

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ. 85203 Phone (480)833-7500

Series:	Exposition of Romans	Pastor/Teacher
Number:		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Romans 10:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Matthew 25:31-33	
Date:	May 17, 2020	

The Judgment of God: a Most Inconvenient Truth

We are told in Jude 3 that as Christians we bear the responsibility “to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” Every generation of Christians down through the centuries have had to face challenges and theological errors that threatened the Faith. In the last 30 years it has been noted that of the many doctrinal challenges facing the Church today, the most critical may be opposition to the traditional, Biblical view of God and the doctrine of salvation.¹ Noted sociologist James Davidson Hunter very acutely identified this developing situation on the campuses of a large number of Christian Colleges over three decades ago. The exclusivism and finality of the claims of Christianity are perceived to be arrogant. To claim that the Christian Faith is the one absolutely true faith creates discomfort for many Christians. He wrote, “The emotional, not to mention intellectual, hostility this would engender for non Christians is predictable. Yet without this particularity, there is no orthodoxy (historically understood). In the face of intense religious and cultural pluralism in the past century, the pressures to deny Christianity’s exclusive claims to truth have been fantastic. Intensive cultural pluralism, one of the hallmarks of the modern world order, has, at least in the United States, institutionalized an ethic of toleration and civility. To be sure, the net effect of Theological liberalism in the past century and a half has been the repudiation of the exclusivism of the Bible (as the only true religious authority), and of faith in Jesus Christ (as the only means of eternal salvation). Yet by contrast, the heritage of Evangelicalism in the past century has been one of continuity with historic Christianity along these lines - a stout defense of these principles. Along with the defense of the Bible, this posture has largely defined the character of conservative Protestantism in America. Once more, however, shifts in the Evangelical theological view of salvation are discernible.”² Nine years later the book by Boston College philosophy professor Peter Kreeft, titled *Ecumenical Jihad: Ecumenism and the Culture War* (Ignatius Press, 1996) burst on the scene. Kreeft became a very popular author with many Evangelicals. His books were highly recommended by Memoria Press (including *The Classical Teacher: Materials, Methods, and Motivation for Classical Education*, which was aimed at Christian schools). In the first half of the book Kreeft aptly described the state of moral decay in our world at the time. (Kreeft was not the first person to call our attention to this state of affairs³) and issued a call to arms to engage in the culture wars that were engulfing all of humanity. Kreeft contended that this could only be done by enlisting *all* of the world’s great religions - Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This type of co-belligerence, you might remember, was what galvanized the famous (or infamous, depending on your perspective) ECT document.⁴ Kreeft, however, had moved beyond simply calling Catholics and Evangelicals to lay aside their differences and join ranks to fight the fiends of secular humanism - Kreeft beckoned us to embrace the other world religions as allies in this great Battle. Let me say, at this point, that the trouble with ECT and Kreeft and their desire to enlist Evangelicals in “co-belligerence” was that, in both cases, Evangelicals were implicitly called upon to sacrifice theological distinctives in the process. In the case of ECT, “sola fide” was laid aside, and with Kreeft, the doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation, ended up being eviscerated of any meaningful Biblical content. Peter Kreeft was in his own right something of an enigma. He was raised and nurtured in the Christian Reformed Church and even taught philosophy at Calvin College before converting to Roman Catholicism. He is a gifted

writer, which I think accounts for his popularity among many within the rank and file of Evangelicalism. His book carried the glowing endorsement of two very high profile Evangelicals: Chuck Colson and J. I. Packer (both of whom also signed the ECT document).

“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.”⁵ One 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 redefined the gospel in the process).⁶ The gospel proclaims salvation by Jesus Christ. What is salvation? The word itself is rich in meaning and significance. It means deliverance; it implies escape from danger; it also denotes release or redemption. From what? Divine Judgment! None of us relishes being judged. In fact, we have an aversion to the very thought of judgment, so we tend to give it little or not thought at all - or worse yet, to dismiss the concept of divine judgment all together as a medieval concept that we need no longer concern ourselves with in our more enlightened age. However, the Scriptures speak loud and clear on this subject (and very frequently).⁷ Judgment is said to be supremely the work of God (Matthew 18:35; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:12; I 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; I Peter 4:5; Revelation 19:11-21). These works are not only our actions but extend even to our very words (Matthew 12:36) and thoughts - “the secret purposes of the heart” (Romans 2:16; I Corinthians 4:5). Everything will be revealed (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18; 10:26; Ephesians 5:11-14; I Timothy 5:24, 25), and 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 17:13; Revelation 20:12).

- I. THE APPEARANCE OF THE JUDGE.** The stark 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.”⁸
- 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 a false profession to be his, ‘Go away from me; I never know 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 the 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.”⁹ 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-ful 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 fulfils all that they foreshadow."¹⁰

CONCLUSION: W. G. T. Shedd correctly pointed out that all forms of Universalism have a very slender exegetical basis. Kreeft's book is a classic example. The overwhelming Biblical data opposing Universalism is an embarrassment to those who seek to establish a clear Scriptural case for their beliefs, and so defenders of Universalism have to resort to appealing to human feelings, emotions, or personal experience. There are various forms of Universalism. Some, like the one Kreeft was promoting, want to claim that the work of Christ secures salvation explicitly for everyone regardless of whether or not they embrace the Gospel in this life because they will have an opportunity to do so after death. Hebrews 9:27 and Jesus' words in John 5:28-29 say otherwise. Lurking behind all forms of Universalism is a distorted understanding of a number of critically important doctrines. The organic nature of Christian belief is obvious. Shedd writes, "The denial of endless punishment is usually associated with the denial of those tenets which are logically and closely connected with it - such as original sin, vicarious atonement, and regeneration. Of these, vicarious atonement is the most incompatible of any with universal salvation; because the latter doctrine, as has been observed, implies that suffering for sin is remedial only, while the former implies that it is retributive. Suffering that is merely educational does not require a vicarious atonement in order to release from it. But suffering that is judicial and punitive can be released from the transgressor only by being inflicted upon a substitute. He, therefore, who denies personal penalty must, logically, deny vicarious penalty. If the sinner himself is not obliged by justice to suffer in order to satisfy the law he has violated, then, certainly, no one needs suffer for him for that purpose."¹¹ The Biblical truth about Christ the Judge is rarely heard today. Evangelicals in particular treat the whole notion of God's judgment as a dirty family secret. Read the best selling "Evangelical" books by Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, 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 former presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church U.S.A., Katherine Jefferts Schori. *First Things* featured an editorial that captured her total lack of concern when it comes to the judgment of God. "'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."¹² There is a stunning contrast between both the "Evangelicals" and the "Liberals" and 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 lowly 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."¹³

Endnotes

1. P. R. House and G. A. Thornbury, *Who Will Be Saved? Defending the Biblical understanding of God, Salvation & Evangelism* (Crossway, 2000).
2. J. D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Univ. of Chicago, 1987), p. 34.
3. To mention only a couple of other works: J. D. Hunter of the University of Virginia authored *Culture Wars* (Harper, 1991) and *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture Wars* (1994); Michael Scott Horton wrote an excellent volume on the subject, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Moody, 1994); *Christianity Today* devoted two issues to this theme (March 6, 1995) and (June 19, 1995). In other words, Kreeft was not telling us something that we didn't already know.
4. ECT stands for Evangelicals and Catholics Together and was issued in the spring of 1993. For an analysis see the *Pastor's Perspective*, Vol. II, No. 1, 2, and 7, 1995.
5. Paul Helm, *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 59.
6. 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 concluded 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.
7. Noted New Testament scholar, Joachim Jeremias, wrote, "The message of Jesus is not only the proclamation of salvation, but also the announcement of judgment, 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* (Macmillan, 1972), p. 120.
8. *The Complete Works of William Bates IV* (rpt. Sprinkle, 1990), p. 395.
9. R. Summers, *The Life Beyond* (Broadman Press, 1959), p. 160.
10. Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Eerdmans, 1960), p. 60.
11. W. G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1977), p. 5.
12. Joseph Bottum, "The Death of Protestant America: A Political Theory of the Protestant Mainline," *First Things* (August 2008).
13. John Calvin, *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ* (Baker, 1950), p. 298.