

Divine Justice

Understanding the Kindness & Severity of God

15:5 After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. 6 Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; 6 for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." 7 And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. 9 They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. 13 Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. 15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." 16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21 From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

(NIV)

1. The Justice Equation (15:5-8)

A. *He has the Authority*

There is much said in this passage (15:5-8) that reminds us of God's position of authority. He is said to be the one who lives for ever and ever. His glory fills the temple, and he is one who is said to have power. This power or authority over us comes from by virtue of his position as our Creator. Being our Creator, God has the "right" to be our judge.

B. *He Makes the Rules*

It is interesting that it is noted that the temple in heaven is also referred to as the "tabernacle of the Testimony". The housing of the Law was one of the primary functions of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. It reminds us that not only is God our ultimate authority as our Creator, but he has revealed his will for our lives by giving us his "rules" which he expects us to keep.

C. *He Will Enforce Them*

The entire upcoming chapter (ch.16) is an articulation of how God's "wrath" is poured on men and women for not keeping his rules. God is indeed the enforcer of his law and will one day repay people for their violation of his good standard.

2. When God Administers Justice (16:1-21)

A. *It is Severe*

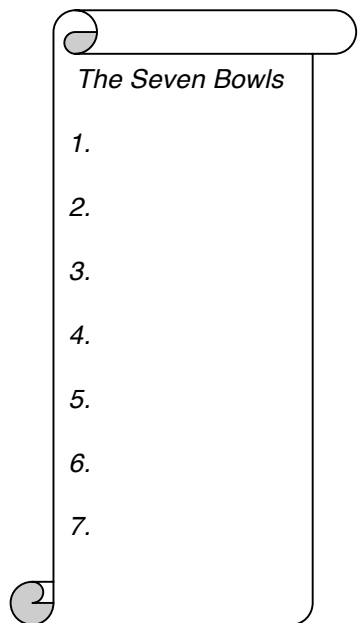
There is no question that as one reads through Revelation 16 that these judgments seem severe—and they are. Yet from the perspective of the angels observing and participating in this administration of justice, these things are “just and true”. The “Just God” of the Bible, if accurately presented and understood will seem to us at times to be “severe”—certainly against the backdrop of what we often see presented as “justice” in our culture.

B. *It is Also Kind*

Strangely enough God’s administration of justice is also kind. It is kind in the sense that it has not yet taken place. These words stand before us today as a warning about the judgment that is to come. It should not be a surprise. God has revealed himself and has included a clear delineation of the consequences of ignoring his standard.

His justice is also kind in the sense that men and women seem to have opportunities to “repent”. Granted, some have already gone too far at this point, having taken the mark of the world leader, but those who have not should consider these judgments as a “wake up call”. Unfortunately, the report is that they generally will not repent. (See 16:8, 11).

Most importantly, there is a statement in 16:15 that reminds us that there are some in the midst of this terrible time who are holding on to the what is right. They are encouraged in our passage to hold on and “stay awake”. The most gracious thing about God’s coming judgment is that he has provided a way of escape from the most devastating phase of his judgment, the Lake of Fire. God has provided an exemption for those who repent of their sins and place their trust in Christ.



Application Questions

These questions are provided for your further study and application of today's message. It is recommended that you take time this week to write out your response to each of the questions. This will help to drive home the point of today's message and will help you to apply the principles to your life situation.

1. The judgment discussed in Revelation (or God's judgment of sin in general) is often dismissed as unthinkable by people today because our society has lost sight of part or all of the "Justice Equation" (see point #1 on the outline). In what strategic ways has God's authority (or *rights over people's lives*) been undermined or replaced in our society?

How does Satan seek to undermine your understanding that God is the ultimate authority having all rights over your life?

2. Give a few examples of how God's rules are being ignored and ridiculed in our society today.

Why do you think the standards of God are so quickly and easily dismissed by our culture today, as opposed to one hundred years ago?

What role has the deteriorating view of the Bible played in this dismissal?

What can be done to counter this?

How "high" is your view of the Bible? What can you do to gain more respect for the Bible as God's word?

3. Most people see only severity in God's enforcement of His rules, and yet there is much kindness—all things considered (as pointed out in Revelation 16). How can a understanding of this help you as you seek to defend the goodness of God in light of his punishment and judgment of sin?
4. Far beyond kindness is God's gracious provision of complete exemption from his wrath. Are you *sure* that you are a participant in this exemption? If so, how should this affect your attitude toward God and your service for him? (If not, now is a good time to repent of your selfishness, and commit yourself to living a God-centered life, placing your trust in Jesus as the complete and sole payment for your sin.)