

Judgment Day

Matthew 12:36, 37; John 3:17, 18

With Study Questions

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But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:36, 37).

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:17, 18).

Introduction

A great comfort (perhaps the greatest comfort) of the Christian faith—a comfort revived during the Protestant Reformation—is that our peace with God, our blessed assurance, our knowledge of having eternal life, rests not in the works of man but in the cross of Christ. It was the error of concluding they could please God with good works among the early Jews that caused the Apostle Paul to write of their misguided zeal in seeking to “**establish their own righteousness**” (Romans 10:3) rather than embracing the “**righteousness of faith**” (Romans 10:6).

So emphatic are the Scriptures regarding faith in Christ and His cross as the singular basis for our righteous standing before God that Paul pits faith against works (works that we should be walking in [Ephesians 2:10]) that we might avoid thinking it is a combination of the two:

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness (Romans 4:4, 5).

When Paul writes “**does not work**,” he is not suggesting Christians shouldn’t do good works; just not good works seeking to merit salvation. Any honest, reflective, remotely introspective person would recognize this grace from God to be man’s only hope of eternal peace and communion

with a holy and righteous God who cannot be in the presence of sin. The two following passages in Scripture would seem to place impassable galaxies between God and men.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8).

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong (Habakkuk 1:13).

For this reason David petitions God with words of universal application:

Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you (Psalm 143:2).

The seeming conflict in the words of Christ:

Yet in the midst of this comfort we read words, even from the mouth of Christ Himself that, at first glance, seem to be in conflict. These words appear to indicate no judgment at all for those who believe in Christ:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned (*krinetai* meaning to evaluate—better “judged” as in NASB), but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:17, 18).

But these words from the lips of Christ seem indicate something else:

But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified¹, and by your words you will be

¹ The use of “justified” here does not mean that the words themselves merit salvation but that they reveal the heart as in verse 34 “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” The words outwardly reveal whether or not one has a heart of faith or rebellion.

condemned (*katadikasthese*—to pronounce guilty) (Matthew 12:36, 37).

The Apostle Paul concurs. Writing to a church, he states:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The question of this apparent conflict—whether or not believers in Christ must face judgment—was brought up in our weekly question and answer time. I don't think the question was sufficiently answered so I'd like to take some time this morning to pursue the issue a bit further.

Various Judgments

We read in the Scriptures of various judgments by God. During the time of Noah He judged all the earth (Genesis 6). We read of God also judging isolated nations, such as Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) or the Amalekites (Numbers 24:20), even Israel (Matthew 24).

There appears to be a level of rebellion, known but to God, where the evil in/of a nation makes it, in a sense, unredeemable or irretrievable. One explanation for the extended stay of the Israelites in Egypt (prior to Joshua's conquests) was that **"the iniquity of the Amorites is (was) not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16)**. Or as the KJV put it was **"not yet full."**

We also see various judgments of individuals who engage in something God deems worthy of immediate attention, such as Uzzah being struck for touching the ark of God (2 Samuel 6:7) or Ananias and Sapphira lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5). Paul seems to indicate that God will deal with Alexander in some sort of judgment:

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds (2 Timothy 4:14).

We also read of perfected saints crying to the Lord to judge those who shed their blood (Revelation 6:9, 10). It is the knowledge of a God who **"judges justly" (2 Peter 2:20)** that serves as the example given by Christ that we should not **"revile in return" (2 Peter 2:23)**.

Finally, some hold to the view that the saints will have their works judged, yielding heavenly rewards. Yet even those (at least within orthodox Christianity) who hold this view recognize two things: 1. The reward for the good works are not merited but are themselves gracious and 2. That no good work is acceptable to God unless He sees the work, as it were, through the blood of Christ.

We might view this as a parent buying a gift for a child to give back to the parent for his/her birthday. The child doesn't have, in his self, that which is necessary to purchase the gift and is dependent on the parent for the purchase and the giving of the gift to the parent doesn't in any way make the child or his deed more or less acceptable to the parent. Perhaps the illustration (as many do) falls short, but it should easily be seen that all things acceptable to God the Father come through God the Son.

Yet we haven't really gotten to our point!

Christians on Judgment Day

We're not primarily addressing here judgments of nations or individuals in history or rewards per se'. The real question is, in what respect must the believer appear before the judgment seat of Christ? As Christians we tend to go through life with the assumption that we will have no day in court—no reckoning before God. Yet there are untold passages which present an accounting before the Maker.

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

For according to the work of a man he will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him (Job 34:11).

If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work (Proverbs 24:12)?

For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds (Jeremiah 17:10).

The Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds (Jeremiah 32:18, 19).

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done (Matthew 16:27).

So it would at very least appear that we ought not go through life dismissing Judgment Day as if we get a hall pass, dismissing us from the event. I remember having a similar cavalier attitude about good works when it dawned on me that I wasn't saved by my good works.

But there came a point later when I realized that I am saved by good works—just not my good works—so I had better be in communion with the one whose good works are sufficient for the job. And I should not live as if there is no call in my life to do good works—which itself would be the sign of an unregenerate heart (John 14:15; 15:10).

I think we should have a similar view of Judgment Day. That there will be a day where all human deeds shall be published should be highly motivational toward my obedience. The exposing of the sins of all men on Judgment Day is a hard doctrine to deny. It's been said:

...it appears that we must admit they will be (all sins published), unless we can prove that the places where men are warned that they must be judged "for every idle word," for "every secret thing," were not addressed to Christians at all, but only to sinners. The disposition to deny that pardoned sins will be published in the day of judgment, doubtless arises from the feeling that it would produce a shame and compunction incompatible with the blessedness of their state.

But will the saints not publish their sins themselves, in their confessions? And is it not the sweetest type of spiritual joy, that which proceeds from contrition for sin?²

And if I may add to this—is it not to the glory of God for all creation to know the depths of all men’s sin, that we might have a greater understanding and appreciation of the cross of Christ where the sins of all the redeemed were nailed (1 Peter 2:24). And I might also add, as we move to our conclusion, that when the Scriptures speak of receiving their heavenly reward *according to their deeds*, it is not to be understood as a heavenly reward *because of their deeds*. For how contrary would that be to the entirety of Scripture!?

It can easily be argued that the good works we see displayed on the Judgment Day (the feeding and clothing and visiting of Christians [Matthew 25:31-46]) are there to show by outward means (since the creature—even in heaven—cannot know the heart) what God has accomplished in the lives of sinful men.

But here is the crux of the matter—the knowledge of a Judgment Day of all men—similar to the effort to keep the law, should drive us with a sort of gravitational pull to the cross of Christ. In the same way that today’s dismissal of God’s law as the standard of Christian ethics lessens our awareness of our need for Christ, our dismissal of our required attendance at the Day of Judgment lessens our awareness of our need for Christ.

It will be on that day, that Day of Judgment, that I will know, as I have never known, how desperately I need the **“Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1)**. It is then that the elements of communion will come into full focus as pointing to the only satisfactory answer to my dilemma of sin and rebellion.

It is not without cause that Paul’s declaration that **“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10)** culminates with exhortation to **“no longer think of each other according to the flesh” (2 Corinthians 5:16)**, but recognizing that **“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17)**. It is in this very passage where we are told that we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ that we are also informed of the glorious double imputation or double transfer which yields our only hope in that judgment.

² Dabney, R. L. (1996). *Systematic Theology* (electronic ed. based on the Banner of Truth 1985 ed.) (721). Simpsonville SC: Christian Classics Foundation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:20, 21).

Conclusion

We should not live this life as if there is no judgment. An awareness of a day of reckoning drives us to Christ and an imputed righteousness (a righteousness credited to our account) which is our only hope when on the receiving end of God's searching judgment. We ought to also recognize that it is not as if God has ignored the condemnation due us all in that Day of Judgment. He has rather poured out His wrath on His own Son—"the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 55:6). He made Him to be sin "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Questions for Study

1. What is one of the great comforts of knowing Christ? What was an early error among the Jews in the Bible (page 2)?
2. What should any honest, reflective, introspective person come to recognize when it comes to our hope of peace with God (page 3)?
3. Discuss the apparent conflict in the words of Christ (page 3).
4. What are the various judgments we see throughout the Scriptures (pages 4, 5)?
5. Will Christians be present at Judgment Day (pages 5-7)?
6. What is the difference between the heavenly reward *according to their deeds* versus *because of their deeds* (page 7)?
7. What is one great purpose that our knowledge of Judgment Day should yield in us (pages 7, 8)?

