

The Heart of the Matter

Lesson 10: The Christian's Attitude Toward Judgment

1. The Need for Accountability

Few people enjoy the burden of accountability, but would we really want to live in a world without it? Imagine how much more dangerous driving would be without accountability to law enforcement officers. Since the payment of taxes is held in universal contempt, who would freely volunteer to pay his portion without accountability to the IRS? It is not difficult to envision the anarchy, chaos and decadence that would plague society if we lived lives of total self-will.

Accountability comes in the form of authority figures – parents, teachers, police, the boss, etc. – who exercise some form of punitive power when we fail to meet standards imposed upon us. Our choices in life are often influenced by the likelihood of being discovered and punished. Thus clear, legitimate accountability functions as a *deterrent* to forbidden behavior.

2. Ultimate Accountability

While God has put in place various instruments of earthly accountability, man may slip through these unscathed because they are implemented by fallible human beings. But God reserves for Himself the right of ultimate, eternal judgment.

One of the clearest tenets of Scripture is that all will eventually stand before God and answer to Him for our earthly lives.

Some key passages:

2 Cor. 5:10 – *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in*

the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Rom. 14:10, 12 – *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”*

Rom. 2:5-6, 11 – *“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’ ... For there is no partiality with God.”*

Note the terms “all” and “each.” Divine judgment is not a collective or group evaluation but individual. God is aware of the activities of each one who has ever or will ever live, and the time will come when every person will stand **alone** before God to explain himself.

But it is not only the acts that will be judged; our deepest thoughts and motives will be laid bare:

1 Cor. 4:5 – *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one’s praise will come from God.”*

We may fool others, or even ourselves, but none can deceive God. He will see us as we truly are.

3. Attitudes Toward Judgment

Fear: The knowledge that we will be brought before God’s judgment should cause us to fear, to approach each act, word and thought as if it is being done in

the very presence of God – for it is. Thus Peter says, *“And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear ...”* (1 Pet. 1:17).

Preparation: If we know we are to be evaluated, the natural response is to prepare ourselves for it. In the case of judgment, we know for certain that it is coming – we just don’t know *when*. So the only sensible thing to do is to *always* be prepared. *“Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Thess. 5:6). The parable of the virgins also urges preparation (Matt. 25:1-13).

Warning Others: As Paul contemplates the horror of standing before God unprepared, he says, *“Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ...”* (2 Cor. 5:11a). Paul traversed the Roman Empire warning and exhorting men to prepare for judgment. He said to the Athenians: *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained ...”* (Acts

17:30-31a). We must cultivate a sense of urgency that dilutes our fears and impels us to speak to our fellow man of salvation.

4. The Standard of Judgment

Inherent within any judgment is a standard by which the subjects will be evaluated. Is there one universal standard by which all men will be judged? Or will the judgment be according to individual cultures, religions and other differentiating factors?

“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48).

Jesus will come *“in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thess. 1:8).

The final judgment is real, not symbolic or figurative. We are laying the foundation for that judgment even now, for every day we write another page in the book of our life. How does our autobiography read so far?

Questions for Discussion

1. How did Paul react to the possibility of failure at the final judgment (1 Cor. 9:24-27)?
2. What assurance is given of Jesus’ appointment as Judge (Acts 17:31)? Explain.
3. To what Gentile audience did Peter speak of Jesus judging *“the living and the dead”*?