

TO JUDGE THE WORLD

TO JUDGE THE WORLD 4



T. M. MOORE

A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

To Judge the World

To Judge the World
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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To Judge the World

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Welcome to *To Judge the World*

God's judgments are in all the earth, and He is implementing them through His people, who are the agents of His *shalom*.

Believers are called to judge with righteous judgment, but this does not mean that we must be *judgmental*. Rather, we seek to bring God's peace and righteousness into the world by making choices and decisions, and by taking actions in line with the hope of glory, which is Jesus Christ in us.

God's *shalom* becomes the context in which His glory can be known, and it is this that we ultimately and continuously seek. By practicing righteous judgments in all the moments and situations of our lives, we become the means whereby the blessings of God flow to the world.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview. We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Appointed to Judge

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 1 Corinthians 6.2

Judging and judgment

The burden of this series has been to show that, contrary to what we often hear, believers are called to judge the world, not to back down from opportunities to render an opinion, suggest a corrective action, proffer a gesture of kindness, or otherwise seek to bring the *shalom* of God to the world. We are called to *judge the world*, and that work of judging and judgment begins in “the smallest matters” of our lives, all the everyday situations where we have to make decisions and choices, take actions, or use our words to assert the truth of God in love.

In Part 1 of this series, “Judging and Judgment,” we saw that judging is inevitable. All human beings make judgments, for God has built it into the structure of our being to choose between things good and evil, right and wrong, true and false, reliable and unstable. So crucial are judging and judgment to the wellbeing of society, that God has established a structure for judgment within His economy. This structure begins within our own souls – where we think about, feel, and value situations and opportunities, weighing the best choices and courses of action to bring the peace and joy of God to others. From there it extends to all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities through structures of judgment ordained by God for human society.

Part 2, “Judge Not?” examined more specifically the frequently heard opinion that we ought not judge others, and showed that Jesus actually taught we must judge with righteous judgment, as we ourselves would want others to judge us. Jesus has appointed to each of us a “jurisdiction” within which to exercise righteous judgment. We may think of this as our Personal Mission Field – that array of places and people where God sends us each day as Jesus was sent, to bring near the Kingdom of God and His *shalom*. Whatever comes before us in this sphere, we must be prepared to judge with righteous judgment, including especially all the “small matters” of daily living.

Then, in Part 3, “Righteous Judgment,” we looked more specifically at what is involved in judging as Jesus did – according to righteousness. We saw that we are called to be diligent and prayerful in judging and judgment; that we must judge generously, esteeming others better than ourselves according to God’s Law and Word; and that we must be faithful in judging, not backing away out of fear or inconvenience, and resting in the joy of the Lord as we exercise righteous judgment.

The home stretch

As we turn into the home stretch of this study, it remains for us to accomplish two more objectives, which we will take up here in Part 4, “To Judge the World.”

We must show, first, that the judgments we are called to make are both ordained by God and are the means whereby He judges the world. In this part of our study, we will consider the teaching of Psalms 9 and 110, which will reinforce what we have previously discussed concerning the importance and inescapability of judging and judgment, and will show the connection between God’s judging the world for *shalom* and the everyday acts of judging and judgment which we perform.

In the second part of this study, we will consider more specifically the scope of our calling to judge the world, and what we must do to prepare for this work. Our work of judging and judgment begins with time, both the time God allots to us each day and the times in which we live. All our judgments are accomplished in time and with respect to matters – small and great – that occur in time. We need a clear understanding of time and

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how God intends it to be used if we are to judge the world with righteous judgment. And we need to understand the times in which we are called to judge the world if we are to judge with righteous judgment.

Then we will look at an example from the apostle Paul concerning the power of righteous judgment to bring the *shalom* of God to the world, even among those who do not believe in God and may even be regarded as His enemies. When push comes to shove, and people are in desperate straits, the judgment of God, exercised by His faithful, obedient, diligent, prayerful, and joyful people, can cause His *shalom* to obtain in even the stormiest of situations.

Finally, we'll look at how to make righteous and edifying judgments about everyday situations and things: matters of culture, issues of morality, social situations and conditions, and even the use we make of the created world. We'll need to concentrate on making our speech as gracious and edifying as we can, and on living out the hope that is within us. Our series will end by framing out that hope in more detail, for the *shalom* we seek is both *in* that hope and *comes from* that hope into the world through our acts of judging and judgment.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to judge the world. If we refuse or fail to take up this task, then we leave the world to the various dispositions of the lie (Ps. 12; Rom. 1.18ff) and the deceptive and destructive influences of spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 5.15-17). Beginning with "the smallest matters," and being faithful to judge these with righteous judgment, we may expect the Lord to fill our Personal Mission Fields with His *shalom*, as the reality of the risen Christ becomes established in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities, and He fills our world with Himself (Eph. 4.7-10).

Let this be our goal, and let us commit to the hard and daily work of judging the world, that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, may guard our hearts and bless our world through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Phil. 4.6, 7; Is. 9.6, 7).

For reflection

1. In case you need to review the first three parts of this series, they are available by [clicking here](#). Download them all and share with a friend.
2. What are the biggest obstacles to your taking up the calling to judge the world? What can you do to overcome these?
3. How can you help your fellow believers to accept and improve their calling to judge the world?

Next steps – Transformation: Pray each day that God will show you the situations in which you will need to exercise righteous judgment. Seek His wisdom, mercy, and grace to prepare and enable you to judge the world.

2 God's Judgment

*But the LORD shall endure forever;
He has prepared His throne for judgment.
He shall judge the world in righteousness,
And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in uprightness.* Psalm 9.7, 8

The judgment of the Lord

Mention the judgment of the Lord, and most people will immediately project forward to the final day of judgment, when all people will stand before the throne of God to receive their eternal disposition.

Those who stand before Him in the righteousness of Jesus, claiming nothing of their own, will enter the eternal Kingdom and joy of the Lord. Those who stand before Him claiming their own as everything, will enter the eternal separation and doom they have chosen for themselves. Not being God, as they supposed they were, they were not able to save themselves from the inevitable fate of all who reject the grace of God in Jesus Christ, preferring to make their way in life by their own wits and wiles, and for their own glory, unto their own chosen doom.

To be sure, this day of judgment is coming, and we must prepare for it daily, striving to make sure that we will hear “Well done, good and faithful servant,” when that great assize is finally upon us.

But this is only the *final* judgment of God. The psalmist explains that the judgments of God are in all the earth *now* (Ps. 105.7). Jesus has ascended to His throne at the right hand of God, a throne from which He carries out the daily work of judging the world according to righteous judgment. His eye is on every person (Prov. 5.21). He knows every heart, what is in every man, woman, and child (Jn. 2.24). He sees all our actions (Ps. 33.13-15), and He works to administer judgment for the peoples of the world so that *uprightness* might prevail among men (Eph. 1.11). This word harks back to the original condition in which God created human beings (cf. Eccl. 7.29), and it connotes that overall condition of *shalom* which Jesus brought to the world, and which we announce and embody to the world in Him (Lk. 2.13, 14).

The Lord Jesus even now is judging the world according to righteous judgment. His judgments are in all the earth, and He is administering judgment to bring uprightness and *shalom* to the peoples and nations of the world.

And the effects of His judgments are visible to those who have eyes to see.

Effects of the Lord's judgment

Psalm 9 continues (vv. 15, 16):

*The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made;
In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught.
The LORD is known by the judgment He executes;
The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.*

The sinful peoples of the world have made a mess of things. Where the *shalom* of God should prevail, strife, competition, animosity, oppression, indifference to suffering, cruelty, crudeness, incivility, self-seeking, manipulation, greed, wretchedness, and moral decay abound. That anything of good whatsoever comes to pass among the nations of the world is only because of the grace of God, sustaining, providing, caring for, and wooing the peoples of the world He loves (Matt. 5.44, 45; Acts 14.17; Acts 17.26, 27; Jn. 3.16).

In the midst of this situation, the Lord Jesus executes His judgments every day, on every thought, motive,

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priority, word, and deed of every person, everywhere. He executes His righteous judgments *now* to extricate the wicked from the snares by which their own works have entrapped them, so that, hopefully, they might escape the judgment which is *yet to come*.

Some people get this. They have come to know the judgment of the Lord in their own lives – their failed attempts to find happiness, their faltering hopes, their longing for some deliverance or some do-over in their life, and, at last, the sin which has deceived and will doom them. They see this, and they see that the Lord condemns it, and offers something much, much better. Thus, seeing the judgment of God *on* Jesus Christ, and *by* Jesus Christ on their sins, they reach out in the power of God's Spirit to find new life in Him. And, following Him, they find joy and *shalom* in the judgments of the Lord. Thus, the Lord is known through the judgment He executes.

But for those who refuse to acknowledge the righteous judgment of the Lord, they become increasingly ensnared in a downward spiral of denial, degradation, disappointment, rebellion, and death (Rom. 1.18-32). The ongoing judgment of the Lord hardens the hearts of those who will *not* acknowledge His rule, even as it softens and transforms the hearts of those who do. Those who do see the judgments of God understand this, and they are urgent to help their neighbors escape the wrath that is coming because of their unrighteous choices (Jude 1.22, 23).

In all the earth

Every day, all day long, in every situation of life for every person on earth, the righteous judgments of the Lord Jesus Christ are at work. He is administering His judgments so that people can break free of the folly of their bad choices, be renewed in Jesus Christ, and find the peace that passes understanding and guards their hearts and minds in every situation.

What an amazing and necessary work is this judgment of the Lord! Imagine what the world would be like were Jesus not intervening with His righteous and upright judgment, leaving the wicked to their wiles and snares, and the world to increasing violence and destruction. God so loved *the world* that He gave His only-begotten Son for its redemption. And all who see in Him the satisfaction of God's judgment against their sins, enter into His work of judgment, becoming salt, light, and leaven for the uprightness and *shalom* of their Savior, King, and Judge. And the power of their taking-up the upright and righteous judgments of the Lord is exerted everywhere, over and over, like the sun in a world of darkness and despair (1 Jn. 2.8).

For God has appointed His people as the instruments whereby He executes His judgment in righteousness and for uprightness and *shalom* in all the earth.

For reflection

1. In what ways have you experienced the Lord's work of righteous judgment in your own life?
2. The words *upright* and *uprightness* appear in various places in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament. King Jesus, we are told, carries a scepter of *uprightness*, the emblem of His Kingdom (Ps. 45.6). What does this word suggest to you? What does it mean to be *upright*?
3. Does Jesus intend to extend His upright and righteous rule throughout your life? Into all the areas of life where you live, work, and have your being? What is your role in this?

Next steps – Preparation: Make sure you have mapped out your Personal Mission Field. This is crucial to exercising righteous judgment. Watch this brief video ([click here](#)), then download the worksheet and get started. If you have already mapped out your Personal Mission Field, spend time each day preparing in prayer for the places you will go and the people you will encounter there, that the Lord might execute righteous judgments unto uprightness and shalom in all your words and deeds.

3 Instruments of Judgment

*The LORD said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!
Your people shall be volunteers
In the day of Your power;
In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,
You have the dew of Your youth. Psalm 110.1-3*

Lord and Judge

When Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of God the Father, He became King of kings and Lord of lords. To Him the Father has given a Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, which He is working to increase on earth as it is in heaven, without end and to the glory of God the Father (Is. 9.6, 7; Phil. 2.5-11).

Our King and Lord Jesus Christ advances His Kingdom on earth by exercising His rule “in the midst of” His enemies, that is, in the everyday situations and circumstances of the world, among all its peoples, throughout its cultures and communities, at every moment, and unto His glorious and incomparable *shalom*. They who do not know Jesus Christ, who have not submitted to His rule, are His enemies, whether or not they regard themselves as such; and we who *do* believe and follow Jesus were at one time among His enemies as well (Rom. 5.10). But God has brought us into His *shalom*, for He is working to bring all the world to that blessed and happy condition.

To this end, the judgments of the Lord are in all the earth, throughout every society and culture. The Lord strives by the Holy Spirit to restrain evil, bear witness to God and His economy, and woo the nations of the earth, so that they might seek and find Him (Ps. 105.7; Gen. 6.3; Acts 1.8; Acts 14.17; Acts 17.26, 27). God the Father loves the world so much that He has taken steps of judgment to deliver the world from the bondage of sin, and to liberate it into the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. He has judged the world’s sin in Jesus Christ, and now through Jesus Christ He judges throughout the world, in every facet and aspect of life in the world, that the world might be brought from darkness to light, death to life, turmoil and uncertainty to *shalom*.

And the instruments whereby the Lord accomplishes this amazing and indispensable work of judgment are the people who freely bind themselves to Him, submit to His rule, and take up His cause in the world. These people are endued with the power of God to go into the world like the refreshing dew of the morning, carrying out acts of judging and judgment to bring the *shalom* of God.

We who believe in Jesus Christ are that people, those volunteers, those instruments of divine judgment and *shalom*.

Free in Christ to follow Him

The Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims freedom to all who are held in bondage by sin and the devil. When we believe the Good News of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, reign, and imminent return, our chains fall off, and we rise freely to follow Jesus in His work of judging the world.

You can know the true people of the Lord Jesus Christ by observing how they use the time He entrusts to them. They who understand and embrace His mission in the world – to bring near the Kingdom and *shalom*

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of the Lord – rise like the morning dew to take up that mission every day. They prepare themselves to go among the enemies of the Lord, armed with His Word, filled with His Spirit, and drawing on His courage, to live out His righteousness in every aspect of their lives (Gal. 2.20), to announce and call others to His Kingdom and salvation, and to judge with righteous judgment in every situation and circumstance of their daily lives.

Together with the Father, the Lord Jesus has poured out the power of His Spirit, Who indwells His followers so that they might overcome their natural reticence, hesitancy, and fear to assert the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Ps. 27.14) by all their choices, decisions, words, and deeds. God has declared His judgments to His people, and He daily sends them out to judge the world accordingly (Ps. 147.19, 20; Ps. 149.5-9).

Through His faithful people, the Lord brings the light of truth and the salt and leaven of righteousness to the places and people where He sends them daily – to their Personal Mission Fields. The Lord Himself is at their right hand, by His Spirit making them willing and able to do His work of judging and judgment (Ps. 110.5; Phil. 2.12, 13). Thus Christ judges in every nation, bringing to light the dead works of God’s enemies and offering refreshment and salvation to any who long for such a hope (Ps. 110.6, 7; 1 Pet. 3.15).

Take up the calling to judge

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must make sure we understand what our discipleship entails. Being a Christian does not only mean that our sins are forgiven and we can be certain of going to heaven when we die. It means that, of course, but so much more.

Being a Christians is not merely a matter of uniting with a church where can find like-minded friends who join with us in soothing and uplifting worship and projects of mutual affirmation and encouragement. Worship and mutual disciple-making are important parts of our calling as followers of Christ, but our calling does not end here.

We are appointed as witnesses to Jesus Christ, and we have been given the power of His Spirit to carry out this mandate (Acts 1.8). In a court of law, a witness offers his own credibility, observations, and experience as a work of judgment, to condemn an offender or exonerate one falsely accused. He can only do what he is prepared to do, but he must do it faithfully, truthfully, and whenever called upon to do so (Lev. 5.1). And an indispensable part of our role as witnesses is to carry out those acts of judging and judgment, beginning with ourselves and our own believing community, that bring the goodness of God to light and offer His healing and restoring *shalom* to the world.

But where do we begin? What does such judging look like, and what can we expect as we are faithful in it? How can we remain faithful and improve diligence in judging the world? In the remaining installments in this series, we will consider these important questions.

For reflection

1. What does it mean to say that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords? Why does it follow naturally from this that His judgments should be in all the earth?
2. How is it obvious in your life that you are one who “volunteers” for Jesus?
3. What are you doing to prepare yourself to be more consistent and effective in judging throughout your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps – Transformation: Memorize Psalm 110.1-3, and use it throughout the day to renew your commitment to judge your world with righteous judgment.

4 The Power of Righteous Judgment

But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss." Acts 27.21

The need of the hour

The great need of the hour in our world is for men and women who will judge with righteous judgment as instruments of the judgment of God.

There must be no shying away from this calling on the part of those who believe in Jesus. Every day we are presented with situations and opportunities to make a choice, render a decision, offer an opinion, or take some righteous initiative, with the view of bringing God's *shalom* into the uncertainty and anxiousness of our world.

Your goal in life must be nothing less than to work diligently to ensure that, increasingly, your Personal Mission Field is flooded with and characterized by the Lord's *shalom*. You must pray for the part of the field to which the Lord has sent you (Jer. 29.7) and prepare well for each day's opportunities and challenges (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17). When the opportunity presents itself to judge with righteous judgment, seek the courage only God can give you, and grace for this moment of need (Heb. 4.12); then step forward by word and deed to bear witness to Jesus by offering your act of judging or judgment according to the need of the moment.

You may be repudiated, ignored, or overruled. But you will have acted. And, if you act consistently over time, judging with righteous judgment at every opportunity, you can expect God to honor your diligence and faithfulness, and to bring forth the fruit of His goodness and *shalom* in and through your efforts.

As a primary exhibit of the truth of this, consider the apostle Paul.

Rejected, but undeterred

Paul, a Roman citizen, was on his way to Rome for a hearing before the emperor. He was accompanied by a Roman centurion and other armed guards as they took to the sea for the longest part of their journey.

How had Paul come to be in this situation? By judging with righteous judgment. During his trial in Caesarea, it seemed he was about to be sent back to Jerusalem, where almost certainly he would have been falsely convicted and put to death, if he survived those hungry assassins who were probably still waiting for him.

To avert this action, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard in Rome, before the emperor. It took courage to countermand a decision toward which the king was leading, but Paul knew he had to act. Hearing his determination, the Roman court before which he stood could do no other than to ship him off to Rome in line with his request.

Paul might have overlooked this right or decided not to invoke it. In which case, he would likely have languished and died in Jerusalem. It took courage to insist on his right, just as it takes courage for Christians to insist on theirs – the right to have opinions, to talk freely about their faith, to intervene in the face of injustice or wrongdoing, not to go along with or blink at unseemly behavior, to encourage others for decency and goodness, and so forth. Do we know our rights? The rights we have in the workplace? In church? In our roles as citizens of an independent republic? Are we bold to insist on those rights and to act on them as often as necessary?

As Paul's ship lingered in Fair Havens, the season changed, making sailing rather more precarious. When the

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ship's helmsman and owner, together with the centurion, decided to set sail, Paul spoke up, warning them this was not a good idea. They chose to ignore his advice, and promptly found themselves in a situation they could not manage.

And though Paul had been rejected at Fair Havens, he knew he had to speak up, for the wellbeing of an entire community – the ship, its crew, and its passengers – was at stake.

Not to be denied

In verse 21, as the storm raged and all hope seemed lost, Paul stepped forward. The decisions being made – the judgments of the unbelievers who were conveying him to Rome – were unwise and even foolish. He would not simply sit by and allow those unrighteous judgments to destroy everyone and everything.

Prompted by a word from the Lord (v. 23), Paul thrust himself forward to offer his opinion and plan. First, he reminded them that he had urged them not to sail, thus showing that had his wisdom been followed then, they wouldn't be in the fix they were in now.

Next, Paul spoke encouragingly to everyone (v. 22). His purpose was not to chide, but to dispel their fears and get them busy on a better course of action that would ensure the safety of them all. The *shalom* of God could be realized, but they would have to work together. At the same time, he made it clear that his judgment and recommended action were in line with the Word and will of God (v. 25). He even gave thanks to God in the midst of their situation for all to hear (v. 35). From that point forward, Paul made the decisions about what should be done. The result is that all followed his lead, and everyone reached the island of Malta safely.

What if Paul had held back? He and everyone would have drowned. He had to act. He knew what was right to do, and he asserted himself graciously but firmly in leading his community to *shalom*.

Those who judge with righteous judgment wield the power of God's Word to bring His righteousness, peace, and joy into their Personal Mission Fields. We are instruments of God's judgments, and God's judgments are always right and good and blessed. We must understand the times that are unfolding before us, and make the best use of our time in judging with righteous judgment. If we do, God will bring His *shalom* to the world.

For reflection

1. How should you prepare for making righteous judgments throughout the day?
2. Righteous judgments are like nudges. Explain.
3. If you don't work to bring God's *shalom* to the people and places of your Personal Mission Field, who will?

Next steps – Preparation: Continue praying about the day ahead, trying to anticipate in prayer the opportunities for judging with righteous judgment you might have. Ask the Lord to give you a Word to guide you in each situation or for each opportunity.

5 The Time of Your Life

... of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do... 1 Chronicles 12.32

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.15, 16

Time on our side

All the acts of judging and judgment we will undertake will be made in time. This is good news, because time is on our side as believers. By understanding time, the times in which we live, and the time of our lives, we can *redeem* the time allotted to us by *shalom*-bringing acts of judging and judgment.

What is time? It is the succession of moments which proceed continuously from the Word of God into our present, where we invest or squander them before they return to the Lord to be noted and recorded. One day, how we used the time allotted to us will be read out before us as witness to our true faith and convictions. We need to make sure that we use the time of our lives in a manner consistent with the intentions of Him Who gives it.

Our Lord's intention is that His *shalom* and glory might be known in the time of our lives. We know this, because we understand it from His Word (cf. Jer. 29.7; 1 Cor. 10.31; etc.). We are not in the dark about time and what it's for, so in that respect, time is on our side. Since we know why the Lord leaves us here and gives us the gift of time, we can bring our use of time into line with His intentions by learning to judge with righteous judgment.

Time is on our side as well because Jesus is the Lord of time. He works *all things* – all of which are done in time – according to the counsel of His will and for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Eph. 1.11; Rom. 8.28). By His powerful Word, our Lord Jesus makes time work for *His* purposes, especially the time He grants to us who know Him, and who understand that He has called us to judge the world (Heb. 1.3; 1 Cor. 6.2).

Finally, time is on our side because we know where time is going. At the end of time we will stand before the Lord of glory and give an accounting of how we used this most precious gift for His *shalom* and glory. The end of time will not spring some unwelcome surprise on us; we know what to expect when we get there, and thus we may happily and energetically prepare for that great assize at the end of time in each and every moment of our lives.

Understanding the times

The current of time is flowing toward final *shalom* and eternal glory; but the *times* in which we live strive mightily to resist that current, and we must make sure the *time of our lives* is flowing as the Lord intends. Thus, to judge the world, we need to understand *the times* in which we live, and to make sure that we are using *the time allotted to us* in line with our Lord's purposes.

Epochs of time are, in a general way, identified by their outstanding features, at least, that is, according to certain observers. Historians talk of the "dark ages" (which weren't all that dark) and "the age of enlightenment" (which frequently seems not very enlightened) or "the age of reason" or "the technological age." Those terms identify the dominant characteristics or worldview of the times, that approach to life which describes the views and aspirations of, if not all, at least the most influential people of any age.

The times in which we live are predominantly secular, materialistic, and narcissistic. Ours is, as Charles Taylor

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had observed, “a secular age.” While many people in our culture continue to believe in God, they do not believe Him to be relevant, except either to blame for incomprehensible disasters (“acts of God”) or to plead with in times of desperation. Otherwise, for most people who claim to believe in Him, God is merely background noise to which most of us have become accustomed and therefore to which we pay no heed.

At the same time, most people in our day define the good life in terms of material comforts – wealth, health, personal safety, and an assortment of delights and entertainments. This feeds our natural self-interest which, in our day, has bloomed into widespread narcissism.

These convictions only *seem* to be the dominant currents of our day; in reality, they are carried along in the larger current of time’s progress toward the day of Christ’s final judgment and glory. We need to understand the ways of these counter-currents, so that we may avoid being swept up in them, and may know how best to help those who are trapped in and being carried along by them. How does such a world spirit of secularism, materialism, and narcissism affect people’s priorities, choices, and way of life? How can we show the Christian worldview as a truer and more satisfying way of life by our decisions and actions? If we pay attention to the times, and the effects they have on the people *in* these times, we may know better what we must do as the people of God to judge the world with righteous judgment.

Redeeming the time

For many contemporary Christians, the faith described in the Bible is not as real as it should be. It exists primarily as a raft of beliefs to assent and a community of people with which to identify. The daily experience of the presence, promise, and power of Christ and His Kingdom eludes many believers, because many of us have allowed, as Francis Schaeffer observed, “the spirit of the naturalism of the age to creep into our thinking, unrecognized.” For many believers, trapped in what George Barna and Frank Viola call “pagan Christianity,” their lives are dominated by priorities, activities, commitments, and interests that parallel more closely those of our secular age than those of the eternal King of glory.

Paul tells us to pay careful attention to how we use the time of our lives. When our approach to the time of our lives is framed in prayer, managed by careful planning, and characterized by constant attention to the will of God, we will make the kind of decisions and choices, and take the kind of actions, that bring the rule of Christ to bear on our world. We will judge the world according to *Christ’s* vision of time, rather than that of our unbelieving contemporaries.

The time of our lives comes to us from our Lord Jesus Christ, pristine and free, intended for His glory and the blessing of our world. We must receive those moments and use them with a view to the larger scope and purpose of time, so that all our acts of judging and judgment will reflect the eternal purposes of our Lord, rather than the fleeting fancies of an age in flight from God.

For reflection

1. Summarize your approach to planning, using, and reviewing the time of your life. Do you see any ways you might improve this?
2. The world thinks of this as a secular age, but the Scriptures refer to the days in which we live as “the last days” (cf. Micah 4.1-8; Acts 2.14-17). Does it matter which of these templates we follow in using the time of our lives to judge with righteous judgment? Explain.
3. Jonathan Edwards described time as, next to our salvation, God’s most precious gift. Do you agree? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: Talk with some other believers about their approach to redeeming the time of their lives. What can you learn from them to improve your own approach?

6 Rightside-Up

*“Truly, this only I have found:
That God made man upright,
But they have sought out many schemes.” Ecclesiastes 7.29*

But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Acts 17.6

Not the way they’re supposed to be

We have mentioned Cornelius Plantinga’s observation that, regarding the present condition of the world, things are “not the way they’re supposed to be.” God created human beings *upright*, and the world around them *very good* (Gen. 1.31). But the misguided propositions, schemes, and programs fallen human beings have pursued over the years have turned God’s good and upright world upside-down. The place is still recognizable and workable, even fruitful and enjoyable, but very little is going according to God’s plan – except, of course, in the larger perspective of the long march of time.

Human beings, the philosopher George Santayana once observed, are remarkably adaptable. But we should be concerned about what we can become adaptable *to*; and it’s clear that people by and large have grown accustomed to our upside-down world, so much so that they scarcely recognize its upside-downness, and believe that any effort to re-right the world constitutes a threat.

Well, they’re right about that, as the people of Thessalonica quickly grasped. The Gospel of Jesus Christ that set people free from guilt, liberated them from the constraints of man-made philosophies and traditions, taught them the way of self-denial and sacrificial love, led them to lay aside familiar worldly ways and walk a new path of righteousness, peace, and joy, and emboldened them to call their neighbors to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ – that Gospel was an upside-down force in the early years of the Christian movement, a power with the potential for turning the world rightside-up in Jesus Christ. The Gospel is a threat to an upside-down world because it turns people and their values, worldview, aspirations, and intentions *upright*, and infuses them with the power to bring God’s goodness and *shalom* into the world.

And that potential exists yet today.

Set your mind

Seated at the right hand of God, as we saw in Psalm 110, our Lord Jesus holds a scepter of *uprightness* (Ps. 45.6), the emblem of His rule and the standard of His agenda. And He sends His people forth into the world each day as He Himself was sent (Jn. 20.21), to seek and advance the Kingdom of God’s *shalom* among the peoples of the earth.

By our daily acts of judging and judgment we assert the rightside-upness of Jesus into our upside-down world, and bring a new program and a new economy to light within our own Personal Mission Fields. In all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities we strive to realize the *uprightness* that brings the *goodness* of God to light in the land of the living – courtesy, kindness, decency, civility, excellence, duty, going the extra mile, truthfulness, beauty, encouragement and edification, and spiritual fruitfulness and flourishing.

But if we are to succeed in this, so that the rightside-up rule of Jesus prevails wherever we are seeking His Kingdom, we’ll need to fix our minds on Him, to see Him in His holy array, enter His glory, become immersed in His Word, and draw on the filling of His indwelling Spirit.

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Our calling to judge the world depends on this. We will only know how to choose, what to say, or where and how to act for righteousness and *shalom* to the extent that we set the Lord always before us, hide His Word deeply within us, and yield to His Spirit rather than to the inclinations of our upside-down age (Ps. 16.8; Ps. 119.9-11; Col. 3.16; Gal. 6.16-23).

We have the mind of Christ and His Spirit, but these will only serve us in our call to judge the world as we are renewed in them daily, and obedient to them at every turn (1 Cor. 2.16; Rom. 8.5-9). We must exercise our minds with the things that pertain to God's *shalom*. As Paul put it in Philippians 4.8, 9: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace [*shalom*] will be with you."

Walk in the Spirit

The people of Thessalonica persecuted those who tried to right their world. Our world will persecute us as well; as we bring the righteousness and truth of Jesus into all our conversations, actions, and obligations. Jesus said that if they hated Him, they will hate us, too (Jn. 15.18-25). But we must not flinch at the prospect of someone objecting to our witness, laughing at our appeal to Scripture, mocking our insistence on truth and common decency, exposing the lie of and dismantling their cherished opinions, and resisting their efforts to infuse our part of the Lord's Kingdom with worldly values and ways. The Thessalonian believers were persecuted, but undaunted, and the witness of their lives and words spread throughout Macedonia and Achaia into every place as they faithfully pursued their calling to judge the world for the *shalom* of God (1 Thess 1.1-10).

We are called to judge the world, but we will need the perspective, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit if we are going to succeed. We must be renewed in Him daily and rely on Him continuously, heedless of what others might think or how they might respond, our minds set only on seeking the upright and good Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit at every opportunity.

Turning the world rightside-up is a full-time calling and the work of the entire Christian community. Make sure you're ready to do your part.

For reflection

1. What evidence do you see that things in the world are not rightside-up? How has this come to be?
2. What is required to be daily renewed in the perspective, presence, and power of the Spirit of God?
3. How can you increase in the mind of Christ?

Next steps – Preparation: Memorize Philippians 4.8, 9, and act consistently on its teaching at every opportunity.

7 The Hope of Glory

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1.27

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5.1, 2

Glory now and then

We in the Christian community are sometimes guilty of using words without understanding what they mean. “You keep on using that word,” the Spaniard opined to the Sicilian. “I’m not sure it means what you think it means” (*The Princess Bride*). The same can be said of us, for example, when we talk about the glory of God.

What is the glory of God? We who are supposed to do everything *for* the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31) ought to understand glory, and know it when we see it. Paul mentions a *hope* of glory, as though the glory of God should be a kind of driving force or guiding light in all we do. What is the glory of God, and how does the glory of God relate to our calling to judge the world with righteous judgment?

When we contemplate the glory of God, it’s typically with respect to one of two referents. We say that we know the glory of God in *worship*, when we’re singing heartily to the Lord and we have that sense of being together in His presence, filled with wonder and love and joy and *shalom* in the Lord. Something overtakes us at such times, and we are beside ourselves with joy. We say this is the glory of the Lord, and for many believers, this is what they seek in the worship God. The glory of God, in this view, requires a particular setting which is only intermittently experienced. Pastors and worship leaders hope the experience will be sufficient to sustain worshipers throughout the week, so that they’ll come back again next week for more of the same.

Or else we think of glory in *hereafter* terms: going to glory, seeing God in His glory one day, entering into the eternal glory of the Lord. Then we will rejoice in glory, because we will see Jesus face to face and be like Him. That will be truly wonderful beyond words, and every believer longs for the day of eternal glory. Glory in this view is a “then and there” condition, one we look forward to and earnestly *hope* for after we die or at the end of the world.

So glory is something we know “now and then” – every so often in the present, but only fully and continuously in the new heavens and new earth. Both these views are true, and we should cherish and pursue them diligently. But neither is a complete view of the glory of God, and neither quite gets at Paul’s meaning of glory, since each is rather more subjective – our experience – than objective – a reality external to us.

The glory of God

The glory of God is not, in the first instance, something we experience. That is, it is not an affection, like love or anger or fear, that arises from within us. Glory does not originate *in* us; it descends *upon* us. The heavens and all creation declare the glory of God (Ps. 19.1-4), whether or not anyone experiences that glory. But when glory *does* descend upon us, the *weight* of it can be spiritually arresting, disturbing, enlivening, even crushing, and can draw out from us emotions of fear and trembling, unspeakable joy, and unbounded courage.

For the glory of God is nothing less than the presence of God, when He makes Himself known to us in ways that are so pointed and clear, that we say to ourselves, like John to Peter, “It is the Lord.” It is the Lord in His glory as He radiates overwhelmingly from a dramatic sunset, weighing us down with the beauty, immensity, and constancy of the cosmos. It is the glory of God that brings us to tears of joy when the love of family and

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friends sinks in in new and deeper ways. It is the glory of God that brings us to tremble at a sudden clap of thunder. It is the glory of God that humbles and warms us when a complete stranger shows us an undeserved kindness. It is the glory of God that brings us to shame and repentance when, by whatever means, our sin is exposed, and we understand more clearly that we are the ones who nailed Jesus to that cross. It is the glory of God that emerges from the pages of Scripture as the Spirit speaks an especially pointed word to our need or fear or unbelief or doubt, or illuminates a sought-for path with sudden light and courage. It is the glory of God that envelops and embraces us, drawing us to participate in Him in all the everyday moments of life where we, through faith and obedience, choose His way rather than ours, and stand firm in our calling against the currents and blows of unbelief and sin. The glory of God is Christ Himself, in us, making Himself known, and showing Himself and the glory of God to the world.

We hope for such glory, to know it *now* and *then*, but not just “now and then.” By working to bring God’s *shalom* into the world in all our daily activities, all our judging and judgments, we are seeking the *then* glory of God in every *now* of our lives, every moment, every situation, every relationship, role, and responsibility. The judgments of God are in all the earth, bringing the glory of God to light in our every act of righteous judging and judgment.

Judging and glory

The aim of our work of judging and judgment is to bring the *shalom* of God into the world, because that peace, which surpasses understanding, creates an environment in which the glory of God can come to light. The world is not much acquainted with peace. It is a place of uncertainty, disillusionment, anxiousness, nervousness, tentativeness, and getting by and holding on. When the peace that passes understanding is injected into such a situation, it is unmistakable, and it brings a sense of relief and hope, if only momentarily so. Our objective is to flood our spheres of influence – our Personal Mission Field – with as much of that peace as possible, so that people might recognize that our choices, opinions, ways, and words are a source of something they wish they knew more of, some hope that can lead them to ask us why we are the way we are (1 Pet. 3.15).

The *shalom* that comes through our acts of judging and judgment can create an atmosphere of wonder that takes people aback, exposing them to something otherworldly – something other than what they typically experience in this world – and giving us the opportunity to say, in response to their queries, “It is the Lord.”

And then our work of judging the world, and the *shalom* that it introduces, can fulfill our hope by bringing the glory of God to the world.

For reflection

1. How should we prepare so that we can glorify God in all things, whatever we do, every moment of the day?
2. What is the relationship between our calling to judge the world and the glory of God?
3. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. What does Paul mean by “glory to glory”?

Next steps – Transformation: Choose one thing you can do today to be more conscious of your calling to glorify God in all things. Share that with a Christian friend, and ask your friend to pray for you.

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For reflection or discussion

1. What kinds of opportunities for exercising righteous judgment appear in your Personal Mission Field each day?
2. What's the difference between judging with righteous judgment and judgmentalism?
3. How can our daily acts of judging and judgment bring the glory of God to the people in our Personal Mission Field?
4. What can you do to improve consistency in your calling to judge the world?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.