

PLAIN PAPERS ON THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

by

C. H. Mackintosh

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CHAPTER SIX

THE JUDGMENT

There is something peculiarly painful in the thought of having so frequently to come in collision with the generally received opinions of the professing Church. It looks presumptuous to contradict, on so many subjects, all the great standards and creeds of Christendom. But what is one to do? Were it indeed a mere question of human opinion it might seem a piece of bold and unwarrantable temerity for any one individual to set himself in direct opposition to the established faith of the whole professing Church - a faith which has held sway for centuries over the minds of millions.

But we would ever impress upon our readers the fact that it is not at all a question of human opinion or of a difference of judgment amongst even the very best of men. It is entirely a question as to the teaching and authority of Holy Scripture. There have been, and there are, and there will be, schools of doctrine, varieties of opinion, and shades of thought; but it is the obvious duty of every child of God and every servant of Christ to bow down, in holy reverence, and hearken to the voice of God in Scripture. If it be merely a matter of human authority, it must simply go for what it is worth; but, on the other hand, if it be a matter of divine authority, then all discussion is closed, and our place - the place of all - is to bow and believe. Thus, in our previous section we were led to see that there is no such thing in Scripture as a general resurrection - a common rising of all at the same time. We trust our readers have, like the Bereans of old, searched the Scriptures as to this, and that they are now prepared to accompany us in our examination of the Word of God as to the subject of the judgment.

The great question at the outset is this, Does Scripture teach the doctrine of a general judgment? Christendom holds it; but does Scripture teach it? Let us see.

In the first place, as to the Christian individually, and the Church of God, collectively, the New Testament sets forth the precious truth that there is no judgment at all.

So far as the believer is concerned judgment is past and gone. The heavy cloud of judgment has burst upon the head of our divine Sin-bearer. He has exhausted, on our behalf, the cup of wrath and judgment, and planted us on the new ground of resurrection, to which judgment can never, by any possibility, apply.

It is just as impossible that a member of the body of Christ can come into judgment as that the divine Head Himself can do so. This seems a very strong statement to make; but is it true? If so, its strength is part of its moral value and glory.

For what, let us ask, was Jesus judged on the Cross? For His people. He was made sin for us. He represented us there. He stood in our stead. He bore all that was due to us. Our entire condition, with all its belongings, was dealt with in the death of Christ; and so dealt with that it is utterly impossible that any question can ever be raised. Has God any question to settle with Christ, the Head? Clearly not. Well, then, neither has He any question to settle with the members. Every question is divinely and definitively settled, and, in proof of the settlement, the Head is crowned with glory and honour, and seated at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens. Hence, to suppose that Christians are to come to judgment, at any time, or on any ground, for any object whatsoever, is to deny the very foundation truth of Christianity, and to contradict the plain words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has expressly declared, in reference to all who believe in Him, that they “**shall not come into judgment**” (John 5:24).

In point of fact, the idea of Christians being arraigned at the bar of judgment to try the question of their title and fitness for Heaven is as absurd as it is unscriptural. For example, how can we think of Paul or the penitent thief standing to be judged as to their title to heaven, after having been there already for nearly two thousand years? But thus it must be if there be any truth in the theory of a general judgment. If the great question of our title to Heaven has to be settled at the day of judgment, then clearly it was not settled on the Cross; and if it was not settled on the Cross, then most surely we shall be damned; for if we are to be judged at all it must be according to our works, and the only possible issue of such a judgment is the lake of fire. If, however, it be maintained that Christians shall only stand in the judgment in order to make it manifest that they are clear through the death of Christ, then would the day of judgment be turned into a mere formality, the bare thought of which is most revolting to every pious and well regulated mind.

But, in truth, there is no need of reasoning on the point. One sentence of Holy Scripture is better far than ten thousand of man's most cogent arguments. Our Lord Christ hath declared, in the clearest and most emphatic terms, that believers “**shall not come into judgment.**” This is enough. The believer was judged over eighteen hundred years ago in the Person of his Head; and to bring him into judgment again would be to ignore completely the Cross of Christ in its atoning efficacy; and most assuredly God will not, cannot allow this. The very feeblest believer may say, in thankfulness and triumph, “So far as I am concerned, all that had to be judged is judged already. Every question that had to be settled is settled. Judgment is past and gone forever. I know my work must be tried, my service appraised; but as to myself, my person, my standing, my title, all is divinely settled. The Man who answered for me on the tree is now crowned on the throne; and the crown which He wears is the proof that there remains no judgment for me. I am waiting for a life-resurrection.”

This, and nothing short of this, is the proper language of the Christian. It is simply due to the work of the Cross that the believer should thus feel and thus express himself. For such a one to be looking forward to the day of judgment for a settlement of the question of his eternal destiny is to dishonour his Lord and deny the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice.

It may sound like humility and savour of piety to hover in doubt. But we may rest assured that all who harbor doubts, all who live in a state of uncertainty, all who are looking forward to the day of judgment for a final settlement of their affairs - all such are more occupied with themselves than with Christ. They have not yet understood the application of the Cross to their sins and to their nature. They are doubting the Word of God and the work of Christ, and this is not Christianity. There is - there can be - no judgment for those who, sheltered by the Cross, have planted a firm foot on the new and everlasting ground of resurrection. For such all judgment is over forever, and nothing remains but a prospect of cloudless glory and everlasting blessedness in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

However, it is not at all improbable that all this while the mind of the reader has been recurring to Matthew 25:31-46 as a Scripture which directly establishes the theory of a general judgment; and we feel it to be our sacred duty to turn with him for a moment to that very solemn and important passage; at the same time reminding him of the fact that no one Scripture can possibly clash with another, and hence if we read, in John 5:24, that believers shall not come into judgment, we cannot read in Matthew 25 that they shall. This is a fixed and invulnerable principle - a general rule to which there is, and can be, no exception. Nevertheless, let us turn to Matthew 25.

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.”

Now, it is most necessary to pay strict attention to the precise terms made use of in this Scripture. We must avoid all looseness of thought, all that haste, carelessness, and inaccuracy which have caused such serious damage to the teaching of this weighty Scripture, and thrown so many of the Lord’s people into the utmost confusion respecting it.

And, first of all, let us see who are the parties arraigned. “Before Him shall be gathered all nations.”

This is very definite. It is the living nations. It is not a question of individuals, but of nations - all the Gentiles. Israel is not here, for we read in Numbers 23:9, that **“the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”** If Israel were to be included in this scene of judgment, then would Matthew 25 stand in palpable contradiction to Numbers 23, which is wholly out of the question. Israel is never reckoned amongst the Gentiles, on any ground or for any object whatever. Looked at from a divine point of view, Israel stands alone. They may, because of their sins, and under the governmental dealings of God, be scattered among the nations; but God’s Word declares that they shall not be reckoned among them; and this should suffice for us. If then it be true that Israel is not included in the judgment of Matthew 25 then, without proceeding one step further, the idea of its being a general judgment must be abandoned.

It cannot be general, if all are not included; but Israel is never included under the term **“Gentiles.”** Scripture speaks of three distinct classes, namely, **“The Jew, and the Gentile, and the Church of God,”** and these three are never confounded.

But, further, we have to remark that the Church of God is not included in the judgment of Matthew 25. Nor is this statement based merely upon the fact which has been already gone into of the Church's necessary exemption from judgment; but also upon the grand truth that the Church is taken from among the nations, as Peter declared in the council at Jerusalem. "**God did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.**"

If then the Church be taken out of the nations, it cannot be reckoned among them; and thus we have additional evidence against the theory of a general judgment in Matthew 25. The Jew is not there; the Church is not there; and therefore the idea of a general judgment must be abandoned as something wholly untenable.

*Who then are included in this judgment? The passage itself supplies the answer to any simple mind. It says, "**Before Him shall be gathered all nations.**"*

This is distinct and definite. It is not a judgment of individuals, but of nations, as such. And further, we may add that not one of those here indicated shall have passed through the article of death. In this it stands in vivid contrast with the scene in Revelation 20:11-15, in the which there will not be one who has not died. In short, in Matthew 25, we have the judgment of "**the quick**"; and in Revelation 20 the judgment of "**the dead.**" Both these are referred to in II Timothy 4, "**I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.**" Our Lord Christ shall judge the living nations at His appearing; and He shall "**judge the dead, small and great,**" at the close of His millennial reign.

*But let us glance, for a moment, at the mode in which the parties are arranged in the judgment, in Matthew 25: "**He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.**"*

Now, the almost universal belief of the professing Church is that "**the sheep**" represent all the people of God, from the beginning to the end of time; and that "**the goats,**" on the other hand, set forth all the wicked, from first to last. But, if this be so, what are we to make of the third party referred to here, under the title of "**these My brethren**"?

The King addresses both the sheep and the goats in respect to this third class. Indeed the very ground of judgment is the treatment of the King's brethren. It would involve a manifest absurdity to say that the sheep were themselves the parties referred to. If that were so the language would be wholly different, and in place of saying, "**Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren**" we should hear the King saying, "**Inasmuch as ye have done it to one another,**" or "**amongst yourselves.**"

We would beg the reader's special attention to this point. We consider that were there no other argument and no other Scripture on the subject, this one point would prove fatal to the theory of a general judgment. It is impossible not to see three parties in the scene, namely, "**the sheep,**" and "**the goats,**" and "**these My brethren**"; and if there are three parties it cannot possibly be a general judgment, inasmuch as "**these My brethren**" are not included either in the sheep or the goats.

No, dear reader, it is not a general judgment at all, but a very partial and specific one.

It is a judgment of living nations, previous to the opening of the millennial Kingdom. Scripture teaches us that after the Church has left the earth a testimony will go forth to the nations; the Gospel of the Kingdom shall be borne, by Jewish messengers, far and wide, over the earth, into those regions which are wrapped in heathen darkness. These nations which shall receive the messengers and treat them kindly will be found on the King's right hand. Those, on the contrary, who shall reject them and treat them unkindly will be found on His left. "**These My brethren**" are Jews - the brethren of the Messiah.

The treatment of the Jews is the ground on which the nations will be judged by-and-by; and this is another argument against a general judgment. We know full well that all those who have lived and died in the rejection of the Gospel of Christ will have something more to answer for than unkindness to the King's brethren. And, on the other hand, those who shall surround the Lamb in heavenly glory will do so on a very different title from aught that their works can furnish.

In short, there is not a single feature in the scene, not a single fact in the history, not a single point in the narrative which does not make against the notion of a general judgment. And not only so, but the more we study Scripture, the more we know of the ways of God; the more we know of His nature, His character, His purposes, His counsels, His thoughts; the more we know of Christ, His Person, His work, His glory; the more we know of the Church, its standing before God in Christ, its completeness, its perfect acceptance in Christ; the more closely we study Scripture; the more profoundly we meditate therein - the more thoroughly convinced we must be that there can be no such thing as a general judgment.

Who that knows aught of God could suppose that He would justify His people today and arraign them in judgment tomorrow - that He would blot out their transgressions today and judge them according to their works tomorrow? Who that knows aught of our adorable Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ could suppose that He would ever arraign His Church, His body, His bride, before the judgment seat in company with all those who have died in their sins? Could it be possible that He would enter into judgment with His people for sins and iniquities of which He has said, "**I will remember no more!**"

But enough. We fondly trust that the reader is now most fully persuaded in his own mind that there is, and can be, no such thing as a general resurrection - no such thing as a general judgment.

We cannot now enter upon the judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 further than to say that it is a post-millennial scene, and that it includes all the wicked dead, from the days of Cain down to the last apostate from millennial glory. There will be:

- Not one there who has not passed through the article of death
- Not one there whose name has been set down in life's fair book
- Not one there who shall not be judged according to his own very deeds
- Not one there who shall not pass from the dread realities of the great white throne into the everlasting horrors and torments of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

How awful! How terrible! How dreadful!

O! Reader, what do you say to these things? Are you a true believer in Jesus? Are you washed in His precious Blood? Are you sheltered in Him from coming judgment? If not, let me entreat you now, with all tenderness and earnestness, to flee, this very hour, from the wrath to come! Turn to Jesus, who now waits to receive you to Himself, and to present you to God in the full value of His atoning work, and in the full credit of His peerless name.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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