## Psalm 7 - God the Judge

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On our way back from vacation this past July, we were stopped at a gas station, and we were picking up lunch. It was one of those gas stations where they have the gas station over here, and a Subway over there. And I was standing at the counter waiting for my turn, and I looked behind me at this rack of hats. And one caught my eye. Written across the forehead it said, "Only God Can Judge Me."

That got me thinking, what does the guy who wears that hat think it means to be judged by God?

Does he have Hebrews 10:30 and 31 in mind? "The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Is he thinking, "ok, one day I'm going to stand before the living God and give an account, so I better walk the line"?

Or is it more of a "don't judge me bro, I'll do whatever I want" attitude? Like, "Only God can judge me, and he kind of hung up his gown, he doesn't judge anymore, so we good."

The picture of God as our judge is one of the most common and most misunderstood pictures of God's relationship to us that we find in the Bible.

The Bible talks about God as a king, as a shepherd, as a father, sometimes even as a husband, and a good handful of other images as well.

But of them all, 'judge' is one of the more consistent and significant. And yet, most people, even sometimes within the church, don't really know what to do with that image.

Usually, we just ignore it. Or if we tend to think of it in somewhat thin, or two-dimensional ways.

We might think of God as a strict judge, and tend towards legalism, where we try to earn God's approval through our own righteousness.

Or we might think of God as a lenient judge, and tend towards worldliness where we think God just kind of winks at sin.

And even for true Christians, who rest in the grace of God, and strive to live holy lives of putting away sin, and putting on righteousness, there's just kind of this ambiguous relationship to the idea of God as judge.

Our culture is so convinced that judge, and judgement are just inherently bad and unloving words, so we struggle to get the comfort and confidence that we should from the idea of God as our judge.

My argument from Psalm 7 today is simple. God is your judge, and that is really really good news. So, what does God as our judge mean for us as Christians? For those who have been forgiven by the blood of Jesus, what does God the judge have to do with us?

In this text today I want to show you three reasons that God being our Judge is good news – three reasons that God being our judge sets us free.

God being our judge can set us free from our pride.

God being our judge can set us free from the fear of man.

God being our judge can set us free from our sin.

#### Overview

Ok, so, at a high level, what's going on in this text?

The little intro before the first verse gives us some context — "concerning the words of Cush the Benjaminite." So, basically, what we should infer from this, and the text itself is that this Psalm is a prayer to God in response to this guy Cush, probably accusing David of something bad. This is probably during the reign of Saul, from the house of *Kish* the Benjaminite, so David isn't king yet, so he might have been accused of something like treason.

Then in this Psalm, David is appealing to God to step in and judge this case. He is calling out to God, not as father, not as king, but as judge, to step in and rescue him with a just verdict.

Charles Spurgeon, commenting on this introduction says, "this [Psalm] may be called the 'Song of the Slandered Saint.'"

I think that is spot on. The Song of the Slandered Saint.

In the Psalm, David is basically going to say, 1) if I'm guilty, let me be punished, 2) if I'm innocent, let me be vindicated, and my accuser punished, and 3) if the guilty won't repent (whether it's them or me), God's judgement will fall on him.

Here's how this thing is basically structured. There's basically three major blocks. 3-5, 6-11, and 12-16. 1 and 2 are the introduction, and 17 is the conclusion. So here's how I would map today's applications on to this Psalm.

In 3-5, if God is our judge, that should give us humility, and set us free from pride.

In 6-11, if God is our judge, that should give us confidence, and set us free from the fear of man.

In 12-16, if God is our judge, that should give us hope, and set us free from sin.

So that's where we're going today.

### Freedom From Pride (1-5)

Ok, so the first blessing of God being our judge is that it allows us to be free from our pride, and live lives of humility. Basically, if God is our judge, then we are free to receive correction so we can actually change and grow.

Look at verses 3-5, what David is saying there, is that he is not willing to win if he is in the wrong. If my accuser is right, let me receive the punishment I deserve. Basically, since David recognizes that God is his judge, he is set free from the need to be right all the time. Free from the need to justify yourself all the time.

Look at the text.

Verses 1 and 2 there are basically the introduction and the main theme of the Psalm. Here's the main point of the whole Psalm – "O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me."

David isn't looking to himself for vindication, and he isn't looking to the crowds for vindication. He is looking to God for vindication.

Then read verses 3-5 again.

(three) O LORD my God, if I have done this, if there is wrong in my hands,

(four) if I have repaid my friend with evil or plundered my enemy without cause,

(five) let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it, and let him trample my life to the ground and lay my glory in the dust.

In other words, "if I'm guilty, let my accuser win this case. If I'm in the wrong, I don't want to win this argument."

What matters most to David here is not his own vindication, is not being proven right.

What matters most to David is that the Truth would prevail.

Here's the point. We all have a functional judge of our lives. Someone that we look to to determine if we are in the right or not, someone that we look to to determine right and wrong for us, wise and foolish for us. We all have someone who is our functional judge.

Generally speaking, there are three options. There is God – obviously that's the right answer – second there is self, then third there is other people.

Right, what does God think of me? What do I think of me? And what do other people think of me?

So, the problem with not thinking of God as your judge is that what you end up with is one of the other two being your functional judge. Either yourself, or other people.

If you are your own functional judge, then you end up with pride, with a sense of always needing to be right. At some point, you stop caring about the Truth, and you just can't admit that you were wrong.

But on the other side, if other people are your functional judge, then you end up with the fear of man, with a sense of always needing to be liked. Again, at some point you stop caring about the Truth, and you just can't stand to go against the group, or against the intellectual or moral fashion of the day, or be disliked for something you believe, say, or do.

We see these three functional judges come into play with the Apostle Paul. He talks about this in 1 Corinthians 4:3-4. There he says, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup>For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me."

I'm not concerned what other people think of me – confidence.

I'm not concerned about what I think of myself either – humility.

What matters is what God thinks of me – freedom.

So, like David here, if God is your judge, then you are free to be wrong. And, what's so great about that, is that if you're free to be wrong, then you're free to grow. If you can never admit you were wrong, you'll never actually be able to grow in anything.

This is why perfectionism is the biggest enemy of excellence.

You are free to admit that you might have been wrong in what you said, you might have been wrong in what you did. If you are in the wrong, you would rather that become obvious to everyone so that the Truth might prevail, and so that you yourself might grow.

If God is your judge, then Truth is more important than being right.

And really, this is one of the sweet gospel blessings. When you become a Christian, what you're saying is that you are so wrong about so many and so important things that the Son of God had to die on the cross to pay for your sins to reconcile you to a Holy God.

The cross outs all of us. So, with that in your pocket, it really shouldn't be that hard to admit you are wrong about smaller things along the way.

The reason that it's hard to admit that we are wrong is that it's hard to admit that we're not perfect, that we don't know everything. That we don't do everything right. But if you're a Christian, when you got baptized you already told everyone that you're not perfect – that you need a savior.

So, for the Christian, admitting that you're wrong shouldn't be a big deal. You've already admitted to the fact that you get lots of things wrong, this just happens to be an example.

This past week I was looking for a good book for the Gospel Life Group leaders to go through over the next year, and I found this little section, just a few paragraphs, that really nails what I'm trying to get at in this sermon. This is a book on spiritual counseling, basically Christian shepherding and discipleship, by a guy named Gregory the Great from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. And he says this about the need to love the Truth more than being right.

He says, "Of course, no one lives who does not sin occasionally. But he who desires that the Truth is loved more than himself is he who does not wish to be spared before the Truth." 1

In other words, I would rather you know and love the Truth and see my error, than be misled and think I'm brilliant.

If we live under the judgement of God, if we really want truth to prevail, even at our own expense, then we are free from the tyranny of our own pride. We are free to actually hear hard things, weigh them, and really learn from them. We are free to hear rebuke and take it to heart.

## Freedom From Fear of Man (6-11)

Ok, so the first way that understanding God as our judge sets us free is it sets us free from pride. But the second way that it sets us free is that it sets us free from the fear of man, from the need to be liked.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Gregory the Great, *Book of Pastoral Rule*, SVS Press, 75 (originally published, 590 AD).

The fear of man is what happens when other people become your functional judge.

We see this freedom in verses 6-11.

Basically, David is not willing to back down, be intimidated by, or change his stance just to appease and please the mobs. He entrusts himself to the judgement of God, while standing confidently against his accusers.

Look at verses 6-7.

[6] Arise, O LORD, in your anger;

lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies;

awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.

[7] Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you; over it return on high.

Basically, he is appealing his case to the court of God. At the end of the day, David is not so concerned about what this mob thinks about him, he wants God to judge this case.

He is open to the possibility that he is in the wrong, but ultimately, he doesn't care to have his case tried before this mob. He doesn't ultimately care if this mob thinks he is guilty, he cares about what God thinks.

David's concern here is not to be understood and vindicated by the crowd, ultimately what David is concerned about is being vindicated by God – who sits in judgement over their judgement.

This is important for us to think about because one of the early stages of the fear of man is simply the fear of being misunderstood – basically the inordinate fear of being slandered in other people's hearts and minds.

This is that impulse you get when you find yourself constantly trying to explain yourself to get other people to see that you did the right thing, or said the right thing. Or trying to convince someone that you're not that kind of Christian.

Maybe you're fine with someone disagreeing with you, but you at least don't want them to think you're dumb or judgmental, or wicked, you at least want them to "understand where you're coming from."

This is the fear of being misunderstood.

College students, you're likely going to have to wrestle with this a lot the next few weeks.

There is going to be an impulse in you to not want to be misunderstood by people. You might be more or less okay if someone doesn't want to come to Bible study, or doesn't want to talk about Jesus with you, but there might be this little itch in you that really wants them to think of you as one of the cool Christians, not one of the uncool Christians.

You might be fine with them not wanting to talk about Christianity, but there might be some part of you that really wants to make sure that they don't think of you as some regressive, bigoted, Bible-thumper.

This is the fear of being misunderstood. And this can be dangerous for you to give in to. You cannot let your walk with the Lord, your definition of what it means to follow Jesus, be defined by the whims and prejudices of non-believers.

How you present Biblical truth can only do so much, at the end of the day it's the truth itself that people are offended by.

You will never be cool enough to make a non-believer not get offended by the exclusivity of Christ, biblical sexual ethics, and the reality of hell.

The fear of being misunderstood, little by little, will lead you to compromise.

Eventually you have to stop caring about what people think of you.

Eventually you have to stop caring about being misunderstood.

Okay, look at 8-9

<sup>8</sup>The LORD judges the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.

# <sup>9</sup>Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous— you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God!

Okay, quick note. When David says, "according to my righteousness," and "according to my integrity," he's not saying, "according to my comprehensive perfection, my comprehensive righteousness." He's just saying, "I'm innocent here. In this case, on this issue, I'm in the right. I didn't do the thing they are accusing me of. I am righteous, in this case. I have integrity, in this case."

So basically, he' saying, "I'm confident I'm innocent, God you know the truth, you know whether I'm innocent or not. And that's enough for me. Lord, vindicate me."

Then he ends this section with verses 10-11,

<sup>10</sup>My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.

<sup>11</sup>God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.

So, he ends this section where he began the Psalm. God is my shield, God is my refuge. God knows the truth. God knows my heart. God knows I'm innocent here. God knows that their accusations and slanders are false, so that's enough for me. I will rest in God's will. He will save and vindicate me. What these people think of me is secondary.

So, to recap a bit, verses 3-5 says, 'if they are right, let them prevail.' Verses 6-11 says, 'if I am right, let me prevail.'

So, in the first section, he does not want to win just to win. He would rather Truth prevail, even if he loses. But then in this second section, he is not willing to cave to the mob just to get them to approve of him.

What he cares about is not winning, nor pleasing people, but the truth – what God sees. This is the freedom of living under the judgement of God.

He is willing to be proven wrong if Truth prevails.

And he is willing to be despised by others as long as he is standing with the Truth.

So, since God is his judge, he is both free from the need to be right, he is free from pride. But he is also free from the need to be liked, he is free from the fear of man.

Now, most of us won't find ourselves in this kind of big public dispute, where the mobs are opposing us. Hopefully none of us will ever find ourselves on trial for treason on false charges. But for each of us, these same dynamics can play out really in all of our relationships.

If God is your judge, then you don't have to get your way every time. You are free of self to let goodness and truth prevail, even at cost to yourself.

If God is your judge, then you don't have to cave in just because someone is upset with you. You are free to stand on truth even if that bothers people.

Self is not your judge anymore, but neither are other people.

This can play out in marriage, parenting, friendships, work relations, neighborhoods, whatever. Wherever you have meaningful relationships, these dynamics are going to come into play.

In most of our relationships we will find ourselves drifting – if we're not careful – towards those two ditches.

We're going to be pulled at by both pride – the need to be right, and the fear of man – the need to be liked.

But if we remember that God alone is our judge, we'll be able to do a little better avoiding them.

Gregory, who I mentioned earlier, in the same section that I quoted, really makes this same argument.

Again, talking about pastoral ministry, talking about shepherding and teaching, he makes the case that if you really care about Truth, and if you really care about people, you should be willing to say hard things to people, even if it offends them.

He says, "The Spiritual director [Pastor, or counselor] in his zeal should not desire to please others, but should focus on what ought to please them." 2

Again, "If you want to really help people, you shouldn't focus on pleasing them, but should focus on what should please them."

In other words, as a pastor, my job is not to get you to like me, or to like the things I'm saying. My job is to get you to know the truth, love the truth, and live the truth, even where it has jagged edges.

But that applies to every other relationship too. In marriage, parenting, friendship, all of it.

God being our judge frees us from pride to actually love the truth, and frees us from the fear of man to actually love others.

Pride pretends to love the truth, but is really about self-love – "I just want to be right."

And fear of man pretends to love others, but again is really only about self-love - "I just want to be liked."

The freedom of living under God's judgement sets us free to both receive hard things with humility, and say hard things with love.

Gregory, again, adds this caveat, that I think is just really helpful. He says, "It should also be known that good spiritual directors [people trying to do good to people's souls] desire to please others, but this is to lead their neighbors by the sweetness of their own character to an affection for the Truth."

Basically, the more you love someone, and the more you are convinced that they love you, the more willing you will be to hear hard things from them.

Paul hits this tension in two different places. Put a finger in Galatians 1, and turn to 1 Corinthians 10.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32-34 Paul basically states, if your goal is to glorify God and do good to souls, go out of your way to offend no one and please everyone.

First Corinthians 10:32-34 says,

<sup>31</sup>So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

<sup>32</sup>Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,

<sup>33</sup>just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

So, please everyone in everything for the glory of God and the good of souls.

But then in Galatians 1:10 he says, if my goal is to please people, I am no longer a servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:10 says, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

If our end goal is to please people, then we're just in it for ourselves, and we don't really care about Truth, or doing good to them.

But, if our goal is to glorify God, and do good to people, then our default posture should be to please them, so that they might know we love them, and might hear and receive the truth from us.

And yet, we are willing to displease them in the moment if we need to say something hard to them.

This humble confidence should shape every relationship. God sits as judge over every relationship. God sets you free in every relationship.

So, husbands, if God is your judge, if you desire to glorify God, and do good to your wife, you are free from the tyranny of self, like Paul, you should seek to please your wife in everything.

Your default posture should be to do what is good and pleasing for her, even at your own expense. And yet, if pleasing her is your goal, your end goal, then you are no longer a servant of Christ.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Gregory, 74.

Christ certainly didn't give you leadership in your family to please yourself, but he didn't give you leadership in your family to please your wife either. Your leadership in your home is about pleasing Christ.

Your default should be pleasing her over yourself, but there will come times where you will need to do things, say things, or lead the family in certain directions that are less than pleasing for her, things that she doesn't entirely see eye to eye with you on.

So, listen to her, hear her, be open to her input, try to bring her along, but at the end of the day, your job is to please Christ, even if that means displeasing her. To live under his judgement, not hers.

Wives, same idea. Looks a little different, but same idea. If God is your judge, if you desire to glorify God, and do good to your husband, then you too are free from the tyranny of self, you should seek to please your husband in everything.

Your default posture should be to do what is good and pleasing for him, even at your own expense.

And yet, same thing, if pleasing him is your goal, your end goal, the purpose of what you're doing, then you are no longer a servant of Christ.

You are free from the tyranny of self, but you're also free from the tyranny of his whims.

There will come times when you will need to say hard and displeasing things.

"Hey, I'm not so sure we're spending family time the best way we could be."

Or "I'm not so sure we're spending our money in the best way."

Or "I don't think this decision you are moving us towards is a good idea."

Or, "hey I think the kids need more spiritual investment from their dad."

What he does with that is on him – before God, he needs to weigh that – but there will come times when pleasing Christ looks like displeasing your husband.

Respecting your husband and pleasing your husband are not always the same thing.

Parents, same basic idea. Glorifying God and doing good to your kids' souls means that your basic posture is doing what you can to please them. They will receive truth from you if they receive delight from you.

Yet, there will come times when you will need to displease them – when obeying Christ and doing good to their soul looks like displeasing them.

If your goal is to please them, if your goal is to get them to like you, you are no longer serving Christ in your responsibility as a parent.

Paul hits this directly in Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

All discipline is hard. All instruction takes work. If you only do what is pleasing to your kids, you will never discipline them or teach them anything important. Anything worth learning is hard to learn.

And yet, you won't be able to do your job as parents, especially as fathers, if your basic posture towards them is exasperating and criticizing them.

They need gospel delight from you just as much as they need gospel discipline from you.

Even in just friendships, whatever age and stage you're in, it's the same principle.

The basic posture of being a good friend, of glorifying God, and doing good to your friends, looks like doing what is pleasing to them. Doing what is nice, and kind, and thoughtful for them.

And yet, under the judgement of God, if you're not willing to say hard things, or do things that displease your friend for the sake of Christ, then that friendship is more about you than it is them. It's more about being liked than doing good.

The judgement of God frees you to actually be a good friend.

It frees you from the prideful need to always be right, always be in charge.

And it frees you to say the hard things that we need our friends to say to us from time to time.

"Bro, don't mess around with that girl, she's bad news."

Or, "man, you've skipped class the last two weeks, what are you doing?"

Or, "your marriage is a mess, you can't come golfing with us, hang out with your wife today."

Being free from the judgement of others – even your friends – allows us to actually be a good friend.

### Freedom From Sin (12-16)

Ok, this third major section is pretty straight forward.

So far, basically David has been saying, on the one hand, if I'm in the wrong, let Truth prevail, and justice fall on me. On the other, if I'm in the right, let me be vindicated, and justice fall on my persecutor. But then in this last section, he turns to describe what that looks like. What does it look like for God's justice to fall on someone?

Verse 12, "If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow." It's not often that I feel the need to translate an English word to English, but it might be helpful to know that that word "whet" there, w-h-e-t, just means sharpen.

Then skip down to verse 16, "his [the unrepentant man] mischief returns upon his own head, and on his own skull his violence descends."

Notice there both the active and passive components of God's judgement. First, God sharpens his sword to deal out justice, but then God also works providentially to make the consequences of sin be its own punishment.

So, straightforwardly this is a warning. If we don't repent, we will face the judgement of God.

It can be easy to want to avoid thinking about this aspect of God's judgement. His wrath. But we really shouldn't. For one, that's like the doctor saying you have really high blood pressure and need to change your lifestyle. And you saying, 'that's a pretty disturbing belief you have there doc. I however don't believe in high blood pressure, I choose to believe that everyone has good blood pressure. And I think that in this day and age doctors should be telling everyone that they have good blood pressure. It's much more uplifting and encouraging. Beliefs like this are why nobody goes to the doctor anymore.' That's just not helpful.

But second, the Bible doesn't shy away from God's wrath towards sin and sinners. Jesus talks about hell a lot. God's wrath isn't a caveat to God's character.

It's not like "In spite of God's goodness, God has wrath towards sin and sinners."

God has wrath towards sin and sinners because he is Good, because he is Just.

It is good for God to punish evil, to punish sin. He would be unjust and wicked if he just did nothing about the sin and evil in the world.

The problem isn't God's wrath, for me the problem is that I'm a sinner.

So, this is why the gospel is good news. It's the message that sinners like you and me can be saved from the wrath of God by the death of the Son of God in our place.

So, the straight forward meaning of this section is this – if you don't repent, God's wrath will fall on you. But then the implication is this – if you do repent, then God's wrath will not fall on you. Sin and judgement doesn't have to be the end of your story.

What's so great about the gospel is that it isn't just a display of God's mercy and grace, kind of at the expense of his justice. It's actually a perfect display of his mercy and justice.

We like to make a big deal about God's mercy on display in the gospel, and we definitely should, but since we're talking about God as judge, I want to just point out today how the gospel displays God's *justice*.

There's more to the story than just what we see here in Psalm 7. Yes, if you repent, God's wrath will not fall on your head. But God doesn't just set it aside either. God's justice requires that God's law be satisfied, so someone has to take the wrath in your place. This is what happened at the cross.

Paul says this in Romans 3:26, talking about the cross of Christ, he says, "it [the cross] was to show [God's] righteousness at the present time, so that [God] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

So, God is shown to be just because he actually satisfied the demands of his own law. He doesn't just say, "ah don't worry about it."

And the merciful justifier, in that the repentant don't have to take the wrath of God for their own sin.

You get to go free, because Jesus took the wrath of God in your place.

So, let's look back at Psalm 7, and think about the justice of God in the gospel.

Verse 1. In you Lord I take refuge, deliver me. Not from unjust persecutors, but from your just wrath for my sin.

- Verse 2. Christ was torn in pieces, so that you might be whole.
- Verse 3. If there is wrong in your hands... there is.
- Verse 6. Christ was trampled in your place. Christ's glory was laid in the dust for you.
- Verse 8. Don't judge us for our righteousness, judge us for Christ's righteousness. We have none of our own to offer.
- Verse 9. By the power of the Holy Spirit, your wickedness can come to an end. You can be made new in Christ. Those who are in Christ are a new creation. Now you are the righteous that he will establish not because of your righteousness, but because of his in him, we become the righteousness of God.
  - Verse 12. If a man repents, then the sword of God falls on Christ instead.
  - Verse 15. Christ has fallen into the pit that you dug, to take your place.
  - Verse 16. Your mischief falls on Christ's head. Your violence falls on Christ's skull.
- Verse 17. I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

Because God is the judge, he has the power to pardon. Because God is the judge, he has the right to accept Christ's righteous life as yours, and to accept Christ's death as yours.

Because God is the judge, you can be free from sin. The door of repentance is open for you today.

## Conclusion

So, what does it mean that God is our judge? How is God's judgement good news?

Since God is your judge, you can be free from your stubborn pride. You have nothing to prove. God sees the truth. If you're in the wrong, it's better to just own that, and actually grow. Since God is judge, you are free to be wrong, you are free to receive correction with humility and even gratitude.

Since God is your judge, you can be free from the fear of man. What other people think about you is not the final word. One day, God will render judgement on their judgement. You are free to displease others in order to please Christ. Just because someone is upset at you that doesn't mean you've done anything wrong.

And since God is your judge, you can be free from your sin. The judge himself sent his own Son to satisfy his own law to set you free from the penalty of the law. If you would turn to Christ in repentance and faith, you can be free of your guilt and your shame today.

Pray with me.