

Leadership Foundation, Inc.

Vol. 16, No. 1

May, 2016

Dear Co-Laborer,

This is the beginning of a four-part series on:

God Is Impartial in Judgment **Part One**

Heaven is where everyone desires to go. The Bible is quite clear that hell is where everyone deserves to go. God, because of His infinite grace, provides a way for the sinner to go to heaven through the propitious death of Jesus Christ. This is the good news of the gospel.

There was a day in the history of the church when the majority of those who called themselves Christians thought that they had to do something to qualify or contribute to God's gracious gift of salvation. This included things like baptism, good works and church attendance. My purpose here is not to show the fallacy of such thinking, but rather call attention to a rather dramatic shift in the church's perception of how people relate to God.

Today, the preponderance of Christianity, at least in the United States, now believes that people do not need to earn God's grace; it is freely given to all who ask for His forgiveness. In their thinking, this means that the believer is free. If people sin, all they need to do is ask for God's forgiveness, and it is as though they never sinned. As a friend once said to me, it is easier to ask forgiveness than it is to seek permission. A verse frequently quoted in favor of this view is Psalm 103:12: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

As the church in our culture has camped on the grace of God, fear and judgment are no longer vogue. Any suggestion that there are eternal consequences for temporal behavior is rejected. A loving God freely forgives and immediately forgets. This means that people end up serving God on their terms – doing whatever they want and then being forgiven. Our objective is to analyze this thinking in light of Scripture.

The Bible calls upon the believer to distinguish between Christ's death satisfying the justice of God for sin and God's justice ensuring that all reap what they sow. The latter is not punishment, but rather living out eternity on the basis of the investment made in this life. Punishment has justice as its goal; chastisement has correction as its goal; judgment for the believer has as its goal the reaping of what is sown. We accrue eternal gain or loss, not by what we are able to contribute to what God is doing, but by obeying God.

Men do not believe this because they do not want it to be so. They want forgiveness to eliminate accountability. I have frequently heard arguments that this position is not Reformed; it is contrary to the historical understanding of conservative, evangelical Christianity. Calling attention to the fact that this is not so, I quote John Calvin from his commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:10, which says, "For we must all appear before the bema seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad":

...as evil deeds are punished by God, so also good deeds are rewarded, but for a different reason; for evil deeds are requited with the punishment that they deserve, but God in rewarding good deeds does not look to merit or worthiness. For no work is so full and complete in all its parts as to be deservedly well-pleasing to him, and farther, there is no one whose works are in themselves well-pleasing to God, unless he render satisfaction to the whole law. Now no one is found to be thus perfect. Hence the only resource is in his accepting us through unmerited goodness, and justifying us, by not imputing to us our sins. After he has received us into favor, he receives our works also by a gracious acceptance. It is on this that the reward hinges. There is, therefore, no inconsistency in saying, that he rewards good works, provided we understand that mankind, nevertheless, obtain eternal life gratuitously.

In our next issue we will look at some of the New Testament passages dealing with reaping what we sow.

Yours for a life of obedience,
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