

CHAPTER 18

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES

THE JUDGMENTS

It may seem revolutionary and a departure from the “old paths” to suggest that there is not to be a “general judgment” at a given time for sinner and saint alike. The Bible plainly teaches that there will be three judgments, conducted separately, with specific intervals of time between each, and with different classes of people involved.

Sin Judged at the Cross

Before considering these three specific judgments, we are not to forget that sin has already been judged on the cross. When Christ died He bore the penalty of sin and made a complete atonement for the broken law, which perfectly and eternally satisfied the justice of God.

Christ’s was a vicarious death. This is the central teaching of Isaiah’s climactic chapter on Messiah’s suffering, namely, that the “Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). Perhaps the crowning New Testament scripture on this is 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” The Word says, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). Again in Colossians we read, “Having made peace through the blood of his cross” (1:20).

We know, of course, that salvation is conditional. Christ has died for all, the sins of the world have been adequately judged in Him, and all who come to Him, who truly believe in Him, will be saved from the penalty and judgment of sin to come. The serpent-bitten Israelites in the wilderness were required to look in order to be healed. So the judgment of sin in Christ avails only as it is appropriated by those who renounce sin and the devil and who take

Him as their personal Savior.

The sinner who takes Christ as his Savior, who abides in Him, who remains faithful to the end, will not come into the last great judgment. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my words, and believeth on him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life” (John 5:24, R.V.). Instead of saints coming into judgment, they are to take part in the judgment:

“Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor. 6:2-3). This is a reference to the time when we shall reign with Him for a thousand years. The saints who have been perfected in love are to have great boldness in the day of judgment because they will then become partakers of the likeness of Christ: “As he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17), and, “When he shall appear, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

Judgment Begun Already

Apart from the three specific judgments that are yet in the future, there are many instances in which sin has already been punished as preliminary and as foreshadowing the eternal judgment of God to come. This includes the angels that sinned, Cain, the antediluvians, Sodom and Gomorrah, Korah and his company, Achan, the Israelites in their exile, and Jerusalem and the Jews in their subsequent dispersion. Every sinner who comes to Christ goes through a judgment-day experience when he confesses his sins and repents of his wrong-doing. The backslider who is reclaimed from his wandering likewise goes through a time of heart-searching and judgment. At sanctification the “old man” or “carnal mind,” that is “enmity against God,” is condemned, and there is an ordeal of heart-searching and dedication that is nothing more or less than a judgment upon self and the old nature.

Having come through this ordeal of regeneration and sanctification, one is perfected in love, and consequently there is no fear of judgment to come. Then, too, all through life there will be the

chastisement of the Lord, an evident token of the love of God towards us, but ordained with an all-wise purpose in view, namely, that we might be made “partakers of his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). The chastisement of God’s people is a form of judgment. “When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32).

Judgment Seat of Christ

The first of the three judgments, yet in the future, is the judgment seat of Christ. The verse that teaches this is 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (See also Romans 14:10).

The “we” who must all appear at this judgment does not refer to the unsaved world of sinners; they are the “we” St. Paul had been talking about in this chapter. There are twenty-six of them. They are the “we” who have a “building of God. . . eternal in the heavens,” we who are “ambassadors for Christ.”

Those who appear in this judgment have already had their judgment by having renounced their sins and by having accepted Christ’s sacrifice in their behalf. This is the judgment of rewards for the faithful in Christ. It is to be a happy judgment; it is to be the saints’ crowning day. Some will be made rulers over five cities and some over two, according to their works and faithfulness, for this will also be a judgment of merit.

The time of this judgment is when Jesus comes in the clouds to take away His Gentile bride preceding the tribulation indignation. “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (2 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Those who have labored and witnessed and done good are to be recompensed. When we call the blind, the maimed and the poor to a feast, it is not expected that they shall recompense us, but, says the

Lord, “Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). This is a further reference to the judgment seat of Christ—the judgment of rewards—and it is specified as being at the time of the “resurrection of the just,” namely, the first resurrection, at the first part of Christ’s return. If one gains the world but misses the prize of eternal life and loses his own soul, Christ asks, “What is a man profited?” and adds: “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27).

Conjointly with the warning of His second coming is the last chapter of the Bible, and the assuring promise of reward: “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12). Do not think that all the saints are to be rewarded alike. The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), and the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12-27) are conclusive proofs of varying rewards at this judgment.

Some will enter heaven with good works and some with bad works—“Whether good or bad,” says the Word. Some will have no works at all for which to be rewarded, such as those who have been saved on their death-beds, of whom the penitent thief is an example. Yet such will be saved, there is no doubt about that. The lives of some saints will be so involved in selfishness that their works, likened to “wood, hay, stubble,” will be burned and will profit them nothing. Others will build upon the foundation of Christ, “gold, silver, precious stones,” and will have a rich and lasting reward. The quality of our works will be “revealed by fire,” and only those whose works abide the test of that day will receive a reward. Yet there will be some whose works will be burned “but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:11-15). These will be rescued as it were from a burning building, and will enter eternity saved, yet without reward. The Word therefore enjoins every saint to keep in mind this coming day and to “take heed how he buildeth.”

The Judgment of the Nations

We have seen that the “judgment seat of Christ” is to take place in the heavens when Christ comes for His saints. The “judgment of the nations” takes place on the earth when He comes with His saints. “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, . . . before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another” (Matt. 25:31, 32).

The nations will have become exceedingly evil; they will have ripened for judgment, and the invisible hand of God will have gathered them to the fields of Armageddon for this great day. “I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat” (Joel 3:2). His purpose in doing this is that He may “plead with them there” for His people—the Hebrews. Likewise in the parable of the “sheep and the goats,” the separation of the nations is based on their dealings with a company whom Christ calls “my brethren.” This is evidently a reference to His “brethren” after the flesh.

There are a number of conclusive scriptures showing that the time known as the “day of the Lord,” will be accomplished by a most serious visitation of the wrath of God of such magnitude as this world has never witnessed.

In Revelation 19, it is called the “supper of the great God,” and the fowls of heaven are called on to come and feed on the flesh of kings and captains, the great and the mighty. At this time Christ will come as the “Faithful and True,” to judge and to make war.” Jude, referring to the prophecy of Enoch, says that He is coming to “execute judgment upon all,” and to convince ungodly sinners of their ungodly deeds and ungodly speeches. St. Paul tells us that His coming will be in “flaming fire taking vengeance” on them that know not God, and that “obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Of this awful time Zechariah says, “Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle” (Zech. 14:3). We know how He fought against the Egyptians at the Red Sea, when not a single one

was left.

We know how He fought for Joshua at Jericho, for Gideon with his three hundred chosen warriors, for Hezekiah against the Assyrians when 185,000 were slain overnight, and for Asa against a million of the Ethiopians (2 Chron. 14:12). So our coming victorious Lord, accompanied with angels and saints, will smite the earth with the sword of His mouth (Rev. 19:15) and the hordes of the wicked will fall like grass before the reaper.

The judgment of the nations will be necessitated by the wickedness of the people; it will show how utterly godless and incorrigible they will have become. This will be the unthinkable culmination of this age of education, scientific invention and gospel light; it will end in violence, lawlessness, catastrophe and world-wide conflict—a conflict of such ingenious scope and intensity that “except those days be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.”

This “judgment of the nations” at the close of this age is also called the “harvest of the earth” when the word of the Lord will be, “Thrust in thy sharp sickle.” (See Joel 3:9-17; Matt. 13:36-43; Rev. 14:14-20.) The tares, who represent the wicked, will be gathered by the reapers, the angels, and burned in the fire. Let us be assured that the angels will not fail in this task. The wicked will be cast into “the great winepress of the wrath of God.”

In Daniel’s dream of history (ch 2), the “stone,” which is the Lord Jesus Christ, smote the image on the feet. This image, a representation of Gentile dominion, was utterly demolished, following which the “stone” is said to fill the whole wide world. This, with other scriptures, teaches that following Armageddon, Christ’s kingdom of peace and righteousness will be established upon the earth.

The Great White Throne Judgment

The “judgment of the nations” will take place at the coming of Christ, at which time He will inaugurate His millennial kingdom. The

“great white throne judgment” will take place at the close of the millennium when all human probation will be ended in conjunction with the second resurrection.

It will be “great” for it will include the unsaved of all ages; because eternal issues will be involved; and because of the magnitude of it. That it is designated “white,” will signify the purity, accuracy, and justice of it. That it is a throne bespeaks its exaltation, dignity, and honor. This judgment will not be conducted on this earth or in the heavens surrounding the earth, or on some astronomical sphere, for they are said to have “fled away,” meaning that the things of this earthly life, the things of time and sense, will be no more.

God will bring everything to judgment—actions (Eccl. 11:9; 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:5). There will be two sets of books: “The books were opened,” which are the books containing the record of all that the wicked have ever done, and “another book,” which is the book of life” (Rev. 20:12).

This last judgment will be especially for the dead, that is, those who will not have received the life of Christ—for all those whose names are not in the book of life. Not one of the redeemed will be included at this judgment. They will be there as witnesses (See Matt. 12:41-42). The dead, small and great, will stand before God, and the “dead were judged.” It is said that the sea will give up the dead which are in it, and that “death and hell” will deliver up the dead which are in them. The wicked dead, in their resurrected, unredeemed bodies, fully quickened and in perfect consciousness of all the evils that they have ever done, will then hear the awful and unthinkable sentence of eternal doom. This sentence will not be computed in terms of time; it will not be a sentence of ten or twenty years, or a sentence for life, or execution at the gallows, horrible and awful though that would be, but it is to be for eternity, for ever and ever, and it is to be eternal suffering. The Word is very plain about this—not a word about annihilation, or of mitigation of this sentence. “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).

The issues of this judgment will be committed to Christ. The two outstanding passages that teach this are John 5:22, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son,” and Acts 17:31, “God. . . hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” And why will Christ, the Savior, be the judge? The answer is found in John 5:27, “Because he is the Son of man”—because He suffered being tempted, because He suffered at the hands of sinners, because He was the expression of the eternal, unchangeable love of God to all.

Therefore, “God also hath highly exalted him, ... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

Let us remember that the day is coming when these future scenes will be just as real and vivid to each and all of us as are the things of today. In view of what is so plainly told us of the judgment to come may we make it the one supreme business of our earthly probationary existence to make Christ our refuge. If our hearts are cleansed by His blood we will have nothing to fear.

Now He is the Savior, then He will be the Judge.