

REVELATION 20:11-15

WILL A GOOD GOD REALLY SEND BAD PEOPLE TO HELL?

“I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”¹

It has been said, appropriately I believe, that no one should ever preach about hell without tears in his eyes. The prospect of eternal separation from all that is good and holy should move each redeemed individual with compassion. Despite a tendency to treat divine judgement with casual disdain, it remains that people we know—loved ones, family members, dear friends, colleagues with whom we have shared many laughs and pleasant hours—will spend eternity separated from God. That in itself is a tragic thought; however, the Bible is very clear in warning that everlasting torment is the lot of all who are cast out from the presence of Holy God. These warnings are issued for no other reason than God’s goodness, even toward rebel sinners.

God is good. Logic informs us that if God is not good He cannot be God. Though we might envision a powerful, even an awesome demigod, we cannot conceive of such a creature as good. However, we cannot conceive of the True and Living God as being anything less than good. Nevertheless, despite His goodness—indeed, because of His goodness—God clearly warns that many, perhaps even most, of mankind will be cast away eternally from His presence.

How else are we to understand a statement such as when the Master warned disciples: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” [**MATTHEW 7:13, 14**].

And what of Jesus’ stern warning to avoid sinning against the Living God? “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” [**MARK 9:43-48**].

On another occasion the Lord is recorded as warning those who listened to His words, “Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” [**LUKE 12:4, 5**]!

One cannot hear such warnings as these spoken by the Son of God without concluding that He spoke of a terrifying prospect for any who offend Holy God. Moreover, it is evident that He gave these warnings, not to gloat over the sentence imposed on the wicked, but in compassion to warn any against attempting to defy the will of the True and Living God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Though undoubtedly some who hear these words are offended that such warnings are even addressed from the pulpit, fidelity to the Master compels the servant of Christ to echo His words. It is false compassion—cruelty of the most despicable sort—to remain silent in the face of the danger that lost people face. Compassion compels the child of God to speak a warning, for there will be some who heed what the Master says.

Whenever an individual reacts with choler at hearing divine warnings such as those just read, it should be evident that they hope to avoid the consequences of their own wicked choices. If individuals attempt to redefine the will of God according to their own desires, they are really attempting to redefine “good” according to an artificial criterion—a standard of their own making which must ultimately fail. Of course, all such efforts are doomed to abject failure. Just as people cannot make themselves live eternally, so they cannot create their own standard for defining what is good while ignoring that which God has established.

I bring the message born out of the compassion of Christ that impels me to speak the truth. I have not received appointment to make you feel good, or to soothe your conscience while you continue in rebellion. I have been charged to speak the truth in love; and I know that some who listen even now are in danger of the fire of hell. I know that each of us listening this day have family members who are lost. Tragically, many of us, and perhaps most of us, have grown complacent, imagining that God will not do what He is pledged to do in holding all mankind—including our loved ones—to account for their actions and their choices.

My sincere prayer is that the message will stir up our pure souls to speak the truth in love—to plead with lost family members, to pray fervently for lost colleagues, and to witness boldly to lost neighbours, warning them to flee from the coming wrath. My prayer in delivering this message is that some who hear the warning will turn to the Saviour to receive the life which He offers to all who come to Him. May God speak to each heart to the praise of His glory as we seek the answer to the question, “Will a Good God really send bad people to hell?” Amen.

WHO WILL JUDGE? “I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.” By nature we resist the idea that we must give an accounting of our actions. Nevertheless, woven throughout the warp and woof of the Word is the concept of personal accountability. Perhaps you will recall the admonition penned for our benefit by the Wise Man. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come ... and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” [**ECCLESIASTES 12:1, 7**].

“We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” [**2 CORINTHIANS 5:10**]. The redeemed do not stand before the Master to determine whether they shall be saved, but to reveal the character they have exhibited as those who believe in the Son of God. The reminder is nothing less than an iteration of a similar enjoinder to consider how we live when Paul wrote, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God” [**ROMANS 14:10**].

This still leaves open the question of who is appointed to judge mankind. In order to address this matter, I point you to Peter’s words spoken in the house of Cornelius. As Peter drew his presentation to a conclusion, he said, [God] “commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that [Jesus Christ] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead” [**ACTS 10:42**]. Peter and those associated with him were convinced that the Father had appointed Jesus Christ to be “Judge of the living and the dead. Where did he learn this?

On one occasion when Jesus was challenged to identify who gave Him authority to heal a lame man on the Sabbath, He responded to the icily precise religious arbitrators of that day, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” [JOHN 5:19-29].

Did you hear what the Master claimed? “The Father ... has given all judgement to the Son.” Jesus also asserted that the Father “has given [the Son] authority to execute judgement, because He is the Son of Man.” Then, to nail down any thought that they might possibly have misunderstood what He was saying, the Master clarified His intent when He said, “An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.” Peter, together with all the disciples heard this exchange, and they witnessed the silence of the religious leaders who appeared nonplused and humbled in the presence of the Son of God.

I point to one other sombre occasion when Jesus spoke of His role in judging mankind. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was 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 welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” [MATTHEW 25:31-46].

You no doubt recall that this teaching was spoken at the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse. The disciples had been revelling in the beauty of Herod's Temple when the Master shocked them by stating that not a stone would be left atop another. They wondered at how this could happen as the stones were so massive. He spoke of the destruction of that temple before leaping from prophetic mountaintop to prophetic mountaintop. He steadily moved the disciples toward an understanding of the way in which the present age will end. What is important for us to understand at this time is that it is Jesus—"the Son of Man"—who will be seated on His throne and before whom all nations shall be gathered to give an account of how they acted toward those who turn to Him in faith during those dreadful days of the Great Tribulation.

The judgement rendered shall be truthful and just. There shall be neither bias nor any possibility that the Judge may be swayed by pleas for a second chance. His judgement will allow for neither judicial terpsichore, nor legalistic slight-of-hand, nor appeal as the Judge renders His verdict. Those who are sentenced will receive due recompense for the choices they have made. They shall not be condemned through questionable legal interpretation, rather, they will be held accountable for the choices they have made. They shall not be judged for the potential of what they are capable of doing, they shall only be held to account for the choices they have made.

There are a few points that beg clarification, if for no other reason than precision. Even among the professed people of God there exists considerable fuzzy thinking about the Judgement. You have no doubt heard some individuals, perhaps even professing Christians, state some variant of the supposition that when they are judged, if their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds, they will be acceptable to God. If you hold to such a notion, you gravely err. Your good deeds can never suffice to assuage the righteous anger of Holy God. We are cautioned in the Word of God:

“We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

[ISAIAH 64:6]

There seem always to be some who react angrily at the thought that God demands perfection, and they sniff, “Well, if I am not enough for God, then that is just too bad!” The only thing that such a reaction proves is the righteousness of God who condemns us because we attempt to create a righteousness of our own, which is no righteousness at all.

There is not one general judgement, as many suppose; there are at least four judgements. One judgement is already past—*the judgement of sin at Calvary*. Paul writes of that judgement, “In [Christ] all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. In him you also were circumcised—not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions. He has destroyed what was against us, a certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us. He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross” [COLOSSIANS 2:8-15 NET BIBLE].

There is pending *a judgement of believers*, when we who believe shall stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ. There, we who call on the Name of the Lord shall be exposed as open books for all the redeemed to see the perfection of Christ's work in us. The self-serving deeds that exalted our own persons shall be permanently eliminated so that only the glory of those acts and words which honoured the Lord God will remain throughout eternity. This Judgement of believers is described in some detail during Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Christians.

"No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" [1 CORINTHIANS 3:11-15].

There is *the Judgement that concludes the Great Tribulation*. At that time, the peoples of the nations shall be gathered before the Son of God at His return. At that time, all the living peoples of the earth will give an account before Him of how they treated those who turned to Him in faith during those dark days that are coming on the earth. This judgement is the one of which the Master spoke when He taught the disciples on the Mount of Olives; earlier, we read this portion of His teaching from Matthew's Gospel [see MATTHEW 25:31-46].

There is finally this dreadful *Judgement before the Great White Throne*, which is the focus of our study today. Before that awful throne, all who have refused to receive the Son of God as Master over life must receive eternal sentence for their choice. Before the Son of God, all the lost of all the ages shall be turned away from the grace and mercy of God which they have spurned in order to pursue their own desires. This is that final judgement when Christ shall cast away even those who were religious, though they were never born from above. He speaks of that awful sentence when He says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" [MATTHEW 7:21-23].

The common feature of each of the judgements named is the centrality of Jesus the Son of God. He judged sin at Calvary, giving His life as a sacrifice because of our helpless condition. He shall judge all the raptured saints of God as they stand before the Bema. He is appointed to judge those who live on the earth at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation when He returns to reign for a thousand years. And He shall judge all the wicked at the conclusion of His Millennial reign. Never forget, "There is only one lawgiver and judge, He who is able to save and destroy" [JAMES 4:12]. And that Judge is Jesus, the Son of God, who is the Christ.

WHO WILL BE JUDGED? "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne." Who will be compelled to face this awful judgement? The judgement of sin at Calvary provides atonement for all who are willing to accept the divine sacrifice. However, those who reject that perfect sacrifice, or those who fail to appropriate it through neglect or through casual dismissal, must bear their own sin. The judgement before the Bema of Christ is only for Christians who are set free from condemnation and who are redeemed through the blood of Christ Jesus the Lord. The judgement before the Great White Throne, however, embraces all who are lost. Any who have never received Christ as Master over life must stand before Him to be judged; and how awful is the prospect of that judgement, for it amounts to an eternal sentence for their neglect.

John informs us that before the Great White Throne stand “the dead.” Their stature on earth is of no consequence. Whether they were wealthy or impoverished is meaningless. Whether people held them in awe, or whether they were faceless and voiceless to the most of humanity is unimportant. What matters is whether they were alive or dead in the sight of God.

You should not fall into the trap of thinking that this is a judgement of those who have physically died; death is unnatural, and we are prone to think of death as a physical phenomenon. However, because man is a tripartite being, we must think biblically about death. Man is created in the image of God [see **GENESIS 1:27**]. God is a Triunity—three Persons in One. Just so, in a measure man reflects the glory of the True and Living God. Man possesses a body, but he is a living soul and he has a spirit that was given to know God and to commune with God. What we mean by the term “death” is that the soul and spirit are separated from the body. When our loved one dies, we honour the body as a tent that once housed the life, but we know that the body is not the individual. However, the Bible presents us with the knowledge that there is also spiritual death, which speaks of the spirit being separated from God who gives life.

Because we are tripartite beings, we are taught that salvation is full and complete, ensuring that our “whole spirit and soul and body [are] kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” [**1 THESSALONIANS 5:23**]. When we embrace Jesus the Master as ruler over our life, we receive a new spirit, because the old spirit is dead; our soul is saved and we have the promise of a new body which will be like His glorified body. Spiritual death, then, is the condition of all mankind because the spirit is dead to God. Listen to the Word of God on this matter.

To believers in the Risen Son of God the Apostle to the Gentiles has written, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [**EPHESIANS 2:1-10**].

Undoubtedly there are some who are angered at the words I now speak. They feel very much alive and they are insulted because they think I am judging them. They say to themselves, “I’m just as good as anybody.” The issue is not how you feel about yourself; the issue is whether you are alive to God. It is not a matter of whether you know about God, but whether you know God—or more importantly whether you are known by God [see **1 CORINTHIANS 8:3; GALATIANS 4:9**]!

Thus, when John speaks of the dead standing before the Great White Throne, he is speaking of those who were never born from above and into the Family of God. He sees those who were dead to God, those who stood already condemned. Though you may resist the evidence of the Word, God is exceptionally clear that outside of Christ the world lies condemned. In the Word of God, we read, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life,” and we are comforted. However, if we accept this statement as true, we must likewise accept the words that follow. Those dark words warn us, “Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him” [**JOHN 3:36**].

We have all heard the glorious promise of **JOHN 3:16**, but we need to hear the full passage. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” [**JOHN 3:16-21**].

Our Lord warns us, “Whoever does not believe will be condemned” [**MARK 16:16b**]. The Word of God also warns us that, “For those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury” [**ROMANS 2:8**].

It is especially appropriate to warn people who have adopted the modern moral code that, “Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” [**EPHESIANS 5:3-6**]. Professing Christians need to be aware of the danger of attempting to live according to the standard of this dying world, or of the danger of minimising wickedness within the assembly, or of accepting a “little bit of sin” in their children—there are consequences to our choices.

Rather than drifting with the tide, Christians who will honour the Master must accept the admonition of the Apostle Paul, who encourages us, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them” [**COLOSSIANS 3:5-7**].

I am neither cruel nor deliberately provocative when I warn that all who are outside of Christ shall be judged. In truth, I am a friend seeking to prevent your judgement when I warn that even now the wrath of God rests on you if you are lost. I seek your welfare when I say that God must judge sin and all who are sinful. Either your sin has already been judged at Calvary, or you must stand accountable for your sinful nature before the Great White Throne. Do not imagine that you can somehow escape this judgement; do not imagine that the death of the body somehow wipes the slate clean and that you shall have no further concern about facing the Living God. God has warned that “The sea gave up the dead who were in it” and that “Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them,” and that “they were judged, each one of them.”

I know that there are some listening who will attempt to argue that they just want to enjoy themselves. They contend that they work hard and they need recreation, or they argue that they will give God time when it is convenient. Such people need to take to heart the admonition, “The one who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives” [**1 TIMOTHY 5:6 NET BIBLE**].

Dear friend, as you listen to this message I urge you to heed the warning of the Word, “The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” [**1 PETER 4:3-5**].

WHAT IS THE JUDGEMENT? “I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

If they must be judged, people want to be judged by their own standard; but, of course, that cannot be. We cannot say, “I am righteous in my own eyes, so whatever I do is correct.” We know we are sinners by birth and by choice. We witness a critical truth in the Psalms:

“I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

[PSALM 51:5]

This was the same lesson that Solomon delivers when he says, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” [ECCLESIASTES 7:20]. It was this knowledge that compelled Job to ask,

“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?
There is not one.”

[JOB 14:4]

No one should imagine that this is a concept that is restricted to the Old Covenant, for it permeates the fabric of the New Testament as well. To be certain, Paul cites the Old Testament in support of the fact that all have sinned.

“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.’
‘Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.’
‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’
“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they have not known.’
“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

[ROMANS 3:10-18]

It is a tragic fact that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23].

Ask yourself this question, “How many sins does it take to make you a sinner?” The answer is obviously “one.” Now, ask yourself this question, “How many sins have I committed?” If by sin we mean offence against Holy God, who of us can count the multiplied transgressions? It is only the arrogant who foolishly assert, “I have never sinned!” Should anyone imagine that they are without sin, they need to think logically. If they are without sin, they are perfect. And if perfect, it means they shall never die. However, we are convinced that “The wages of sin is death” [ROMANS 6:23]. My mortality—the fact that I shall die—testifies to my sinful condition. It is on this basis that the Apostle testifies, “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” [ROMANS 5:12].

God keeps a record of life, and should one imagine that they can present their deeds before God, that one must realise that the divine standard is the perfect life of God’s own Son. On this basis all will be judged in that awful day before the Great White Throne on which is seated the Son of God. The lost will be judged by their deeds. John saw that “The dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done” [REVELATION 20:12b]. To ensure that no one should miss the import of this truth, John again states, “They were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done” [REVELATION 20:13b].

Yet, no Christian is judged for what he or she has done. Because we look to Christ Jesus who gave His life as atonement for sin, we are forever freed from condemnation. The Bible comforts all who believe when it states, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” [ROMANS 8:1]. This is but an iteration of Jesus’ own statement given to all who believe: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24].

Believers find the greatest joy and deepest comfort in the words of the Hebrew Letter. There we are told, “When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” [HEBREWS 9:11-14].

The comfort of that passage is made all the more precious when the author reminds us, “Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him” [HEBREWS 9:27, 28].

No one should imagine that the forgiveness of sin is a result of performing religious rituals. No priest can forgive sin. No mere mortal can forgive sin; no mortal can assuage the wrath of God. The Bible declares, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” [1 TIMOTHY 2:5, 6]. No religious rite can set aside the sin which contaminates our lives. This is the reason that we read, “Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” [HEBREWS 10:11-14].

Either we have already been judged and we are now safe in Jesus Christ, or we must bear our own sin before the Great White Throne where the Son of God shall judge the wicked. What is truly frightful about that prospect is that so many now imagine themselves to be good people. They have never purposely hurt another. They are not thieves, nor murderers, nor blasphemers. However, they have never accepted the gift of life that is offered in Christ the Lord.

The lost have spurned the Son of God and profaned the blood of the covenant. Therefore, the unanswerable question is posed, "If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay'" [HEBREWS 10:26-20a].

Tragically, many of our loved ones are now in peril. They are lost, and we console ourselves that we love them too much to warn them of their danger. We have children that are under sentence of eternal death. We somehow imagine that we can build a relationship on a lie that refuses to speak to them of the judgement of Christ. Yet, they shall be cast away from His glorious presence and into eternal darkness. When that happens, and it shall happen, and they fix you with their anguished gaze asking, "Why didn't you warn us?" What will you say?

Friends and colleagues, neighbours and relatives, all alike are eternally condemned if they do not know the Lord. And we are responsible to warn them, showing them the compassion of the Saviour by speaking to them of His mercy and of His grace. If we fail to act responsibly with the knowledge of the life of Christ the Lord, who will plead with them?

Judged by their deeds, held accountable by the words of their own mouth, they face certain banishment from grace and from goodness, for the Word of God now warns us, "Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" [REVELATION 20:14, 15]. Is it not time that we who name the Name of Christ should warn the lost?

If as I have spoken the Spirit of God has given you grace to realise your peril, you need to know that God is gracious and that He now offers life to all who will receive the grace extended. The Word of God teaches us, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

"Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain." The passage concludes with this encouragement to believe when the Word says, "Behold, now is the favourable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-6:3]. Turn to Christ; receive His grace; believe the message of life. I have faithfully fulfilled the divine assignment by declaring to you Christ's mercy and warning you of His terrible judgement. On that awful day when the dead stand before Him, I shall lift these hands and declare that I am free of the blood of those who despite hearing would not believe. My sincere prayer is that my hands shall not testify against you. My prayer is that you will believe, and that you will even now turn in faith to Christ the Lord to receive the life He offers to all. Amen.