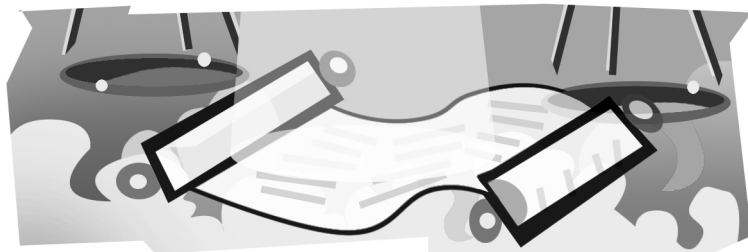


# Judgment Must Begin



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Eccles. 12:14; Dan. 12:1, 2; Matt. 8:12; 22:1-13; 25:31-33, 46; John 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:10.*

**Memory Text:** “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (*Romans 2:16*).

**G**raffiti written on a wall by an Italian atheist reads: “There is no God—and Mary is His mother!” However funny, the point is important: As human beings, we are subjective creatures. However much we might try to be objective—to look at things honestly, fairly, logically, without preconceived notions—we inevitably bring our own ideas, culture, moods, and experiences into whatever subject we approach. Even the idea of not having a preconceived notion about something is, indeed, to have a preconceived notion about something.

This week, while realizing our inherent limitations, we’re going to be as objective as we can as we look at what the Bible says about judgment. Let’s forget for the moment about 1844, the pre-Advent judgment, Ellen White, Hiram Edson in the cornfield, etc. Instead, let’s just let the Bible speak for itself on this important topic. And, as it does, let’s see what answers it gives to the following questions: How are judgment and the gospel linked? What are the final results of judgment? Are Christians judged? What role do works play in judgment? When is the judgment?

Though none of the answers to these questions contains all that we need to know on the subject, woven together they form a nice tapestry that will enable us to grasp better the concept of judgment, regardless of whatever preconceptions we already have about it.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 8.*

## Hour of His Judgment

As Adventist Christians, we say that the gospel of Jesus Christ is “good news.” In fact, the Greek word translated “gospel” means just that, “good news.”

But if it’s good news, it’s good news about what? It’s the good news that Jesus died as our Substitute (*1 Pet. 2:24*); that at the Cross He paid the penalty for our sins (*Isa. 53:6*); that through faith in Him we stand perfect in God now because we are covered with perfect righteousness (*Rom. 3:22*); and that because of what He has done for us, we have the promise of eternal life (*1 John 5:11, 12*).

So, the good news is that we have eternal life, as opposed to—what?

**Read** the following texts. What’s the option for those who, in the end, don’t have eternal life? *Dan. 12:2, Matt. 8:12, 25:46, John 3:18, 2 Thess. 1:9, Rev. 14:11.*

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Look at some of the images and phrases from these texts: “everlasting punishment,” “smoke of their torment,” “condemned,” “everlasting destruction,” “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” If this isn’t talking about judgment, what is?

Thus, the good news of the gospel is that we *are spared* condemnation in judgment. In other words, inherent in the gospel itself is the promise that those who have accepted Jesus aren’t condemned as are those who have rejected Him. There is, then, no such thing as the gospel without judgment, because “the good news” of the gospel is that we are spared condemnation. In short, the gospel without judgment is like a circle without roundness: By its very definition, the gospel includes judgment.

**Read Romans 2:16 and Revelation 14:6-8. How do these verses show the link between the gospel and judgment? How does what we’ve read today help you to understand even better what we have to thank the Lord for because of the sacrifice of Jesus?**

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**Key Text:** *Romans 2:16*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To review the link between the investigative judgment and the gospel.
2. To examine the mode, the nature, and the time of the investigative judgment.
3. To discuss the outcome of the investigative judgment.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. The Nature of the Pre-Advent Judgment (*Eccles. 12:14; Dan. 12:1, 2; Matt. 25:31-33, 46*)

- A. The pre-Advent judgment investigates the lives of those who have professed a belief in God.
- B. Both the living and the dead will be judged.
- C. Each person, as a result of his or her choice, faces one of two outcomes: eternal life or death.

#### II. The Verdict of the Judgment (*John 3:18, 2 Cor. 5:10*)

- A. The pre-Advent judgment reveals the life decision of every professed believer, either for or against the salvation by Jesus.
- B. God will carry out the judgment, according to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- C. Accepting Christ's gift of grace in place of our sinful lives renders a verdict of "not guilty" in the judgment.

**Summary:** The Bible says that judgment and the gospel are inseparable. As the events of prophecy move closer to their ultimate fulfillment at the end of time, a final judgment will take place. Only two final outcomes prevail: eternal life or death.

## COMMENTARY

Because God is just, His relationship to us is just. He condemns those who reject Him, and He accepts as part of His family those who accept Him. God's judgment is an inevitable divine activity: "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (*Heb. 9:27*). This week's lesson dwells on judgment as condemnation, judgment as acceptance, and judgment's relationship to the gospel.

### I. Judgment: God's Condemnation

Sin brings divine judgment, because God's holiness and justice is incompatible with sin. The Bible speaks clearly of God's judgment on sin. When Lucifer sinned in heaven and refused God's countless pleas to repent, God's immediate judgment cast Satan and his followers out of heaven (*Rev. 12:9*). A final judgment awaits them (*Rev. 20:10*).

## Life or Damnation?

**Look** up the texts below. Who are the two ultimate classes of people depicted here?

*Dan. 12:2*

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*Matt. 12:37*

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*John 3:16*

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*John 5:29*

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Whatever else judgment involves, it results in only two classes of people: those who are saved eternally and those who are lost eternally. These texts don't show any kind of happy medium or middle ground. In the end, the ultimate fate of all of us is either eternal life or eternal destruction.

Thus, it's clear from even these texts that some sort of judgment divides the righteous from the wicked. A final separation occurs, a judgment in which the final fate of everyone is, forever, decided.

**Read** the following text: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left” (*Matt. 25:31-33*). What more do they teach us about the nature of judgment?

A number of fascinating points are brought out here. First of all, who is being judged? It says that “all nations” shall be gathered before Him. Thus, this seems to be some sort of universal judgment; all nations come under scrutiny, which means that everyone does because, after all, is not the Lord “the Judge of all the earth” (*Gen. 18:25*)?

Here, too, we are faced with the same clear division: the sheep and the goats, the saved and the lost, those who shall, in Christ's own words, “go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (*Matt. 25:46*).

It doesn't get much plainer than that.

**Dwell on the sober implications of the texts for today's study. How much more earnest should you be in caring not only for your own soul but in working prayerfully and faithfully for the salvation of others?**

When Adam and Eve sinned, God judged them by expelling them from Eden and making them subject to death (*Gen. 3:19, 23*). The sins of Noah's generation and of Sodom and Gomorrah brought swift judgment in a Flood and a destructive fire (*Gen. 6, 7, 19:12-29*). Enoch stated that the Lord will come in the last days to judge all the earth (*Jude 14, 15*), while Isaiah spoke of God as coming with eternal fire to consume the wicked (*Isa. 66:15, 16*).

Jesus spoke of the final judgment in which all humanity will be called to give account for every word and act not in harmony with God's will (*Matt. 12:36, Luke 9:26*). Paul wrote that God had implanted in human conscience the concept of a final judgment (*Rom. 1:32, 2:14-16*), while the author of Hebrews wrote that the wicked can hope for nothing but utter destruction (*Heb. 10:26, 27*).

So, we see that judgment as God's method of destroying sin is essential to His basic nature. Because He is righteous, no unrighteousness can stand in His presence. Therefore, "He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth" (*Ps. 96:13, NIV*).

### **II. Judgment: God's Acceptance**

Upon what basis does God condemn some and accept others? Jesus said: " 'But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned' " (*Matt. 12:36, 37; see also 2 Cor. 5:10, 1 Pet. 1:17*). From these passages and others, it often is concluded that God's acceptance of us depends on what we do. In support of this position, the parable of the separation of the goats and the sheep often is quoted (*Matt. 25:31-40*). This parable recognizes the significance of caring for what many people consider to be the least in society. But the most significant question the parable asks in view of the final judgment is one of relationship: "How is your relationship to Christ the Savior?" Does your life reveal that you have known your Savior?

### **III. Judgment and the Gospel**

The gospel is the good news that we are redeemed by Christ's blood. The Bible also pictures judgment as part of the gospel.

In what sense can judgment be a part of such good news? The judgment is good news in that it offers salvation for those who accept the redeeming provision of the gospel. It is also good news in that the judgment carries out condemnation and ensures the final defeat of sin, sinners, and Satan. Thus, God's character is vindicated, and this earth is purified from sin and its effects.

The Cross is central to the vindication of God's character in the cosmic conflict. As Jesus' death drew near, He said, " 'Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out' " (*John 12:31, NIV*). The Son of God hung between

## House of God

Yesterday's study revealed the idea of some sort of universal, end-time judgment that involved all people. But what about the church? What about those who have professed the name of Jesus and, from all outward appearances, are living the Christian life in sincerity and faithfulness? Are they, too, judged?

As Christians, we understand that Jesus was judged and condemned at the Cross in our stead. He faced the condemnation for sin that we, otherwise, would have to face ourselves (*see Isa. 53:4-6, Matt. 20:28, Rom. 5:8, 2 Cor. 5:14, Eph. 5:2, 1 Thess. 5:10*). As Ellen White expressed it: "Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753. Does this mean, then, that because Christ was condemned in our stead, Christians don't face judgment?

**Look up the following texts. How do they answer the question Are Christians judged?**

*Matt. 7:21-23*

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*Rom. 14:10*

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*Heb. 10:30*

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*1 Pet. 4:17*

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These few texts, along with many others, make it abundantly clear that God's people, His church, do face judgment. When Jesus in Matthew chided those who claimed that they did many wonderful things "in thy name," He wasn't talking to atheists, Hindus, or Wiccans because they don't do things in His name. Christians do. Paul's words that "we shall all" stand before the judgment seat includes himself in those who will be judged.

There's no question that, according to the Word of God, those who profess to be followers of Christ, those who are indeed "his people" (*Heb. 10:30*) will face some sort of judgment at the end of time.

**When was the last time you were judged, either rightfully or wrongfully? What difference does it make for you knowing that, in the end, God will judge both with mercy and with justice? Why do you want mercy more than justice? Why will you need it?**

heaven and earth, proclaiming to the universe that He paid the price of sin and that through His death, Satan is defeated. The Cross inaugurates the gospel as the good news of salvation and the good news of Satan's destruction.

The link between the gospel and judgment is further borne out in Jesus' parable of the wedding garment. This parable tells of a wedding feast to which the king had invited many. Among them was a person without the proper garment, which the king himself

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Ecclesiastes 12:14, Matthew 7:21-23, 22:1-13, 25:31-33, Revelation 14:6-8, 20:12*

- 1 Some people see Christianity only in terms of judgment (it probably does not help that so many Christians are judgmental and critical). But this week's lesson points out that justice and grace are just two sides of the coin we call "the gospel." What person, in your experience, most closely reflected the ideal balance between justice and grace? What was the overall effect on your life? What prevents you from having that same balance in your own life?
- 2 While the Bible declares that the judgment will ultimately reveal only two classes of people, we should resist the temptation to categorize people into one of those two groups now. Irreparable harm has been done by crusaders wanting to force the issue. Cite three examples of how Jesus dealt with known sinners. How should His example be translated into modern settings?
- 3 One of the great ironies of the gospel is that we are saved by faith but judged by works. How have you reconciled those two concepts? What are the practical implications of this Bible truth? Which Bible texts offer you the most encouragement that everything will turn out all right?
- 4 Jesus' words, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me" (*Rev. 22:12, NIV*), indicate that some kind of deliberative process takes place prior to the execution of justice. What does this process reveal about God? Is it designed to be redemptive or exclusionary? Who benefits most from this process? Read 2 Peter 3:9.
- 5 Unpack the symbols of the parable of the wedding banquet (*Matt. 22:1-14*). How can we know whether we're properly attired for God's wedding banquet?

## “Every Secret Thing”

**“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”** (*Eccles. 12:14*).

Solomon writes the whole book of Ecclesiastes and ends with the above text, which is about as clear and unambiguous a statement one could find in Scripture regarding not only the reality of judgment but that judgment involves our works, even “every secret thing.”

Of course, Solomon wasn’t the only one to tell us about a judgment by works. Jesus was pretty explicit in Matthew 12:36, 37 when He said that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Peter makes it plain also: “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (*1 Pet. 1:17*). Paul, too, understands the reality of a judgment by works: “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 Cor. 5:10*). John, in Revelation, writes also of a judgment by works: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (*Rev. 20:12*).

**What** other Bible texts can you find, such as in the parables, that talk very clearly about a judgment by works?

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**Why does it make sense for there to be a judgment by works? When you think about all the evil that has been done in this world, how could God be just if there weren’t such a judgment? On the lines below write out why it’s important, especially in the context of theodicy (see last week’s lesson), for there to be a judgment by works. Be prepared to compare your answers in class on Sabbath.**

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had provided free to all. This person, however, felt that his own garment was good enough to enter the feast, indicating that he cared nothing for the king's. Acceptance of the garment was essential for the entry to the feast. Rejection of the garment meant receiving the king's judgment: " 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' " (*Matt. 22:13, NIV*). Thus, we learn that "only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God's presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul. . . .

"This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 311.

To wear the robe of Christ's righteousness or not to wear it marks difference between the judgment of acceptance and judgment of condemnation.

## Witnessing

One of the hardest points to get across to secular people is the idea of the basic sinfulness of humanity. The idea that we, at our core, are bad, sinful, even evil, is a concept that many people find hard to accept.

On the other hand, all one has to do is take a look at the world around us, and indeed, this Christian doctrine should seem patently obvious. Someone once said that while we might need faith to believe in a lot of Christian teachings—like the Second Coming, the millennium, heaven—what we don't need faith to believe in is the basic sinfulness of humanity. All one has to do is read the newspaper!

Sure, we are sinners. And we run, we dodge, we hide, we gloss over our faults and sins, hoping that the neighbors won't notice and, perhaps, that God becomes a little absentminded.

But it is all to no avail. We might be able to fool our neighbors, friends, relatives, and maybe even ourselves. But the Bible says that there is a record of our sins, God keeps it, and judgment is upon us. The good news—the great news, in fact—is that Jesus is both Judge and Chief Defense Counsel. If we only put our trust in Him, He will plead His sacrifice as payment for our sins. Sure, though we all face judgment, because of Jesus we have assurance and surety in that judgment.

This week, think about someone who needs to know the good news and let them know that, though they aren't angels, there's a God who loves and cares for them, a God who will forgive their sins and stand in their place in the judgment.

## His Reward Is With Him

**Read** Matthew 22:1-13 and then answer the following questions:

**1** What is the wedding imagery all about? See also *Isa. 62:5, Hos. 2:19, Matt. 9:15, Rev. 21:2.*

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**2** What significance is there to the fact that a person who had accepted the invitation faced judgment?

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**3** What was the fate of the man who, after scrutiny, was found without a garment?

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What this parable also teaches is that there is some sort of judgment prior to execution of the sentence. After all, even in human courts, how often is a sentence executed before an inquiry that leads to judgment? Revelation 22:12, in which the Lord says that when He returns, His “reward is with me,” also implies a prior judgment. (Why would the reward already be with Him if there were not something beforehand that determined who should get it?) Second Corinthians 5:10 implies a reckoning prior to a final reward or punishment, so that “each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body” (*NIV*). This idea is found also in Daniel 12:1, where those found in the book of life are delivered.

Any kind of judgment according to works implies a reckoning of those works *before* the execution of the reward or punishment that those works have deserved, be that judgment a hundred years or a hundred seconds before the punishment or vindication is carried out. And because, according to many of the texts we’ve seen this week, the reward or punishment comes at the Second Coming, there must be some sort of reckoning or judgment prior to that event itself.

**How would you like to be judged, even punished, prior to some sort of fair scrutiny of the facts? Why, then, is the idea of a prior judgment so fair and logical? Think, too, about the question of theodicy, of God being vindicated in His whole dealing with Satan, sin, and evil. How does the idea of theodicy help us understand the need for a scrutiny prior to execution of a sentence?**

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “Out of parental concern and a desire to teach our young son responsibility, we require him to phone home when he arrives at his friend’s house a few blocks away. He began to forget, however, as he grew more confident in his ability to get there without disaster befalling him. The first time he forgot, I called to be sure he had arrived. We told him the next time it happened, he would have to come home. A few days later, however, the telephone again lay silent, and I knew if he was going to learn, he would have to be punished. But I did not want to punish him. I went to the telephone, regretting that his great time would be spoiled by his lack of contact with his father. As I dialed, I prayed for wisdom. ‘Treat him like I treat you,’ the Lord seemed to say. With that, as the telephone rang one time, I hung up. A few seconds later the phone rang, and it was my son. ‘I’m here, Dad!’

“ ‘What took you so long to call?’ I asked.

“ ‘We started playing and I forgot. But Dad, I heard the phone ring once and I remembered.’

“How often do we think of God as One who waits to punish us when we step out of line? I wonder how often he rings just once, hoping we will phone home.”—Dennis Miller, “Discipline of Children,” eSermons, [http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/d/discipline\\_of\\_children.htm](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/d/discipline_of_children.htm) (accessed February 22, 2005).

### Thought Question:

More than four out of every five Americans agree that “we all will be called before God at judgment day to answer for our sins,” says a poll conducted for the Times Mirror company.—National and International Religion Report, quoted in *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>, August 1993, p. 6. While we are aware of the judgment and the need to be accountable to God, we sometimes act with complete disregard for the consequences of our actions. How do you explain such behavior in spite of the strong belief in the final judgment?

### Application Question:

Like the child in the Icebreaker, we oftentimes obey God, not out of desire but out of fear of the consequences. What motivates you to make important choices in your life? What effect does the judgment have on the choices you make? Would you continue to choose to live a Christian life if you knew for sure that there is no heaven? Explain.

**Further Study:** “Judgment deserves careful attention, since it is involved in the issues of (a) divine justice in an unjust world (theodicy), (b) retribution for wrong done, (c) the suffering of the innocent, (d) the resolution of the conflict of good and evil, and (e) the end of sin and suffering. But above all, final judgment vindicates the Creator—His character, law, and governance—in the minds of all created intelligences, whether loyal or lost, thereby obtaining eternal security and peace for the universe. Judgment is thus portrayed in Scripture as an essential part of the ‘eternal gospel’ (Rev. 14:6, 7).”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12, p. 815.

This week we’ve seen that Scripture teaches the following points about judgment: (1) Judgment and the gospel are linked, even inseparable; (2) there is some sort of final judgment near the end of time; (3) among those judged are the professed followers of Christ; (4) works are clearly part of this judgment; (5) only two final outcomes are presented, eternal life or eternal destruction; and (6) some sort of judgment takes place prior to the execution of the sentence.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** As a class, go over your answers to the question at the end of Wednesday’s study. What can you learn from one another? How, too, does the question of theodicy play in with your answers?
- 2** Go around the class and have each person who is willing answer this question: How do you feel about the prospect of being judged by your works?
- 3** Ask different people in the class whether they have ever been in a position in which they had to execute some sort of judgment upon another person. What was the process like? How important was it to be fair? How seriously did they take their responsibility? Why was it important to get all the facts before coming to a conclusion? What can the class learn from what was said that could help us better understand the idea of God’s judgment?