

Lesson 4

"The God of Grace and Judgment"

Concern for some sort of a future judgment grips the human race. The five major religions of the world [1], and their variations, all think about this time when every soul will give an account for good or evil. Even those with no religion who hold to the doctrine of atheism, as promoted by Marxian Communism, have feared that religion would be a danger to the state and in this sense would ultimately bring judgment upon society. Like it or hate it the truth of a judgment faces every person alive in the 21st century and the human race from Adam to our day is confronted with God's plan of salvation for all people. In the human heart, there is a hidden longing for something better. This void in the human soul senses that justice demands that there must be a judgment eventually.

Many people have the idea that God is a vengeful Deity just waiting for a chance to strike them with His lightning bolts of retribution for their sins. And if God is indeed like this, a judgment with Him on the bench would certainly be a fearful prospect. The Bible, however, describes a God and a judgment that differs startlingly from this common misconception.

God is not looking for an excuse to punish us. We sometimes picture a loving Jesus who stands between us and a harsh Father. But according to the Bible, the Father loves us and is just as anxious for our eternal salvation as is the Son. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing [counting] their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

God never planned for any of us to face the terror of being found guilty in the judgment. Jesus declared that the condemnation of the judgment--"eternal fire"--was specifically "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). If any human being finds himself sharing Satan's fate, it will not be because God has willed it. Those who are destroyed along with the devil and his angels will have spurned and beaten back repeated efforts by God to save them.

In what appears to be a happy exception to Paul's statement about "all" appearing in judgment (2 Cor. 5:10), Jesus declares good news: "In very truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts his trust in Him who sent Me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgment, but has already passed from death to life" (John 5:24, New

English Bible). The word *judgment* here means the condemnation of the judgment; the point is that God wants to exempt us from the terrible experience of facing judgment and being condemned.

The Father has turned over to Christ the task of judging men. "The Father judges no one, but has committed [entrusted] all judgment to the Son." "... and has given Him authority to execute judgment, ... because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:22, 27).

Our judge, then, is Jesus Himself. No one more friendly to us could be found! If in a human court, the judge and all the jury members are warm personal friends; you could hardly wish for a more favorable chance of acquittal. Yet the Son of man will do for us what no earthly friend can do when we are in trouble. John says, "I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous. And He is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world!" (1 John 2:1, 2).

How can Jesus be our Advocate in a law case if He is also our Judge? God puts all the odds in our favor. Jesus is both Judge and defense Attorney. He can defend us because He has already suffered the condemnation we deserve in the judgment. The death that Jesus died on the cross was the condemnation sin requires carried to its ultimate degree. "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus died as the eternally lost sinner will die--"forsaken" by His Father--because "[He] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes [wounds] you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Since He is the second Adam, we are "in Him" corporately if we choose to believe it. The idea is that when Jesus died, *we* also died. "I have been crucified with Christ," said Paul (Gal. 2:20). Any lightning bolts of hot wrath that should fall on sinners already fell on Christ at the cross.

By receiving the gift of Jesus as our Savior by faith, we are identified with Him. There is not the slightest reason why anyone should have to duplicate Jesus' experience of dying for sin unless that person rejects his identity with Christ. What Jesus did on the cross satisfies the statutory claims of the broken law. It does that, and more--our personal identification with Him and His death. By faith the believing sinner accepts that he is "in Christ," accepts the divine judgment on his sins, but actually suffers it "in Christ." Justice makes no further claims against him. This is why he "does not come up for judgment." And everyone can have this advantage if they will accept it!

Throughout the 6000 plus years of human history God's inspired servants have often employed fear as their motivation tool for inducing sinners to respond. The Old Testament prophets frequently speak of God destroying nations and people. There is no question that God sent the Flood to destroy sinners, also the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah, and destroyed the Egyptians at the Red Sea crossing.

The question that is of concern to us is what appeal will God use in that final "lighting of the earth with glory"? A "voice" will sound from heaven with unprecedented power, "Come out of [Babylon], My people." The motivation will be a uniquely clear revelation of the cross, what the Son of God accomplished there, and what it cost Him to save the world.

Our unique 1888 message teaches just what the Bible says, that "God did not send His Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Our evangelistic message is that Christ has reversed "the result of one [Adam's] misdeed [which] was condemnation for all people, so the result of one righteous act [the cross] is acquittal and life for all" (Rom. 5:18, Revised English Bible). God does not condemn the race of sinners. [2] He gives "acquittal and life" to them. The question is, will the sinner appreciate His gift purchased at such infinite cost and *let* God's love reconcile his soul to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

--From the writings of Robert J. Wieland and

Paul E. Penno's Sabbath School class notes

Note: Bible texts (unless noted otherwise) are from the New King James Version.

Endnotes:

[1] Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism.

[2] The lesson (Wed., Jan. 25) mischaracterizes this biblical teaching by stating "these texts clearly debunk the notion that, after the Cross, all humanity is automatically justified. ... Everyone stands condemned. ..." The word "bunk" means "nonsense," therefore it follows that "debunk" means to expose the nonsense. Here is the rejection and ridicule of the 1888 message. Writes Ellen White, "I can never forget the experience which we had in Minneapolis, or the things which were then revealed to me in regard to the spirit that controlled men, the words spoken, the actions done in obedience to the powers of evil. ... They were moved at the meeting by another spirit, and *they knew not* that God had sent these young men, Elders Jones and Waggoner, to bear a special

message to them which they treated with ridicule and contempt. ... I know that at that time the Spirit of God was insulted" (*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1043 [Ms. 24, 1892]).