

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

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Concern for some sort of a future judgment grips the human race. The five major religions of the world, and their variations, all think about this time when every soul will give an account for good or evil.¹ Even those with no religion who hold to the doctrine of atheism, as promoted by Marxian Communism, have feared that religion would be a danger to the state and in this sense would ultimately bring judgment upon society. Like it or hate it the truth of a judgment faces every person alive in the 21st century and the human race from Adam to our day is confronted with God's plan of salvation for all people. In the human heart, from the pygmies to cannibal valley, from the outcast of society to the tycoon on Madison Avenue, there is a hidden longing for something better.

This void in the human soul senses that justice demands that there must be a judgment eventually. God's answer to this need of the human heart is set before the world in words that cannot be misunderstood: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Because of this gift God "hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained." This is confirmed and we are given the assurance it will happen because "He

hath raised Him (Christ] from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

And no one comes into this world without at least a spark of understanding and appreciation of this truth of the judgment. The Bible calls it "Light." Neither our parents our language, our race nor our culture can change the fact that this perception is given to every one is born on this planet. (John 1:9).

A judgment is coming in which even our secret thoughts and purposes will be revealed. Is it possible that a judgment this exacting may still mean good news?

Before automatic railroad warning sensors, British law required bridge keepers to flag down trains if the bridge was out. One night a passenger train plunged into a river because the bridge keeper failed to do his duty. At the trial, the judge asked, "Did you wave your lantern in warning?"

"Yes, your honor," he answered. But later, after being exonerated, he told friends, "I'm glad the judge didn't ask if my lantern was lighted."

Human courts seldom discover the whole truth; they cannot weigh motives. But a judgment is coming that will reveal even secret thoughts and purposes, "including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." Ecclesiastes 12:14.² It's true that wrongdoers often face a partial judgment even in this life. But imagine a judgment in which *everything* comes out in the open. The Bible describes such a judgment that will take place when life is finished,

¹ Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity.

² Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

for “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” Hebrews 9:27.

The Scriptures bring this universal final judgment into focus by explaining: “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).

The absolute justice in this trial is assured by what is written in the books. No one will be able to bear false witness or bribe the court. The record is all there in the “book of life” and in the other “books.” There will be no partiality for rich or poor, small or great, for we are told: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The magnitude of this trial, which takes place before the whole universe, is portrayed graphically by the prophet Daniel: “At that time [the time of the end] shall Michael [another name for Christ] stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1).

Here is a pledge straight from heaven—even though a “time of trouble, such as never was” engulfs the world God’s people will have nothing to fear for they “shall be delivered” because they are

“found written in the book.” Clearly, in this time of judgment, this “book” is of supreme importance. To be written in it means eternal life. To be blotted from it means eternal death or as the record states: “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

The “Book of Life”

This “book of life” was in existence long before Gutenberg changed history as he began printing books and reason proclaims that the heavenly court doesn’t need computers to log the records of the human race. But the Bible is clear; there was a “book of life from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). Equally clear, we are told that the true worshippers of God are written in this “book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (13:8). This book is the Lamb’s book and the Lamb is none other than Christ Himself. This means that the life of God’s people is written in Jesus. This is explained by Paul: “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

John provides in his epistle a further description of how Christ is the book of life: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). Unmistakably this “Word” that was from the beginning is Christ Himself and He is the One God gave to the world and He is God’s message to the human race. Paul

in Hebrews sharpens this truth by proclaiming that God has specifically “spoken unto us by His Son” (1:1, 2). This was heaven’s mutual plan. The text states: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). God does not hold our trespasses against us for they are written in Christ, God’s book of instruction to the human family. This is His gift to the world, which is none other than the “book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Revelation 13:8.

All of this makes sense. We are written in Christ the Lamb that was slain before we knew our lost condition—before we existed, before the foundation of the world. This is because “in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The way we are written in this book defies forgery. Thomas, the disciple who had doubts, was deeply concerned with only the genuine and so he demanded to see the print of the nails in Christ’s hands which would confirm the crucifixion and the resurrection (John 20:25). Here was a record beyond question that would last for eternity. The scars in His hands could never be erased and this Word, this “book of life” would forever declare the justice of God and enable every sinner to stand before the judgment without fear. Indeed, the redeemed will gladly acknowledge they made these marks in His hands. The nails were their writing instruments that as sinners they used when they wrote the record. But this dare not engender fear for the promise is beyond question: “There is therefore

no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

Paul gives us further help in knowing that in Christ we will not stand condemned in the judgment. This is true because He has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9, 10). Our confidence in a just verdict is based upon the “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). What a majestic promise, not because we are good but because of His purpose He gives life and immortality through the gospel based upon unlimited love even before the world began—and God cannot lie!

The “Book of Remembrance”

Being written in the “book of life” can be compared to being written in another book called the “a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Mal. 3:16) with a similar result in the judgment. Those written therein belong to the Lord and have nothing to fear. The account explains: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord harkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of

hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Malachi 3:16-18).

Jesus gave the assurance that there should be rejoicing “because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). They are written there because He “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). This is the record that stands in the day of judgment.

The “Books”

The word *books* is obviously a euphemism; recent human technology in processing and storing data helps us understand that God certainly has all the information about our lives accurately recorded, including data impossible for any man-made computer to catch—our thoughts and motives. God’s “commands are boundless.” Psalm 119:96. His law describes what He is like and is the principle on which His universe is founded. (James 2:12 calls it “the law that gives freedom.”) Any act or motive that conflicts with this law puts us at odds with God and becomes a part of our life record—the “books” by which John says we will be judged.

Revelation 20:12 makes clear that there are “books” and there is another book, “which is the book of life.” The contrast is clear. We have seen that this “book of life” is none other than Christ Himself and we are written in that book by the print of the nails. But what about those other books that

are opened and “the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works”?

If Christ is the book of life, then sinners must be the book of death. Paul refers to the believers as “epistles” or letters, each one a small book known and read of all men (2 Corinthians 3:20). There is no way to escape the personal biography that each person writes in the life lived. Those who by faith agree they are sinners are written in the book of life, Christ Jesus, for He “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Those who do not have faith in the pardon brought at infinite cost must stand on their own record and be judged accordingly. Sinners find pardon when they believe and understand that they made the record by the nail prints “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). What a glorious promise, no condemnation in the judgment for those who believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Since God gave “His only begotten Son” for “the world” (John 3:16), it means that the entire human race has been written in Him, the book of life. The record in the “book of life” is the final means of determining the cases of the righteous in the judgment. Though unworthy, they are not condemned because they overcame “by the blood of the Lamb . . . and they loved not their lives unto the death” and they “came out of great tribulation,

and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11; 7:14).

Before Jesus comes the second time there must be a process by which judgment will determine whether a person who has died will come up in the first resurrection or the second. These two resurrections are explained in Revelation 20:4-6. The first resurrection is for those who believed on the name of the Son of God and refused self-worship and are pronounced “blessed.” The second resurrection at the end of the thousand years is for those—“not found written in the book of life,” and they are therefore “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). With absolute justice this will be determined by the “book” record; whether written in Christ the “book of life” or written in their own “book” of death. Here is an eternal difference for the record says: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Revelation 20:6). The other group written in their own books, who believed not in Christ Jesus but depended on their own merits, will come up in the second resurrection when “the thousand years are ended” (verse 5). This is the group that cannot enter in because they are not “written in the Lamb’s book of life” (17:8; 21:27).

It is clear that this must be settled before Christ returns for He proclaims: “Behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). He could not bring the reward with Him unless it was known who the recipients are. The inheritance of death that Adam brought to the human family has

been defeated by Christ, as Paul says: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:23, 23). He knows who are His own—they “are Christ’s,” His possession, but even more.

In the final time of trouble which Daniel spoke about, “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,” God’s people “shall be delivered” (12:1). While the angels are holding the four winds of strife on the earth, they are cautioned to take care and watch over God’s people and the angel is told to continue to do this, “and we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” (Revelation 7:1-3). This means that they are not only “written” in the book of life, but they are sealed, and are the unique possession of the Lord Jesus.

Written in the “book of life,” “sealed in their foreheads,” God’s very own, both living and dead, hold a special place at His coming.

The One who presides in the judgment is an impressive figure known as “the Ancient of Days,” before whom “a river of fire was flowing.” “Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.” Daniel 7:9, 10. The whole world is arraigned, for “all have sinned,” and the “wages of sin is death.” Romans 3:23; 6:23. An ancient Roman governor reacted in a very human way when he heard Paul preach about this coming confrontation. “As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid.” Acts 24:25. So

are we! Each of us has a built-in conscience, and the prophetic judgment scene seems calculated to warn us—possibly even frighten us—into preparing for it. Is this God’s intention? Does He want us to fear Him as the unyielding Judge who will decide our eternal destiny?

Facing reality is always best. To try to push the judgment out of our minds would be foolish, for “we must all appear.” 2 Corinthians 5:10. If death and taxes are certain, the judgment is even more so. But the judgment—serious and final though it is—need not be something we dread.

Many people have the idea that God is a vengeful Deity just waiting for a chance to strike them with His lightning bolts of retribution for their sins. And if God is indeed like this, a judgment with Him on the bench would certainly be a fearful prospect. The Bible, however, describes a God and a judgment that differs startlingly from this common misconception.

1. God is not looking for an excuse to punish us. We sometimes picture a loving Jesus who stands between us and a harsh Father. But according to the Bible, the Father loves us and is just as anxious for our eternal salvation as is the Son. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” John 3:16. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” 2 Corinthians 5:19.

2. God never planned for any of us to face the terror of being found guilty in the judgment. Jesus declared that the condemnation of the judgment—“eternal fire”—was specifically “prepared for the

devil and his angels.” Matthew 25:41. If any human being finds himself sharing Satan’s fate, it will not be because God has willed it. Those who are destroyed along with the devil and his angels will have spurned and beaten back repeated efforts by God to save them.

3. In what appears to be a happy exception to Paul’s statement about “all” appearing in judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10), Jesus declares good news: “In every truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts his trust in him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgment, but has already passed from death to life.” John 5:24, NEB. The word *judgment* here means the condemnation of the judgment; the point is that God wants to exempt us from the terrible experience of facing judgment and being condemned.

4. The Father has turned over to Christ the task of judging men. “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.” “And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.” John 5:22, 27.

Our judge, then, is Jesus Himself. No one more friendly to us could be found! If in a human court, the judge and all the jury members are warm personal friends, you could hardly wish for a more favorable chance of acquittal. Yet the Son of man will do for us what no earthly friend can do when we are in trouble. John says, “I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning

sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world!" 1 John 2:1, 2.

5. How can Jesus be our Advocate in a law case if He is also our Judge? God puts all the odds in our favor. Jesus is both Judge and defense Attorney. He can defend us because He has already suffered the condemnation we deserve in the judgment. The death that Jesus died on the cross was the condemnation sin requires carried to its ultimate degree. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus died as the eternally lost sinner will die—"forsaken" by His Father—because "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:24. Since He is the second Adam, we are "in Him" corporately if we choose to believe it. The idea is that when Jesus died, we also died. "I have been crucified with Christ," said Paul. Galatians 2:20. Any lightning bolts of hot wrath that should fall on sinners already fell on Christ at the cross.

By accepting Jesus as our Saviour by faith, we are identified with Him. There is not the slightest reason why anyone should have to duplicate Jesus' experience of dying for sin unless that person rejects his identity with Christ. What Jesus did on the cross is far more than a legal maneuver to satisfy the statutory claims of the broken law. It does that, of course, but it involves more—our personal identification with Him and His death. By faith the believing sinner accepts that he is "in Christ," accepts the divine judgment on his sins, but

actually suffers it "in Christ." Justice makes no further claims against him. This is why he "does not come up for judgment." And everyone can have this advantage if they will accept it!

Paul presents a glorious picture of pending history: "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

This glorified company has overcome by the blood of the Lamb and in the judgment they reap the promise of not having their names blotted out of the "book of life" and each one is assured by Jesus that He "will confess his name before my Father and before his angels" (Revelation 3:5). The whole human race has this privilege of being acquitted in the judgment for "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). The only reason condemnation comes upon anyone is because they choose "darkness rather than light" (John 3:19), and deliberately reject God's love for "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This is the reason that "all" shall be

made alive, saint and sinner, and at His second coming even “they also which pierced Him” shall be made alive to see the result of their choice (Revelation 1:7). The fact that the ungodly come up in the final (second) resurrection is evidence to them and the whole universe that they were written in the book of life but they are lost because they refused to believe “in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

The day of God’s judgment is a glorious event to bring gladness to the whole universe. It is the crowning act in His plan of salvation which was laid from the foundation of the world and every son and daughter of Adam can rejoice and be glad “because your names are written in heaven.” The One with the print of the nails in His hands will at last “see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:11, 12).

There is nothing to fear. May God’s day of judgment come soon!