

Judgment – Is it for the Believer?

By Ginny Larsen

“For the time has come for the judgment to begin from the house of God. And if it first begins from us, what will be the end of those disobeying the gospel of God? And if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing, as to a faithful Creator.”
(1 Peter 4:17-19, NKJV)

I always looked at the “at” the house of God and thought this was judgment *by* God being talked about. It is not. It is simply speaking of the persecution and hardship of living the Christian life in this world and what all Christians have endured for all time, since the beginning of Christianity, at the hands of wicked men in this world, such as Christ Himself did.

McDonald's notes: During this age, the church is undergoing judgment by the unbelieving world. Believers are experiencing their sufferings now, just as Jesus did when He was on earth. If that is so, what will be the fate of those who do not obey the gospel of God? If Christians suffer now for doing good, what will the unsaved suffer in eternity for all their ungodly deeds? The same argument is contained in this verse, quoted from Proverbs 11:31; *‘If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner.’* The righteous person is scarcely saved or **saved with difficulty**. From the divine standpoint his salvation was purchased at enormous cost. From the human standpoint, men are told, *‘Strive to enter through the narrow gate’* (Luke 12:24). Believers are taught that *‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God’* (Acts 14:22). With all the dangers and temptations that beset a Christian, it is only a miracle of divine grace that preserves him for the heavenly kingdom—William McDonald, *The Believer's Bible Commentary*)

It struck me that in the Modern King James version the word was *from* the house of God rather than *at* the house of God. So I looked up the word in Strong's and found it interesting that it is the word for “departure.” This puts a little different light on the verse:

Strong's G575 apo: A primary particle;

“*off*”, that is, *away* (from something near), in various senses (of place, time, or relation; literally or figuratively): - (X here-) after, ago, at, because of, before, by (the space of), for (-th), from, in, (out) of, off, (up-) on (-ce), since, with. In composition (as a prefix) it usually denotes *separation, departure, cessation, completion, reversal*, etc.

Thayer Definition: G575 apo1) of separation, 1a) of local separation, after verbs of motion from a place, i.e. of departing, of fleeing; 1b) of separation of a part from the whole; 1b1) where of a whole some part is taken; 1c) of any kind of separation of one thing from another by which the union or fellowship of the two is destroyed; 1d) of a state of separation, that is of distance; 1d1) physical, of distance of place; 1d2) temporal, of distance of time; 2) of origin; 2a) of the place whence anything is, comes, befalls, is taken; 2b) of origin of a cause.

If judgment begins from the house of God, it is a point of origin for God's judgment on the world. There are so many arguments today that Christians must go through the Tribulation to be

“purified” or “cleansed” because we are not yet “without spot or wrinkle.” People who believe this often use 1 Peter 4 to teach that the Church has to go through a “judging” process and partake of the Tribulation. I don't find this mentality in the Bible at all. I know suffering does have a purifying effect on our faith in that it causes us to look at things above and not things on earth. In this way, suffering can cause us to draw closer in dependence on our Lord, and our faith in Him is made stronger as we learn to lean on Him and draw from Him. But this is not the same thing as saying we are not “fit” for the Kingdom until we go through this purifying judgment from God. What then of those who died in Christ without ever going through persecution and tribulation? What about the many who never reach that state of spotless perfection? Do any of us? It is this “purgatory-like” thinking about the Church that needs to be corrected, because it is not much different than the Catholic church teaching that we need purgatory to complete the work of Christ! Do we need to be perfected somehow in our lives here below before Christ can accept us into Heaven? Or is our salvation through faith in the blood of Jesus alone sufficient to cleanse, purify, and save us for all eternity? Here are some of my notes on this study:

*“The husbands, be loving your own wives, just as also Christ loved the Assembly and gave Himself [or, handed Himself over] on her behalf, so that He should sanctify her, **having cleansed** [or, purged] [her] with the bathing of the water by [the] word, [compare with John 15:3 below] so that He should present her to **Himself, the glorious [or, splendid] Assembly, not having spot [or, blemish] nor wrinkle, nor any of such things, but so that she should be holy and unblemished**” (Ephesians 5:25-27, Analytical Literal Translation). **“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you”** (John 15:3, ESV).*

We are cleansed only by the blood of Jesus by believing His Word, and it is that alone which is our righteousness and makes us presentable and Holy, without spot, blemish, or wrinkle. The moment we believe in Jesus and He gives us His Spirit, we are cleansed, and we are presentable to Him. He sees no more spot or blemish in us.

Christ gave Himself so that **HE** should sanctify her, so that **HE** should cleanse her, so that **HE** should present her to Himself, **NOT HAVING** spot or blemish or wrinkle – it is because of what **HE** has done, not what she has done. It is **HE** Who makes her holy and unblemished. It is not after she goes through some sort of trial or suffering that she is made this, but it is through what Christ alone has done. He is soon to come for this Church that He has made ready through His blood and who have put their hope and faith in Him alone by believing His Word. We are to comfort ourselves as we walk through this dark path below, full of sufferings caused by evil, full of unreasonable, wicked men who come against His purposes, full of unspeakable darkness, by reminding ourselves He is coming for us. How hard it is to be comforted or look to a “blessed hope,” so called, if we are told we must suffer in order to be made spotless and that God is judging His Church and purifying it, and we must pass through our time of “purgatory” in this earth, so to speak, by going through the Tribulation. The argument is, “Christians all over the world are suffering and for ages have suffered so why do we think we won't have to go through the Tribulation and suffer also?” The answer is because we are only perfected in Him, through His blood, and this world here has already been the Christian's “tribulation” since Christ left the earth, not as a “purgatory” for us, but as our sharing in His sufferings which He told us we would. Also, the tribulation period is called the “time of Jacob's trouble,” and is a time of testing specifically for Israel, as well as God's judgment on the Gentile world that has rejected Christ.

Paul says, *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake”* (Philippians 1:29). He also tells us as He has made us His children

He has also made us *“heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:17-18).

It is assumed that those in Christ will suffer. Our inheritance in Christ is not conditional on our suffering but our being “in Him.” The Lord knew that all those who are in Him will suffer with Him, as they walk through this world. There are many tribulations in this life we go through in our walk and many battles we fight in the spirit. His sufferings are ours now. We are to “keep the Word of His patience” until He comes for us: *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts; and shuts and no one opens, says these things: I know your works. Behold, I have given before you an open door, and no one can shut it. For you have a little strength and have **kept My Word** and have not denied My name...Because you have **kept the Word of My patience**, I also will keep you from the hour of temptation which will come upon all the habitable world, to try those who dwell upon the earth”* (Revelation 3:7-8; 10).

This is His last days faithful Church, who are walking in this world's sufferings by faith alone and keeping His Word. Notice this Church is not given any other admonishments or rebukes. And this Church is promised that they will be delivered “out of” the “hour of temptation which will come upon the habitable world”... the “earth dwellers,” which is a term for the ungodly who make this earth their habitation and do not look to Heaven. The Church has shared in the Lord's sufferings on this earth. They will be delivered from the world's tribulation and judgment that is about to come upon them. If you are not sure you will be delivered from this judgment, you can know, simply by putting your faith in that incredible sacrifice He gave to “whosoever will believe” (adhere to, cling to, rely on, trust in) Him and what He did to pay the penalty for your sin, justify you before His perfect righteousness and Holy throne of judgment, and accept you into His kingdom, giving you His Spirit to then indwell you, cleansing you, and giving you a new heart, or a new nature, that will serve Him. In order to receive this you must know that you are a sinner and that there is no other justification that is acceptable to Him, that your sin is repulsive to a perfect, holy, righteous God, and that you cannot dwell in His Heaven with that sin. That sin separates you from Him for eternity, unless the penalty is paid, which could only be paid by God Himself, Who became flesh, Who lived among us, Who gave Himself on the cross, though sinless, to take upon Himself our sin, and justify us and bring us “into Christ,” in union with Him now so that in Him we are seen before God as righteous. If you see your sin, and if you are convicted of its evil, and want to turn your heart to Him to be cleansed and made new by His Spirit coming to live in you, all you need to do is ask, believe it, and receive by faith all He has done. There is nothing more. He will cleanse you, give you a new heart, guide you in His Word as you give yourself to reading it, teach you to know Him, and show you the new life He has for you to walk in. In order for that new life to grow, find other Bible believing Christians to meet with, read your Bible daily, pray, and talk to Him often as your Heavenly Father. He says that all who believe in Him He will *“come in to them and sup with them and they with Him.”* He will reveal Himself to you in a personal way to walk with you through this life of trial and suffering. And He will keep your heart close to Him to give you the grace you need daily to live it. He will reveal His will to you so that you know how to walk pleasing to Him.

The Christian will one day face the “judgment seat of Christ”: *“But why do you judge your brother? Or also why do you despise your brother? For all shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each one of us will give account concerning himself to*

God” (Romans 14:10-12). “So speak and do as those who shall be judged by the **law of liberty**” (James 2:12). James says we will be judged by the “Law of Liberty.” Paul says in Romans, “There is therefore now **no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus**. For the **law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** made me free from the law of sin and of death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:1-3). “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he condemning? It is Christ who has died, but rather also who is raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Romans 8:33-34).

We are not judged or condemned for our sin – it has completely been taken care of in Christ! Yet our works will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ, and there will be either reward or great loss according to what we did under that “law of liberty,” with the great incredible grace that God has given us: “*But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's **work** shall be **made manifest**: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's **work** shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's **work** shall be burned, he shall **suffer loss**: but **he himself shall be saved**; yet so as through fire*” (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

There is **chastisement** for the Christian but not *judgment* in this world. Chastisement has to do with “training” or “correction,” as a father for his beloved child, and judgment has to do with reward or paying a penalty. Christ has already paid the penalty of our sin.

“*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and **cometh not into judgment**, but hath passed out of death into life*” (John 5:24, KJV).

“*And ye have forgotten the exhortation which reasoneth with you as with sons, My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, Nor faint when thou art reprov'd of Him; For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, And scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father chasteneth not? But if ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness*” (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Gill's Commentary: “my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord”; by which is meant, not vindictive punishment; this would not be speaking to them, nor dealing with them as children, and would be contrary to the love of God towards them; besides, chastisement in this sense has been upon Christ for them, and it would be unjust to lay it on them again; but a fatherly correction is designed, and which is given in love by God, as a Father, and for the instruction of His children, as the word used signifies: and it is called not the chastening of men, but of the Lord; every chastening, or afflictive providence, is appointed by God, and is looked upon by believers, when grace is in exercise, as coming from Him; and it is directed, and governed, and limited by Him, and is overruled by Him for His own glory, and their good: and this is not to be despised, as something nauseous and loathsome, or as not useful

and unprofitable, or as insignificant and unworthy of notice, but should be esteemed for the good ends, which are sometimes answered, by it.

So when you look at the things happening in this world, the evil that is seeming to take over, growing at a rapid pace, prospering, and overwhelming you, you can know you have a blessed assurance that *“if God be for us [and He is], who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31b) He is there with you, and your reward is greater than anything you could compare it to here below. Nothing can take it from you and nothing can separate you from Him! Know that God is not against you to judge you in this world, nor does He delight in your suffering, as some seem to think. He hates suffering; He came to defeat it. He allows it only for a time until sin has reached its fullness. His allowing it is because of His patience (which we are to also keep and walk in as Revelation 3:10 says), sharing in His suffering for a time, because of His love, because He is full of grace and does not wish any to perish but that all would come to repentance. Not all will, but God's desire is for life. He knows those who are His and will come to Him and patiently waits for them: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). *“Where-fore let them also that suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing unto a faithful Creator”* (1 Peter 4:19).

We have much to encourage our hearts through our time of suffering now, but they cannot be encouraged if we are walking here in fear and a wrong relationship with the Lord. We must see Him rightly and all He has provided for us now. We must walk in what He has given us: *“every spiritual blessing in the Heavenlies in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 1:3), and *“all we need to live godly in Christ Jesus”* (1 Peter 1:3), for He promises nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35-39); and that all things in this life that happen to us are for our good and conforming us to His image (8:28-31); and that we have an inheritance undefiled, kept in Heaven for us, that no one can take away, that we are kept for through it all (1 Peter 1:3-6). We need not walk in fear but love. His perfect love for us casts out all fear as we know that we have no fear of judgment since He has taken our judgment upon Himself.

*“Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent His only begotten Son into the world **that we might live through Him.** Herein is love, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us,** and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us: hereby we know that we abide in Him and He in us, **because He hath given us of His Spirit.** And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God. And we know and have believed the love which God hath in us. God is love; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him. Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, even so are we in this world. **There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment; and he that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love, because He first loved us**”* (1 John 4:9-19).

The Believer's Bible Commentary, by William MacDonald on 1 John 4:17: Love has been perfected among us in this. It is not our love that is made perfect, but God's love is made perfect with us. John is now taking us on to that future time when we will stand before the Lord. Will it be with **boldness** and confidence or will it be with cringing terror? The answer

is that it will be with **boldness**, or confidence, because perfect love has settled the sin question once and for all. The reason for our confidence in that coming day is given in the words “**because as He is, so are we in this world.**” The Lord Jesus is now in heaven, with judgment completely behind Him. He came into the world once and suffered the punishment which our sins deserved. But He has finished the work of redemption and now will never have to take up the sin question again. As He is, so are we in this world. That is, our sins were judged at the cross of Calvary, and we can confidently sing:

Death and judgment are behind me,
Grace and glory lie before;
All the billows rolled o'er Jesus,
There they spent their utmost power.
- Mrs. J. A. Trench

Just as judgment is passed for Him, so we are beyond the reach of condemnation.

1 John 4:18: Because we have come to know God's love, we have **no fear** of perishing.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. It is **perfect love** that **casts out** our **fear**. I am assured of the Lord's love first of all, because He sent His Son to die for me. Secondly, I know He loves me because He indwells me at the present moment. Thirdly, I can look to the future with confidence and without fear. Truly, **fear involves torment, and he who fears is not made perfect in love.** God's love has not been allowed to operate in the lives of those who are afraid of Him. They have never come to Him in repentance and received the forgiveness of sins.

1 John 4:19: We love Him because He first loved us. The only reason **we love** at all is **because He first loved us.** The Ten commandments require that a man should love his God and neighbor, but the law could not produce this love. How then could God obtain this love which His righteousness required? He solved the problem by sending His Son to die for us. Such wonderful love draws out our hearts to Him in return. We say, “You have bled and died for me; from now on I will live for You.”

May these things encourage and strengthen your heart as you wait for Him by faith! He has promised He will come! He will do all things just as He said He would. He will fulfill His promises to you as a Believer and His judgment to the world as He said. He will come for His Church just as He said, “*Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also***” (John 14:1-3, NASB). He has promised, and so it shall be! Look up! Your redemption draweth nigh!