



December 6, 2016

feeding...gathering...carrying...leading. (Isiah 40:11)

Dear Church Family,

In this People of Judgment series so far, I have been promoting the idea of becoming more judgmental, not less, as we face our judgment adverse culture. But this is with the idea of focusing that judgment primarily on ourselves. And one of the results of this is that we are keenly aware of the mercy we have been shown as people who would deserve condemnation from the judgment of God. It is as if we are spared having to take a test that we know we will fail. Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

But there is more to the picture of judgment for us as believers than what we will not have to face. There is a clear picture of a judgment that we will face as believers. Rom 14:11-12 *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.* 2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear 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.* These verses are written to believers about believers. This judgment seat of Christ is on display in chapters 2 and 3 in the book of Revelation with the letters to the churches. What is written is judgment on what believers are doing right and what they are doing wrong, works that are good or evil. Jesus says, *"And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works."* (Rev 2:23). Paul offers further insight into this judgment in 1 Cor 3:10-15, with the image of fire testing the work of believers with works either surviving in the fire (gold, silver, precious stones) or being destroyed in the fire (wood, hay and straw).

What are we to make of this judgment that we will face? I would agree with Randy Alcorn's comments on this judgment. *"Whether good or evil"* in this verse (2 Cor 5:10) is perhaps the most disturbing phrase for believers in the entire New Testament. It is so disturbing, in fact, that I've found any honest attempts to deal with it are met with tremendous resistance." He asks, "Why is the believer's coming judgment of works, such a clear teaching of Scripture and such a central motivating force among God's people for centuries, so badly ignored in the western church today?"

We are so accustomed to the idea that we are saved by grace and not by works that we stumble over the idea that our works will be judged and that they matter. Many are understandably eager to focus on the end of 1 Cor 3:15 *If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.* If I do not do well, if my works are wood, hay and stubble I will still be saved. But I do not think this is what Paul wanted his readers to focus on. The message is not, well that will not really matter because I will still be saved. He wants them to take seriously this judgment as motivation to alter the way they are living and looking at their lives.

People want to know if they can lose their salvation if they live their lives in a way that is judged as evil or worthless at the judgment seat of Christ. This is a controversial issue with different perspectives. There are some passages that would indicate that you cannot, like in 1 Cor 3:15. Even if all of a person's works are rejected as worthless at the judgment and burned up, he or she is still saved. Logically, if my salvation (the foundation) is entirely due to the work of Christ on my behalf and nothing I have done, then how could I undo it or jeopardize it. There are passages,

however, that seem to indicate that a person can lose their salvation. Hebrews 10:9-27 is a passage where both perspectives are present. Verses 9-13 are all about a believer's confidence in Christ's work on their behalf. This is followed by an exhortation to godly living in v.24-25 and a warning in v. 26-31 to those who *go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth*. For them, *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment*. No longer having a sacrifice for sins could indicate that they will be condemned.

It is difficult to hold these different teachings together, but it is easy to see how applicable and effective they each are depending what type of person you are dealing with. The person who is concerned about their holiness, who struggles with feeling unworthy in God's presence, needs the assurance that they have been saved by grace and enjoy the confidence of their salvation. But what of the person who does not pay any attention to holiness and lives entirely as their desires might lead them, confident that it makes no difference at all since they are saved by grace? What does this person need to hear?

A key aspect to anticipating the judgment of believers is who we are focusing on. We are so accustomed to approaching everything from a self-centered perspective. What will it mean for me? What will it feel like? But what if we look at it from God's perspective? Do we want God to be pleased with how we have lived our lives? Do we begrudge him the chance to judge our lives and declare that which was good and that which was bad? If God's pleasure is our primary concern, don't we want him to have that opportunity? If our good works, our faithfulness brings God pleasure, don't we want them to matter? They are after all His works too (Eph. 2:8-10, Phil. 2:12-13).

At the judgment of believers, it is holiness that is being honored. Can we be for that or are we too concerned with how we will come out? Are we too preoccupied with self to desire to submit to God's holy and righteous judgment that is about His glory? What we do know about His judgment is that it will be entirely accurate and just.

It is appropriate that we engaged this topic on a communion Sunday. We were able to celebrate that we are on the team or in the orchestra (listen to the message) and embrace that great confidence and hope in our salvation based on the work of Christ. We came with a fresh desire for that work of Christ to also produce in us a greater desire to live lives that are pleasing to God, to offer good works that give Him glory. And we asked for a fruit of Christ's work which is a freedom from that preoccupation with self that is so much a part of our world and gets in the way of embracing God's righteous judgment. May we recover the judgment of believers as a motivating force in our lives and become a witness to the world that God's judgment is glorious, joining in the ministry of John the Baptist *to make ready for the Lord and people prepared*.

Pastorally Yours,
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