



The Judgment of Christians

by David Clayton

A half truth is often one of the most effective untruths. Fixing itself upon some element of fact, it is able to raise itself up on a foundation which, to a superficial examination appears to be sound, and thus, it has the potential to deceive a great many people.

One illustration of the point which I am making is where the Bible states as a fact that Christians are not "under the law." (Rom. 6:14). This fact is used as a foundation for the false teaching that the law has been abolished. Another example is where people make the false statement: "Works have nothing to do with salvation." Such a false statement they base upon the truth that we are saved by grace and not by works. (Eph. 2:8).

Many Seventh-day Adventists over the past century and a half, have had a similar problem in approaching some of the distinctive truths of Adventism. They have focused on one facet of some truth and have become so one-sided and unbalanced in their perception of that truth, that to them, it has seemed to contradict some point of the Advent message. The consequence has often been that they have ended up rejecting Adventism.

In this article, the third in our series on the Sanctuary message, we wish to examine another of our teachings which has become a bone of contention with some who make the claim that, "it contradicts the scripture." This teaching is that of the **Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment of the Righteous**.

Simply stated, what this doctrine says is that before Jesus returns to this earth to finally deliver His people, there will be, in heaven, an investigation of the life record of every single person who ever claimed to be a Christian, in order to determine, or in order to reveal, whether the person was truly a Christian, or not. This investigation will be a public investigation in the sense that all of the heavenly hosts will be participants. This judgment includes and begins with Christians who are already dead (from the time of Adam) and climaxes with the judgment of living Christians in the final moments of time. When the judgment is over, then Jesus will

return to claim those who have been revealed in the judgment to be His genuine followers.

The question is, does the Bible teach such a doctrine, or was this doctrine fabricated by the Adventist pioneers?

We believe and will demonstrate that this is a clear teaching of the Bible in both the Old and the New Testament, and that the doctrine of the investigative Judgment does not depend on the writings of Ellen White, The SDA pioneers, or even on Daniel 8:14 for its foundation.

A SPECIFIC TIME APPOINTED

Let us first of all examine Acts 17:31:

"Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

The first significant point which we need to notice is the fact that God has **appointed** a day of judgment. It is a part of God's plan; His program, His timetable, that there shall be a day of judgment. It is He who has appointed the day! Some question the need for a day of judgment, using the following argument:

"Why is there the need for heaven to wait until a certain time to judge men? Cannot each person be judged during his lifetime?"

This question is really irrelevant. Notice, it is **GOD** who has appointed a day. It is His wish, His will and wisdom which have ordained that it shall be so. Beyond this it is neither our prerogative, nor is it expedient that we should question.

God appointed a time for His Son to come to earth. Why at that particular time? He appointed a day for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Why at that time? God knows why. There is order and purpose in all that He does, and so, He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world. This is the indisputable teaching of his word.

We need to realize of course that this day of judgment is not a literal twenty-four hour day, but is rather a prophetic day, spanning

a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4). A period of time in which God finally settles all the issues concerning the destiny of men (a time also referred to as "The Day of The Lord."). Let us now examine a few facts concerning this "Day of Judgment."

WHO WILL BE JUDGED?

According to the text which we just examined, it is "the world" that will be judged on that day. Does this mean the entire world, good and bad, as well as the dead and the living? Or does it mean only the unrighteous people who are alive in the world at the time of the judgment? A comparison of this verse with one or two others will give us a clear and unmistakable answer. Consider the following verses:

Rom 14:10-12 :- But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. {11} For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. {12} So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

It is not possible to misunderstand this verse. We shall **ALL** stand before Christ's JUDGMENT SEAT! We who? We Christians! We shall stand there, as well as the unrighteous. We shall stand there, not to praise and give thanks, but to "give an account of ourselves to God!" There can be no question as to the intent of this verse. It is before the judgment seat that we shall stand. A place where sentences are passed, and evidently, where cases are examined, because there, it says, we must "give an account (explain our actions) to God." See how this text is further supported by the words of Jesus in Matthew 12: 36,37:

Mat 12:36-37 :- But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. {37} For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Again, we see the clear teaching that there is a "day," a specific period of time when men must give an account of their deeds. As we are told in Ecclesiastes 12:14, "every work" shall be brought into judgment, with "every secret thing whether it be good or whether it be evil." The examination of the evidence will take in every detail of our lives. Nothing will be passed over. Jesus

Himself says that EVERY idle word will be considered. Notice that the words of the righteous, as well as those of the unrighteous will be examined. The text says, "*by thy words thou shalt be justified.*" The only people who will be justified are the righteous, so, clearly, the righteous must also give an account on that day.

The question may be asked at this point: Are we to wait until the day of judgment before we are justified? Does not the Bible teach in other places that we are justified the moment we believe? The answer is, yes. We are justified immediately when we accept Christ as Lord of our lives. However, the process is not over. A day is appointed of God when we shall be vindicated; when our sincerity, and the genuineness of our conversion shall be investigated on the basis of an examination of all our deeds, including every word we have spoken, and even, "every secret thing." Then, in another sense, we shall be "Justified," or vindicated.

An examination of the Greek word which is translated "justified" will help us to understand the matter. In the Strong's Greek dictionary, the word is defined as follows:

1344. *dikaioo, dik-ah-yo'-o; from G1342; to render (i.e. show or regard as) just or innocent:—free, justify (-ier), be righteous..*

We see that the word not only indicates being made, or declared to be righteous, but can also mean, to be **SHOWN** to be righteous as well. A person is regarded as righteous, by God, the moment that person "believes" in Jesus. However, this text clearly shows that there is a future time, on the day of judgment, when a person must be **SHOWN** to be righteous as well. (See also Rev. 6:9-11)

At this point, a seeming difficulty appears. This concept of a future judgment when the saints must give an account of their deeds seems to contradict certain facts.

We know that when Jesus comes again, the saints will be immediately caught up to meet Him in the air and will enter into the joys and reward of the Lord. There will be no judgment and examination at that time. (1 Thess. 4:16,17; Matt. 24:30,31).

Will they, in heaven, be brought before the judgment seat, and demanded to give an explanation of their actions? Clearly the answer must be no. They will not be embarrassed in heaven by

having their past sins brought back to them in the presence of millions of other beings.

Therefore, any judgment of the saints must take place **before** Jesus returns (Dan. 7:9,10). It must be pre-advent. When He comes again, those who will be saved are already sealed and their destiny settled forever.

In the light of the above-mentioned facts, the difficulty then, is this: How shall we "appear" at the judgment seat if the judgment takes place **before** Jesus comes again? How shall we "give an account" if we are not present to explain our actions? The answer is very simple. We give an account, and are present at the judgment, not in person, but on the basis of the record of our deeds, minutely recorded in the books of heaven. I do not need to be present, because my life's record, detailed in those books, will demonstrate what my relationship with God was like. In addition, my advocate, or lawyer, Jesus Christ, is present and can argue my case far better than I ever could.

WHAT ABOUT DEAD CHRISTIANS?

2 Tim 4:1 :- "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;"

Two truths are taught in this verse. Firstly, that both the living **and** the dead will be judged. Notice, **will** be judged. Their destinies are not yet determined (except in the foreknowledge of God who knows all things). However, at a certain time, they will be judged. We have seen before, that this period is referred to as "The Day of Judgment," or "The Day of The Lord." The timing of this day is further clarified in this verse. It says that this judgment will take place, "at His appearing and at His kingdom." When is this? On the surface it may seem that this "appearing" refers to the time when Jesus appears again in the clouds of heaven to take His saints to heaven. But we have already seen that this is not in harmony with other Scriptures. As we search more closely we see that reference is made to another "appearing" of Jesus, when He does receive a kingdom. We find this in Dan 7:9-14 :-

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sitthousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was

set, and the books were opened.... I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. {14} And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom...."

In this passage we find the following truths taught:

- (a) There is a judgment which takes place in heaven.
- (b) Hundreds of millions of heavenly beings are present at this judgment.
- (c) This judgment takes place before Jesus returns to this earth.
- (d) This judgment is based on the evidence found in books.
- (e) Jesus is brought before His Father (His appearing).
- (f) Jesus receives an everlasting kingdom.

It should be very clear that the "appearing of Jesus, when He receives his kingdom and judges the quick and the dead, is **before** He returns to earth. This fact is further emphasized in Malachi 3:1-3 and Luke 19:12-15.

EVIDENCE FROM PARABLES

Let us now examine one of the parables of Jesus where once again, the truth that there will be an Investigative Judgment of the entire Christian Church, is clearly and unmistakably taught.

In Matthew Chapter 22:1-14, Jesus told the parable of a king who made a marriage for his son and invited certain guests (the Jews). The guests were unworthy and murdered his servants and generally despised the king's invitation. Finally the king sent his armies, and destroyed them and their city (the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70). The king then invited all to the wedding (the gospel invitation to the whole world) and many came in, both good and bad (they became Christians). Finally, the wedding was furnished with guests, all sitting down and waiting for the

bridegroom's arrival. However, at this point, something surprising happens:

Mat 22:11 :- And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

What do we see happening here? **The king examines the guests!** What does this mean? Are not all these children of God? People who have accepted the gospel invitation and become Christians? Why does God examine (investigate) them? The answer is found in verse 14.

Mat 22:14 :- For many are called, but few are chosen.

This is the striking truth. All Christians are called, all have responded and come into the Christian fold, but not all are true Christians. There are wolves among the sheep, there are tares among the wheat, and so there has to be a choosing process. God (the king) examines the guests and rejects those who are not prepared for the wedding. Those who are not genuine in their Christianity. This same truth is brought out in the parable of the net:

Mat 13:47,48 :- Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

In the parable, all the guests are represented as sitting there. In reality, most of these people are actually dead, today, but they are nevertheless among the guests, and according to the parable will be included in the examination.

THE BASIS OF THE JUDGMENT

Before we conclude, there is just one more point which must be made. It concerns the basis of this judgment. The argument of some is that a judgment based on our deeds is inconsistent with the teachings of the New Testament, because the grounds of salvation is not our works, but rather our faith (Eph. 2:8). The simple answer to this argument is very clearly outlined in James 2:17-20. *"I will shew thee my faith by my works."* Is that so difficult to understand? My faith can be assessed **only** on the basis of

what I **DO**. Not what I say! If we need stronger evidence, let us examine the words of our Master Himself:

Mat 7:20-21 :- Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. {21} Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Jesus makes it clear that it is not our profession that counts, not our seat among the guests which counts, but our deeds. "He that **doeth** the will of my Father." This is what reveals our true nature. "By their fruits ye shall know them." As Ellen White was told by an angel, "you shall be justified by your faith, but judged by your works."

The doctrine of the Investigative Judgment is a solid biblical truth. It is not surprising that it is rejected and condemned by the greater proportion of Christendom, because the religion of Babylon is based largely upon wishful thinking and a distortion of Scripture. Popular religion has converted Christianity into a sentimental, wishy washy philosophy which lulls men into a false sense of security while they indulge themselves in sin.

Bible religion is different. Saved by grace, through faith, we nevertheless guard carefully against every wrong word and action, recognizing that the tree is known by its fruit.

The Lord has a message for His people. This message will be borne, whether men will accept or reject it. As in the days of Christ, there will be the deep plottings of the powers of darkness, but the message must not be muffled with smooth words or fair speeches, crying peace, peace, when there is no peace, to those who are turning away from God. (4BC - 1149)