Well, first ... just love them! This is not trivial. But this is what God tells us to do – even to love our enemies! True, love is often not easy, but it is also not complicated. Love always acts in the best interest of those we love.

Love, of course, includes telling others the truth and giving them good advice – but only when invited by them to do so when we have earned their trust. But it does not include judging them -- setting ourselves up as the ones who decide for them what they should and should not do. Some time back, I gave a friend “advice” about his personal life that he had not requested from me. But God made it clear in my heart that I had really only judged him and had not loved him. So I went back to him, admitted my wrong, and asked him to forgive me. I had not earned his trust or the right to be heard. This takes time and true love.

Judgment belongs to God alone – leave it with him; he is very good at it. In fact God judges perfectly and justly. So we are wise to leave all judgment to God where it belongs. When we do, we find that we are much more able to love others and truly act in their best interest by having a genuinely caring relationship with them – one that demonstrates God’s love for them as we love them unconditionally just as he does. When, and only when, we have earned their trust, then, and only then, are we ready to share with them our perspective and what we have learned from God about life. We must earn the right to be heard, and this always begins with love, not judging.

## Love -- The Basis of Judgment

God's judgment is always rooted in his love – nowhere else. If love is not his motive, what else could it possibly be? Hate? Revenge? Complacency? What else is there? What is your motive when you judge and correct your children who you love? Is it not, ultimately, love? Could it be anything else for the God who *is* love?

God is love, and everything he does is motivated by his love – especially judgment! He always wants the very best for everyone because he loves everyone and will not fail to eventually bring about the very best in them. This is what love does. He loves us because we are all created by him in his very own image and likeness. There is so much of God in each and every person! He created us to know him, love him, and become more like him, and he will not fail to eventually bring this about in every person. This is what “reconciling all things to himself” is all about.

Love is kind and gentle, patient and long suffering, and it does not seek its own. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers makes this clear. And this is who God is – all of these things and much more – simply because God *is* love. And love is also who he wants us to be.

But love is also severe. It has to be, because true love always acts in the very best interest of those who are objects of it. Judgment is love acting severely, to bring about the very best in us. Love takes action. It is not passive. God does not sit back and watch us destroy ourselves and do nothing about it. He takes action, severe as it needs to be, to bring us into reconciliation with himself.

Unlike us, God has everything in life at his disposal to accomplish this great and wonderful (but often severe) purpose in us: difficulty, illness, accidents, natural disaster, betrayal of others, even death (of ourselves or loved ones). None of these things are ever done capriciously, without exact purpose, or short of perfect wisdom, love, and precise timing. Could we ever expect anything less of God who is perfect?

God first acted with severe love in the person of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, where God was “in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” This was not an *attempt*, or just an “offer” made to us, or something in *potential* form waiting for us to somehow apply it to ourselves. God saved the human race, completely and finally on the cross in Jesus who was the promised Messiah (Christ). This is why he is called the “Savior of the world” and is identified as the one who “takes away the sin of the world.” It is said of Jesus that he actually “became sin” for us. As Jesus said in his final words, “It is finished.” And finished it was, concerning all



sin for all time for everyone (just as the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews repeatedly stated).

But God also takes severe action for us in judgment. Such judgment is always based in his love for us and always accomplishes a good purpose in us. This is because God is good and only good – always! Everything he does has a good purpose. How could it not? His severe judgment is the ongoing action of saving us from the entanglement of sins we commit – sins that were all taken away by Jesus, for us, on the cross. God’s judgment accurately assesses our situation and takes whatever action is needed to bring us to repentance, turning us away from sin and back to himself.

## **Reconciliation -- The Goal of Judgment**

God’s goal in loving judgment is reconciliation with himself. And this is exactly what God promises – that everything in heaven and on earth will eventually be reconciled to himself. How could he possibly do anything less for those he loves and paid such a supremely high price to purchase? He certainly cannot abandon, annihilate, or torment anyone! Reconciliation *must* be his ultimate and final goal for everyone. His sovereignty, grace, mercy, and love are all focused on this goal and he will not – indeed, he cannot -- fail. His judgment is the lovingly severe means by which he will faithfully, and finally, bring all this about. Mercy will, for sure, ultimately triumph over judgment!

God always judges justly. Justice is “making things right.” Justice is not retaliating or getting back at someone. Retaliation is the *petty* kind of “justice” that puny man does, because it is all he has the power to do. Only God can make things right. And ultimate justice – the ultimate “making things right” – can only be the full reconciliation of man with God. God retaliates against sin with love! What a concept.

For example, suppose someone committed a horrible crime against you or a loved one. (You can decide which horrible crime to use in this example.) What would ultimate justice be in this terrible situation? Lock up the offender of this crime for life? Take his/her life? Torment him or her in the same way he or she tormented others, physically or mentally? Is any of this ultimate justice – making things ultimately right? Are things really “right” for you if any of the above things are done to the perpetrator? As finite humans, this is all we can get out of justice in this life, but it will never be the ultimate and total justice that only God can bring about. And he will bring about such justice through full and final reconciliation.

But what if the person who wronged you came to full repentance and expressed complete and genuine sorrow for what they had done. And suppose somehow, by God's grace and with his help realizing how much he had forgiven you, you were able to forgive this person and eventually be fully reconciled to him or her? This, and only this, would be *ultimate* justice. It would bring peace to you and the one who wronged you. It would bring real peace, final peace. Ongoing, unending punishment can never accomplish this. Things would remain less than ultimately right. Something would still be wrong, forever!

The same is true of God. Abandoning, annihilating, or tormenting someone (even forever) can never accomplish ultimate justice – making things ultimately right. Only full reconciliation with sinners brings this about. And this is God's goal and purpose in Judgment. The best-selling book "The Shack" portrays one of the worst and most heart-breaking of all possible wrongs that can be done. This is what makes this book such a powerful presentation of who God is and what true justice and judgment really are.

And so, God makes things right – he brings us to justice to make everything right in us. But he does so by judging us and taking loving, corrective, reconciling action. How could he possibly do anything less and still be God? Could he stand by and do nothing? Never! Could he abandon, annihilate, or even torment us in an act of retaliation? Not the God who is love and always has a good purpose in all that he does! What good and loving purpose could these things ever bring to those who are created by him in his own likeness designed to have a loving relationship with himself?

If God does not (through his power, love, mercy, and grace) bring about complete restoration of all things, and leaves even a spec of sin and rebellion to linger anywhere in the universe or beyond, then he fails in his mission to save the world – something that was clearly the mission of Jesus when he came.

So as you read through all of these passages (below) from the New Testament writings on judgment, condemnation, and other severe descriptions of God's actions, keep in mind who God is, what is good purpose he has for everyone, and his goal of complete reconciliation (and therefore ultimate justice) for all people everywhere.

## **The Absence of Torment by God**

One of the most interesting things that came out of my study of God's judgment was the fact that the Bible never ascribes to God an act of deliberate torment. In all

of the many verses portraying judgment, condemnation, and punishment, the idea of God directly bringing torment on anyone just does not exist. Gnashing of teeth, outer darkness, torment, etc., are all spoken of, but not as a result of God's direct action. Though at first I was surprised, once I thought about who God really is – one who is love, who is a savior, a redeemer, a rescuer, a restorer, and reconciler – I realized it could really be no other way. God does not need to be a tormentor, nor does he in anyway desire to be one. Torment is something done by those who are void of God – brutal dictators, terrorists, haters, evil-doers, and those void of God's love who have a sadistic desire to hurt and destroy others without and good purpose.

There are, however, a few of passages that could be taken that God is the active agent of torment. But when these are taken in the full context of the New Testament writings that overwhelmingly describe God as loving, merciful, gracious, patient, kind and good, there is really no question how to read them. And this is the error of all misguidance: to take the few exceptional verses on a particular subject and make the vast body of truth (that states otherwise) agree with these few. It is just bad “hermeneutics” (method of interpretation)!

Here is one of those very few passages with some explanation about it:

*Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart. Matt 18:21*

This is a story (parable) used by Jesus to teach a truth about the importance of forgiveness. Like all illustrative devices, not every detail is directly and completely applicable to the lesson presented. The evidence in the Bible against God being any kind of a tormentor is vast, so the angry king that “tortures” does not represent God in every aspect. Yet, the story clearly teaches a lesson about forgiveness. But even in this story, the evil man is only tormented until he had paid his debt! His torment was not eternal!

## **The Absence of Eternal Judgment**

Another important and interesting thing that came out of my judgment study was the absence of any *eternal* aspect of judgment -- except, perhaps, the idea that God will forever destroy all evil in us due to our “old man” (old person), our “fallen nature”, also known as “the flesh.” Whatever kind of refining fire God has in future judgment, it will not be “eternal”, though the *results* of such refinement and

correction will be. In other words, God will destroy all of the bad in us while keeping the good in us that he brought about when He made us in his own image.

As it turns out, the word in Greek that is often translated “eternal” (“aion” -- from which we get our word *eon* or *age*) simply means “age-long.” It does not automatically mean eternal. Aion is, by its nature, a word that takes its meaning from the word it modifies. If aion is used with God, then it is an “eternal” age-long time period, because God has no beginning or end.

But when the disciples came to Jesus and asked what would be the signs of his coming and the “end of the aion”, it could only mean “world” or “age”, since it is a time period that has an end. We even refer to people as having an “age”, and what we really mean is how many years make up their “aion” (age-long period of time).

JW Hansen in his excellent book “The Greek Word Aion-aionios” (available on Amazon) demonstrates all of this very clearly and convincingly. I checked out his work and it proved valid. As he suggested in his book, I did a word study in the Greek NT on the word “aion” and clearly it is used primarily as “age” and other such finite durations. But occasionally, when “aion” is used with some aspect of God, it rightly takes on the idea of “eternal.”

In the case of using “aion” with punishment (as Paul does in 2 Thess 1:9), there is no justification to conclude that God’s punishment is eternal (without end), and therefore without any restoring or correcting purpose. We as humans do not execute punishment in this way to either our children (who we love), or even criminals (who we despise). Punishment always has a goal of correction and demonstrating right from wrong. It is not eternal retribution with no other good purpose on the part of God toward those He so dearly loves.

## **Judgment in the Book of Revelation**

The book of Revelation is a very special book in the collection of New Testament writings.

First, it is the only book that is presented as the “Revealing of Jesus” (who is the promised Messiah). It is not a typical letter to a particular church or person, like most other NT books. But this highly symbolic revelation by John attaches to it seven “letters” to groups of believers around the Mediterranean Sea.

Second, the book of Revelation is highly symbolic. No other New Testament writing comes even close. All of the other writings are just straight talk – letters,

narratives, accounts, and a travel log (in the case of the second half of “The Acts of the Apostles”).

But John, after he wrote letters of criticism and commendation to the seven churches, launches into a description of what he saw in a vision on the Island of Patmos where he was exiled. And the symbolism is very extreme. It is extreme to the point that many people who have studied this book carefully disagree greatly as to what it means. But that is OK because this is the kind of writing it is. It is intended to give the reader an “experience” as much as to give him factual information. After all, it is the “Reveling of Jesus” – not just facts about him, but a *picture* of him! The impressions you get of his majesty and divinity are as important (if not more so) than what few clearly stated facts about him.

Whenever I teach from this book, I encourage people to look for “what”, “how”, and “why”, rather than “who”, “when”, and “where.” All questions are important, but the questions you ask determine what answers you will get. If you ask, for example, *who* is the anti-Christ, *where* will he appear, and *when* is he coming, etc., you will miss out on the greater revealing of the person of Jesus in this book. But if you ask, *what* is God (and Jesus as the central figure) doing, *how* does he do what he does, and *why* – then you will gain great and wonderful insight to who God is in the person of Jesus and what he has planned for us (the human race) that he loves.

Third, a balance between reading Revelation too literal and too figurative must be maintained. Either extreme will end in erroneous understanding of this important book.

Finally, the Revelation of Jesus Christ is the very last book in the Bible. This is for good reason. In it all things are concluded and summed up in future. Everything is presented in terms used throughout the Old Testament writings that came before it. It is in these writings that the understanding to Revelation’s symbolism lies. Turning locus into futuristic helicopters (as done by Hal Lindsay) seems foolish and short-sighted. This sells books and gets people excited, but it does not aid in presenting the book of Revelation in the historic context from which it was framed by John.

The point of all of the above information is that as a reader you are very wise to draw conclusions from the book of revelation with great caution and care. You are also wise to find the bases of what you believe (about judgment or any other subject) in the writings that are less symbolic and, therefore, less subject to speculation. Once this has been done, then, and only then, should the book of Revelation be considered.

The book of Revelation is clearly tied to the time period in which it was written. This does not mean that everything in it is a prediction of that age, for much of it may be predictions of the “end of the age” and into eternity. But the book was very clearly written to first-century believers, for them to read and understand, and for them to “pay attention to what is written *because* the time is near.” The book of Revelation had to first mean something to those to whom it was written, then, secondarily, we can gain from it as we see what was being communicated to them in their day.

The great judgment throne of God and the lake of fire in Rev 20 are always popular passages of those who believe that God is an eternal tormentor. Often it is the first “bible verse” that is presented by those who object to the idea that God will eventually reconcile all things to himself. Here is that passage, along with some comments about it:

*“The devil, who had deceived people, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*

The above translation of “forever and ever” is literally “ages of the ages” in the Greek text. It is the word “aion” (age-long) used twice—once as an object and once as a “possession” of that object. As in other cases in the New Testament writings, there is nothing here that requires this to be “forever and ever.” This is just translators acting as interpreters. Shame on them! Their goal *should* be to faithfully represent the Greek writings in English. And good old faithful Robert Young, in his literal translation, renders it “ages of the ages”, exactly as it is in Greek! And why not do this and give the reader the correct translation rather than to change it into something else that serves a theological agenda!

*“And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God’s throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds. Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

As stated previously, we should approach the highly symbolic book of Revelation with great care. If we find that here alone our beliefs lie, especially in opposition to the rest of the New Testament writings, we are on very shaky ground. Context, especially the full and complete context of the Bible will be your best friend in studying it. Really!

On the other extreme (also to be avoided) is ignoring what is clearly written that has value and meaning to be sought. That the above is a “judgment scene” cannot be denied or explained away as trivial. Nor should anyone want to do so! But the nature of this judgment and the degree to which it is administered, must be determined by the reader.

It seems fair to ask what we would expect God’s purpose to be in this judgment. Is it to destroy all together those who are judged, or is it to destroy what needs to be destroyed in those he loves, as an act of love, in order to reconcile them to himself? This passage, alone, does not tell us. Such questions can only be answered in the full context of who God claims to be and in who he really is! It is reasonable to say that all of the Bible, in its full context, compels us, on almost every page, that God is good, loving, merciful, patient, kind, and desires all people to be redeemed from their fallen state. He is also holy and just and such holiness demands perfection in all his creatures -- creatures who can never, on their own, bring about the holiness God requires and desires in his creatures for their own happiness and good. Only God himself can bring this about. Humans never can and never will. But God does this because this is his plan of love before the world was ever created.

We rightly expect the judgment of God to be good and in the very best interest (and improvement) of the creatures he loves. And, alas, we see that God throws both death and Hades into the lake of fire to be forever destroyed. Because of his redeeming and reconciling purposes for the human race that he created and loves, we would rightly expect (based on what he does with death and Hades) that he will destroy the “old man” (old person) in us, and our “old nature” that has been defeated on the cross of Christ.

One writer has said, “There is no *death column* in the book of life!” And, sure enough, this passage never says how many, if any, are *not* written in the book of life. If in Adam all died, and in Christ all (the same “all”) are made righteous, then why would we not expect all names to be written in the book of life? -- especially since all names are *only* written there on the basis of Jesus dying on the cross to take away the sin of the world? Does someone have to be lost in order for God’s salvation to be valid? As asked by Isaiah: “Is God’s ear so dull that he cannot hear, or his arm so short that he cannot save?” In other words, is God not able to save everyone, or is he unwilling?

The point of all of this is that what is written in Revelation chapter 20 is hardly conclusive and should be understood in the much greater context of who God so

clearly presents himself to be in the New Testament writings and in the whole Bible

## **Commentary on Judgment Passages**

The passages that follow are a collection of the most serious verses I could find on judgment, condemnation, punishment etc., in the New Testament writings. Each writer deals with the subject of God's loving judgment in a somewhat unique way and presents his own message of what God is doing as He faithfully and lovingly pronounces accurate judgment on every human being to bring about the changes in them that will bring them to himself and be fully reconciled.

But my goal is to demonstrate and explain how God's judgment is an act of love – his love in action – and not hate or retaliation (something we only find in fallen human beings). There must be a good and eventually positive benefit for all people that he judges because everything he does is motivated by his love and is ultimately good.

So, as you read through all of these passages (below) from the New Testament writings on judgment, condemnation, and other severe descriptions of God's actions, keep in mind who God is, what is good purpose he has for everyone, and his goal of complete reconciliation (and therefore ultimate justice) for all people everywhere. There are really only two views of "judgment" (and all of its related severe actions by God: punishment, condemnation, etc.). One view is that judgment is basically *retaliation* for wrong-doing or unbelief on the part of humans as wayward sinners, and has only a negative and destructive purpose. The other view is that "judgment" it is basically corrective and has an ultimately good purpose (not in spite of its severity, but *because* of its severity) because God is good and always has a good purpose in everything He does.

When you read these many passages in the NT, ask yourself, "Is the purpose in these severe things ultimately good and corrective, or is the purpose pure *retribution* (retributing sin or unbelief) with no corrective, redeeming, restoring, healing or reconciling purpose whatsoever?" And keep in mind that as soon as punishment becomes never-ending, all corrective and restoring purpose disappears completely and our view of God must become altogether different that a God who punishes temporally and has a goal of correction.

As for whether or not there really is eternal punishment from God, consider running this simple three question test on each severity passage listed below:



1. Is the torment directly applied by God, or from some other source or situation.
2. Is the torment clearly never-ending?
3. Is the torment for the purpose of pure retribution?

When I apply these three criteria to NT passages of judgement, punishment and correction, no passage seems to be able to pass this three-fold test to ensure that God eternally punishes (torments) anyone. For example, when considering the parable of *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, though the rich man is in Hades being tormented, there is no indication that God is the *source* of that torment. And, although there is said to be a “fixed gulf” separating the rich man from Abraham, there is no indication that this separation is *never-ending* (eternal). Additionally, the rich man seems to be improving in his disposition and is repenting of his wrong-doing enough to want to warn others. Is this a place of *pure retribution* with no corrective purpose whatsoever? So as you read passages on judgment, ask yourself about the source, duration, and purpose of the severity that is presented in them. Keep in mind, also, the vast and overwhelming evidence throughout the Bible of the grace, forgiveness, passion, care concern, mercy, patience, self-sacrificing love of God that renders Him as the only being in all of the universe with the highest possible moral excellence!

So, is there judgement, condemnation, punishment, etc., on the part of God expressed in the Bible? Of course! But the real question is ... what is His purpose in it: good or bad, corrective or retributive? You be the judge. But always give God (of all persons) “benefit of the doubt”, and never let anyone “sell God short” on who He is in His perfection and ability to succeed at what he sets out to do on His mission to save His world!

## Judgment Categories

- Judgment
- Judgment in Romans chapter 2
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## Judgment

“Judgment” is the largest category of all the various aspects of God’s severity presented in the New Testament writings. Unfortunately, most people have been taught that “judgment” means to send someone to hell and is a negative action. But actually, “judgment” is not necessarily a bad thing. It simply means “to make and accurate assessment”. People make judgments all the time that are not necessarily negative of bad – though sometimes they are. But judgment, especially when it comes from God who is always good and does everything with a good purpose, can be a good thing! When God judges He makes an accurate assessment of us and our situations with the good purpose of revealing the truth about who we are and what we have done, good and bad.

Kittle, my favorite Greek word lookup source” (see the *Book Resources* section below for a description of Kittle) devotes 30 pages to this word. It is a fairly involved word study, and well worth the effort, but Kittle sums it up this way (paraphrased): *The word at its root means to part, to sift, to part out or select. Its most common meaning is simply to decide or assess, or even to seek justice (to make things right!). In the New Testament it is used as the judgment of God, but can also be personal human judgments seeking to resolve or determine situations, including law suits.*

But the bottom line is that although judgment can be, and often is, a very serious matter on the part of God concerning his creation, there is nothing in the word itself that requires never-ending torment as pure retribution for sin or unbelief. But it does, for sure, include God judging, and therefore acting, severely – as he should! But the *purpose* in judgment is in question, not the *fact* of it. So look for all the good (but severe) purpose of God in his judgment and not some extreme retributive purpose that does not reflect all of the good and highly moral attributes that God so fully reveals about himself in the Bible.

Every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’ Matt 7:17

You people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in wicked Sodom, it would still be here today. I tell you, even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than you. Matt 11:21

You testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started. Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of Gehenna? Therefore, I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers of religious law. But you will kill some by crucifixion, and you will flog others with whips in your synagogues, chasing them from city to city. As a result, you will be held responsible for the murder of all godly people of all time—from the murder of righteous Abel to the murder of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed in the Temple between the sanctuary and the altar. I tell you the truth, this judgment will fall on this very generation. Matt 23:29

There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. John 3:18

And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment. John 3:36

The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don't be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God's Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will. John 5:26

I will not judge those who hear me but don't obey me, for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. John 12.47

But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. John 16:7

And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. Acts 10:42

Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and declared, "It was necessary that we first preach the word of God to you Jews. But since you have rejected it and judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we will offer it to the Gentiles". Acts 13:46

We should not think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:29

A few days later Felix came back with his wife, Drusilla, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about faith in Christ Jesus. As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the coming day of judgment, Felix became frightened. Acts 24.24

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn't it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

If you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 1Cor 11:29

The sins of some people are obvious, leading them to certain judgment. But there are others whose sins will not be revealed until later. In the same way, the good deeds of some people are obvious. And the good deeds done in secret will someday come to light. 1Tim 5:24

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God! 2Tim 4:1

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said. 2Tim 4:14

Just as every person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment. Heb 9:27

Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies. For anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Just think how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to us. For we know the one who said, I will take revenge. I will pay them back. He also said, God will judge his own people. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb 10:26

So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you. James 2:12

Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. James 5:1

Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. Don't grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. For look—the Judge is standing at the door! James 5:7

## Judgment in Romans chapter 2

All of chapter two of Paul's letter to the believers in Rome is provided. This is an amazing presentation of God's judgment, but it starts off with an exhortation that we are not to judge others! This chapter should be read very carefully for it contains many truths about how God judges and why. But notice how Gehenna, Hades, hell, or any kind of never-ending is not described or warned of. In fact, nowhere in the whole book of Romans does Paul ever mention or warn of such things. Certainly there are severe consequences for unbelief and lack of repentance, but it is always wise to look for and find God's good purpose in his judgment based on his goodness, mercy, grace, holiness (perfection) and justice (making things right).

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God's judgment when you do the same things? Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on doing what is evil—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism. When the Gentiles sin, they will be destroyed, even though they never had God's written law. And the Jews, who do have God's law, will be judged by that law when they fail to obey it. For merely listening to the law doesn't make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight. Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life. Rom 2

## Everyone Judged

There are many passages in the New Testament that make it clear that all people will fall under God's judgment. Tied with this is often the fact that God shows no favoritism (does not favor one person over another) and that he renders to all people according to what they have done. The fact that God judges all people according to their deeds is undeniable. But this is a good thing. We all hold our

children accountable because we love them and we want them to understand what is right and wrong. Our love for them never changes and we will never abandon them or torment them, but our judgment of them is necessary and good. The same is true of God. His love, salvation, forgiveness, and faithfulness to us never changes, but his judgment of us is to expose the garbage that needs to be eliminated from our lives so we can be fully reconciled to him for eternity.

For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. Matt 16:27

The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don't be so surprised! John 5:26

And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. Acts 10:42

We should not think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:29

And this is the message I proclaim—that the day is coming when God, through Christ Jesus, will judge everyone's secret life. Rom 2:16

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn't it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For the Scriptures say, 'As surely as I live, every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess and give praise to God.' Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall. Rom 14:10

I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God! 2Tim 4:1

Just as every person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment. Heb 9:27

Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. But remember that they will have to face God, who will judge everyone, both the living and the dead. That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit. 1Pet 4:4

Even "believers" are judged. This is because God does not treat people differently (shows no favoritism). What he graciously does for one person, he does for another.

Salvation is completely by grace and not by works, and it is the action of God on behalf of all people. What he requires of one, he also requires of all others – whether a “believer” or not.

For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News? And also, If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners? 1Pet 4:17

## **No Favoritism in God’s judgment**

It is important to notice in the New Testament writings that God is always presented as one who deals fairly and honestly with all people, not showing favor for some people over others. This does not mean that everyone gets dealt with in exactly the same way. I had two kids with two different personalities and temperaments. I did not always treat them exactly the same, even in the same or similar situations. But I did treat them fairly and without favoring one over the other. I knew how much severity or leniency each kid needed in each situation. I did my best to treat them as they needed to be treated in order for them to learn and become the best person each could be. God does the same with us, only perfectly!

Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. Acts 10:34

For God does not show favoritism. Romans 2:11

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn’t it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.) Galatians 2:6

Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don’t threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites. Ephesians 6:9

But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites. Colossians 3:25

I solemnly command you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus and the highest angels to obey these instructions without taking sides or showing favoritism to anyone. 1 Timothy 5:21

But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. James 3:17

And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as “temporary residents.” 1 Peter 1:17

## Eternal judgment

(See “*The Absence of Eternal Judgment*” in previous section for more detail).

In the following passages, the literal translation (more accurate and honest) of Robert Young has been inserted in parentheses below where the word “eternal” has been rendered. The resulting difference in meaning is important! As you will see, many times the word for eternal is not even in the Greek text! And, when it (aion) is, it is rightly translated “age-long.”

Jesus is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending (unquenchable) fire. Matt 3:12

Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ And they will go away into eternal (age-long) punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life. Matt 25:31

I, Paul, know that none of you, to whom I have preached the Kingdom, will ever see me again. I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death (“eternal death” is not in the Greek text), it’s not my fault, for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know. Acts 20:25

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. (“eternal” is not in the Greek text) Rom 6:20

Jesus will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal (age-long) destruction, *forever* (“forever” not in the Greek text) separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. 2Thess 1:7

You don’t need further instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal (age-long) judgment. Heb 6:2

The beast you saw was once alive but isn’t now. And yet he will soon come up out of the bottomless pit and go to eternal destruction. And the people who belong to this world, whose names were not written in the



Book of Life before the world was made, will be amazed at the reappearance of this beast who had died.  
Revelation 17:8

## Condemnation

The word “condemnation” in the Greek language does not mean “to send to hell forever”, even though this is what many people think and have been taught. It is closely related to “judgment” (above) in Greek, and so it simply means to declare something or someone to fall outside of, or fall short of, what is right and correct. It is clearly a negative word by its nature, but it is not automatically represent the worst possible thing that can be pronounced on someone. But it is a negative pronouncement and it identifies the target as clearly less than it needs to be in order to be declared good or right. Like all severe words used in the New Testament writings to describe God’s severe action, we must always ask, “What is God’s purpose in “condemning”? Is it to do away with someone or to forsake and give up on them in some way? Is this the kind of purpose we would expect from God in light of all we know about Him? Always look for the purpose God has in the severe things He does and assume the best of motives in Him. If the best is not always found in God, then where in the universe and beyond can it ever be found? I can’t and won’t!

And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you. Matt 12:36

Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned. Mark 16:16

How can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory? And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, The more we sin, the better it is! Those who say such things deserve to be condemned. Rom 3:6

In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God’s law will condemn you Jews who are circumcised and possess God’s law but don’t obey it. Romans 2:27

“But,” someone might still argue, “how can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?” And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, “The more we sin, the better it is!” Those who say such things deserve to be condemned. Romans 3:7

And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. Romans 5:9

And the result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but God’s free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins.

Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Romans 5:16

But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my death? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation to death. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commands for its own evil purposes. Romans 7:13

Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:32

If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God! 2 Corinthians 3:9

Then the man of lawlessness ... will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies. Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth. 2Thess 2:8

For people like that have turned away from the truth, and their own sins condemn them. Titus 3:11

We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. For instance, you know about Job, a man of great endurance. You can see how the Lord was kind to him at the end, for the Lord is full of tenderness and mercy. But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned. James 5:11

In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed. 2 Peter 2:3

Later, God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and turned them into heaps of ashes. He made them an example of what will happen to ungodly people. 2 Peter 2:6

I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:4

## **Wrath and Anger**

The word "wrath" in the Greek New Testament writings is the word "orga." It essentially means "intensity." It is the Greek word that our English word "orgasm" comes from. There is, for sure, a negative aspect associated with "orga" and that is why translators use the word "wrath." But the problem with using "wrath" is that it gives the impression that God is in some kind of uncontrollable rage and on the path to destroy everything and everyone that is an object of His intensity (orga). Further, it is falsely assumed that the very worst kind of intentions are transferred from God to his "objects of wrath."

But this far from the truth. Since God is love and always acts as a result of that love (and not out of hate or any other motive), his wrath (orga) is intense love. Love can be both intense and severe because love takes action, and always acts in the very best interest of the one loved, and will do whatever it takes, no matter how intense and severe, to save, redeem, correct, restore, and reconcile those who are objects of love. Read the following passages with this understanding of “wrath” (orga) or “anger” in mind.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?” Matthew 3:7

But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Romans 1:18

But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 2:5

But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness. Romans 2:8

In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. Romans 9:22

Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the Lord. Romans 12:19

All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. Ephesians 2:3

You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Don’t be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Eph 5:5

So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. Col 3:5

For some of the Jews killed the prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus. Now they have persecuted us, too. They fail to please God and they instead work against all humanity as they try to keep us from preaching the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles. By doing this, they continue to pile up their sins. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last. 1Thess 2:15

For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. 1Thess 5:9

For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said, “In my anger I took an oath: ‘They will never enter my place of rest,’” even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. Hebrews 4:3

And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?”

Revelation 6:16

The nations were filled with wrath, but now the time of your wrath has come. It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, as well as your holy people, and all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest. It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth.” Revelation 11:18

They must drink the wine of God’s anger. It has been poured full strength into God’s cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. Revelation 14:10

So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God’s wrath. Revelation 14:19

Then I saw in heaven another marvelous event of great significance. Seven angels were holding the seven last plagues, which would bring God’s wrath to completion. Revelation 15:1

Then one of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. Revelation 15:7

Then I heard a mighty voice from the Temple say to the seven angels, “Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God’s wrath.” Revelation 16:1

The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble. So God remembered all of Babylon’s sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath. Revelation 16:19

From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will release the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty, like juice flowing from a winepress. Revelation 19:15

## **Punishment**

Punishment is a Greek word that means (in its most basic form) “to trim”. If we just stop and think about what punishment means when carried out by loving parents, and keeping in mind that God is our Father (not just a cold sterile “god”), it is clear that punishment must have correction as its goal. Otherwise, it becomes pure revenge, retaliation, and retribution. When my dad (now passed) punished me as a boy, he had only the very best in mind for me. His goal was to correct and help me become a better person. He never had any thought of discarding me or retaliating against me. It was always *for* me, and never against me. Was it severe? You bet, and I did not always believe it was good intentioned as an ignorant child. But it was done in love, and had he not punished me ... that would be unloving! Love does whatever it takes to correct, improve, restore, reconcile, and heal. Love

never gives up or forsakes, and love never fails! (See 1 Corinthians 13). But love does indeed punish ... and so does God. We should always thank him for it as He acts in faithfulness toward us!

Sometimes the word punish is used with the word “age” or “indefinite time period” (aionios). Traditionally, this is interpreted as “eternal punishment”. But this is not definite justification for such use, and based on the meaning of the Greek word “aionios” (especially in light of the fact that there is a word for “eternal” and that it is seldom used in the NT), it is more likely understood to mean “punishment in the age to come”. (See the section above titled *Absence of Eternal Judgment*, and the book titled *Terms for Eternity* in the *Book Sources* section below).

You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. Matthew 5:38

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life. Matthew 25:46

Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished. Mark 12:40

“And a servant who knows what the master wants, but isn’t prepared and doesn’t carry out those instructions, will be severely punished. Luke 12:47

You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you who judge others do these very same things. And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. Since you judge others for doing these things, why do you think you can avoid God’s judgment when you do the same things? Don’t you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can’t you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin? But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done. Rom 2

But, some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose, for it helps people see how righteous God is. Isn’t it unfair, then, for him to punish us? (This is merely a human point of view.) Of course not! If God were not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world? Rom 3:5

So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished.  
Romans 13:2

Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and so it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve. 2Cor 11:14

Jesus will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. 2Thess 1:7

For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child. Hebrews 12:6

For anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Just think how much worse the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God, and have treated the blood of the covenant, which made us holy, as if it were common and unholy, and have insulted and disdained the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to us. For we know the one who said, I will take revenge. I will pay them back. He also said, God will judge his own people. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Heb 10:26

After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin. Have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the My discipline, and don't give up when I correct you. For the God disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child. Heb 12:4

So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment. 2Peter 2:9

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. 1 John 4:18

Then I heard another voice calling from heaven, "Come away from her, my people. Do not take part in her sins, or you will be punished with her. Revelation 18:4

His judgments are true and just. He has *punished* the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. He has avenged the murder of his servants. Revelation 19:2

## **Gehenna**

Gehenna is a physical location just south of Jerusalem. The manner and infrequency in which Jesus used Gehenna, plus the absence of any other NT writer (except James, one time) to use this word at all, makes it difficult to conclude that Jesus was identifying an actual metaphysical place of eternal torment. (For more detailed information on "Gehenna", see the section in this booklet titled "*Stubborn Facts ... About Hell*." It is also available on the GILF Resources page at: <http://www.godislovefellowship.com/resources.html>)

Matthew 5:22 But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of Gehenna.

Matthew 5:29 So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna. And if

your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna.

Matthew 10:28 “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

Matthew 18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of Gehenna.

Matthew 23:15 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of Gehenna you yourselves are!

Matthew 23:33 Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of Gehenna?

Mark 9:43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of Gehenna with two hands.

Mark 9:45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It’s better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into Gehenna with two feet.

Mark 9:47 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It’s better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into Gehenna,

Luke 12:5 But I’ll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into Gehenna. Yes, he’s the one to fear.

James 3:6 And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by Gehenna itself.

Here is a breakdown of where and how Jesus used the word Gehenna:

1. If you call a person a fool you are in danger of the fire of Gehenna (Matt 5:22)
2. Better to get rid of an offending eye or hand than to keep it and be thrown into Gehenna (Matt 5:29, 18:9, Mark 9:43)
3. Fear God who can destroy body and soul in Gehenna (Matt 10:28, Like 12:5)
4. The Pharisees make their followers into twice the offspring of Gehenna as they are (Matt 23:15)
5. How will you Pharisees escape the sentence of Gehenna? (Matt 23:33)

Wow! That’s it! This brevity about hell (Gehenna) is a very stubborn fact that most people are not aware of. Now, it could be that Jesus is warning everyone about a spiritual place of torment to be avoided at all cost. And if He is, then so be it. But a closer look at these occurrences makes this even harder to believe.

## Conclusion

After reading (or at least, looking through) all of the above passages in the New Testament on judgment and other terms used to express God's severe actions, my hope is that you have observed what I did when I read these very carefully, that ...

1. There is, indeed, judgment (including punishment, condemnation, destruction, etc.) that is executed by God, presently and in the age to come (eternity).
2. Though judgment is at times very severe, it does not require a never-ending aspect in order for it to be real and severe.
3. The purpose in judgment need not be *pure retribution* with no corrective, healing, and reconciling purpose in it whatsoever.
4. That no passage in the New Testament passes the three-part test (source, duration, and purpose) required to render God's judgment as "never-ending."
5. All passages *can* be read from the perspective that God is good and that everything has a good purpose based on His well-established, overwhelming evidence in the whole Bible that God is loving, merciful, patient, kind, holy (perfect), and just (making things right), and has the very highest moral excellence.

But, of course, you must be the judge of what you conclude about God's judgment. I only ask that you study, pray (ask God directly and specifically if He is an "eternal punisher" and seek an answer from Him!), give God "benefit of the doubt" before you assign to Him the worst possible thing that could ever be said about anyone (direct, on-purpose, never-ending agony and torment) without clear and convincing evidence that He will actually do this! Go back and read all these passages again with this in mind if you need to. But... make sure.