



QUESTION – Many Christians believe they will be judged by God on “Judgment Day”. If that is so, how was Paul able to confidently assert, ‘henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord...will award me on that Day’? Was Paul pre-judging himself?



This is the subject and the question about which we have been asked to think about this month. The quotation referred to, as you will doubtlessly know, is from 2nd Timothy 4:7.

## The Opening Statement.

Let us begin with the opening statement in the first sentence. My immediate response, upon reading it, was, “*If this is really what ‘many Christians’ believe, they are very greatly mistaken!*” and our task must be to try to dispel, once and for all, the trepidation that some Christians feel when ‘Judgment Day’ is mentioned.

## The ‘Day’

We need to ask ourselves to *which* ‘Day’ Paul was referring, because the word is used in different contexts. Was he thinking about the ‘Day’ on which God will “judge the world in righteousness’ by the One whom He has appointed?” (Acts 20:31). Or, the ‘Day’ on which he, as a servant of Christ, must *give an account of his stewardship* to his Lord? (1st Cor. 3:13)

You see, there is a difference between the two Days. One relates to sin and salvation, and therefore, concerns the unsaved world. The other ‘Day’ specifically concerns the saints, and *only* the saints, and the relationship they have with their Lord.

## Human and Divine Judgment.

I think it is a pity that much of the confusion about ‘Judgment Day’ has arisen because our thinking about ‘*The Judgment*’ is undoubtedly shaped and coloured by what we know about human judgment. But, whilst it is true that there are aspects of human and Divine judgment that are very similar, there are also significantly great differences. Without going into great detail, let me point out that the similarities are obvious. In a human Court of Law we have:

- > The Judge, before whom Evidence is offered.
- > The Accused and the Accusation – the Charge.
- > The Pronunciation of the Verdict reached on the basis of that evidence.
- > The Passing of the Sentence, if the verdict is ‘Guilty’!

Similarly, according to Rev. 21, when the Final Court convenes, on what we know as ‘The Day of Judgment’, there will also be:

- > The Judge. “The Throne and Him who sat upon it.” v.11
- > The Accused. All those who are to be judged, “the dead, small and great.” v.12-13.
- > The Production of the Evidence, “the books were opened.” v.12
- > The Passing of the Sentence.

The major and most significant difference is that, whilst in the earthly Court the evidence must be thoroughly weighed before a verdict is passed, on the ‘Day of Judgment’ that will not be necessary, because it will not be a ‘Judgment’ day in the **human sense of the**

## **word. No need for 'witnesses for the prosecution', or for the defence.**

God's purpose will *not* be to decide, on that occasion, whether those who stand before Him are innocent or guilty, righteous or unrighteous, saved or lost, because this was settled for every one of them, at the moment of death, having been determined by their response to the offer of forgiveness, made in the Gospel. Those who die without the assurance of salvation offered in the Gospel, will die in a lost state. Those who die, having accepted Christ as Saviour and have lived according to that faith, will die in a saved state and will have no need to fear when '*the books are opened*' (Rev. 20:12-13), because their names are enrolled in '*the Lamb's Book of the Living*'.

Having already been judged and acquitted in the person of the Lord Jesus, they will not again stand trial for their life.

## **No 'Double Jeopardy'**

It is written in the law of our country that a person, having been once been acquitted, may not be tried again for the same offence. Let me therefore ask you to think about this. Is it not true that, because we are followers of the Lord Jesus, our sins were carried "**in His own body on the cross?**" (1st Pet. 2:24) Did He not receive, in Himself, the penalty for sin that we deserved to receive? (Rom.5:25)

And is it not also true that when God looks at us, He sees us *already clothed with our Saviour's righteousness?* (Phil.3:9) This is a truth to which we should hold fast. **God will not require atonement for our sins, first at the hand of Jesus, and then again from us.** The redemption price has already been paid! The debt has been cancelled. Freedom has already been purchased. In the Lord Jesus we have *already* been tried and justified. And there can be no double jeopardy! **God will not require the price for our sin twice; first at our Saviour's hand and then again at ours.**

## **The Abiding Efficacy of the Sacrifice.**

Perhaps you are thinking that when we obeyed the Gospel, the blood of Christ dealt only with the guilt of our past. But that is not so. The efficacy of His blood is both retrospective and prospective. It covers the past, the present and the future, because He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and His blood effectively deals with the sins of all those who, in every age, past, present and in the future, live by faith.

## **Pardon for the Believer.**

We recognize, of course, that none of us is perfect and we all sin, even though we are Christians. For this reason, the scriptures contain what we may call '*the second law of pardon*', which God has provided as the way of dealing with the daily sins of His children. **"If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1st John 1; 9) Belief of the Gospel and obedience is the law of pardon for the sinner. Confession of daily sin is law of pardon for the saint. This means that the faithful Christian is able to remain in a constant state of grace and does not need to fear the future.

## **Why, then, 'The Day of Judgment'?**

It is here that we see the uniqueness of God's Day of Judgment. I describe it as 'unique' because there has never been, nor will there ever be again, an event like it. It will be convened, not to decide the eternal destinies of those who appear before Him on that day, because, as I have already stated, that decision is made during earthly life.

There is a well-known saying which is very appropriate in dealing with our subject. It states, "*Justice must not only be done; it must be seen to be done.*" When '*the books*' are

opened before God, it will not be because God needs to be reminded what men have done in their lives, or because He needs to weigh up the evidence, for or against them. It will be in order that every individual may know and understand clearly, why God's verdict is just and the sentence deserved.

None who are banished eternally from God's Presence will be left in any doubt as to the reason. None will be able to say, 'I don't deserve this!' Or, 'I don't understand why I am being treated in this way!' Truly, justice will be *seen* done.

## **A Final Thought to Consider.**

We should always bear in mind, whenever we read John's description of the awesomeness of the Judgment scene or the glories of Heaven, that these portrayals occur in the 'Revelation', the book that contains more symbolic and figurative language than any other book in the Bible.

Even although he is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when he describes his visions, he has to struggle with the limitation of human language. He must attempt to represent the eternal and the heavenly in human language, as best he can. Consequently, he is led to use words that are the most beautiful, most glorious, most awe-inspiring and most striking, available to him.

Do we really think that heaven is a 'place' - a literal four-square 'city', which is 1,500 miles long and 1,500 miles wide, built upon 'foundations' that are decorated with precious stones, and having streets made of gold, and surrounded by a 'great and high wall' that is made of Jasper on all sides, in each of which are set 12 gates of pearls, etc.? Surely we can understand that when John attempts to 'describe the indescribable' he is compelled to use such vivid expressions. But, in reality, the beauties of Heaven and the glories of our life in eternity will be far more wonderful and joyous than human language can depict.

So, also, with the world's final Day of reckoning held in the presence of the Great Judge. John's description of the Judgment scene is intended to make mankind realize that God's righteousness *will* be demonstrated and His justice *will* inevitably and eternally deal with sin. We need not think that there will be a physical throne, or written records, as we know them. The description of the scene must be understood as symbolic and figurative.

## **Accounting for Service.**

Although, as faithful Christians our eternal salvation is assured, when Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he revealed that we must finally give an account of our stewardship. Read 1st Corinthians ch.3, and see that v.13 tells us that our work will be revealed, or tested ('*manifested*' in KJV). But this 'judgment' has to do with 'rewards', not with salvation, as verse 15 tells us.

### **“Was Paul judging himself?”**

So our question asks. But, no! Paul was not 'pre-judging' himself. The quotation in the question comes from 2nd Tim.4:7, but his own judgment of himself is revealed earlier, in 1st Tim.1:15. In his second letter he is expressing the confidence in his salvation, which every Christian is able to express. Do not fail to read the last three verses in 1st Cor. chapter 3. It may appear to be a solemn and sobering chapter, but it ends on a glorious note of assurance!

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