

## 4.

# THE COMING JUDGMENT

All believers will someday stand before the undiluted presence of God. "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rm 14:10). There, what we are and what we have done will be tested by the intense, fiery presence of Who He is. All of us will pass through this divine fire.

It is clear that not only our actions, our words and our "deeds," will be analyzed by the holy fire, but we too will be tested by it. The scriptures teach us: "...each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, *yet so as through fire*" (I Cor 3:13-15).

Most believers already know that their works will be tested by this fire. But many perhaps think, "I may lose out on a few rewards, but so what?" "What difference will it make to me if some of my works are burned?" Yet what they fail to see is that *they too will be tested by the same fire*. He or she may still be "saved" but they will appear, without protection or excuse, in the intense, fiery presence of God almighty.

For some this will be an awful experience. They will suffer shame, and loss. Their unconfessed sins will be exposed and their sinful nature will be consumed. It will be burned up.

For others it will be an awesome experience. There they will see face to face the One who has transformed and cleansed their lives. There they will be rejoicing with joy which is beyond human words.

When we stand before God, all the unholy, sinful "parts" of our soul will be destroyed. The untransformed portions of our being will be consumed. These sinful areas of our soul will not enter into the new creation because they will be destroyed or "lost" at His coming. This is an important, biblical fact of which far too many believers are unaware. Yet it is crucial to understand. How can we be sure of such a fact?

To begin, we must remember the beginning of our discussion about the unimaginably concentrated essence of who God is. In His direct presence, His holiness, purity, honesty, love – in short all of His divine nature will be manifested without dilution. Nothing which is not like Him

will be able to pass this test. Anything different will be consumed by this “fire.” No sin, no self, no unrighteousness of any kind can exist there. Only something which is of the same nature could pass the test.

If I were to tell you that I could put a piece of newspaper into an intense fire and it would not burn, you would not believe me. In the same way, no “natural” man will be able to stand in the presence of God. He would be consumed.

At that time, it will be too late to simply ask for forgiveness. On that day, even repentance will not work. There will simply be no more time or opportunity for the transformation process to work. There will be no more time for God’s life to grow. No amount of forgiveness at that time could protect our untransformed soul from the intensity of who God is.

## THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

Moses loved God. So he was curious to see Him. Consequently, one day he made a request. He said: “Please, show me your glory” (Ex 33:18). But God had to explain something to him. What he was asking just was not possible. Moses could not see His face. He was unable to stand in His direct presence. Why was this? God explained saying: “...for no man shall see Me and live” (Ex 33:20).

Now why would this be? Is it that if someone accidentally sees God, then God must kill him? Could it be a punishment for peeking

somewhere where we shouldn't be looking? No, it is just the natural consequence of the holy presence of God. No mere human could withstand it. It is simply not possible to survive this experience. So in the end God revealed to Moses His "back," but not His face.

The natural man with the sinful nature will not be able to endure in the presence of a holy God. Anything in us which does not correspond to the divine nature will be burned up. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). This is the only possible result of any man or women's encounter with Him. Whatever remains of the natural life will be consumed.

This will be the fulfillment of the sure promise of Jesus. He teaches us: "For whoever desires to save his life [soul] shall lose it" (Mt 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; Lk 17:33; Jn 12:25). Any of the old life which we do not yield to crucifixion today will be "lost" tomorrow when Jesus comes. This is not an obscure teaching.

The writers of the Gospels thought this truth so important that it is repeated five times. Anyone who refuses to yield his old life and nature to death through the cross of Christ, will most certainly lose it, without recourse, on the day when Jesus comes.

This is the only possibility. We have absolute certainty that nothing sinful will enter into the new creation. We also know that sin will not endure the presence of God. We understand too that instant spiritual growth or transformation is not possible. So, the only option is that our old

“life,” “soul,” or “self” will be lost at the judgment seat, just as Jesus has promised us.

Today is the time of preparation for this event. Our Creator does not want us to perish, so He has provided salvation for us – His own eternal life. This eternal, indestructible life can substitute for our own. We can die, and He can live in our place. We can be crucified with Him and also resurrected.

In this way, we become fireproof. We are transformed into a variety of creature which can survive in the presence of God. We become what He is by the saving power of His life which He gave to us. In this way we become prepared to meet Him face to face.

It seems that many believers, like Moses, are satisfied seeing only the “back” of God. When Moses looked, he saw God’s mercy, His graciousness, long-suffering, abundant goodness and truth (Ex 34:6). Truly, these aspects of God are wonderful. They are precious virtues which we all need to see and understand.

Yet there is more to God than this. Although we may delight in what we see in His “back,” one day we will see His face. There we will gaze upon His extreme holiness; His burning, consuming righteousness; His undiluted, blazing justice; and much more.

All Christians need to get to know God intimately – not only the “easier to take” aspects of His “back,” such as mercy and forgiveness – but also begin to know Him face to face. Through repentance and forgiveness, we must enter into

an intimacy with Him. We must gaze into His glorious face to that we can be changed into His image (II Cor 3:18). It is only by drawing near to Him that all of our sin can be exposed and eliminated. It is only through intimacy with Him that His life can saturate and permeate us with all that He is. Only such intimate believers will be comfortable in the presence of the eternal fire and suffer no loss at His coming.

### TESTED BY FIRE

Will believers really be tested by fire? Certainly they will. We have already read about those whose works will be burned yet they themselves will be saved “yet so as through fire” (I Cor 3:15) Also we have studied the case of those who harden their hearts against God and can no longer repent. These are they “...whose end is to be burned” (Heb 6:8).

Further, Jesus Himself taught us that we should pay careful attention to maintain our intimate relationship with Him. If not, then there will be some serious consequences. We read: “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (Jn 15:6).

John the Baptist also warns us about the importance of bearing fruit. This fruit is simply a result of our continued, intimate relationship with Jesus. But if and when we ignore this privilege, the results are catastrophic. He proclaims:

“And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 3:10).

Although many have tried to use these verses to show that believers can lose their salvation and “go to hell,” here we understand a different truth. It is the fire of the very presence of God about which these passages speak. There His intense, burning presence will consume anything which is not like Himself.

## PARTIAL TRANSFORMATION

But let us suppose that we are only partially transformed. Let us imagine that someone has not yielded completely to Jesus during his lifetime and so is only changed a little. While God’s life is filling some parts of his being, other areas are still full of the natural, sinful life. What then will be the results when this person appears before the judgment seat? What will happen in this case?

The answer is quite simple. That “part” of any believer which has been transformed into the image of Christ will certainly survive in the presence of God. The “fire” will have no effect on it. It has become eternal by the operation of the eternal life.

But that portion of any believer which still remains natural and sinful will be consumed by the fire of God. There is no other possibility. It will not be instantly changed. It will not be over-

looked. It will not at that moment simply be “forgiven” and ignored. Instead it will be burned up by the intensity of who God is. It will be “lost,” fulfilling the promise of Jesus.

The years of rebellion against the transforming work of the Holy Spirit will bear fruit. Any time which we spent resisting the conviction of sin in our conscience will be revealed. Our lack of repentance and our unwillingness to be put to death will be seen clearly when we “lose” that portion of our soul which was untransformed by the Holy Spirit.

### HOW WOULD THIS LOOK?

What then would such a person look like who was only partially transformed and therefore lost “part” of their soul? Would we see “half a person” or someone without arms or legs? How could someone be “fractionally” saved? How would this manifest itself?

To begin, we must remember that we are not speaking about the body of a person, but their soul. This then is a question of growth, a question of spiritual maturity. Since we are transformed by the maturing of the supernatural life within us, then our “degree” of transformation must be intimately linked to how much this life has grown up within us.

In the natural world every kind of life grows and matures. This is a process which takes time. Humans, for example, are born as infants, grow to be children, next they become adolescents,

then young adults and finally fully mature individuals. In the Bible we have evidence that the spiritual life also has these stages. This process takes many years.

In I John 2:12-14 John writes about three degrees of maturity: "little children," "young men," and "fathers." There are also many other places in the New Testament where various writers refer to "babes in Christ," problems of immaturity, spiritual growth, the need for maturity, etc. So there is no doubt that the spiritual maturation process parallels that of the natural world.

It seems therefore very logical to imagine that if this growth process were interrupted or incomplete, the individual involved would not be fully mature. They would remain at the stage of maturity where this process was halted. They would possess only that degree of maturity to which they had attained.

Consequently, when the natural man is consumed what would be left would be the transformed "part" or aspect of their soul. For example, a baby believer would be a baby, a young believer would still be young, and a mature believer would appear as mature.

The stage or degree of spiritual growth to which they had attained would be their eternal condition. Whatever "level" of maturity they had obtained would be theirs forever. The rest will be burned up and lost.

I hope that this is perfectly clear. In "eternity" believers will appear in many different

stages of spiritual development. It will not matter what their age was on earth. Their physical, earthly maturity will not be a factor. What will govern in this case will be how much they cooperated with God so that His life could mature within them. It will be the development of our spiritual life which will translate into our eternal condition.

It would seem likely then that in eternity we will encounter baby believers, young believers and mature believers. Their appearance will be linked to how much progress in the spiritual life they attained. Everyone will not be the same. Each one will receive his or her "reward" based upon their growth in the life of God.

The spiritual maturity of each one will actually be all of, or at least a large part of, our reward. This is because just as in this earthly life, our maturity will enable us to enjoy things more fully. Children might be happy, but there are many things they cannot do. Young people are also limited in their ability to appreciate or savor many experiences. So too in the future, our maturity will govern the depth to which we will enjoy God and all that He will create.

My guess is that for each one, their new glorified body which they will receive will reflect their degree of maturity. It is possible that as we grow spiritually, these new bodies are "growing" also, demonstrating a greater degree of maturity. Jesus is now preparing this "place" for us (Jn 14:2). These new bodies are now being prepared for us to dwell in (Jn 14:2).

Joining two verses together in I Corinthians 15: 41,42 we read: "...for [as] one star differs from another star in glory. So also is [will be] the resurrection of the dead." (Please remember the original Greek was not divided into verses or sentences by punctuation.)

There certainly will be a difference between believers in eternity future. Just as the brilliance of each star is different from the others, so believers will exhibit a different degree of glory depending upon their maturity.

Of course this is a mystery. We only see these things imperfectly while we are on this earth. But we have ample scriptural evidence demonstrating that the untransformed portions of the soul will be lost. It is simple logic to understand that what will remain is what has been saturated and permeated with the life and nature of the eternal God.

## **BUT GOD IS LOVE**

Some may argue against the fact that the untransformed part of a believer's soul will be destroyed by the presence of God, or "lost." They might insist that since God is full of love, mercy, compassion, forgiveness and long-suffering, He could not judge one of His children in this severe way.

It is certainly true that our God is full of all these wonderful attributes. So, when He appears, these virtues will also be manifested in all their intensity and fullness. For example, the

atmosphere around Him will be permeated with an unbelievable love.

But in the light of this love, all our lack of love will be exposed. Our self-love will be seen with utmost clarity. The many times when we did not act in His love toward one another will be painfully evident. This will not be a result of a lack of love on God's part but rather of the greatness of the love which defines His nature. This will have an unavoidable impact on what we are at that moment.

In the same way, the times when we did not have mercy towards others, the moments when we lacked compassion, the situations in which we refused to forgive others and our shortage of long-suffering will be exposed by what He is. What He is will reveal with startling clarity all that we are. If we have not been changed by His life to be like Him, then we will experience loss.

Further, the fact that He offered us freely, at so great a cost, the opportunity to change and be full of His nature instead of our own, will stand out with the utmost clarity. If we suffer loss when Jesus comes, it will not be because He lacked love or that He failed to show love for us, but because of our own negligence and disobedience. It will be because we did not take advantage of His love. We will have no excuses or arguments. The universe will see and agree that His judgment upon us is just.

It is true that God is good. He is not judging us today. He is interacting with us based upon His goodness, love and grace. In this church age

He is reserving His judgment while giving us every chance to use our time and be changed into His image.

Yet we must not misunderstand His goodness and grace. We must not imagine that this means judgment will never come. This interlude, this time of blessing, should be an opportunity to prepare ourselves for what is coming.

Instead of relaxing and using this present lack of judgment to indulge our flesh, we should use this short period of time to gain the maximum amount of transformation through an ever-deepening repentance.

Paul admonishes us saying: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom 2:4)? Instead of imagining that God's goodness will excuse us from future judgment, we must realize that it is this very goodness which is drawing us to repentance to save us *from* this judgment.

When the time of judgment comes, forgiveness will no longer be an option. The age of grace will have ended. The opportunity to repent and be transformed will be passed. May God have mercy upon us so that we will be prepared to receive Him with joy and open arms.

## THE SECOND COMING

Jesus Christ is coming again. He will return someday soon in His glory to destroy the king-

dom of the coming man of sin and to establish His kingdom here on the earth. In the same way He ascended, He will descend again to receive us to Himself (Acts 1:11). It is at this time that He will judge His people. We will all appear before His judgment seat (Rm 14:10). That will be the hour in which our true spiritual condition will be exposed – whether it is good or bad.

The early Christians thought that the return of Christ would be within a few short years. They were expecting Him to come again at any minute.

Therefore, many lived as if He might come right then. The majority did not involve themselves in sin. They were always seeking to be pleasing to Him. They kept themselves pure from the world and other distractions. They cooperated with the work of the Holy Spirit to transform them. In short, they lived with the expectation of Jesus' return and judgment at any moment.

But as time went on, things changed. Soon it became clear that His return was not as imminent as they at first believed. So, following the natural tendency of the human race, this immediacy and expectancy waned in the hearts of some. They began to go about their lives as usual. Sin became more evident in the early churches. The human tendencies towards self and sin began to express themselves more and more. These same natural inclinations are very much in evidence in the churches of today.

There are many believers today for example,

who might sing "Come Lord Jesus" during a time of worship. But how many of us really want Him to come right now? I mean right this minute? Or are there other priorities which we have in our lives? Perhaps we'd like to get married. Maybe we are anxiously saving to buy something we want, like a house or car. Possibly there are some events in the future which we would like to enjoy first. These other things which attract our hearts are evidence that we are not where we should be in relationship to Him.

Another thing which would hinder us from longing for His appearing is our involvement in some sin. It could be that we know something which we are doing is wrong. We realize that it grieves the Lord, but somehow our fleshly enjoyment of it hinders us from repenting and making a clear break from it. Our conscience bothers us, but we just shrug it off and harden our heart a little more. Of course anyone in such a condition will not be anxious for the Lord to come today.

This reminds me of an experience we had many years ago during some meetings which we had in our home. Every once in a while the presence of God would be manifested in a powerful, glorious way.

So I thought, "Next week, this place will be full of people." "This meeting was so fantastic, everybody will want to come next time." But instead, the next week almost nobody was there. It took two or three weeks for everyone to come back again. This experience happened

more than once. I found this very perplexing. While meditating on this phenomenon, I came to the following realization. Many Christians are not really comfortable in the presence of God. They enjoy being there for a little while, but they are not really at peace with Him enough to live there all the time. They like to get a little “dose” of God every once in a while – to touch the hem of His garment so to speak – but their troubled conscience, their lack of repentance from sin, will not allow them to stay in His presence for a long period of time. They do not live in the Spirit.

Still another situation comes to mind. Many years ago when I was a single young believer, I lived in a house with several other Christian young men. One day another brother who had a reputation for tending toward really “spiritual” experiences asked me to pray with him. So, there in the living room, we began to seek the face of God.

And we found Him! His presence began to be felt more and more strongly. We began to enter into the heavenly places together in Christ (Eph 2:6). The sense of Jesus’ presence grew ever more real. The glory of the Lord was shining around us. It almost seemed as if He would appear physically in front of us.

Suddenly, to my complete surprise, I heard this other brother screaming “stop, stop!” He had reached his limit. He wanted no more of this presence. He was not comfortable with so much of the Lord at one time. And Jesus did

stop. The experience rapidly faded away. God respected his limitations at that time. In the same way today, Jesus will never push past our barriers which we have between us and Him.

## **WE WILL ALL APPEAR BEFORE HIM**

Yet, one day we will all appear before Him. There will be no “stopping” on that day. Then will be the day when we will stand in His undiluted, intense, burning presence. Then there will be no place to hide. No one who has not made themselves ready will have any way to escape. There whatever is in our hearts will be exposed.

Now how about you? How are you living today? Are you living in the fear of God? Would you be ashamed if He appeared right now? Would He be pleased to find you doing what you are doing and living in the way you are living? Are you using your time wisely getting yourself and others ready for His coming? Are you repenting ever more thoroughly so that you can be changed into His likeness? Are you someone who truly “loves His appearing” (II Tim 4:8).

If so, then you will hear Him say: “Well done, good and faithful servant... Enter into the joy of your lord” (Mt 25:23). If not, then you will be ashamed and suffer irrecoverable loss in His presence and in front of the watching universe.

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls” (Heb 10:39 RSV).

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