

The Judgment and Forgiveness of Jesus Christ

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Introduction:

Jesus promises to reward you for every good thing you do. He says three times in the same chapter,

‘God sees what you do in secret and will reward you.’ (Matthew 6:4,6,18)

Every truly good thing you do is a spiritual deed. You are going against your natural desires of self, and being selfless. You are giving instead of taking. This honors God and Jesus says you will be rewarded.

‘If anyone gives even a cup of water to someone in need, they will be rewarded.’
(Matthew 10:42)

I’m not sure how all this works. You see, on the one hand we have a gospel message of Jesus that seems to be all-or-nothing. Saved or lost. In or out. Heaven or hell. But on the other hand, we have deep and consistent teaching of Jesus that all people will be judged separately, individually, and rewarded for good they have done.

We also have teaching, clear and undeniable, that every individual – Christians included – will be judged and punished for sin. We often overlook this, and speak and teach as if the only judgment on believers has been put on Jesus on the cross. But this is not biblical. In the same

way good deeds will be rewarded, so too our sins will be judged – every sin, personally before Christ. No one gets away with hurting you, not even a Christian.

In this short book we will look at both the judgment and the forgiveness that is ours in Christ, and why both are good news.

1. David and Uriah

David was said to be a *'man after God's own heart.'*¹ God called him at a young age, set him apart, anointed and prospered him. However, when David was king, he stole his loyal friend's wife. In an attempt to cover it up, he had his friend, Uriah, killed. The details are heartbreaking. Read the full account in 2 Samuel 11-12.

After all was said and done the prophet, Nathan, came to David and said:

'God says, 'You have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah... you have utterly scorned the Lord.' (2 Samuel 12:10,14)

God was dishonored by the choices of David. Note, God had not intervened and blocked the sin, but he was dishonored by it and it was God's will that it did not happen. Any time we sin we are going against God's will.

But now God comes to David through the prophet and addresses the sin. Look carefully at these two things that God communicates to David. We'll note them both, and then consider them briefly:

¹ 1 Samuel 13:14

'The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die.' (vs.13)

'The sword shall never depart from your house because you have despised me. Your neighbor shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun. You did it secretly, but this will happen in the light of day.' (vs.11-12)

David's sin opened the door of his life and his kingdom to evil. The consequences would mirror his own sin – lust, violence, adultery. He hurt people, and his own people would now be hurt. Note, sin affects others, not just the sinner. In fact, the very definition of sin is that it takes from someone innocent.

And as time went by, it was just as Nathan said. The situation got so dark and violent that when reading the Bible to my kids I had to skip the last few chapters of 2 Samuel.

And yet, the Lord *'put away'* David's sin. (vs.13) It would seem that God had an ultimate plan of restoration and reconciliation with David – and between David and Uriah in the afterlife. But such would be the judgment and punishment of David that even Uriah would pity him when they happened to meet again.

I think this is how God works. This is how God shows compassion to the believer, the follower. He will purge them. He will judge, punish and

yes, save them, but in such a way that even our victims – those we sinned against - will pity and forgive us. Even they would say, '*Lord, have mercy on him.*'

2. Jesus and Judas

‘Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’ (Matthew 26:24)

Jesus is speaking in a way that speaks to judgment after life. Judas took his own life shortly after this, overcome with guilt and regret he hung himself. But Jesus is speaking about some kind of consequence, dealing, that would come after the life and death cycle.

If this is the case, natural, childlike thoughts come to mind, and I feel these kind of thoughts are the truest. Why? Because Jesus himself said that unless we change and become like a child, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 18:3) And when we do think like a child, we realize that God’s teaching – his Scriptures and histories - validate that thinking. Children’s thoughts might not be the deepest or most developed, but they are purest. And so like a child I hear Jesus speak these words to Judas, and I think:

1. Judas will not be forgiven for this.
2. Jesus is angrier about this than he was about some other sins.
3. Judas will be punished more than others for this.

Why did Jesus let the adulterous woman go, and speak mercy over her, but here he warns Judas of severe judgment?² Are not all sins the same?

Well, no. And we know this instinctively, when we are humble and think like children. It's obvious that all sins are not the same, and all consequences not the same. And then, of course, we see it everywhere in Scripture:

‘Jesus said, ‘The servant who knows the master’s will and does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.’ (Luke 12:47-48)

Jesus to his disciples, in sending them out on mission: ***‘If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.’ (Matthew 10:14-15)***

We're told by Paul that sexual sin is different to other sin.³ And why would this surprise us? We know this instinctively and see it in the consequences. We see it every day. And yet we often say, *‘All sins are the same to God.’* That's not true. All people are sinners, and in that

² John 8:1-11

³ 1 Corinthians 6:18

sense all need to come to Jesus in repentance and faith for salvation. But not all sin is the same to God. If it were, Jesus would have said the same thing to the adulterous woman as he did to Judas. But he didn't.

God is going to judge everyone individually – reward and punish. Everyone. Individually. Different outcomes.

Let's take a quick look at the parable of the Prodigal Son to conclude this section:

Jesus tells the story of a father who had two sons. One comes to the father and cashes in early on his inheritance. He uses his money (his God-given talents, resources, privileges, strength, etc.) on sinful living. But he repents, comes to his senses, and comes home. He is forgiven. He is saved, so to speak.

The other son goes to the father and complains. He has been faithful all along, not wasted what the father had given him, and yet all he sees is a celebration for the other son who has returned. The father says to him:

'My son, all that I have is yours. But it is fitting that we celebrate your brother's return because he was dead and is alive again!'

(Luke 15:31-32)

Jesus says here to the faithful, to those who toe

the line, who soldier on, that there is gain, reward, that remains with them. ***'All that I have is yours.'*** The brother who had ***'squandered his father's wealth on prostitutes'*** (vs.30) was home, was forgiven, was saved, but was out of inheritance. And yet how obvious, right? This is how things work in life, and Jesus was clear that God is not less just, but more just. The faithful to God will be more highly rewarded than others – even others who are saved – who have not been faithful to God. We close this section with these words of Paul:

'Each one should build with care. No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames.'

(1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

You cannot lose your salvation, but you can lose reward.

This should encourage us, not discourage us. Yes, we have to consider the issue of judgment.

We need to ponder that we will stand alone before Jesus and have to address that thing we did to that person, those thoughts we hid and then acted on. We will. That is sobering.

'People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.' (Hebrews 9:27)

But how powerful, then, is the promise of God that we will come out of that court room free! We will deal with Jesus on what we did, how we lived, ***'every word we spoke.'***⁴ But he will ensure that, as with David, our sin will be put away, and we will not be given over to eternal death. He will go further. He will wipe every tear from our eyes, and take all sadness and even regret from us⁵ – such will be the purge.

⁴ Matthew 12:36

⁵ 2 Corinthians 7:10; Revelation 21:1-5

3. Healing

One day I was doing some outreach, sharing verse cards on the streets with people. One lady said to me that she had trouble believing in a good God, a Father God, because she had been abused as a child. And when she was a child, she prayed that it would stop, but it didn't.

Her story, her eyes, made me want to cry. I told her how sorry I was.

I shared with her that Jesus himself felt abandoned by God. In fact, Jesus cried out in public, '**God, why have you forsaken me?**'⁶ I said if Jesus could feel that, experience that, and say it out loud for others to hear, then she could too. She was not disappointing God by whispering the same words of Christ, '*Where were you? Where are you now?*'

I went on to say that she, in her suffering, had a very special place in the heart of God, and in her future with God. We're told in Timothy that '***if we endure, we will reign with him.***' (2 Timothy 2:12) I asked her if she would, just one more time, consider Jesus?

I told her just one more thing. I said that Paul, the apostle, once said that he wanted to know Christ, not only in his power, but in his suffering.

⁶ Matthew 27:46

And I said that if she would use her suffering to know Christ in his suffering, she would reign with him! Don't allow her suffering to take her away from Christ, but to bring her close to him in a way that many of us cannot relate to. She felt forsaken by God, and so did Christ. She can relate to him in this, ***'fellowship with him in his suffering.'***⁷

She was humble. Her heart was open. She said she would consider Christ one more time, and go home and read a Gospel.

⁷ Philippians 3:10

4. To Forgive

What is true forgiveness? Is it to say that something no longer really matters, all good?

Regarding some sins, yes; but some others, no. I mean, there are little things to shake off, to forgive and forget in this sense. But there are things that are more serious, deeper and darker, and forgiveness means something else. To forgive someone that has wronged you in this scarring way, is to not take personal vengeance and to let God discipline and punish the person.

What forgiveness does not mean is that you no longer want the person to be punished or disciplined. That is not biblical forgiveness.

We see with Jesus that he did not forgive Judas. Simple as that. He didn't even pretend to. He was not bitter in his words and spirit, but he was clear that judgment was deserved and coming.

The way Jesus dealt with sin towards him, the way he forgave it, was to **'entrust himself to the one who judges justly.'** (1 Peter 2:23) Jesus entrusted his case to God. And God will avenge Jesus. God will avenge me. But God is also going to avenge those I have wronged. Jesus is going to call me to his court to account for that. Now let me reflect on this for a minute, i.e. the fact that I, too, am going to be judged.

I am actually glad – or deeply relieved – that Jesus is going to judge me. There are people in my life I have sinned against. I cannot even apologize to some of them now. It would not be helpful; it would not be loving or considerate. But I have deep regret. I actually need that time with Jesus, for him to look me in the eyes and table some of my wrongs with me. I need to be able to acknowledge, own, and apologize to Christ for what I did, for his daughters and sons that I hurt.

I need the closure. I need to cry about it with Christ. And then I need the full experience of complete redemption, where I walk away and with every step I begin to forget what I did. It is no more. It never was. My sin became one with Christ and died to never rise again.

‘Christ became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.’

(2 Corinthians 5:21)

After judgment, complete redemption will set in. I will no longer be dealing with sin, and my sin will have no record in history. It will never have happened. It will have ***‘become Christ’*** and died with him in his death, but not risen with him in life.

But you see, for now I still remember. For now, although I am forgiven, I have the history, and the people I’ve wronged have the memory. Their healing is part of my justice, my judgment. For

this reason, while still in life, Christ calls us to make amends for sin, to address it with it people.⁸ And it is OK, it is even right for people to want me to be judged for wronging them, to feel strongly about that. God promises them vindication:

‘Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,’ says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the Lord Almighty.’

(Malachi 4:1-3)

God upholds justice. Forgiveness is not about letting justice – and judgment – slide. In fact, God tells us that we honor him by seeking justice. (Micah 6:8) A deep cry for justice and judgment is a righteous thing. Look at what Mary sings after she receives the good news that she is with child, the Savior of the world:

⁸ Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 5:25-26

'God has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.'

(Luke 1:51-53)

Mary is passionate about justice, and even wealth and money being shared. Look carefully at her language, we often miss it. She is talking about God '*scattering*' the proud, not just gently instructing them. She sings about God '*bringing down*' rulers; this is a dramatic act of power and punishment. She says, '*God sends the rich away empty.*' Why? Is it a crime to be rich? Mary has no space in her spirit for this kind of question and rhetoric. She knows what she knows. And she speaks out that the rich need to feel empty in their stomachs. This is the mother of Jesus speaking.

So when I speak to someone who has been abused, raped, stepped on, I can – and must – confidently reach for the heart and promises of God that he has given me to give to these people. I can say, quoting God through the prophet Malachi: '*You will trample on them! There will come a day they are ashes under your feet!*'

'How do I forgive this person?', they might ask.

I tell them, *‘Just give Jesus the sword. He will do it. Don’t take revenge, but let God avenge. He will. He has promised.’*

‘My friends, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.’ (Romans 12:19)

Look at how Jesus closes out the parable of the Talents in Luke 19:27

‘But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them - bring them here and kill them in front of me.’

The language of judgment in the New Testament is shocking. We mostly skim over it. But if we stop and actually allow the words of Jesus to land, they are sobering:

‘Fear him who after the killing of the body has the power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.’ (Luke 12:4-5)

‘If you don’t acknowledge me in public before people, I won’t acknowledge you before the angels of God.’ (Luke 12:8-9)

This is tough stuff. I’m not dwelling on it for any other reason than to bring us into the right mindset when we think of our sin against people.

We often let ourselves off the hook too easily. We think God forgives, and time will heal. But this is not biblical. We need more fear of God, and more attention to the detail of what Jesus actually said about judgment and justice. We put too much emphasis on the fact that we will, in Christ, walk completely free one day. We all still have a court date with the King, and those we sinned against are the **'apple of his eye'**,⁹ his precious sons and daughters.

Are we living our lives in this holy fear? Are we on our knees before Jesus asking if there is more we need to do now regarding our sin, before we stand before him?

'We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.' (2 Corinthians 5:10)

⁹ Psalm 17:8

5. To Be Forgiven

I met a man in prison, let's call him John. They screened me, emptied my pockets, walked me through loud and heavy doors, and locked me in a room with him. He sat there in his orange jumpsuit and handcuffs. I asked if they would be OK to take off the handcuffs, so they did. Then they left us alone together.

He told me that he had been inappropriate with a child, his own daughter, 'taken liberties' (as the legal term says). He wished he could go back in time and change what he did. He had deep regret. He was broken.

I said, *'John, let's talk about Jesus. Let's talk about his love for you.'*

He welcomed this.

I was able to say to John with conviction, that the death of Jesus cut across his sin. A most powerful verse says:

'The blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of murder.' (Hebrews 12:24)

I was able to tell John that God reasons with him even now, saying, ***'Come, John, let us reason together! Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them white as snow.'*** (Isaiah 1:18)
John wept as we talked.

***'Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.
The old has gone, the new has come.'***

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

We held hands, bowed our heads, and prayed to Jesus. We prayed for forgiveness, for his blood to cover John, to heal his daughter, and to lead John in a powerful life of faith on the inside.

Now, should John be out of prison? No. The reason he's in prison is because God is good and answered prayers.

Now that John has regret about what he's done, should he reach out to his daughter to apologize? No. That would be unloving to his daughter, and more about John and his conscience than about her healing and peace of mind.

John is a Christian, does this mean there will be no judgment for what he did? No. He needs to live his life in holy fear, pray for healing of those he has hurt, and expect that he will see Jesus face to face and have to also deal with this sin at that time.

John was contrite and humble. I met with him a number of times. I know that like me, he will welcome Judgment Day. He owns his sin and there is no one safer to speak openly about it with than Jesus Christ – even if he is on a Judgment Seat at the time. Will there be

punishment for this sin, rebuke and loss? Yes, I believe so. Discipline and judgment of God is fair to the victim.

So can his daughter still believe God when he promises her vengeance, justice, and even the satisfaction of vindication and trampling the wicked underfoot? Yes. These are God's words and promises after all.

How do I reconcile John's forgiveness with his daughter's justice. I don't. I just know them to be true. God does not lie. He has evidenced start to finish in Scripture and through histories in the Bible that he rages against sin and will leave no trace of it – not in the victim, and not in the aggressor.

'It is time for judgment to begin with God's household...' (1 Peter 4:17-18)

'Since everything will be destroyed by fire... you ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.'

(2 Peter 3:11-13)

'How unsearchable God's judgments and his paths beyond tracing out!' (Romans 11:33)

Thank you for taking time to read this book. For more free resources to encourage you in your faith, please visit:

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Notes: