

Redeemer OPC, Hawaii

Adult Sunday School

The Apostles' Creed (9)

“Seventh Article - Christ's Judgment of All”

- I. Introduction. Review: We have considered the sixth article of the Apostles' Creed dealing with Christ's ascension into heaven and session at God's right hand. We found that Christ ascended into heaven as the risen God/Man, Mediator, and Savior of His people. Upon His arrival there, He also ascended His throne as King of kings and Lord of lords. We also saw that Christ's sitting at the right hand of God means more than that He finished His saving work. It also means that He is the King and Judge whose court is “in session.” So, His session will go on until He returns in glory, and He rules, administers God's plan by providence, intercedes for His people, and fulfills the redemptive purpose of God. Now we move on to the seventh article of the Apostles' Creed, and that which comes when Christ's session comes to its consummation: “from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.” There are really two parts to this article, as there were with the last.
- II. The Return of Christ. We read in Acts 1 that the angels told the apostles “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven.” We might read it superficially and assume that it will be an event visible in one location, because His ascension seemed to be, and therefore not so “big a deal.” But that would conflict with other passages of Scripture. What Acts 1:11 points out is that Christ Jesus will return in glory as He ascended in glory. It will not be a hidden or secretive event. It will be a visible return in which the division between earth and heaven will be opened and the glory of heaven will shine out because the great glory of God will shine out. These are the general aspects of Christ's return that we can glean from that one simple text. But we need to compare what the Bible says elsewhere to understand the

magnitude of the event that Acts 1 isn't really addressing. Mt. 24:27, for example, says that His return will be like the lightning flashing from east to west. So, it will be an unexpected and instantaneously beginning event. But in context, it also makes the point that it will not be hidden or secret, nor will it allow for Christ to be mistaken; all those who, after His ascension and up to that point, have claimed to be Christ will be proven false. It is a very illustrative picture that Jesus draws there that implies His return will be highly visible, like lightning, *everywhere* on earth, from east to west. We are told in Rev. 1:7 that every eye will see Him. All indications of Scripture are that Christ's return will be a cataclysmic event in which the "fabric" dividing heaven and earth will be ripped apart and the glory of God will shine through and attend Christ as He comes to judge the living and the dead. It will bring unimaginably great joy, relief, and satisfaction to His people who are living at the time. On the other hand, it will bring unimaginably intense horror, terror, and despair to the reprobate who are living at the time—so much so that they will try to hide from Him and His judgment by calling upon the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them from "the wrath of the Lamb." This teaches us that we can say with Paul, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus!" and not only desire it greatly, but to long for the presence of our Lord and to be in the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells, so that we can be done with all of the ills, ailments, problems, etc., etc., etc., of a sin-cursed world and ALL of the effects of sin upon ourselves. It also teaches us to be constantly ready for His return, but constantly faithful in serving Him where we are; we must live as though He will return today, AND as if He will not return for 10,000 years. It teaches us to live in the knowledge that we are coram Deo, before the face of God, and we do not want to shrink from Him in shame at His coming. It teaches us to hold onto the things of this world loosely, and use them only as tools and instruments for His glory, not as goals in and of themselves, for man knows not his time: we do not know when He will return, but we do not know when He will take us, by our

own death, to be with Himself until that day. But, His return is not the end in and of itself; rather, it is to accomplish...

III. The Judgment.

A. A Distinction in the Term. We can understand the term “judgment” in two different ways when it comes to what takes place at the end when Christ returns. In one sense, judgment is determining and proclaiming the disposition of those who are being judged. I.e., the Judge, in this case Christ, determines and declares what will happen to those who are being judged, what their final end will be. In the other sense, it is the penalty that those who are judged guilty receive. We call it “the judgment.” The Bible either uses the term or pictures the event in both ways. For example, the parable of the sheep and goats in Mt. 25 pictures the “courtroom” scene in which Jesus Christ will declare the disposition of all people based on who belongs to Him by virtue of His saving them, and those who do not belong to Him. He passes down the verdict, either guilty or counted innocent on the ground of His imputed righteousness. So the disposition that He declares is either hell and eternal punishment for the guilty and unsaved, or heaven and eternal glory for the saved and guilty who are counted, or judged, innocent. Most of the time, modern evangelical Christians and even Reformed Christians, when we use the term “judgment,” are thinking of the punishment that the unsaved will suffer as a result of the verdict that the Judge passes upon them. We seldom think of the passing down of the verdict. And yet, the seventh article of the Apostles’ Creed refers to the “courtroom” scene—not that the punishment isn’t assumed because of the inseparable connection. But the direct reference is to the Judge’s pronouncement of the verdict upon the sheep and the goats. And that is the emphasis that we find in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Especially in light of that scene, the Judge, and the verdict for

each group, we must consider...

- B. **The Qualifications of the Judge.** We often simply attribute the judgment (in general, without making the distinction above) to God. But clearly, the NT, in both parable and plain statement, shows that Jesus Christ will judge all people on the last day (Jn. 5:22 - “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.”). This makes perfect sense. Jesus Christ is God, so it is still God doing the judging. But as the Savior who redeemed the elect, He is especially qualified to know those who are His; and He has earned the honor, by suffering, dying, and rising again for their justification, as well as carrying out His mediatorial task in His ascension and session, to judge between those who are His by faith and have His righteousness imputed to them, and those who are not His and have rejected Him. The Father has given judgment over into His hands in order to honor Him, as Jn. 5:23. For these reasons, He is uniquely qualified to be the Judge of all people, and both to pronounce the final verdict of acquittal or guilt and commit each group to its final end, heavenly glory or dishonor and punishment in hell. Now, let’s consider...
- C. **The Basis of the Judgment.** We’re told in Scripture in more than one place that we’ll be judged according to our deeds. Jn. 5:28-29 says, “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” That makes it sound like we’re all headed for hell because we have all done evil deeds. Scripture says elsewhere, “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Eccl. 7:20); and there are many other similar statements. Is Jesus contradicting other parts of the Word of God? No. The final judgment is based on people’s deeds insofar as those deeds reflect the heart from which they issue.

Evil, fallen, unregenerate hearts can produce only evil deeds. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit. So a record that shows that one has only ever done evil because “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” will be judged guilty and receive the eternal wrath of God in hell that is the penalty for evil that is both rebellion against and evil committed against the eternally holy and just God. That’s the easy one to understand. But then there is the whole matter of the good deeds. But notice that Jesus did not say “Perfect deeds”; nor did He say “only ever good deeds.” So, He didn’t mean perfection or lifelong sinlessness. We must interpret this in keeping with what the rest of Scripture teaches. He referred to the fact that a saved heart, a heart which the Spirit of God has regenerated and in which He has instilled faith in Christ is a heart that loves Christ, loves God’s law, and seeks to think, speak, and act in conformity with His law. Righteous deeds will therefore be seen in that life—deeds that, while they are not perfect and are fraught with many infirmities, are still done with the righteous motive of glorifying God, and the effort to render righteous obedience to God. The purpose of bringing these sincere yet imperfect deeds of obedience forward in reference to the final judgment is so that they serve as evidence for Christ to put forward in His own “court,” so to speak. They serve as evidence that one has saving, justifying faith in Jesus Christ, and that through that faith, that person was justified by God during his lifetime. That person, then, on account of being a justified person in whose life good works are evidence of faith, will be openly acknowledged by Christ as one of His own in the day of judgment—one to whom Christ’s own perfection and lifelong sinlessness had been imputed through faith, one who had been declared righteous in the sight of God on the ground of Christ’s righteousness. And that person will therefore also be openly acquitted by Christ. This means that Christ will declare to everyone present that this

person is a justified person because his faith in Christ is true, God-given, saving faith, and that since the moment of his justification through faith alone, he has been pardoned of all sins and acquitted of all guilt. On the day of judgment, that which only the justified person can know for certain in his own heart will be known by all because of Christ's open declaration of it—that is what we mean by “*openly* acknowledged and acquitted.” But there is another aspect to the judgment that Christians will face. This is the “judgment” of each Christian's faithfulness during his life. We want to be careful here to understand that this is NOT a judgment that will affect the Christian's salvation. From the moment he is given faith in Jesus Christ and is justified, onward throughout all eternity, his salvation is perfectly secure—not because of what he does, but because of what Christ has done! But, Christ will evaluate the various aspects of our Christian life: our stewardship of the gospel, our use of gifts, talents, abilities, and resources for the sake of advancing His kingdom, our fulfillment of our various callings in service to Him and others, the quality and extent of our efforts to obey Christ; i.e., how closely and faithfully did we follow Christ? This is for the purpose of giving out rewards of grace to each. While it may seem almost contradictory to use “reward” and “grace” together, it isn't; it points to the fact that God has promised rewards to those who serve Him well, but they are still gifts of grace because we owe God perfect service and obedience without His having promised anything in return. But with that said, there will be this judgment in which we will each see some works burned up because we built with wood, hay, and straw, and some works rewarded because we built on the foundation of Christ Jesus with gold, silver, and precious stones (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15). Our Lord is very gracious and kind to give us these kinds of incentives to serve Him whom we love all the more and better. But now we look at...

D. The Nature of the Judgment. We have already seen something of the verdict. It will be pronounced either in the form of open acknowledgment and acquittal, and the award of eternal glory for the believers and righteous, or in the form of open rejection and declaration of guilt, and the sentence of condemnation for the unbelievers and wicked. As for those who claimed to be Christian in their lifetimes, but can show no evidence of their faith by good deeds as God defines good deeds (and that includes the heart motive and goal), it is solemn, sobering, and causes us even to tremble that Jesus Christ the Judge will say to them on that day, “Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness; *I never knew you.*” With that judgment of rejection, they will take their place among the unbelieving, wicked, guilty, and condemned where they belong, all the more because of their deception that amounts to blasphemy of Christ. The actual penalty that will be carried out on the condemned is the same that the souls of dead unbelievers will have been suffering during the intermediate time; namely, the wrath of God in the pouring out of unimaginably painful and intense torments upon them. But whereas they had been spiritual torments on the soul alone, they will be joined with physical torments on the corrupt body to which their corrupt souls will be rejoined when they are raised from the grave on the last day. The physical and spiritual torments are described by Jesus when He says that the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. The worm of a corrupt and defiled conscience will eat away at them, and the fire of physical pain will burn them. It will be so intense that “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” “And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever” (Rev. 14:11a). It will never stop; it will never decrease; it will only intensify. The condemned person will not have any contact with anyone else in hell, so don’t think you’ll have a great time there with your buddies doing all the evil you like. It is a place of desolation and outer

darkness. The condemned sinner will only be aware of the presence and wrath of a just and angry God, the torments, and all of their terrible effects upon himself. If you are still unsaved, just *hearing* this ought to make you want to flee to Christ. But remember this: salvation is not only salvation from hell, so don't think that you can have fire insurance against hell and go on in your sin. Salvation is also salvation from sin's guilt, and from sin's power. So, you must flee to Christ by repenting of sin and believing in Him as your Savior, Redeemer, Mediator, and Friend. What about the other side of the judgment, the award to the believing and righteous? Eternal life in the glory of heaven, with body and soul glorified and rejoined. It will be life in its greatest abundance, satisfaction, fulfillment in being in the immediate and blessed presence of God our Savior. It will hold for us who trust in Christ by God's grace unimaginable happiness, joys, comforts, holy delights, meaningful employments in worship, the word, service, and freedom from pain, tears, grief, death—freedom from all of the effects of sin—you won't even get tired there—freedom from all of the presence of sin; it will be gone. You will be in the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness, and only righteousness, dwells—and you will count it wonderful because you love righteousness. Your fellowship with God's people will be everlasting, and ever-refreshing. But now we are led to...

- E. The Extent of the Judgment. Christ's judgment will extend to "the living and the dead." This means all people who have ever lived, including those who are alive at His coming. There will be no one who can avoid it. Christ is the one who will call all of the dead forth from the grave, and we're told, as we pointed out, that the living either can't escape or don't want to. There is not one single person throughout all of history and the entire world, including Adam and Eve, who will not face the final

judgment. As far as I can tell from Scripture, that includes those two blessed men who were taken into heaven without undergoing death, Enoch and Elijah. They are already in heavenly glory in glorified body and soul still joined together. But no one is exempt. That fact alone holds solemn and sobering implications for this life. For the unbeliever, it is one more of many motivations to turn to Christ and trust in the Savior. It is a warning that many Christians use almost exclusively when they are witnessing to unbelievers. We should perhaps not rely on it so heavily, but neither should we neglect using it in our witness altogether. For the believer, the fact that we shall face a judgment of the kind we described earlier should motivate us to be all the more serious and diligent about living a holy life as both proof of our faith and testimony to the gospel, and just plain that which pleases our God and Savior. For we know that this is the kind of life in which we'll be perfected, and we'll be living and enjoying for eternity. Let's live accordingly with all the greater resolve so that we might not shrink back in shame from Christ at His coming.