

Judgment Is Eternal

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, 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 by fire.—I Cor. 3:10-15.

ALL science is postulated upon the theory that the universe is governed by an immutable law. Everything in nature speaks of law and order. Like causes always produce like effects. A law always works the same way for all men. If this were not true, there would be no point in trying to discover scientific laws, for if they were erratic and subject to daily change, they would not be reliable to use once we had found them. The water which puts out fire today might act like fuel tomorrow and feed the flames. The gravity which pulls down today might push up tomorrow. The chemicals which blend harmlessly together today to produce some useful product might explode tomorrow if laws and principles were not stable and eternal.

There is law and order in the universe, then; and religion infers from this fact that nature's law must have been

given by an eternal and almighty Lawgiver. Each law which he has ordained and established carries with it certain irrevocable and inescapable rewards for its observance, and equally certain consequences or punishments which ensue if it is violated.

REASON DEMANDS A FINAL JUDGMENT

We may hide our sins from the eyes of man. We may commit crimes and seemingly get away undiscovered and unpunished. But every act, good or bad, every thought and wish leaves its impress to judge us. Every act, every thought, every wish either conforms to and obeys law, or defies and flouts it. It therefore follows that every act, thought, and wish leaves its impress on us, has its inevitable effect and influence upon our total character. We *are* what we *do*; we become the kind of people that our actions make us. God's laws are eternal; the consequences of obedience or disobedience to those laws are eternal; therefore, God's judgment is eternal, or in other words, it is eternal judgment. It is judgment which shall endure through all eternity, for never can we escape from the consequences of our many choices, the total of which make up our character.

Although judgment is continuous, contemporary, eternal, and unceasing in the sense which we have already described, reason and justice demand that there should also be a day of *final* accounting and judgment, a day when the Lord who has granted his servants their stewardship will return to take account of how they have administered that stewardship, and give final rewards or punishments in keeping with the results of that judgment. It will be the day when each man's character will be revealed for exactly what it is. It will be the day when "there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known" (Luke 12:2). It will be the day when hidden and unsuspected good will be revealed, when all the heart's best wishes and motives

and desires, and all its unheralded kindness will be brought to light.

The revelation of the true nature of each man will not necessarily be the publication or broadcasting of each man's secret sins or his hidden charities and kindnesses. Part of it will be a revelation to *ourselves* of the kind of people we really are. Personally, I have always liked the idea of the final judgment expressed in the Book of Mormon. Resurrected men, with spirit and body inseparably reunited, will stand before the presence of Christ, the righteous judge. The Book of Mormon says, to paraphrase the teachings of several different verses, that we shall then have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, uncleanness, and nakedness. We may have consistently ignored and rebelled against God and Christ during our earthly existence, but the time will then have come when we can no longer ignore, and it will be too late to repent. Too late we shall see the perfection, the worthiness of Christ; we shall know his love for us; we shall see the enormity of our crime in rejecting and spurning that love. The demands of divine justice will awaken in our souls a lively sense of our own guilt, which will cause us to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and fill our breasts with guilt, pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire whose flames ascend up for ever and ever. (See Mosiah 1:83, 84.)

When we stand before the perfect Christ to be judged, each one with a lively remembrance of all the deeds of his past life, it will not be necessary for God to exercise any police force to escort us to the place we are worthy to occupy through eternity. Before the perfect Christ, who offered himself in love for the sins of men, sinners who have spurned that love will quail and quake, smitten with a sense of their own unworthiness. Those who have been redeemed from their sins, who have been born again of his Spirit, who have become his sons and daughters by spiritual rebirth and adoption, who have loved him, obeyed him, lived in his presence during this

life, will feel at home in his presence then, and will remain with him through eternity.

PRINCIPLES OF JUDGMENT

There are two or three important principles of judgment which we find laid down in innumerable Scriptures. The first is an inviolable principle: that every man will be judged for *his own* works, and not the works of another. No other man can be blamed for what I do; I cannot be charged with any other man's sins, though all of us may suffer during this life the *consequences* of others' sins. This idea is discussed at some length in the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, and summed up in the twentieth verse: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

This leads us to a consideration of another principle. Judgment will be absolutely just; and justice demands that judgment be tempered to some extent by the degree of knowledge and opportunity given the individual. The widow who cast in two mites, the limit of her capability and opportunity, did more than the rich men who cast in much more. Jesus said that it would be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants had not heard his voice, than for some of the cities which rejected his ministry in Palestine. The man who received two talents from his Lord was not condemned because he had not made an additional five out of the two. It was sufficient that he had doubled his two, giving the same rate of increase that the owner of the five talents had given. But the man who had a one-talent opportunity and who failed in that responsibility was condemned.

Many billions of men and women have lived on this earth without ever having heard of Jesus. God would not

condemn billions of his creatures to an eternally burning hell for not accepting a Christ of whom they had never heard. It is not the heathen's fault that they known not Christ. It is God who determines the bounds of man's habitations, who places the heathen in non-Christian lands where the name of Christ is not known. It is Christian people who know of Christ and fail to take him to the heathen both at home and abroad. Therefore Latter Day Saints believe that every soul of man who ever lived on earth will have opportunity either here or in the spirit world to hear Christ preached, and to accept or reject him as Savior. Accepting him, they will be saved, and judged according to the deeds done in the flesh with the application of the principle laid down by Jesus himself in Luke 12:47, 48: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (See also John 3:19, 20; John 9:41; John 15:22; Luke 13:6-9; Hebrews 10:26-30; II Peter 2:20, 21 for further explanation and elaboration of this principle.)

There is another principle which should be associated with this one, lest some get a wrong idea about this probation after death. Probation after death will give opportunity for those who never heard of Christ in this life to accept or reject him and his salvation. But it will not give them nor anyone else an opportunity to relive his life. The basis of judgment for *every* man will still be his own deeds done in the flesh, in this life. Nothing he can do in eternity will change that record, and on the basis of that record he will be judged. Men may accept Christ after death, if they have not had opportunity in this life, but every man, no matter when he accepts Christ, will still be judged according to the

deeds done in the flesh. There is no principle more frequently or more plainly declared by Scripture.

If men are to be judged according to their works, it must follow that there will be varying degrees of reward and punishment and not a simple separation of all souls into "saved" or "lost" and a despatching of them to heaven or to hell. God's punishments are not vindictive but corrective. When the object of correction is achieved, the punishment ceases. In his vision of the last judgment, John saw that after men were judged, death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. The purposes of punishment had been achieved. The day of judgment had come and gone. All who could be saved had been saved. There could be no possible purpose in punishing any soul which was still rebellious and unrepentant at that day, after he had rejected the opportunities of this life, the opportunities afforded by the correction and instruction of the prison house, and the age-long pleadings of the Holy Spirit. For such souls there could be only the oblivion of the second death. Not as punishment but as consequences of their rebellion they would be forever denied the presence of God, of Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, because they had rejected all three in time and in eternity.

At the judgment the souls of men will be divided into two main groups or classifications, saved, and lost. The basis of this division will be very simple, full and obedient acceptance or rebellious rejection of Jesus as the Christ, the Savior, the Son of God. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). Men cannot be saved by their works. Only belief in Christ, plus obedience to him, can save.

TO WHAT WILL MEN BE SAVED?

Men will be saved to that degree or quality of glory and of reward which they have earned by their *works* done in the

flesh. Paul expresses it beautifully and clearly in the Scripture at the beginning of this chapter. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Any life which is not built on that foundation will not endure in the day of judgment. "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon." Some will build of one material; some of another. Some will build carefully, wisely, beautifully, well. Others will build carelessly, foolishly. But when he has finished building, each man will have only what *he has built* on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Christ furnishes the foundation; we furnish the building. In the day of judgment, every man's work shall be tried by fire, to see what sort of work it is. If the house has been built of wood, hay, or stubble, the fire will consume it; if he has built of imperishable gold, the fire will not harm it. And now notice the last verse: "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but *he himself* shall be saved; yet so as by fire." The man who has built of perishable material may find all his *work* destroyed, but he himself shall be saved, standing on the foundation of Christ, with nothing much to show for his life's work. The man who has built on the foundation of Christ, and built with imperishable materials for eternity, will enjoy the fruits of his work through all eternity.

Paul gives some additional explanation of this principle in the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians, where he speaks of a glory of the sun, a glory of the moon, and a glory of the stars, all occupied by those who have been saved, their degree of glory determined by their works done in the flesh.

Judgment is eternal. It is going on now; it will continue through eternity. The kind of character which our choices and our deeds in the flesh build for us is our reward, or our punishment. We are punished not *for* our sins, but *by* our sins; we are rewarded not *for* our good deeds, but *by* them. The sum total of all the good and bad choices of a lifetime built upon the foundation of Christ or upon a sandy founda-

tion makes us what we are; and not even the miracle of God's mercy can change the result, for his judgment is eternal. Let us then build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, but build of those imperishable materials which shall stand in the day of judgment, when they are tried as by fire.