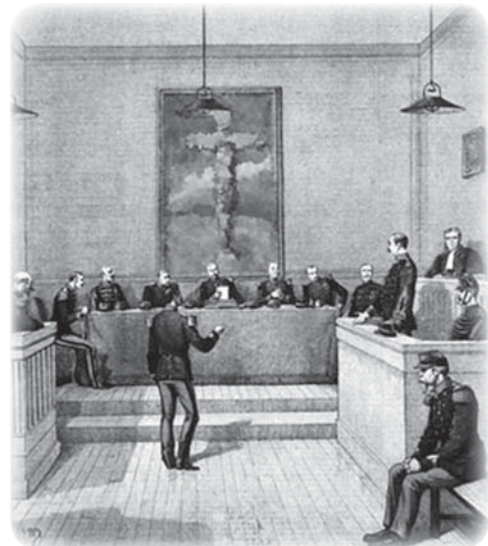


Judgement Day Is Not a Theology Test

Dean Taylor



For we must all appear before the judgment 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. (2 Co. 5:10)

What's the boldest example of evangelism that you have ever seen? For me, it was when I was fresh out of anesthesia school. I was working in a hospital that employed a lot of foreign medical students and residents. Because of all the students, the operating rooms there were usually bustling with all kinds of people—not just the surgeons and their residents, but the X-ray people had their trainees, the scrub techs had their trainees, the lab techs had theirs, etc ... I guess you get the idea—the operating rooms were packed!

Well, it had been one of my first days on the job there in this teaching hospital. I was just about to administer the anesthesia to put my patient to sleep when he looked up at me and said, “Is this it? Am I going out now?”

I told him, “Yes, I am about to start the anesthesia.”

Then he said “Before you do, I want to talk to the main surgeon who will be doing my surgery. I have a question for him.”

I told the residents nearby, and they quickly ran up to the head of the bed and said that they could answer any questions that he had.

He asked, “Thank you, but are you the main surgeon?”

The resident told him he was not the main surgeon—that the main surgeon was in his office and would be coming out soon—but that it would actually be a while before he would get there.

But the man insisted, “I want to talk to him ... I must ask him a question.”

After trying a few more times, the resident finally gave up and called for the chief surgeon. He was in his office, which was about 10 minutes away.

As we waited there, I guess we all just figured that this guy simply needed a little reassurance about his surgery. As I recall, I think it was a knee surgery of some kind. I think we all just assumed that he wanted to hear which leg they were planning to operate on—straight from the chief surgeon's mouth.

As time crept by, we each tried to ask him if we could help him with his question. But he was still insistent—he would speak to the head surgeon. It seemed like a long time; but finally, after about 10 long minutes, in rushed the chief surgeon to hear “the question.”

Now, allow me to describe some of the details of this scene. This patient was lying down on his back on an operating table, with nothing on but a surgical gown. Surrounding him are the surgical techs (who help with the surgery), residents (who also help), x-ray techs, a few drug salesmen, and standing at the head of the bed were me and a Hindu anesthesiologist from India. In my hand was the anesthetic agent needed to put him to sleep.

As the chief surgeon came around to the head of the bed, the man looked up, pointed his finger at him, and asked “Are you the main surgeon?”

“Yes, I am sir. How may I help you?”

“I have a question for you.”

“Yes sir, what is it?”

The whole room was dead silent as all waited in suspense to hear what “the question” would be.

And then, right there—flat on his back on the operating table—with his finger pointing up at the surgeon, he asked the question, “If you were to die tonight, and you had to appear before God, and He asked you why He should let you in—what would you say?”

The surgeon was speechless ... I was speechless ... the whole room was speechless! We all just sat there in com-

plete silence! It was one of those attention-grabbing, potentially defining moments, when the silence seemed almost deafening. Then suddenly we were riveted out of the moment by a joke cracked by the Hindu anesthesiologist: “He would say that he took care of you, so then God would let him in!” Everyone had a good laugh and the surgery began.

Well, I’m still impressed with that scene today. However, while I believe that this is a good question to get someone thinking, I have to wonder if this line of thinking is completely biblical. Of course, the right answer to the question from a solid, born-again believer should be something like, “I trust in nothing but the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. I put my faith in Him, alone. He is all my righteousness and all my salvation.” Good answer, right? I certainly think so.

But ... who said there was going to be an oral exam on Judgment Day? From what I read in Scripture, Judgment Day will be based on the reality of my life here on earth. On that day, it will be revealed whether I lived my life by grace through faith, or not. Quoting a creed or a theological doctrine will be irrelevant.

It is surprising how regularly this “theology test” scene gets brought up in our thoughts and sermons. I admit, the whole idea is very attractive: Learn the right answers with sincerity and be ready to give them to anyone who asks. So, theoretically, when we get to Judgment Day, instead of worrying about a bunch of do’s and don’ts (or rather did’s and didn’ts), we simply answer the big theological questions and then walk right on in.

The only problem with this idea is that the Scriptures never mention this scene anywhere. From every indication given to us, on Judgment Day the time for theological answers will be over. Any talking on our part seems to be merely rendering an account of what we did or what we said. The Bible simply describes Jesus judging us based on the reality of our life—not a theology test.

Judged by works?

Paul said in some pretty clear words that *everyone* will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. To the Church of Corinth he wrote, *For we must all appear before the judgment 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.* (2 Co. 5:10) Modern Christianity is very quick these days to explain away the whole idea of a Judgment Day—especially for the Christian. But to do so really twists the Scriptures. Jesus repeatedly taught through the Gospels the need for genuine conversions. The theme “You will know them by their fruits” resonates through almost every other chapter. Every picture Jesus gave of a judgment

day was inextricably connected to what grace actually *did* in a believer’s life. A Christianity based solely on mental assent and verbal profession was firmly condemned: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*”¹

Saved by works?

Does all this mean that we come to Christ through our works? Not at all. When Jesus was asked “*What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*” Jesus answered, “*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*” We cannot save ourselves. The only way to come to Christ is to believe—by faith. However, when this truly happens, the Bible says that we actually change. A few verses down from his sobering statement about Judgment Day, Paul said: “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away;*

behold, all things are become new.”² In other words, when someone—through grace—became a follower of Christ, they actually followed

Christ; it’s that simple. As Paul said in the letter to the Ephesians: “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*”³

James shared the same thoughts when he said “*I will show you my faith by my works.*”⁴ Put simply, James said that the grace-motivated works that Christ performs in and through us are the *evidence* of our faith. James was asking, “Is your faith real or not?” To James, reciting a creed or a list of theological truths was not evidence. As a matter of fact, James compared a faith that exists only in the mind to the faith that demons have! “*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*”⁵ Our faith—is it real or is it not? Our faith-motivated works are the evidence now—and they will be the evidence on Judgment Day as well.

Modern corruption

Like so many other controversial subjects, I have found that when reading books just a few hundred years back, it is amazing to find that preachers on many sides of the theo-

Judgement Day will be based on the reality of my life here on earth.

1 Mt. 7:21

2 2 Co. 5:17

3 Ep. 2:8-10

4 Ja. 2:18

5 Ja. 2:19

logical spectrum are in agreement on this topic. Spurgeon, in his sermon *The Great Assize*, preached:

Ask ye now, who is it, or who ARE THEY THAT WILL HAVE TO APPEAR BEFORE THE THRONE OF JUDGMENT? The answer is plain; it admits of no exemption: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." This is very decisive, if there were no other text. We must all appear; that is to say, every one of the human race. We must all appear. And that the godly will not be exempted from this appearance is very clear, for the apostle here is speaking to Christians. He says, "We walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident. We labor." and so on; and then he puts it, "We must all appear." So that, beyond all others, it is certain that all Christians must appear there. The text is quite conclusive upon that point. And if we had not that text, we have the passage in Matthew, which we have read, in which the sheep are summoned there as certainly as are the goats; and the passage in the Revelation, where all the dead are judged according to the things which are written in the books. They are all there.

John Wesley, in his sermon also called *The Great Assize*, said:

"Had all men a deep sense of this [Judgment Day], how effectually would it secure the interests of society! For what more forcible motive can be conceived to the practice of genuine morality? To a steady pursuit of solid virtue? A uniform walking in justice, mercy, and truth? What could strengthen our hands in all that is good, and deter us from all evil, like a strong conviction of this, "The Judge stands at the door;" and we are shortly to stand before him?"

Saved by grace—evidenced by works

Speaking on the topic of judgment by works, I thought John Piper put it well when he said, in a sermon preached back in 1980:

It is by grace we are saved through faith; not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. But the heart that is full of faith will overflow in attitudes and actions very different from those which flow from unbelief. Therefore, our deeds will testify truly to the genuineness or absence of faith, and it is not inconsistent for God to judge us according to our works. But we must understand that this judgment according to works does not mean

we earn our salvation. Our deeds do not earn, they exhibit our salvation. Our deeds are not the merit of our righteousness, they are the mark of our new life in Christ. Our deeds are not sufficient to deserve God's favor, but they do demonstrate our faith. Please keep that distinction clear in your mind regarding our attitudes and actions: they do not earn, they exhibit; they do not merit, they mark; they do not deserve, they demonstrate. And therefore, "God will render

to every man according to his deeds," **including Christians.**"⁶

I like that statement: "they do not earn, they exhibit; they do not merit, they mark; they do not deserve, they demonstrate." That statement makes you think ... if salvation is by faith, and the evidence of

that faith is works, then faith must be a lot more than mere theology! Faith must be visible, real, and powerful!

Send your sins ahead of you

In the last chapter of the Bible Jesus lets us know that on Judgment Day it will be too late to change. "*He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.*" (Re. 22:12)

Now is the time we can make an eternal difference. Paul told his young disciple Timothy that, "*Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after.*"⁷ Likewise, John wrote in his letter to the churches, "*And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins.*"⁸ According to the apostles, on Judgment Day the "reality" of whether we confessed and repented of our sins and brought them to Christ will determine whether we will meet Christ as an Advocate or as a Judge. If we repent and bring our sins to Jesus now, He has promised that He will forgive them and even blot them out!⁹ If we refuse to open up our sins beforehand and "*send them on ahead of us to judgment*" as Paul put it, then we await a fearful judgment.

6 August 31, 1980 (Morning) Bethlehem Baptist Church. (Emphasis mine) It should be noted that some of Piper's other teachings take the punch out of what he says here.

7 I Ti. 5:24

8 I Jn. 2:1-2

9 Is. 43:25; He. 8:12

What could strengthen our hands in all that is good, and deter us from evil, like a strong conviction of this: The Judge stands at the door?

Sins of omission

After the Apostle John gave us this beautiful truth about how to deal with sins in our past, he also reminded us how genuine sin-washed souls will act: *“And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”* What a blessing: in Christ we are forgiven—free—and faithful!

So ... if you were to die tonight and you were to appear before God, what would you say? The answer is that you would say nothing except to render an account of your life.

The bottom line will be whether you were genuinely saved by grace through faith while here on earth—or—whether you were not. On that day you will bow to Jesus, either as your Advocate¹⁰ or Judge.¹¹

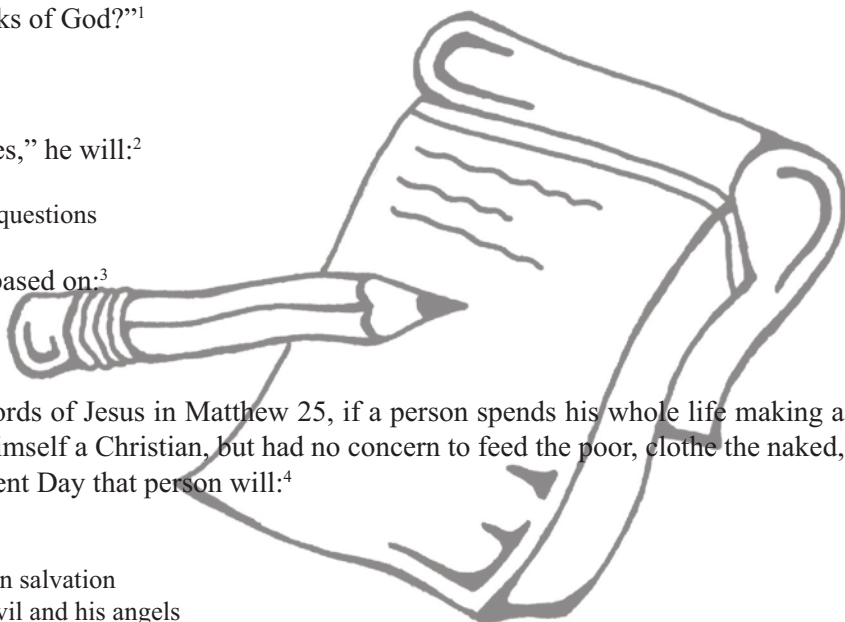
“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” (Jude 1:24-25) ~

10 “Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (He. 7:25, and see also 1 Jn. 2:1)

11 “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” (Jn. 5:22)

Judgment Day Theology Test

1. According to Jesus, how can we do the “works of God?”¹
 - a) Try very hard
 - b) Martyrdom
 - c) Believe on the Sent One
2. According to Jesus, if a person really “believes,” he will:²
 - a) Buy a Christian T-shirt
 - b) Learn the answers to important theological questions
 - c) Bear fruit that is evidenced by good works
3. According to a Jesus, Judgment Day will be based on:³
 - a) Words we tell the Judge
 - b) Works
 - c) Good intentions
4. According to a literal interpretation of the words of Jesus in Matthew 25, if a person spends his whole life making a profession of Christ, all the while considering himself a Christian, but had no concern to feed the poor, clothe the naked, receive a stranger, or visit a prisoner; on Judgment Day that person will:⁴
 - a) Lose a reward
 - b) Have his crown taken away
 - c) Be thankful that he didn’t try to earn his own salvation
 - d) Go into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels
5. Things specifically mentioned by Jesus that we would be judged by on Judgment Day:⁵
 - a) Saying the “sinner’s prayer”
 - b) Church membership
 - c) Baptism
 - d) Feeding the poor
6. According to Jesus, if a person professes Jesus with his mouth, even calling Him “Lord,” but his life isn’t really changed, on Judgment Day that person is:⁶
 - a) Lost
 - b) Saved



1 (C) Jn. 6:28

2 (C) Mt. 7:15-27

3 (B) Re. 22:12. See also Ro. 14:10, 2 Co. 5:10 (To name a few). This includes how we talked on earth: Mt. 12:35-37

4 (D) Mt. 25:31-46

5 (D) Mt. 25:31-46

6 (A) Mt. 7:15-27