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Your Father: Judge of the Universe

The word of God is filled with the frequent exhortation to do all things for the Lord.

Joshua 24:15b, "...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Colossians 3:23a, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord..."

Ephesians 6:7a, "With good will render service, as to the Lord..."

Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

And so, in and through all things we must be very careful and deliberate to do our work for the Lord! And why is that? Because in the end, according to Hebrews 4:13b, it is the Lord God “...with whom we have to do!” Truly, when all has been said and done, it won’t matter what:

- Your spouse thought.
- Your parents thought.
- Your boss, friends, coach, or any of influence or in authority.

For truly, it is the Lord God “...with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:13b)!

It was this reality that inspired Pete. Having considered the glories that are ours in Christ on account of His redeeming work — think of...

- Our future inheritance that is “imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3).
- Our salvation that will NOT come to its fulness until the final state (1 Peter 1:5b).
- The recognition we shall receive in glory involving “praise and glory and honor” given to us by Christ Himself (1 Peter 1:7).

And having considered this glorious future, Peter is mindful — and so ought we — that none of these blessings will be enjoyed until we first go through the Last Judgment!

This no doubt is why Peter addresses this important reality here. To a people tempted to shrink back and so compromise their fidelity to the Lord on account of threat, suffering, or the intimidation of man, Peter here shakes them unto sobriety! That having been said, he also gives them an incredible assurance: When we stand before this Judge and look into His face, we will see our dad!

That is where Peter brings us. We begin with the prefatory statement Peter makes in v. 17 as he introduces us to God’s role as judge of the universe.

1 Peter 1:17, “And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work...”

From this it is clear that God is THE Judge of the Universe. Yet what does this involve?

If you and I were going to stand before an earthly judge in a capital case, we’d want to know the details that we might be ready. Well, every man, woman, and child — saved and unsaved — is going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This morning let’s consider the particulars surrounding this event. After His disciples asked Him about the end times and after describing the tribulation that would precede the last day, Christ said this:

Matthew 24:29-31, “But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be

darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky [the Last Day will be a terrifying and shocking moment as this fallen world is summoned before God to give an accounting!], and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn [which would include some calling upon the rocks and hills to fall on them, Revelation 6:16], and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

As we’ve seen in other contexts, on the day of Christ’s Second Coming the dead will be raised from their graves and rejoined with their souls (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and then all will stand before the throne of Christ for Judgment — a reality Christ picks up on in Matthew.

Matthew 25:31-33, “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.”

This is the Last Judgment! At this time, ALL mankind will stand before God and be judged. Peter speaking to the non-believer says this:

1 Peter 4:4-5, “And in *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign *you*; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

So indeed, the non-believer is going to stand before Christ’s throne and give an account. But what about the believer? Will we be spared? Paul speaking of the believer declares:

Romans 14:10, “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.” (cf. also 1 Corinthians 4:4-5)

Truly, all of mankind is going to stand before the throne of Christ where a judgment will be rendered. Now during this judging, a great separating/sorting will take place in which Christ will put the saved on his right and the unsaved on his left.

Matthew 25:34, “Then the King will say to those on His right [the saved], ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”-

Don’t ever forget: It was the Kingdom of God that was toppled when Adam and Eve rebelled, and it is this Kingdom that will be established at the Last Day! With this, Christ then will turn to the unsaved.

Matthew 25:41, 46, “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’”

This is what is meant by the Final Judgment. From this, notice that the Final Judgment is the time when ALL of mankind — that has ever lived or will ever live — is gathered before God’s Throne. Here they will be separated into two groups: The children of God and the children of Satan. And that raises the question: What determines what group a person will be placed in? Notice the basis of God’s judgment.

1 Peter 1:17d, “And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work: this may be a surprise to you; yet the basis upon which each individual is placed in each group is their conduct. Peter here says that God will judge “according to each man’s work.”

And that is exactly what we see in Matthew 25. after proclaiming His approval of the sheep, Christ will then give the reason for the determination:

Matthew 25:35-36, “For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.”

After declaring the fate of the rebellious, Christ once again will give the reason for the determination.

Matthew 25:42-43, “For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.”

Truly, the final judgment will have our conduct as its focus; IT WILL BE BASED ON OUR DEEDS — which is in keeping with the rest of Scripture! Christ told the crowds of His day:

Matthew 12:36-37, “And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. // For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

Speaking to the church in Corinth, Paul said this:

2 Corinthians 5:9-10, “Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

That is why our doctrinal statement reads this way:

WCF 33.1, "God hath appointed a day, wherein He will judge the world, in righteousness, by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil."

You say, "Wait a minute. I thought salvation was based upon Christ, not my works." That is correct! Salvation is by faith alone BUT not by a faith that is alone. The final judgment will be based on our conduct because the salvation that Christ grants is NOT simply a theoretical deliverance from sin, BUT a real transferring of the believer out of the kingdom of darkness into Christ's marvelous light. Or another way of saying it is this: While most today make a distinction between theology and practice, the Bible makes no such distinction. What you do is the greatest declaration of your theology. And thus, the final judgment will be based on our works NOT because our works are the ground of our salvation, BUT because our works are its evidence! In the words of the Apostle Paul:

Titus 1:16, "They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*..."

Notice the nature of His judgment.

1 Peter 1:17b, "and if you address as Father the One who impartially judges."

"Impartially judges" ἀπροσωπολήμπτως (*aprosōpolēmptōs*); this is an important word. In the Greek it is composed of three parts: ἀ (a) which negates the idea of the main word; πρόσωπον (*prosōpon*) which references the "face" or the "appearance" of someone; λαμβάνω (*lambanō*) which means "to take" or "receive." Combined the resulting word denotes the idea of "not accepting/receiving a face"- that is, not giving consideration to a person because of who he is.

That is the idea behind the depiction of justice as a blindfolded woman. Lady justice is unable to see who is before her to be judged and therefore is not partial either for or against the accused. And so is the nature of God's judgment on the last day. Money, occupation, race, gender, club affiliation, heritage, tribe, tongue, or name will mean nothing on that day. God will render judgment based on what the individual man, woman, or child has done during his/her time in the flesh!

Proverbs 24:12, "If you say, 'See, we did not know this,' does He not consider *it* who weighs the hearts? And does He not know *it* who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?"

Truly what we know, the level of our education, or any other distinction that can be made amongst men will be irrelevant on that day. All will be judged based on their deeds!

Family of God, this truly is sobering if not frightening. No wonder Peter in v. 17 wrote, "And if

you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth." In the words of John, "For the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:17) Quite honestly, the answer is: "No one will be able to stand on that day except one... he whose Father is the Judge!"

Note the confidence of the redeemed.

1 Peter 1:17a, "and if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work."

The Judge of the Universe is our Father! Consider that Paul spoke of one of the privileges which flows from a saving relationship with Christ:

Romans 8:15, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'"

Again, what is the most fundamental way God would have us relate to Him? The Lord has deigned that the most fundamental relationship we have with Him is that a child to his father (cf. Galatians 4:6-7)! That is why when it comes to how we ought to approach the Lord in prayer, Jesus said this:

Matthew 7:5a, 9a, "And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men... Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven...'"

In Christ's day, this was a radical statement. Though faithful Jews had known of God as their Father in several ways in the Old Testament,¹ yet on account of their disobedience and rebellion, the intimacy of God's Fatherhood was lost to the Jews. Accordingly, the Jews of Christ's day saw "God as Father" as a remote, distant, faded figure who had once guided their ancestors. Accordingly, when Jesus told His disciples to approach God in prayer as their Father, this involved a radical freeing of His people. It brought with it five incredible privileges. God as "Father" meant the following:

- The end of the fear associated with pagan religion where the supplicant approached a capricious being who might kill a loved one if the right words, incantation, or gift were not offered.
- The end of all uncertainty when it came to God's response to our prayer. If an earthly father will spare no effort to help and protect their children, how much more will the heavenly Father love, protect, and help His children (Matthew 7:11; John 10:29; 14:21)?
- The end of all loneliness. If serving Christ means being forsaken by our earthly family, friends, and the rest of the world (which it so often does), we know that our heavenly Father will never leave us or forsake us (cf. John 14:21; cf. Psalm 68:5-6)!
- The end of worldly care. The fact that He is our "Father who [is] in heaven" tells us

that all the resources of heaven are available to us when we trust God (cf. Ephesians 1:3)!

- The end of all fear, even when we disobey. Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son and the love that the Father had even for His rebellious, disobedient son (cf. Luke 15)!

As children of God, we rightly have confidence before the Lord, Our Father, on account of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit! First the work of Christ:

Romans 5:10, "...if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Paul wrote, stating the basis upon which every blessing in the heavenly places flows:

Romans 8:1-4, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

As such, we live with incredible confidence not only in the present, but in the future. On account of Christ, there is NO foreboding when it comes to the Last Judgment. Because we are in Him, though we will stand before His judgment seat, we know without a doubt it will be well with our soul —for He is our Father!

Secondly, we see it in the work of the Holy Spirit. Speaking of the Spirit of God, Paul said this:

Ephesians 1:13-14, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory."

A "pledge of inheritance" in Paul's day it was a financial term referencing a down payment. When we were saved, the Spirit of God was placed in us as a down payment pointing to a future redemption referenced here as, "the redemption of God's own possession." This no doubt is why when Paul thought of our default relationship with God in Christ (the fact that He is our Father), he linked our filial relationship with God to our final inheritance.

Galatians 4:5-6, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Do you understand the significance of God as our Father? On the last day, we will approach THE Judge of the Universe, BUT it won't be for the sentencing of death as in the case of a criminal; rather it will be for the receiving of our inheritance as in the reading of a will (we'll talk more about this next time)!

Yet — and this is the question — what good will all of this be if on the Last Day we are judged by our conduct/our works?

- Recognize that the vast majority of Christians judged in the Last Judgment at this moment are in Christ's presence worshipping and enjoying Him. From this we conclude that the Last Judgment is NOT about us! It is NOT the time when God determines who will be in glory.
- If it is NOT about us, then what it is about? God and His glory.

Ephesians 1:3-6, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."

This is such an important verse when it comes to our understanding of Christianity and salvation... God has ordained to save us NOT to make us happy, BUT to bring honor and glory to Himself!

Accordingly, when it comes to the Last Judgment, we conclude that God wants His children to be judged on the same basis as the children of darkness NOT to lose any of His blood-bought children, BUT to demonstrate His transforming grace!

1 Timothy 1:15-17, "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of* all. [Don't Miss This: when Paul compared himself NOT to his fellow Christians, BUT to all of mankind, he considered himself to be the greatest sinner. In other words, he wasn't morally superior to the non-believer! He knew this. If that is the case, then what possibly could be gained at the Last Judgment by the evaluation of Paul? Look at v. 16...] And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. [And what is the result?] Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Family of God, you must see that this is what our forgiveness is all about! God receiving the glory for His transforming grace in the lives of sinners. Accordingly, I believe that as a foretaste of the Last Judgment as it relates to Paul (and so all of us), that day will be a continuation of what began when Paul was saved.

Galatians 1:22-24, "And I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only, they kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they were glorifying God because of me."

So why a Last Judgment when it comes to the blood-bought Children of God? It is NOT to determine their eternal fate, BUT to demonstrate the glory and beauty of God's grace!

You say, “But I am such a sinner and my life has been such a waste when it comes to the things of the Lord!” I would NOT debate that — most certainly when it comes to my own life. However, if we are going to glean anything from Matthew 25 and the judgment of the sheep, it is that none of us have an accurate view of ourselves.

Matthew 25:34-39, “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’”

Family of God you CAN’T look at yourself and see salvation! Our sinful deeds always cry out for our death. Rather, we must look to Christ.

Yet what does that mean? While it is true that to gauge the genuineness of our faith you have to look at the fruit of our lives. However, to correct a false faith you don’t address/focus on the fruit, but the foundation upon which it is resting! In other words, knowledge of the Last Judgment today should drive us to a greater belief/dependence upon Christ (cf. John 14:29; 20:31)!

It is for this reason I exhort you — as you think of the Last Judgment — take your eyes off your conduct and place them upon Christ. For and get this: the Christ who someday you will address as Judge, today you address as Savior! In the word of Michael Card in his song, *Jubilee*:

To be so completely guilty and given over to despair, [yet] to look into your Judge's face and see a Savior there... Jubilee! Jubilee! Jesus is that Jubilee. Debts forgiven, slaves set free, Jesus is our Jubilee! (Randy Lynn Scruggs, 1989)

References

Randy Lynn Scruggs, M. C. (1989). Jubilee [Recorded by M. Card].

End Note(s)

¹ They saw Him as the Father of Israel, the nation He chose to be His special people (cf. Isaiah 63:16; Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9). They also saw Him in an even more intimate and personal way as their spiritual Father and Savior (Psalm 89:26; 103:13).