

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Psalms: Living By Faith In God
XCVI. Anticipating God's Edifying Judgment
(Psalm 96:1-13)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

The world stands in great need of a just, comprehensive, and lasting judgment that will settle troubled hearts:

(1) The secular realm needs God's edifying judgment: "(M)ore people than ever are self-reporting poor mental health . . . (L)ast April, Pew Research Center noted, 'Around six-in-ten (58%) say that life in America is worse today than it was 50 years ago for people like them. Only about a quarter (23%) say life today is better, while 19% say it is about the same'" so that "mental-health outcomes and perceptions of American life" are "worse than ever." ("Solving the right problems," Republican-American, February 20, 2024, p. 8A) The cause is arguably "(p)olitical leaders, activists and media personalities" who "often talk about the need to have 'difficult conversations,' but . . . thanks to advents such as 24-hour cable news, social media and smartphones, Americans are in fact subjected to a never-ending stream of 'difficult conversations.' Maybe Americans are not facing a historic abundance of obstacles but a dearth of the kind of self-confidence and healthy communal ties that allow people to triumph over them." (Ibid.)

(2) The religious realm needs God's edifying judgment: (a) Five years after "Pope Francis convened" a "summit of bishops from around the world to impress on them that clergy sexual abuse was a global problem, and that they needed to do something about it . . . the church's in-house legal system and pastoral response to victims has proven incapable of dealing with the problem . . . Even the pope's own child protection advisory commission says structural obstacles are harming victims and preventing basic justice." (Nicole Winfield, "Victims fault Vatican work on sex abuse," Ibid., p. 1B) (b) Evangelical circles also need God's edifying judgment: Believers from two large evangelical churches in our state have recently told us of troubling problems in the teaching or administrative actions of pastors and/or leaders in their churches. In one case, the abrupt resignation of the new, corporate-minded pastor and the voicing of a corporate-speak, baffling account about the resignation by church leaders in a meeting with the congregation when no sin by anyone had caused the resignation has left the congregation confused and shocked!

(3) The problem shows up in the rising pursuit of witchcraft in society: "(I)nterest in witchcraft, Wicca, and the occult surged in 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued to rise with national and global political unrest," for "(w)itchcraft appeals to people who long for inner peace and some sense of control in what feels like a rapidly unraveling world . . ." (Witchcraft 101: Toil and Trouble," Answers, January-March 2024, p. 31)

Need: *So, we ask, "With the worldwide need for just, lasting and edifying judgment, what should we do?"*

- I. After the psalmist in Psalm 96:1-6 called for the world's nations to praise Scripture's Lord as the sole Creator and true God as opposed to pagan idols, the psalmist urged the nations to worship the Lord because He will sovereignly judge the world's people groups with equity, Psalm 96:7-10:**
- A. The Lord is said to reign over the world so that it is firmly established and cannot be "shaken, moved" (*mot*, B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 556-557) into a state of uncontrollable disorder, Psa. 96:10a,b.
 - B. Accordingly, with His control of the world's order, God will "execute judgment" (*din*, Ibid., p. 192) on the world's people groups with "equity, evenness" (*meyshar*, Ibid., p. 449), Psalm 96:10c.
- II. In Psalm 96:11-13, the psalmist called on the whole created universe to praise the Lord, for He is coming to set up His kingdom over the world by permanently deciding controversies between people groups with unbending righteousness:**
- A. The verb rendered "judge" twice in Psalm 96:13a,b translates the Hebrew word *shaphat*, that means to "decide controversies" (Ibid., p. 1047-1048), so God will settle world conflicts.
 - B. The Lord will decide these disputes with "righteousness" (*sedeq*, Kittel, Biblia Hebraica, p. 1059; Ibid., B. D. B., p. 841-842), what implies impartial and unbending alignment to God's laws (Robert B. Girdlestone, Syns. of the O. T., 1968, p. 101; H. A. W., Theol. Wrdbk. O. T., 1980, v. II, p. 752-755), Psalm 96:13c.
 - C. In addition, God will decide controversies in His '*emunah*, "steadfastness, faithfulness" (Ibid., B. D. B., p. 53), meaning that His decisions will be permanent in accord with His unchanging character, Psalm 96:13d.

Lesson: *The whole created universe, including mankind, owes God great praise, for He is the True, Sovereign Creator God versus man's false idols, and He is coming to execute judgment with equity and to decide disputes between people with inflexible alignment to His Law that will permanently align with His unchanging character.*

Application: (1) *May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.* (2) *May we joyfully praise God for His coming world kingdom that will provide perfect, lasting, edifying justice in His judgment, and heed His Word in our lives for blessing.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and provide additional guidance . . .)

Each issue of concern mentioned in our introduction is corrected with God's blessing if the party involved aligns with God's order as revealed in Scripture. We thus view this information for our application and edification:

(1) On the self-reported poor mental health of Americans due to an endless stream of "difficult conversations" from political leaders, activists and the mainstream media, Philippians 4:6-9 has the solution: (a) First, we must not be "over-anxious" (*merimnao*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 690; Moulton & Milligan, The Vocab. of the Grk. N. T. 1972, p. 398) about anything, but by prayer with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God. His peace that passes all understanding will then (literally) "put military garrisons" (*phroureo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 875) in our hearts and minds [to guard them from anxiety] through Christ Jesus, Philippians 4:6-7. (b) Second, we should fill our minds with what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable, Philippians 4:8 ESV. (c) Third, we must apply what Paul teaches, and by application, this includes heeding all Scripture, and not only will the peace of God guard our hearts and minds, but the God of peace Himself will be "with" (*meta*) us as to His "company, companionship" (Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 509-511), Philippians 4:9.

(2) On the inability of the Roman Catholic Church to handle clergy sexual abuse in its ranks, (a) 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 calls on *local* church leaders and their *local* congregations to exercise church discipline on sins in the *local* body. The Catholic hierarchy which itself violates the 1 Peter 5:3 order not to lord it over God's people, which hierarchy is also too cumbersome and shielding of abusers, should be replaced with *local* church government for a *locally responsive* and *responsible* handling of abuses in *local churches!* (b) In addition, the Catholic Church needs to repent regarding its false gospel of salvation by faith in Christ plus the keeping of the extrabiblical sacraments of the Catholic Church (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9 with Galatians 1:8-9), for some Catholic clergy have not been regenerated by faith in Christ, so they have no power to overcome their sins of abuse. (c) Also, the Catholic Church must correct its errant views on sanctification by teaching saved ministers to rely on the Holy Spirit for a holy walk (Galatians 5:16-23) and (d) it also needs to let clergymen marry if they do not have the gift of celibacy, 1 Corinthians 7:1-5.

(3) On the problems in evangelical churches of teaching, administration, immorality, and the influx of an incoherent corporate business mentality in church leaders, (a) 1 Timothy 3:5 directs that if a man does not know how to manage his own household, he will not know how to care for God's church. In other words, church leadership is to be patterned after the leadership of a family, as also implies 1 Timothy 5:1-2. We cannot take the corporate business model of leadership and apply it to the church with successful results any more than one can lead a family with corporate leadership with successful results! (b) As for proper Bible teaching, it must involve giving the **content of Scripture itself** (2 Timothy 4:1-2) with its correct interpretation (2 Timothy 2:15). That interpretation involves heeding Christ's Mark 12:18-27 example of using the literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation of a Bible passage. (c) On the issue of immorality in the church, (+) we are to avoid it at all costs (Ephesians 5:3), (+) but if it does occur, we must handle it Biblically, locally, and fully, with careful church discipline as explained by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 (with Matthew 18:15-17 for practical application).

(4) On the problem of a growing commitment of many people to witchcraft to handle insecurity and fear in a seemingly rapidly unraveling world, (a) many people do not know that witchcraft is very dangerous! It opens the door to trafficking with demons, and demons are out to deceive people into being brought under their dominance so that the demons can harm people emotionally, mentally and even physically! (cf. Mark 5:1-5) (b) The security one needs in a world that seems to be unraveling is not to be found in trafficking with demons, but by fellowshiping with the Creator God of the universe, Jesus Christ (John 1:3). He currently holds the universe together by His Word that He spoke to call the universe into existence (Hebrews 1:3). (b) When one trusts in Christ as his personal Savior from sin, he is transferred out of the realm of Satan's power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). One is then sealed by the presence of God the Holy Spirit, and preserved in his salvation status until the rapture of the Church when he is taken to heaven (Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30). (c) A believer in Christ can also currently enjoy spiritual victory when facing the angelic conflict if he heeds Ephesians 6:10-18 by putting on the whole armor of God to withstand Satan's attacks. This action basically involves relying on God to think and to act in alignment with Scripture like Jesus did when He was tempted by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11 (cf. also 1 John 2:14b)

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we praise God for His coming kingdom of perfect, permanent justice, and live under His rule in our hearts and lives for blessing in this life.