



What Happens on Judgment Day?

Is it the same for saints and sinners?

Whenever we think of the Judgment Day we tend to think of sin, all sin, every sin, being exposed for condemnation. If this were so, we as Christians would find ourselves, along with everyone else, answering to the Great Judge with a plea of "Guilty, as charged!"

Worst of all, even before those words are uttered, there is the revelation to the entire universe of those shameful and embarrassing things we did or failed to do; many, until then, known only to God, ourselves and perhaps few if any others. Is this really so for the saints?

What has God revealed concerning the saints and their sin on the Judgment Day?

Well, firstly we can't deny what we read in Scripture that *"we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ"* (2 Cor, 5:10). However, the Scriptures also teach that the nature of the assessment of each person before the "bar of Heaven" will vary.

In Matthew 25, as in most of the parables on the Judgment, our Lord divides "the nations" into two groups. These He pictures as the sheep and the goats (vs. 32, 33). To the sheep He speaks with commendation and invites them to receive their eternal reward (vs. 34, 35); to the goats He speaks with condemnation and assigns them to their eternal punishment (v. 41). Here as elsewhere our Lord is silent as to our past sin as His sheep.

So too the Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 2:16 that there is to be a judging of the secrets of men, but only in terms of that division of the truly faithful from the hypocrite. Earlier in Romans 2:5-10 he said that God shall *"render to every man according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek glory and honour and immortality — eternal life ... While there will be 'tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil...'"* Once again there is no reference to sin or shame for the saint.

Yes, there's a judgment, and *"deeds whether good or evil"* are its subject, but curiously the saints' sin is never specifically mentioned; and for good reason.

In Jeremiah 31:34 God makes a promise which is one of the terms of His new covenant with the future house of Israel. He said, *"I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more."* In Christ God forgives and "remembers no more" our sin. We too are called to forgive others "from the heart" in a similar way for wronging us. Is not one of the marks of true forgiveness that of never raising the matter again?

So then, if God promises to forgive sin and "remember it no more" (and God cannot lie), and if He expects us to do the same, how can it be part of the proceedings of His court that Day?

Lastly, consider this: that most cherished of Protestant doctrines — justification by faith — supports this truth. Romans 8:1 sums up its implications by stating that *"There is therefore no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus..."* and again that *"those ... whom He called, He also justified ... Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the One who justifies, who is the one who condemns?"*

Now let's illustrate this from the workings of our own human legal system. If we break the law and are fined, but then refuse to pay, we still have a case to answer. But if the fine is paid for us, then, though we're no less guilty, there's no further case to answer; no court to front.

Similarly, if our confessed sin is truly atoned for by Christ's death, as John in his first epistle clearly tells us (1:7-9), then surely here too we have no further case to answer regarding our sin.

But someone may well ask, is there no answering for their sin at all by the saints? And again, for what shall the saints be judged on the great Day if not for sin? The answers to these questions must wait for some future consideration.

But for now, we surely can see the blessedness and glory revealed in Jude's benediction (v.24) which says: *"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy..."* Our joy will be exceedingly great because we will stand by faith clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We will have been redeemed, sanctified and finally glorified through His blood and by His Spirit.

Far from living with the prospect of facing the shame and condemnation of the ungodly, we who have believed can now know *"that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at his coming"* (1 John 2:28). To God be the Glory!

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