

APPENDIX THIRTY

The Biblical Doctrine Of Judgment

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF JUDGMENT

Judgment is a term applicable to an objective point in the past (Calvary); a process in the present (Christ's mediatorial rule as priest-king) which marks the relationship of men to the cross and seals each at the close of his personal probation; and to yet another objective point in the future, when the destinies already sealed and adjudged will be objectively manifested.

In John 12:31 we have the first; in Rom. 1:16-32, Rev. 1-3; Zech. 3; Rom. 8:33-34; Rev. 7:1-4; Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 4:4 the second; and in 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rom. 2:3-10; Rev. 19:11, etc. the third.

What Adventists have called the investigative judgment belongs to the second meaning, and what they have called the executive judgment the third. The terms are not biblical — but the concepts are.

A chief problem with Adventism's view has been the long continuation of the judgment process. But understood in the light of Matt. 24:34, which teaches that Christ can return to any generation which spreads His gospel to the world, that problem is not insuperable. Had Miller's message been responded to, rather than opposed by the professing church, 1844 could have marked the end of the world, or at least the borders of that event. The many Spirit of Prophecy statements to the effect that the kingdom could have been here long ago substantiate this.

What theologians call the delay of the Parousia is a similar situation. The whole New Testament expects the end of the world in that generation. Only the failure of the church to fulfil the Great Commission prevented the fulfilment of the promise of Matt. 24:34.

As regards the present judgment taking place while Christ is our King-priest we must see its parallel to our individual sealing of destiny here below by our response to the Gospel. God sums up moment by moment a man's relationship to Him. Death for most, seals destiny, but for the living the final test of Rev. 13 will have that function. Men judge themselves by their relationship to Christ and His cross. This is not done in a moment as though an impulsive decision alone can seal destiny. The decision of faith has to be continually reaffirmed right up to the time of death or the close of probation for the living. He that endureth to the end shall be saved. Matt. 24:13; Heb. 10:26-31. Therefore justification, while an anticipated last judgment, must not be confused with the sealing of one's destiny which can only take place at the end of one's probationary tests and before the Parousia. This is just as clear as the fact that the first advent is not the same as the second, and the kingdom of grace is not identical with the kingdom of glory.

What SDAs call the investigative judgment is the sealing of one's destiny by our own choices and God's declaration of that event by the sealing of Rev. 7 and 14. It takes place before Christ comes. 1844 witnessed a stress on that truth which was particularly pertinent in that the public manifestation of judgment by Christ's second advent was about to take place. Obviously resurrection and translation are manifestations not investigations. They are results of a previous process of judgment in probationary time.

Christ sealed His destiny as our substitute in Gethsemane. The angel came to strengthen Him. Heaven affirmed His decision. But Calvary was the manifestation. So it will be at the end of the age. The saints must make their decision and thus seal their destiny before the public manifestation of that destiny at the advent. In that sense they are judged beforehand when Christ, as since the moment of faith, but now finally, imputes His righteousness

eschatologically, after their loyalty to Him has been demonstrated. Thus they do not partake of the plagues which constitute the wrath of God. Instead white robes are given them as to the earlier martyrs. Rev. 6:11. They have been delivered from that wrath by the Judgment decision of Christ. Zech. 3; Rom. 8:33-34; Rev. 22:11; 7:1-4; 14:1. Thus also all who had sealed their destiny aright before death are “accounted worthy” (Luke 20:35) to obtain the resurrection of the dead — this latter event being the public judgment or manifestation of the previous.

The concern of men now should be with the sealing of their destiny, not the public manifestation of that decision.

As men confess Christ by choosing Him He confesses them before the Father. Matt. 10:30-32. Thus in the last crisis they are “accounted worthy,” delivered from Antichrist and death because “found written in the book.” (Dan. 12:1) for Christ has promised concerning those who choose Him “I will not blot out his name from the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” Rev. 3:5.

“The hour of His Judgment has come” (or “is come” KJV) points to the manifestation of what is already decided. Compare John 12:23, and see Rev. 18:9; 19:2; 15:4; 17:1; 20:4. It is a declaration affirming that punishment already decided is about to be meted out. In John’s writings “judgment” is never a neutral term, but a negative one pointing to condemnation. It is also true that other Scriptures make it clear that such condemnation of the wicked also brings vindication to the saints. See Dan. 7; Luke 18:1-8 and consider the judgments of the Flood, the Exodus, and upon Babylon. Thus “judgment” can be good news to believers.

The Day of Atonement in Scripture is used soteriologically and eschatologically. It applies to inaugurated eschatology and to consummated just as is also the case with the Jubilee and the kingdom of God. (See Luke 4:16; Matt. 12:28.)

The Spirit of Prophecy applies the Day of Atonement and the high priest’s entrance into the most holy both to Christ’s ascension and to His final work of judgment at the end of the age. See *DA*, 757; *SDABC*, 5:1109 (Letter 230, 1907 and *YI*, June 21, 1900) *COL*, 385. Similarly E.G. White applied “within the veil” not just to the first apartment but to the second. See *EW*, 55 and compare *IT*, 566; 57,113; *SD*, 354; *MYP*, 89; *COL*, 14.

This is but an echo of Scripture which in Hebrews applies the Day of Atonement to the cross and ascension, but in Scripture applies it to the final judgment. See Heb. 6, 9, 10, 13 and Rev. 8:1-5; 11:19; 15:1-8; 20:1-3. The mark of the beast and seal of God presentations in Revelation are allusions to the seals placed on the two goats on the Day of Atonement. Even the Pseudepigrapha applies the Day of Atonement eschatologically.

In the typical Day of Atonement Israelites did not enter personally for judgment into the presence of God. All was decided in their Representative — the High Priest. Then when he left the inner sanctum and reappeared to the people **the decision already made while he was in the most holy** was now made publically manifest. Even so in the great antitypical Day of Atonement.

Because the public judgment at Christ’s advent belongs to the supernal realm all descriptions of it by inspired messengers are necessarily parabolic or metaphorical. Thus Matt. 24:31-45 with the righteous and wicked of all ages together before the great throne, and then separated after divine investigation, will never literally take place. Similarly the giving account of every idle word of Matt. 12:36 or the giving account of every deed done in the body of 2 Cor.

5:10. The case is the same with the *GC* chapter on the Investigative Judgment which, like Christ and Paul, stresses the solemnity of present Christian stewardship which is sealing our destiny now before the eyes of the great Judge who is even at this moment judging the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Heb. 4:12. The record of our stewardship is a testimony regarding our attitude to the cross of Christ. Works point to the faith which saves through its acceptance of Christ's righteousness. At the second advent, either resurrection or translation constitute the divine reward and public manifestation of the acceptance given saints (justification full and complete) at the close of their probation before the coming of Christ.

It is quite clear from New Testament passages that inspired writers speak of judgment as both a process and an event. The process is now during the priestly ministry of Christ, when men are either being covered by Christ's continual intercession or "given up" to "wrath" in the sense of Rom. 1 and John 3. The judgment event is the second coming of Christ and includes the great white throne condemnation of the wicked at the end of the millennium. **Before the latter, the wicked have already been judged and rejected.** Therefore they were not raised in the first resurrection. Similarly, before Christ's manifestation of His acceptance of the saints at the second advent there has been prior judgment and acceptance. The first resurrection was the fruit of that judgment. This process judgment has attended the whole period of Christ's heavenly ministry for he is the priest-king, but it is the message of the three angels which reminds all men of that fact, and reins them up before the present judgment bar. Because the end is imminent, Christ's judgment ministry has special pertinence in this hour of the cleansing of the sanctuary as human probation is about to close.

Dan. 8:14 as well as Rev. 14:7 points to that judgment which ushers in the eschatological kingdom. Until recent years SDAs have been virtually alone in recognizing that Dan. 8:14 is parallel with the judgment scene of Dan. 7:9-13, and therefore is not to be limited to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. Similarly until 1844 almost all believed that the final sequence of events would include a general resurrection of righteous and wicked and THEN Judgment day. Adventism, though sometimes crude in its eschatological pictures, has nevertheless been in the vanguard of truth about the great consummation.

The way we have usually proclaimed the judgment omits some precious New Testament emphases, and overdramatizes other ones. For example, we have not seen clearly enough the wonder of the gospel truth that believers need not in person stand before the judgment bar. Christ is there in our behalf as both judge and advocate. We need have no fear in judgment. The sad evidence of the testimony of many SDAs is that they are unsure how it will go with them in the Judgment — a far cry from the assurance of Paul, John, and other New Testament worthies.

In speaking of the Day of Atonement we have often forgotten to say that its original and chief application is to the sacrifice of Christ and its acceptance in the heaven of heavens above. Obviously Christ was not sacrificed in 1844. The Judgment was but the final application of the merits of Calvary. Neither have we clearly enunciated the fact that men are being judged as they listen to the gospel message. Too often our emphasis on books of record have made it sound as though the Judgment were a balancing of good deeds over bad rather than a perception of the tenor of a man's life as revelatory of his attitude to the cross.

The investigative judgment is and always has been Christ's scrutiny of His own, summing up day by day their progress in well doing as evidence of their trust in His merits. This judgment for individuals terminates with the close of their probation by death or at the last test. In 1844, Adventists perceiving themselves to be on the borders of the promised land, and

anticipating the imminent close of probation for them while living, applied the Day of Atonement imagery in a special way appropriate for those who saw the New Testament significance of being an eschatological community. Thus now, before the advent, destinies are sealed and adjudged by heaven, but at the parousia such judgment will be made publicly manifest.

Desmond Ford