

Judgment

1 Peter 4:17-19

¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?
¹⁸ And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:17-19 (ESV))

These words of warning about a sure and certain “judgment” that will come to us all are given as a follow-on to all of the other warnings that the Apostle Peter had been speaking about, especially the warnings regarding the sufferings that “test” our faith. And I am convinced that it is essential that we receive this warning about “judgment” exactly as it is being given, and that we refrain from our too-often rationalization of such words.

What do I mean by that? Listen carefully to these words in verse 17 regarding the word “judgment”.

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(1 Peter 4:17-19 (ESV))

As we listen to many of the sermons given today, both in our churches and especially those given by many of the televised preachers, when the subjects of God’s laws and God’s “judgment” are preached, we unfortunately are apt to hear a wide and varied explanation about what God really means about such matters. And it seems that more and more often the message is one that tells us that “yes, God will someday judge us for the things that we have done in this life. But because God is a “God of Love”, He will somehow work it out for all of us to get past any accountability for the sinful behaviors that filled the days of our earthly existence, and we will all be invited to come on into heaven.

In a recent conversation with a dearly loved family member, she voiced these very teachings back to me saying that, “God is a God of love, and I just cannot believe that a God of love would send people into an eternity in hell! I just know His love will prevail and we will all go to heaven!”

May I pause for a moment and ask you, “What are your most deeply held beliefs on this matter of “judgment”? Verse 17,

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May I repeat what I said a moment ago . . . It seems that many people these days, people who confidently believe that they know the heart and mind of God, people who are faithful attenders at their churches, can read and hear these words very clearly, but still rationalize them to mean something other than what is being said . . . that, yes there really will be a day of “judgment”, but at that judgment, God will relent and will show grace and mercy to everyone. And He will allow them all to come into heaven.

As I listened to my beloved family member telling me her opinion about what God would do on judgment day, I knew very well why she was saying those things. She is a Momma who loves her children with all her heart. And though her children are living their daily lives in rejection of Christ, she, as a loving mother is trying desperately to rationalize a way in which her children can do the things they do, but still be saved from an eternity in hell. And to do that, she must rationalize away the possibility of a “burning pit of hell” and, rationalize a loving God who could not and would not condemn any person to an eternity in that kind of hell.

That manner of thinking also helps us to keep a better opinion of God, again rationalizing that a God of “mercy and grace” does not match well with the concept of a God of “justice”, therefore we must give up on one of those concepts, and it will have to be the “God of justice” that will have to go.

Before we look further at what the scriptures tell us about this matter of “justice” and “judgment”, may we ask ourselves, “can such beliefs develop within our own souls, yours and mine? Are you able to sit in this church Sunday after Sunday listening to the sermons that are being preached, but still walk out of here believing wrongly about these words?

May I offer us a warning, the same warning that God is giving to us here in this text? The warning is that yes, yes, you and I can listen and hear God’s word in even its purest form, but because of pressures like those I mentioned a moment ago involving my beloved family member, your own thoughts will wonder and search and reach for more pleasing answers. As Mommas and Daddies and Grandparents, our hopes can outrun God’s truth, and our beliefs can bend in such a way as to give us the answers we want. Instead of our simply receiving these words and believing them in the way they are given, our “desperate hopes” take charge, and we begin to remold and reshape these

truths to “fit” the ends that we would most like to take place. But folks, that sort of rationalization will seldom, if ever, really work out well.

Here, in the words of our text, we find God being very straightforward and resolute in this declaration about “judgment”. Listen again!

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¹⁸ And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:17-19 (ESV))

A simple question . . . with these same doctrines of truth being given over and over throughout these scriptures, why does God find it necessary to restate this warning about “judgment” over and over again?

The implication is clear and it is as we have said here today, earnest and even devout people are able to sit in the pews each Sunday, listen carefully to the preached word, even perhaps be really involved in the many church activities. But as the oft difficult forms of suffering assail them, their minds reach to reinterpret some of the truths being given. And that is especially so with this matter of “judgment”, some clinging desperately to the unbiblical hope that the “God of love” will somehow come through in the end and make everything turn out OK.

But folks, the testing that God brings to us in those “fiery trials” mentioned in verse 12, has more than one purpose. Just as with the testing in our school systems not only reveals how well a student has learned the material, but also produces a grade that will be kept in their records to later be the basis of accountability for them, so also the “testing” of the “fiery trials” will not only reveal the truth about the beliefs that we each hold within our hearts, those test results will also be kept by God and will become a part of our “permanent record” that will be reviewed when each church member will stand before Him in this judgment spoken about here in verses 17 and 18.

Most people really do not like the thought, that God actually keeps a record of our behaviors. And many preachers actually preach that He doesn’t, declaring that once we take that one all-important step of walking forward and praying the sinner’s prayer that “God remembers our sin no more”, that He will never discuss our sin with us again. They quote convenient verses such as the ones that tell us that our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west, and also the verse that implies that God “forgets” all about our sins.

But dear folks, God also has so much, much more to say about sin and righteousness and judgment. Listen to these words found in Ecclesiastes and in 2 Corinthians!

¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NASB))

And

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10 (NASB))

Folks, God's "forgetfulness" and His "remembering our sins no more" and His "removing our sins as far as the east is from the west" has to do with our guilt for our sins and the penalty that we owe for them. In our confession and repentance, Christ's blood removes the guilt and the penalty. But clearly, from the scriptures that we just read from Ecclesiastes and from 2 Corinthians, God's mind does not just forget something that takes place during these days of our lives.

I personally believe the reason that God will bring to remembrance all of the things that I have done, whether those things be good or evil, will be so that I will be able to look back and clearly see His great love and mercy and grace towards me. And I will know for all eternity that yes, I was truly a wretched sinner, needing a Savior, that even my very best of behavior was not enough to save my own sinful soul, that it really was absolutely necessary for Christ to come to my defense and die on the cross so that I would not have to spend an eternity in the burning pit of hell.

Folks listen! For us to believe that God will just turn out to be the gentle old "grandfatherly" type judge who will be compelled by His love to simply say to every person, "It's OK, come on in", we really ought to go back and read the real truth that is given within these scriptures! God will not be that kind of Judge. He is God and He is absolutely holy and righteous. He cannot allow sin to remain in His presence. And sinful people "will not", may I say again, "will not" be allowed to enter into heaven. Sin must be completely removed from a person's soul before they can step into God's presence.

And there is only one way to remove that sin, only one way, and that is through the precious shed blood of Jesus Christ! Think for a moment! If God is going to simply say "OK" on judgment day, then all the wretched suffering that Christ did on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin had no purpose whatsoever. It was worthless. He suffered and died for nothing! And if that be true then God is a liar and He is untrustworthy and we

ought not be following after Christ. Being in this church each Sunday is a silly waste of our time.

But listen, the things that God has been telling us in these scriptures are the real truth. Yes, yes, there really will be a day of judgment. Jesus will sit on His throne and we will be judged for the things we have done in this life. And there will be “just and due penalties” paid for unforgiven sin. Listen to these words given in Matthew 25!

³¹ "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Matthew 25:31-34 (NASB)

And

⁴¹ "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41 (NASB)

My heart breaks for my beloved family member who has read and heard these words so many, many times, but doesn't truly believe them. But folks, the difficult truth is, it really does not matter whether a person believes these truths or not, this will still take place. Covering our head in the sand and pretending something to be the way we want it to be simply does not work.

And it also will not work out for those lost ones to whom we simply hope that God will be merciful. Our hope does not change that outcome. Those loved ones that my family member desperately hopes will be saved need exactly the same thing that you and I need. We all need the shed blood of Christ to cleanse us from our sin. That and that alone will gain us entrance into heaven.

And please do understand the strong warning that is being given to all the many churches across our land, the “households of God”, many of which are full to the brim with people. Here, God warns that judgment will begin with us, the “household of God”. He is saying to us that many of the things that take place within the walls and from the pulpits may not be in accordance with His truth, that wrong doctrines are often being taught. Scripture is often being misinterpreted. Souls are walking out the doors each Sunday believing things they should not. And so, He warns us here that “judgment will begin with us, you and me”, and for me especially because I am your pastor and

shepherd. I had better preach the truth of these words, and do it in such a way that you will have no misunderstanding of these words.

It breaks my heart to think that any of you would someday stand before Christ in judgment and hear words like these in Matthew 7.

²¹ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³ And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21-23 (KJV))

Can you not imagine the stunned look that many people will have on their faces, confused and pleading, but for naught? Their time for redemption will have passed and they will have only the fires of hell to look forward too. May that not be any of us!

Folks, this warning is clear, both to those of us who have Christ as our Savior and Lord and also to those who do not, those who are described here as the “ungodly and the sinner”.

You and I within the church must handle this truth of God so very carefully. We must not be confused by any of it and neither must we make it confusing as we give it on to others, especially to our own beloved children. Their eternity depends on our getting these truths right and then passing them on in a “right” manner.

Listen again as we close!

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