

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: Exposition of Romans

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THE JUDGMENT OF GOD: A MOST INCONVENIENT TRUTH (PART VI)

The idea of divine judgment," writes Paul Helm, "is integral to the gospel. Take it away and what Christ did is essentially changed; in fact, what he did no longer makes sense."¹ You would think that professing evangelicals would be united in affirming this important truth. Think again.

A growing number of people who proudly claim the label "Evangelical" have completely jettisoned the whole concept of divine judgment (and have re-defined the gospel in the process).² The gospel (good news) proclaims salvation by Jesus Christ. What is salvation? It is rich in meaning and significance. It means a lot of things that imply blessing and joy. One of these is *deliverance*. Salvation does imply escape from danger. It does denote release or redemption. From what? Judgment. None of us relish being judged, and since we have an aversion to the thought of judgment, we tend to give it little or no thought--or worse yet, to dismiss the concept of divine judgment as a medieval concept that we need not concern ourselves with in our more enlightened age. Think again. The Scriptures speak loud and clear on this subject (and very frequently).³ Judgment is said to be supremely the work of God (Matthew 18:35; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:12; 1 Peter 1:17, 2:23; Revelation 20:11, 12). This work is accomplished by Jesus Christ who has been appointed to this task (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42, 17:31; Romans 14:9). We are told that Christ will *summon* all before His judgment seat and judge them in strict justice according to their works (Matthew 25:32; Romans 14:9-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; 1 Peter 4:5; Revelation 19:11-21). These works are the expression and product of the heart and extend even to the very words (Matthew 12:36) and secret purposes of the heart (Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:5). Everything will be revealed (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18; Matthew 10:26; Ephesians 5:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:24, 25). The norm for this judgment will be the entire Word of God in both the Law and the Gospel (Romans 2:12; Matthew 25:32; Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:12).

I. THE APPEARANCE OF THE JUDGE

The contrast between Christ's first and second coming is stated in terms of "weakness" and "power." His first appearance was, in the words of William Bate: "to be the mediator between the righteous God and sinful man, by patiently suffering the most afflictive evils; to propitiate the incensed justice of heaven against us; to restore us by humility who fell by pride; to illustrate his signal love to us, to recommend by the efficacy of his example, the meek suffering all the transient evils of the world: but the second will be to perform the last act of his regal office, to determine the eternal states of angels and men, and suitably in the glory of his Deity. The divine oracles were never less obscure than in describing the first and second coming of the Messiah; the eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness, and his future glory: and the most clear accomplishment of them in his humiliation, is a convincing visible argument they shall be fulfilled in his exaltation."⁴

II. THE MANNER OF HIS APPEARANCE

His personal appearance will be *glorious*. He will be attended with *holy angels*, and He will sit upon a visible throne of glory. The glory is the glory of His Father (Matthew 16:27).

III. THE PURPOSE OF HIS APPEARANCE

Ray Summers observed, "The principle of Christ as the agent of judgment established at his first coming continues to the end and the consummation of God's purpose. In the day of final judgment it is Christ who will say to those who make false profession to be his, "Go away from me; I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). It is the Son of man who will send his angels at the end of the world to gather the tares for burning and to gather the grain into everlasting granaries (Matt 13:41). It is Christ who will sit on his throne and judge men (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). This Stone rejected by the builders will fall with crushing judgment upon those who have rejected him (Matt. 21:44). Judgment and the authority to execute judgment are given to the Son (John 5:22, 27). The judgment which the Son exercises is righteous judgment (v. 30). In the parable of the sheep and goats it is the Son who sits as a king on his glorious throne and makes the division of those who are before him (Matt. 25:31). It is Christ who will judge the quick and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1). Christ's coming into the world meant separation of the good from the bad; when the final day of separation and judgment shall come, the eternal Christ will carry out that work of division."⁵ He will bring salvation (Hebrews 9:28) and execute judgment (Matthew 16:27; 2 Timothy 4:1). This day of God's judgment is described as majestic (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 14). "It is clear," says Leon Morris, "that the Judge is understood as a regal personage, as One whose appearance is awe-full beyond description, as dispensing final justice with a royal hand. This great day is everywhere assumed throughout the New Testament. There are preliminary judgments of God throughout history. But at the end there will be the climax, that which proceeds out of the preliminary and partial judgments, and which perfectly fulfills all that they foreshadow."⁶

CONCLUSION: The Biblical Truth about Christ the Judge is rarely heard today. Evangelicals in particular treat the whold notion of God's judgment as a dirty family secret. Read the best selling 'Evangelical' books by Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyers or Robert Schuller – the subject is never mentioned. In this regard, many Evangelicals are no different than the theological Liberals in the Mainline Church. Take for example the Bishop of the Episcopal Church U.S.A., Katherine Jefferts Schori. In a recent editorial in First Things we read, "To be saved, we need only to realize that God already loves us, just the way we are. Schori wrote in her 2006 book, *A Wing and a Prayer*. She's not exactly wrong about God's love, but, in Schori's happy soteriology, such love demands from us no personal reformation, no individual guilt, no particular penance, and no precise dogma. All we have to do, to prove the redemption we already have, is support the political causes she approves. The mission of the church is to show forth God's love by demanding inclusion and social justice. She often points to the United Nations as an example of God's work in the world, and when she talks about the mission of the Episcopal Church, she typically identifies it with the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals... Her Yahweh, in other words, is a blend of Norman Vincent Peale and Dag Hammarskjold." There is a stunning contrast between both the "Evangelicals" and the "Liberals" with the clear teaching of the Bible. The Bible declares that those outside of Christ (in unbelief) are the *enemies* of Christ (Romans 5:10; 11:28; Philippians 3:18; Colossians 1:21; Hebrews 10:13). In Psalm 2 we read of the Son's anger and wrath and in Revelation 6:16 we read of "the wrath of the Lamb." Some people have a difficult time reconciling this startling image with that of the sweet and lovely Jesus they have grown so accustomed to hearing about. Jesus did come to seek and to save sinners (those deserving wrath). He came in the form of a servant and in humiliation to accomplish redemption (Philippians 2:5-11). Listen to John Calvin: "He appeared thus, then, to be made obedient in our name, as was necessary to satisfy for our sins. But now He will come to be Judge. He has been judged and condemned so that we might be delivered before the judgment seat of God, and that we might be absolved of all our sins. It will no longer be a matter of coming in such humility. He will come then with the Angels of His glory. That is what St. Paul meant by saying that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be dreadful."⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ Paul Helm, The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 59.

² This attitude was blatantly demonstrated by one of the leading spokesmen for “New-model” Evangelicals. Robert Brow in his article “Evangelical Megashift: Why You May Not Have Heard About Wrath, Sin and Hell Recently,” Christianity Today (Feb. 19, 1990), pp. 12-14. He concludes by saying that “no one would deny that it is easier to relate to a God perceived as kindly and loving.” In other words, since the concept of divine judgment is unpleasant, we need to adjust our view of God and make Him more likeable. Despite the fact that distinctively Christian terms are used to describe this kinder, gentler, user-friendly gospel, it is not the true Gospel. Many years ago C. H. Spurgeon warned the church about such false claims. “It is mere cant to cry, ‘We are evangelical; we are all evangelical,’” and yet decline to say what evangelical means... You may believe anything, everything, or nothing and yet be enrolled in the “Evangelical’ army—so they say. Cf. John MacArthur, Jr., Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World (Crossway, 1993), p. 194.

³ Noted New Testament scholar, Joachim Jeremias, wrote: “The message of Jesus is not only the proclamation of salvation, but also the announcement of judgement, a cry of warning, and a call to repentance in view of the terrible urgency of the crisis. The number of parables in this category is nothing less than awe-inspiring.” The Parables of Jesus (Macmillian, 1972), p. 120.

⁴ The Complete Works of William Bates IV (rpt. Sprinkle, 1990), p. 395.

⁵ R. Summers, The Life Beyond (Broadman Press, 1959) p. 160.

⁶ Leon Morris, The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment (Eerdmans, 1960), p. 60.

⁷ John Calvin, Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ (Baker, 1950), p. 298.