



How do you respond to a God who hates sin? God's reaction to sin is more than a simple distaste or aversion. God's ways are holy. God's ways are pure and right. Sin occurs when humans prefer their own paths more than the paths to which God calls them. The affront to God is massive. Sin maligns and mocks the character and stature of God. Although God is patient, God will have none of it. God will win. Sin will eventually be no more.

Was God just when he instructed the Israelites to annihilate the inhabitants of Canaan? Absolutely. God would be fully in the right to bring an end to all sinners. That's what sin deserves: death. The amazing thing is that God extends grace to anyone. In the Old Testament, God extended grace to the children of Abraham. They too deserved death, but God relented—just because he chose to. Through the Israelites, God was going to extend grace to the whole world. For their part, the Israelites had to remain obedient; otherwise God's judgment would fall on their sin too. (By the way, they failed miserably—as all of us would have. God eventually used the Assyrians and the Babylonians to bring about Israel's punishment.)

In the Old Testament, judgment regularly occurred in the present. What about in today's world? Now, under the reign of Christ and in light of his work on the cross, judgment is emphasized as a future reality. Everyone will have to face it. There is death and then judgment.

So where is grace? Wherever God wants to extend it. Grace can't be earned, manipulated, stolen, or conjured up. God remains in charge of dispensing God's unmerited favor. In the Old Testament, God worked his judgment through his people. Since the time of Christ, God works grace through his people. If you are a follower of Christ, then your call is clear: hate sin and live grace.

Personal Reflection and Application

Keep a journal to address the following questions and topics.

AC Spend a day contemplating how opposed to sin God is. Consider God's holiness and the self-centeredness of sin. Consider the distortions that occur when evaluating right and wrong from a human-centered point of view rather than from a God-centered reality. Consider the extent to which God was willing to go in order to rescue you from your own sins.

Q To what degree do you think and act as though you are the strong arm of God's judgment? To what degree do you think and act like a grace agent of Jesus Christ?

Q In what ways do you keep trying to force God to be more likable or palatable? What do you fear about getting to know God as God is? What aspects of God do you keep trying to ignore? What impact does your redefining God have on your faith and on your ministry to others?

P *May I know and trust you as you are and represent you clearly to others.*



Small Groups

Opening Question: What is an injustice that tends to rile you the most?

This study examines an aspect about God that many people in our time struggle to comprehend. Patience with one another will be important. Beware of tendencies to refashion God in our image and temptations to reject God as God truly is.

AC Read the following verses about sin and judgment: Genesis 3; 6:11-13; 12:3; Deuteronomy 20:16-18; 28; Joshua 6:21; Judges 2:20-23; Psalm 96:10-13; Amos 1-2; Matthew 25:31-46; John 3:16-21; 5:22-27; Romans 3:21-26; 6:23; Hebrews 10:26-31. What do you learn about God’s character?

Q What influence do each of the following attributes and works of God have on your day to day life?
God’s holiness?
God’s mercy?
God’s grace?
God’s forgiveness?
God’s commands?
God’s discipline?
God’s judgment?

Q In what ways are you choosing to be an instrument of grace? How would others answer this question on your behalf?

P Pray that each of you would let God’s grace fully influence your life.

One-on-One Relationships

Equality of people is one of our culture’s core values. Giving deference to somebody because of their “place” in life is mostly a thing of the past. Everybody is approachable; nobody’s special.

Christians assert, however, that God is not equal in stature to humans. They claim that God is infinitely better, wiser, more important, stronger, and purer than any human is capable of even imagining.

The cultural view of equality can make the Christian understanding of God’s superiority difficult to comprehend, accept, and respect.

Be patient with your disciple. Resist arguing dogma. Instead, keep introducing your disciple to God. Explore God’s character in Scripture. Ask God to teach you both who he is. Spend time viewing the world from where God sits. Tell and retell the stories of God’s judgment and God’s grace. Demonstrate what obedience looks like. Demonstrate what grace looks like. Trust God to capture your disciple’s heart.

Sometimes difficult issues are easily settled and sometimes not. Your willingness to stick it out is a testimony to God’s grace.

Families

Pick and tweak items below to fit your own family’s context.

AC Have each family member identify five things that they like to do but that God can’t stand. For example, you might like gossiping about other people or pushing someone just because you feel angry—but you know God hates these things. Write each of the five things on a separate sticky note and stick them to a wall in the kitchen. Each day this week, family members can pluck one of their ungodly tendencies off the wall and use the paper as a reminder that day to not engage in that behavior. Talk about the results at dinner.

AC Divide up the front section of the paper and give each family member a highlighter. Have everyone mark reports of injustices—things that don’t align with the ways of God. Talk about your tendencies to want God to bring his judgment down on each injustice. Also talk about what God might want you and other Christians to do to bring his grace to bear on the various ungodly happenings.

AC Compare God to seven superheroes of your choice, acknowledging God’s superiority. When finished, everybody gets on their knees and tells God just how great he is.