
Knowing God

Part 7 by: Ronald L. Dart

If you sit down to read the Old Testament, you're very likely to come across some events that are profoundly disturbing. There are some instances where God commands Israel to wipe out whole cities, men, women, children and animals. Just 'scorch the earth policy' as they go through that part of the land. It is not easy to reconcile these events with what we otherwise know about the nature of God.

People make two big mistakes when they tackle this issue. On the one hand they try to justify God, as though God needed somebody to come along and explain Him. On the other hand, they condemn God for allowing bad things to happen.

Now as to the first error, God doesn't need me to explain His actions or justify Him before anyone. God is sovereign. He can do what He wants to do.

My task is not to justify God, but to understand Him and to know Him.

As to the second error, that God allows bad things to happen, this arises from the human desire to have our cake and eat it too. We want to be free to live our lives as we choose, without anything bad ever happening to us. But, the freedom to live our lives as we choose means that we each have the freedom to harm one another, which we proceed to do. If we are free to harm someone, that means that somebody else is, let me use the expression, free to be a victim.

Judgment Day

The presence of evil in the world is not that hard to understand. Man is free. Man commits sin. When we commit sin, bad things happen and if God is just, then He cannot let evil deeds go unpunished.

Now I think it's fair to say, that every Christian faith believes in a 'judgment day' of some kind. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it is good or whether it's bad." So it is out there, somewhere, ahead of us. Judgment day when we are going to receive the things that we've done in our body, whether it was good or whether it was bad.

Paul went on to say, {11} "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men: but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your conscience." We understand now, that there are bad things and good things that can be out there ahead of us in the judgment of God.

Saved by Grace

Now at the same time, we all know we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8), by the unmerited pardon of Almighty God. Sometimes though, we speak so much about the grace of God, the mercy of God, and the latter idea of unmerited pardon that we forget the former. We forget that if there were no judgment, we wouldn't need grace and if there were no justice, well one kind of behavior is no better than any other.

It is absolutely incumbent upon God to call men, to account for the evil deeds that they have done. He does it in this life, and He will do it again at the end of days.

Knowing God

Now this is what God told us we can know about him. He told Jeremiah, "Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me." So, God can be known, and God can be understood. "That he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:24).

So, we can know God, we can understand Him, and the three most important things to know about God are laid out for us. God exercises lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth.

Jesus Christ Will Judge

Now taking one step beyond this, we have the greatest personal example of this that we could ever find in the life and in the ministry of Jesus Christ, the greatest personal example of all three. We all know about the grace of Jesus. We know that he is a gentle Savior, that He is meek, that he is mild. through endless songs and hymns we praise His love, His kindness, His mercy. We don't sing quite so much about the judgment of Jesus, but we should know, that if there is no judgment, mercy and grace don't mean a thing, and if there is no judgment, then men will get away with all their evil deeds.

There came an occasion where Jesus felt it necessary to explain to his listeners where He stood on the issue of judgment. We find it in John chapter 5 verse 22, where Jesus says this, "For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son." Now that in itself is both encouraging and sobering because it basically says that these three characteristics of God, lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness, while they are the attributes of God, they are also the attributes of Christ, and that all judgment, all of it, is handed down to Jesus Christ.

Verse 23, "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that does not honor the Son, doesn't honor the Father who sent Him. {24} "Now I'm going to tell you the truth," Jesus said, "He that hears my word, and believes on Him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but he has passed from death into life." Did you catch the significance of what I just read to you? Let me read it to you again. It bears repeating.

Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I tell you the truth, he that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me has everlasting life." Do you realize that implies strongly that the person who will not hear Jesus or believe the Father who sent him, does not have everlasting life, "and shall come into condemnation." Well, otherwise the saying here makes no sense.

Not only that, but the person who will not listen to Jesus, will not believe on the Father has not passed from death to life, but abides in death. Now this should really send a little chill up our spine. Sometimes we get over busy telling people God is good and kind and we forget that God's goodness requires justice to be done in order to be fully good. Good people, you understand, cannot tolerate evil and remain good.

Jesus went on, on this occasion, verse 25, saying "I'm going to tell you the truth, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live, {26} For as the Father has life in Himself, He has given the Son to have life in himself, {27} And has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man." Why? Because He is the Son of Man. This has to do with Jesus humanity, the fact that Jesus actually walked on this earth in the flesh and experienced the flesh, and therefore is in a position to be compassionate upon man. But at the same time, compassion doesn't mean anything unless there is justice, on the other side of the scales.

God has given to Jesus, the authority to execute judgment. Jesus said in verse 28 of John 5, "Now, don't marvel at this, for the hour is coming, in which everyone in the grave shall hear his voice, {29} And shall come forth, they that have done good to the resurrection of life, they who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation." Now the message seems clear enough to me. I can't live my life any old way I want, and escape being called into account for it. The time is coming when everyone in the grave, no exceptions, are going to hear His voice and come out of their graves, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.

It's out there. It is down the road. We know it's there and we shiver a little bit when we think of it.

Jesus said, in verse 30, "I can of my own self do nothing, as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just, because I don't seek my own will, but the will of my Father who sent me, {31} If I bear witness of myself, my witness would not be true." Later he says this, verse 45, "Don't think that I am going to accuse you to the Father. There is one that accuses you, even Moses, in whom you trust."

These people who were assembled around Jesus that He was talking to on this occasion, were people who really relied on the law of Moses, the law was the thing they trusted in. Jesus said,

"There is going to be one that accuses you to the Father, Moses, in whom you trust. {46} For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote of me, {47} But if you don't believe his writings, how shall you believe my words."

Now it is important to know, that Jesus firmly linked His words and Moses writings, and what Moses wrote was the law.

Now we all know about the lovingkindness of Jesus. Hymnals are full of the praise of His grace, His kindness, His patience, and His goodness, but what we may not know is, that none of this means a thing, if Jesus is tolerant of evil, harmful and hurtful behavior.

Woe Unto You, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites!

How did Jesus judge evil men when He walked the streets of Jerusalem?

So, we understand that the goodness of Jesus requires that He stand in opposition to evil, that He stand against evil and hypocritical men.

Now, there was a time when Jesus had occasion to speak to just such a group of people, and when the time came, He spoke plainly, and He judged them. Matthew 23 verse 13, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you don't even go in yourselves and you won't allow those who are trying to enter to go in."

Now this is a rank condemnation of the exclusivism of the Pharisees and the scribes who would shut people out, who would not eat with Gentiles, who if a person was seen in any way received their disapproval, they wouldn't eat with them, wouldn't talk to them, they would not allow them to be in the synagogue.

Verse 14, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" What do you mean, hypocrite? Well, He's going to tell you what He means by hypocrite. Jesus says, "You devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer, therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation." Now right there is a classic example. These men would take advantage of a poor widow in a business deal. They would foreclose on her property, unfairly, all the time maintaining all the religious trappings of long prayers and attendance at the synagogue and standing on the street corner and praying. They have Jesus' condemnation for harming the widow and it is doubled because of the pretense of religion.

Now how could Jesus pretend to exercise lovingkindness if He was willing to stand still while men abuse poor widows? You have to stand up against that sort of thing if you have any claim to be a good person, as Jesus did.

Jesus continues in verse 15, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell that you are. {16} Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "If anyone swears by the temple, it doesn't matter, but if you swear by the gold of the temple, you are bound by your oath. {17} You fools and blind, which is greater the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?"

It was an argument of the time, but Jesus' point with them is, you are blind, you're fools, verse 18, "You say, whoever will swear by the altar, it is nothing but whoever swears by the gift on it, is guilty. {19} You fools and blind." And Jesus again just stomps the daylight out of the Pharisees, in their ridiculous hairsplitting ideas about what was right and what was wrong.

He said {21} "Whoever shall swear by the temple, swears by the temple and by him that dwells there {22} And he that swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by Him that sits on it." You have to be careful about your swearing.

Verse 23, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin." Little leaves of herbs. "And you have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, faith, you should have done these and not left the other undone." And right in the middle of it all, judgment. Judgment and mercy and faith, and the way you deal with other people.

Verse 24, "You blind guide, you strain in a gnat, and swallow a camel. {25} Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You may clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but inside it's full of extortion and excess." These men were extortioners! Jesus could not fail to judge their behavior for what it was, and to condemn it.

Lovingkindness and Judgment

Now this is our little Savior, meek and mild, gentle Jesus, the one who was kind and wouldn't harm a flea. But you see, lovingkindness and judgment have to go hand in hand.

Verse 26 of Matthew 23, "You blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, so that the outside can be clean also." That's what's important. {27} "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs. You are beautiful on the outside, but on the inside, you are full of bones and dead men's bones and uncleanness. {28} And outwardly, you appear righteous to men but on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. {29} Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets and you garnish the sepulchers of the righteous and {30} You say, 'If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'" We would not have done that.

Jesus said, "Do you know what you have done? You're witnesses to yourselves that you are the children of them who killed the prophets." {32} "Fill up, then the measure of your fathers. {33} You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?"

Are you getting the picture now? Are you understanding that, if you going to know God and understand God, you have to know not only that he's loving and kind, but that He is also a God who exercises judgment! This is His judgment of evil men for the things that they do.

Now notice what Jesus said to them, {34} "I will tell you what I'm going to do. I am going to send to you prophets and wise men and scribes and I'll tell you what you're going to do to them, you'll kill some of them, and crucify them. Some of them, you will scourge in your synagogues

and you will persecute them from city to city." Do you know why this is going to happen? {35} "So that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Able to the blood of Zacharias, of whom you slew between the temple and the altar."

This is a painful thing to consider, though, Jesus said that he would deliberately send them prophets, wise men and scribes and He would allow the Pharisees to persecute them, all the way to death. Jesus would send good men to their death at the hands of evil men. That is hard to accept, isn't it? That Jesus would send innocent people in this world to see how the world will treat them? Jesus seems to say the only way the Pharisees would ever accept the judgment that they were evil was by challenging that evil with good men, men who were vulnerable to that evil. Men with whom they would take advantage of. And would ultimately kill and destroy, and therefore these men who claimed innocence, would see their guilt before their own eyes.

"I will tell you the truth," Jesus said, {36} "All this is going to come upon this generation. {37} O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and you stone them that has been sent to you. How often I would have gathered your children together, like a hen gathers her little chicks under her wings, and you wouldn't have any of it. {38} Behold, your house is left to you desolate. {39} You shall not see me henceforth until you say. Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord."

Destruction of Whole Societies

Now I opened this article with a very painful question, why God not only allowed but even commanded the destruction of whole societies including the women and children of those societies. I can't pretend that I fully understand why God did that, but I understand it a little better today than I used to.

Just recently I saw an article in the 'Times of India,' that documented something I had already seen on television. I had already been very disturbed by it. I had seen pictures of these Islamic schools in Pakistan and the way the children are being taught there. 'The Times' started off by saying, "The call to prayer, wails. Young boys put aside to study the Koran, shake out their prayer rugs and kneel face down towards Mecca. For these student's life is simple. Their days are spent praying and studying the Koran, but when they leave Pakistan's exploding number of small private religious schools, they have few skills that help them to get jobs. Many remain unemployed, surviving on occasional manual labor. Some people believe the schools are creating a growing pool of Pakistanis easily recruited to extremist Islamic causes. Most of the students come from the poorest families, who send their children because the institutions feed and care for them, as well as provide education, but the education is very limited. They teach only the Koran and stress the responsibilities of Muslims to fight for Islam. The Pakistani government tried to, at one time, to reduce the government funds to these religious schools and they tried to regulate the curriculum, but they failed. Their efforts were derailed by small right-wing religious parties. Why? Well, they have their objective."

Here's one of the disturbing things. "The authorities say that there are nearly 4000 religious' schools in Pakistan that are registered with over half a million students, but there are thousands more unregistered schools that are believed to exist turning out students who go on to fight for

Islamic parties in Afghanistan's Civil War and may be ready to join other militant movements. Pakistan's former Interior Ministry, who was in charge of the national police, said this, "Some of these religious schools are hotbeds of terrorism. All of this is a carryover," he said, "from the Afghan jihad. Now," he said, "some graduates are involved in fighting between Shiite and Sunni Muslim groups that caused hundreds of deaths in recent years." Fact is, it affects the entire society. You can see the resulting sectarian clashes that take place. It wouldn't be happening otherwise.

The teachers at these schools, combination of schools and mosques, teach their students the Koran and the obligation to fight for Islam at home and abroad. Such schools graduated thousands of Afghan Mujahedin, freedom fighters, who battled the Soviet army in the 1980s in Afghanistan and now they boast of schooling the men who make up the backbone of the Taliban religious army that has won control over most of Afghanistan in recent years.

Now I take that little bit of information and realize that there are thousands, hundreds of thousands, perhaps, of children in Pakistan alone who are being taught nothing but the Koran and to fight for Islam. These children are being taught to go to war. I couple this with all the Palestinian children who relish the idea of becoming a suicide bomber, one of the greatest things they look forward to in life is death. Death as a suicide bomber, killing a few people in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem.

Kids who throw rocks at armed soldiers inviting death and who is educating all these children to do this evil? The children are not doing it themselves. In parts of the Muslim world today, children are being infected with hatred and an evil that is totally foreign to our understanding. The leadership in those countries is taking steps to ensure that the holy war will not end with their deaths but will go on generation after generation after generation.

It is possible, to so infect the children of a generation with so much evil that they have no hope of life worth living but are a danger to themselves and to the world around them.

Evil Must Be Cauterized

I still can't get my mind around it, but I can at least begin to understand why evil must be cauterized off the face of the earth. Otherwise, it cannot be put to an end.

Paul wrote of the return of Christ along these lines. It's in second Thessalonians, the first chapter, verse 6, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, {7} And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, {8} In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, {9} Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, {10} When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired and all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day."

Now also back in Deuteronomy. Now a lot of this would still be troubling if it weren't for one thing, that God says about himself. He says in Deuteronomy 32 and verse 39, "See now that I,

even I, am he, and there is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal, neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand." The awareness that God can and does kill, has to be tempered with the fact that God alone has the power of the resurrection. And for those that are killed in these wars, there is yet hope in a resurrection.

Continuing in verse 40, God says, "For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever. {41} If I whet my glittering sword, and my hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies and will reward them that hate me. {42} I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. {43} Rejoice, O you nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people."

Sobering isn't it? If you want to know God, you have to know and understand, that He not only exercises lovingkindness in the earth, but also, judgment.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been confronted about God's judgments in the Old Testament?
2. If you have, how did you answer them? Is it even our place, since we are mere humans, to even comprehend all the things that are in the Bible in the first place?
3. Do you ever think about Jesus being our judge?
4. What images does that conjure in your mind?
5. Do you feel that churches today preach more about His loving kindness and mercy and not enough about His judgment?
6. Have you ever been guilty of not standing up for the 'small person' because of some reason be it peer pressure, over zealotness, etc...?
7. Do you believe the idea "once saved always saved"?
8. Why or why not?
9. What do you think Paul met when he said "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" in Philippians 2:12?

10. How do you picture the final judgment?