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Here's Hope
by Rev. Jerry Rea

Judgment is Not God's Final Word

In Isaiah, chapter 30, we find that judgment is not God's final word. God will always judge, but in the end He has plans to build up and remake. The last verse of this song is better than the first one.

Often I hear people who know just a bit about scripture complain about the harshness and judgmental Spirit of God. They prove by these thoughts that they don't know the whole heart of God. He judges because, first, it's who He is. He is a holy and righteous God. Second, He brings new life because that, too, is how He is. At the flood, there was judgment but then God brought new life. The curse of mankind fell on Jesus. That is God's judgment on all sin. The back end of that story, though, is so much better and brighter than the front end. Because of Jesus' affliction, we have new life through Him. He judges sin because He wants better for us. He wants to show mercy.

The story of Jonah comes to mind. By His consummate grace, God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh. He is just; therefore, He must judge their sin, but because He is gracious, he drafts a missionary (however so very reluctant) and sends him to warn the people of impending doom. Jonah does *not* want to go. The scholars are all over the map as to why Jonah was reluctant, but no one really knows completely. By contrast, our God is *anxious* for these people to be spared.

A New Testament version of this concept is the teaching in 1 Peter that He is "not willing that any should perish." His desire clearly comes out. Jesus stated it in a slightly different way. He told the city of Jerusalem, "How often I would've gathered you together as a hen gathers her chicks." That is the desire of Jesus, and the will of God. God's will is that all be saved. It's the powerful "whosoever" of the New Testament gospel! Though He is tremendously powerful, holy, and just, His mercy exceeds His own justice. By all rights and fairness, God could walk away from us in our sinful state. It would be only "right" that He would judge; however, judgment is not God's final word. His desire and longing is to forgive and heal. It is, in fact, God's very nature to be merciful.

Now, here's the hope in that. Though we repeatedly show a leaning and desire to go our own way and do our own thing, God is merciful. Mankind is stubborn and bent on moving away from God. God is the Good Shepherd who seeks and finds them. He might do that through a messenger like a prophet or preacher. He might do that by sending His own son, seeking to save. You know that's what the Bible teaches, don't you? He came to seek and save. It might be that the meaning of this idea for you is this: though you are being judged by God, this is not God's final word. The meaning might be that you are *not* too far gone for God to do an impossible thing in your life.

On the one hand, our God is a holy God. His very nature is holiness. On the other hand, that's not His final word. His very nature is also mercy.

Praying for Your Soul,
Jerry Rea