

The Eternal Judgment

BROADCAST September 9

SCRIPTURE—Revelation 20:11-15

TEXT—*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”*—II Corinthians 5:10.

One of the factors contributing greatly to the confusion and unrest in our modern world is a philosophy or ethic which I would call “relativity.” This means simply that there is no fixed principle by which to measure conduct. Applied to morals it says that right and wrong are relative. What was wrong for our grandparents is right for their grandchildren. Social patterns change, and with them the concept of what is moral and immoral. But when this seemingly rational theory is applied either to individuals or to a society of people or nations, conflict and chaos are the inevitable result.

We live in a moral universe. You can no more ignore the Ten Commandments with impunity than you can the law of gravity. God does not change from one generation to the other. Nor does His book the Bible. And in the Bible God declares the fact and basis of judgment. A recognition of this truth should give to modern society an anchor, a stabilizer, in the present storm.

Several years ago we crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Mary and returned on the Queen Elizabeth. In rough waters the former rolled and tossed, while the latter plowed smoothly through a rough sea. The latter possessed stabilizers which the

former did not. A sense of the moral and spiritual judgment of God is the stabilizer needed today.

This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. . . .”* (II Cor. 5:10).

Walter B. Knight tells of a man who laid his billfold on the counter while he stooped down to look for two pennies which he had dropped. When he stood up he found that someone had taken his billfold containing fifty dollars. He was penny-wise and dollar foolish. He was unwise indeed, but he was not nearly so unwise as the man who is time-wise, but eternity-foolish. We are so careful about time, but so careless about eternity.

I want to talk to you about eternity, specifically about “The Eternal Judgment.” Now this is not a popular subject. Skeptics scoff at the thought of a divine judgment. Sentimental religion viewing God through rose-colored glasses passes off lightly the thought of justice in the universe. But “a person of good judgment considers the final judgment.”

Therefore, let us note, first, the fact of judgment; second, the focus of judgment; third, the fear of judgment.

First, consider the fact of judgment. Paul speaks of "the judgment seat of Christ." These are not my words, but those of the inspired word of God. Therefore, we shall do well to heed them.

The fact of judgment is written large across the pages of history. The highways of time are littered with the debris of nations which have fallen under the fact of judgment. But I am thinking primarily of judgment with respect to individuals.

You cannot escape the fact of judgment even in this life. Sometimes we are judged by the laws of nature. Violate the law of gravity, and you are judged by it. Ignore the laws pertaining to health, and you are held accountable to them.

Sometimes we are judged by society. Jails, courts, and penitentiaries testify to this truth.

Many people are summoned before the judgment bar of conscience. "The king can do no wrong," said David. But when faced with his sin of adultery with Bathsheba he cried to God, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. . . ." (Ps. 51:4). Even apart from written law Paul says of men, ". . . their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:15).

A man came to me with a problem. Crossways with other members of the church, he said that he planned to move his membership. I said, "Very well, do it if you must. But just remember that when you have done so, you will not be free from your problem. For it is within you. You can

run away from others, but you cannot run away from yourself."

It is impossible to escape the fact of judgment, whether it be through nature, society, or yourself. The only wise course is to face the fact, and conduct yourself accordingly. For the words of Holy Writ cannot be denied. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Now if judgment be a fact of life, it is logical to suppose that it is also a truth of eternal import. Jesus often spoke of a final judgment (Matt. 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36, 41-42). The author of Hebrews says, "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (9:27). Peter spoke of the Lord knowing how "to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (II Pet. 2:9).

John, the apostle of love, encourages his Christian readers "that we may have boldness in the day of judgment" (I John 4:17). Jude warns that the Lord comes "to execute judgment upon all, and to convince [convict] all that are ungodly . . ." (v. 15). Revelation sees the end of time as a great judgment (20:11-15). And Paul says, ". . . we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10).

So whether you accept the teachings of God's Word or merely observe the obvious truth of life at its several levels, the fact of judgment is inescapable. Merely wishing that there were no judgment, or blatantly denying that there is, does not change the fact.

Second, note the focus of judgment. Our text says, "*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.*"

This is a general statement regarding the fact of judgment. And yet it contains many specific applications. Let us examine some of the words in this verse.

The word "must" renders a verb which means that it is binding or inevitable. "All" is a plural form referring to all men without exception. "Appear" means to appear in one's true character. "Every one" means each one separately. "Receive" means to receive in one's self. "Done" renders the verb from which comes our word "practice." "Bad" means worthless or wicked.

Now let us read this literally from the Greek. "For it is inevitable with respect to all of us collectively to be made to appear in our true character before the judgment seat of Christ, in order that each one separately may receive within himself the things which he practiced in the body, whether good or worthless or wicked."

Now what do these words say to us? They tell us that it is inevitable that at the end of time all of us will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. At that time Christ, the Judge, will not arbitrarily and judiciously decide our eternal fate. Each of us will bring a character before Him, a character being formed now through our relationships to Christ and by the daily practices of our lives. Each will be made to appear in his true character. You may wear a camouflage now, but then you will be revealed as you really are. And each one of us separately will receive within himself the degree of reward or punishment in keeping with the character that he

has formed.

Recall that I said that this is a general statement regarding the judgment. It does not refer to one's destiny in heaven or hell. That we shall consider presently. The point here is with respect to Paul's being criticized by his enemies. He simply says that what men say about us now is of secondary importance.

Men may criticize us unjustly or praise us without cause. But there will come a time at the end of history when Christ, the all-wise and just judge, will judge justly. The world may withhold its reward from the righteous or bestow its reward wrongly on the unrighteous. But Christ will make all things right as our true characters are revealed before Him and rewarded accordingly.

Now let us look at the judgment more specifically. In Revelation 20:11-15 Christ is seated on the throne of judgment. Before Him appear all men who ever lived on the earth. ". . . and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works . . . and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. (vv. 12, 15).

Note the presence of "books" and "the book of life." Those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire or hell. By implication those whose names are written in the Book of Life will go into heaven. So your destiny in heaven or hell will not be determined by your works, but by whether or not your name appears in the book of life.

The moment that you accept Jesus Christ as your Saviour your name is written in the Book of Life. Thus in the sense of judgment as to salva-

tion you have already been judged in Christ. There is no further judgment for you in that regard. Conversely if you continue to reject Christ until you die, your name will be absent from the Book of Life. Therefore you abide under the condemnation of God (John 3:18): Thus to determine whether you will be saved in heaven or lost in hell will not come at the judgment.

The state in which you die, either saved or lost, will be a fixed, eternal one. The last chapter in the Bible says, "*He that is unjust [not justified], let him be unjust still . . . and he that is righteous [justified], let him be righteous still . . .*" (22:11). There is nothing in the Bible about a second chance for salvation after death.

What, then, is the significance of the "books"? This is that to which Paul refers in II Corinthians 5:10. Whether you are saved or lost the deeds which you practice, both good and bad, are being written in the "books" of God. And they will be revealed for all to see at the judgment. Things long forgotten by you will be there. Things done in secret will be shouted from the housetops. A cup of cold water given in the name of the Lord. Some seemingly innocent sin, a wrong or idle word, yes, even worthless deeds that were a waste of time and talent. And from these we shall be judged, not as to salvation or damnation, but as to degrees of reward in heaven or punishment in hell.

The lost man who repeatedly rejects Christ will have greater punishment in hell than the heathen who never or scarcely heard of Him. But both will be in hell. The Christian who quietly served the Lord out of love for Him will have a greater reward in heaven than the one who makes a grand display of his service for self glory or who wastes time and talents in worthless deeds. But both will be in heaven. Each will enjoy it to the

utmost of his capacity. But this capacity of the one will be greater than that of the other.

Third, consider the fear of judgment. Paul crowns his statement about the judgment by saying, "*Knowing therefore the terror [fear] of the Lord, we persuade men.*"

Some today would discount fear as a proper emotion upon which to base one's decision for Christ. But Paul did not, nor did Jesus. Because they knew that there is a judgment awaiting every man, they constantly warned men to prepare to meet God. Now this is not the only motive for becoming a Christian, but it is one, and a legitimate one.

Preachers preach, witnesses witness, we are on this radio broadcast, because "*knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*" And knowing this same fear of judgment, you should respond to the persuasion.

Suppose that this were the last day of your life. And it may be, you know. What would you do with Jesus? As a Christian how would you spend this day?

Archaeologists tell us that when Mt. Vesuvius buried Pompeii under lava and ashes, it caught and sealed people in whatever act they were doing—children at play, adults in the theater, kitchen, market place, or in some den of sin. Two thousand years later they remained as they were in that one fateful moment. Suppose that death or the return of the Lord should so find you. Not for two thousand years, but for eternity the record would remain. No wonder that Paul persuaded men! No wonder that you should decide for Christ right now! I pray that you will receive Him this moment, as the Saviour of your soul and the Lord of your life.

For "*it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*" (Heb. 9:27). ●