

Judgment To Come

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1. The Principles Of Judgment

1.1. The Purpose Of Judgment

Judgment Now

The judgment seat of Christ is not a means by which the Father and Son gather information about us, consider it and then give a verdict. It will be for *our* benefit. Our behaviour is constantly analyzed by them and 'judged'. The idea of sitting upon a judgment seat or giving judgment doesn't necessarily involve the idea of weighing up evidence. To 'judge' can mean simply to pronounce the final verdict, which the judge has long since known; not to weigh up evidence (consider Mt. 7:2; Jn. 3:18; 5:22; 7:24,51; 8:15,16,26; 16:11; 18:31; Acts 7:7; 23:3; 24:6 Gk.; Rom. 2:12; 3:7; 1 Cor. 11:31; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 10:30; 13:4; 1 Pet. 4:6; James 5:10,22).

*'Judge' = to pronounce the final verdict,
not weigh up evidence*

“He that believeth on him is not condemned [judged]” (Jn. 3:18)

“Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (Jn. 7:51)

“Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to out any man to death” (Jn. 18:31)

“If we should judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31)

“That they all might be damned [judged] who believed not the truth” (2 Thess. 2:12).

Pilate sitting on judgment seat = to pronounce verdict (Jn. 19:13)

“The Lord standeth to judge the people” (Is. 3:13) = to pronounce verdict

“I will call...the kingdoms of the north [Babylon]...and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem...and I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness” (Jer. 1:15,16).

All these passages are impressive evidence that 'the judgment seat' isn't the weighing up of evidence which we may tend to think of it as. Pilate sat on the judgment seat not to weigh up evidence but to pronounce the verdict (Jn. 19:13). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17). The trial of our faith is going on now; the judgment will

simply formally reveal the verdict which is now being arrived at. The Father judges now "according to every man's work" (1 Pet. 1:17), as He did in OT times: "Thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Ps. 62:12). Yet when His Son returns, He will give every man "according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). It couldn't be clearer: the judgment is going on now, and the Lord Jesus returns to give us the reward which has been 'judged' appropriate for us. With this background, Peter drives home the almost inevitable practical lesson: "...[therefore] pass the time of your sojourning here in fear". *Now* Yahweh's eyes judge and examine the righteous, as He sits enthroned; and He *will*, at the future day of judgment, rain sulphur upon the head of the wicked and chase them away with His brining wind (Ps. 11:4-6 RV- reference to the Angel of the Lord chasing the rejected away?). The "end" of the rejected is to be later "burnt" (Heb. 6:8), as if rejection occurs in the mind of God now, but will articulate the punishment later, at the judgment. "He that loveth his life loseth it" (Jn. 12:25 RV)- we are right now losing our lives if we love ourselves. The final judgment is likened to a winnowing process. But right now, according to Ps. 139:3 RVmg., God winnows our path [our daily living], all day ("my path") and every evening (at my "lying down"). "The Lord sat as king [in judgment] at the Flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever" (Ps. 29:10 RV); He is just as much sitting in judgment now as He was at the flood, which is a well known type of the judgment to come.

Jeremiah's ministry began with God describing how Babylon would set her thrones of judgment near Jerusalem, and then God would utter His Judgments against His people (Jer. 1:15,16). These thrones and this judgment seat scenario wasn't for the obtaining or weighing of evidence; it was for the pronouncement of verdict. "The Lord standeth to judge the people" (Is. 3:13) alludes to the judge standing up at the end and pronouncing the conclusion. God's 'judgment' of His people here didn't involve a gathering and weighing up of evidence. And so with us. That 'judgment' in the sense of the weighing up of evidence *is going on right now*. The Lord returns and will sit on the judgment seat to give the final, unalterable summing up of His judgment of us, and to pronounce the final verdict in the light of this. One of the themes of the book of Job is that God is not passive to the human condition and human behaviour, as Job thought. "The cause is before him, and thou waitest for him" to express His judgment of the case (Job 35:14 RV). He is judging our cases right now; they are before Him. And we wait the Lord's return to pronounce the verdict.

The king (Jesus) makes a reckoning with His servants right now, and it is for us to be influenced by the gracious accounting He shows towards us, and then in this life reflect an appropriate grace to our brother (Mt. 18:23 RV). The reckoning is going on right now, indeed in a sense it occurred on the cross. Right now, God is ashamed or not ashamed of us, according to our separation from the spirit of this world (Heb. 11:16); and yet His not being ashamed of us will also be apparent at the final judgment. We have our judgment now, from His point of view.

The judgment seat which there will be is in fact only a bringing to earth of the judgment seat which even now is going on in Heaven. Consider Mt. 10:32: "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven". What does this speak about? Surely of the Lord's speaking to the Father in Heaven right now, in this life. But compare the parallel Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God". Of what does this speak? Surely of the last judgment [note the reference to the "Son of man", a term usually used about judgment to come; and denial before the angels surely equates with the "I never knew you" of the final judgment]. The

events of the last day, with the Lord confessing or denying us before the Father and the Angels, are actually going on this very day.

The Purpose

The judgment seat will be for our benefit and for the glorification and vindication of God's Name / character. Whenever God condemns a person or a system, it is for the articulation of His Name- and not merely an expression of anger from an all powerful God. Thus "The Lord is known [revealed] by the judgment which He executes" (Ps. 9:16). The vision of Kingdom glory was "according to the... vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw [Ezekiel twice stresses this feature!] when I came to destroy the city" (Ez. 43:3). The same essential glory of God is revealed in both condemnation and salvation. It's been pointed out that "In Hebrew, 'to judge' and 'to help' are parallel ideas" ⁽¹⁾. We see it in Is. 1:17, where to 'judge the fatherless' means to help and save him. There He will reveal the hidden things of darkness (the human heart), and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4:5). Of course He knows these anyway; but He will make them manifest *to us*. The judgment seat is for our benefit, not God's- He knows our lives and spiritual position already. The day of judgment is to purify us (Mal. 3:2)- not ultimately, for that has been done by the Lord's blood and our lives of faithful acceptance of this. But the fire of judgment reveals the dross of our lives *to us* and in this sense purges us of those sins. Without the judgment, we would drift into the Kingdom with no real appreciation of our own sinfulness or the height of God's grace. The judgment will declare God's glory, His triumph over every secret sin of His people. The heathen will be judged "that the nations may know themselves to be but men" (Ps. 9:20)- self knowledge is the aim, not extraction of information so that God can make a decision. And it was the same with Israel: "Judge the bloody city... (i.e.) shew her all her abominations" (Ez. 22:2). The Hebrew word translated 'carry away captive' means also to denude, to reveal, uncover. Israel were revealed for what they were by being carried away into captivity (Ez. 16:37; Hos. 2:10; 2 Kings 17:6,11,23,33). And yet morally they uncovered themselves, they revealed their own shame (Is. 57:8; Ez. 16:36; 23:10); God didn't inflict anything on them which they had not in principle inflicted on themselves during their lives. To a certain degree, the acceptance or rejection which will be shown to us in the day of judgment can be visited on us in this life, in accordance with our actions. Thus the Lord Jesus appears as the judge of the seven ecclesias in Rev. 1:14, the description of him there being very similar to that in Dan. 7 and 10, where he is portrayed as the judge at the second coming. Asaph knew that God *now* judges, and therefore asks God to arise and judge openly in the earth according to those judgments (Ps. 82:1,8).

Having spoken of the coming of judgment, Ecc. 3:18 RV comments: "It is because of the sons of men, that God might manifest them [i.e. to themselves], and that they might see that they themselves are beasts". The purpose of the judgment is for us, to teach us the gripping truth of the mortality of man. This theory we know, as doctrine. But only in the chilling reality of the judgment will we know it in reality. Again and again I repeat: the judgment seat is for our benefit. "For he [God] needeth not further to consider a man; that he should go before God in judgment" (Job 34:23 RV). Yet man will go before God in judgment- but for our benefit. Another doctrine which the judgment seat will teach us in practice is the humanity of Jesus. God "gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man" (Jn. 5:27 RVmg.). His humanity is His ability to judge us. We will then realize the extent to which He succeeded in every point where we realize we failed, despite being strapped with our same nature. And thus we will respect Him yet the more for His perfection of character, and for the wonder of the salvation that is thereby in Him.

All this may be the explanation of the otherwise enigmatic Ps. 94:15: “Judgment shall return to righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it”. The end result of God’s judgments is righteousness, both exhibited by Him in the nature of the judgments, and also in the reformed lives of those who respond to meditation upon those judgments.

The Faithful Learn By The Condemnation Of The Wicked

The very existence of “the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” is in order to “make known the riches of his glory upon the vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:22,23 RV). After the experience of Divine judgment, “ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem”; and yet these are exactly the words used to describe how God will be 'comforted' after the judgments (Ez. 5:13; 14:22). We will come to share God's perspective through our experience of the judgment process. It will teach us to be like Him, to see things from His viewpoint. As a result of it, the struggles we have over "why...?" so many things happened will be resolved. The purpose of the judgment is not only to convict us of our sinfulness, but also to make us appreciate our own righteousness for what it was and is. The faithful almost argue back with the Lord when He points out to them their righteous acts; they were done within a spirit of service that simply didn't see them as He does.

1 Tim. 5:24,25 likewise implies a 'going through' of the good and bad works of men, with the added implication that it is done in the presence of others. Thus they will "see his shame" (Rev. 16:15). “All that behold” the unfinished spiritual building of the wicked “will mock him” (Lk. 14:29); and the accepted will praise each other for their humility in taking the lowest seat in ecclesial life (Lk. 14:10). The rejected will awake to "the reproach and abhorrence of the age" (Dan. 12:2 Dr. Thomas' translation)- as if they will be reproached by some. "When the wicked are cut off, [the righteous] shall see it" (Ps. 37:34). The 12 disciples will judge the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). At judgment day, the children of the Jews who criticized Jesus would judge them- "they shall be your judges" rather than Jesus Himself (Lk. 11:19). "The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools" (Prov. 3:35) is looking ahead to the judgment. But "shame" must be in the eyes of someone; therefore the rejection of the wicked will be in the eyes of those who once knew them in the ecclesia. The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel (Mt. 12:41); the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common (e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

The public nature of the judgment experience is hinted at throughout the Lord's parables. The other guests at the Lord's table will see the man who took the highest place in the ecclesia taking now the lowest place- he has "shame" before their eyes, and likewise the believer who took the lowest place in this life will have praise for that humility from the other guests, as the Lord exalts him or her higher (Lk. 14:9,10). In this context the Lord proceeded to warn His followers not to be like the man who sets out to build a tower, but can't complete it- and therefore he has shame from those who behold it (Lk. 14:29). This is just another way of saying the same thing. There will be believers who grandly showed themselves to their brethren to be building something which actually they couldn't complete; and they will have shame before their brethren when the day of judgment reveals who they really are. All this, of

course, has massive practical implications. If all will be ultimately revealed before our brethren in the last day, why try to act before them as someone we're not?

This is all the same theme as we find expressed in Prov. 26:26: "Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation" or ecclesia- at the day of judgment, when our innermost motives and feelings behind our smarmy words will be revealed to every one of our watching brethren. There is in this 'media is the message' world a great emphasis upon nice-speak. Say it nicely, that's the main thing, and don't let your bad feelings against someone show. Keep them in your heart, but don't speak them or write them. But it's the basic feelings we need to control- and then the expression of them won't be an issue. And it is those basic feelings behind all our spoken and written words which will be revealed to the whole ecclesia in the last day.

The Purpose Of Judgment (1)

- To reveal *to us* the hidden things of darkness [the human heart] and make manifest *to us* the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4:5)
- To purify us, to reveal the dross of our hearts to us (Mal. 3:2)
- The nations judged "that the nations may know themselves to be but men" (Ps. 9:20)
- "Judge the bloody city...(i.e.) shew her all her abominations" (Ez. 22:2).
- 'Carry away captive' = 'to denude, reveal, uncover' (Ez. 16:37; 2 Kings 17:6,11), as men reveal themselves now (Is. 57:8): "Thou hast *discovered* thyself to another than me...thou hast enlarged thy bed".
- Folly of the rejected made manifest to all men (2 Tim. 3:9); faithful see the shame of the rejected (Rev. 16:15).
- Israel's judgments executed "in the sight of the nations...so it shall be an *instruction* unto the nations round about" (Ez. 5:8,15).
- Through His judgments men knew Him as Yahweh (Ez. 25:11; 28:22; 30:19).
- "All nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15:4)

God's judgments are in all the earth right now (Ps. 105:7). God judged nations in order that men might *know* Him as Yahweh (e.g. Ez. 25:11; 28:22; 30:19). Yahweh is exalted in His judging of men (Is. 5:16). His judgments make His Name / character manifest. "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy Name?...all nations shall come and worship before thee; *for thy judgments are made manifest*" (Rev. 15:4). A number of OT passages (e.g. Is. 25:3) hint that a remnant of Israel's Arab enemies will actually repent and accept Yahweh's Truth- *after* their experience of His judgments (this is expanded upon in *The Last Days*). The manifestation of His judgments is for the benefit of humans, that they may come to know God and appreciate their own sinfulness. When God finally arises in judgment, "all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing" (Ps. 64:9). God is to be feared and worshipped because of the hour of His judgment (Rev. 14:7);

"when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Is. 26:9); for "the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth" (Ps. 9:16). Israel's condemnation was to be "an instruction" unto the surrounding nations (Ez. 5:14,15). And Israel herself will know that "I am the LORD" in their final condemnation, as Ezekiel so often prophesied. This clearly associates God's judgment with a learning process. "When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise" (Prov. 21:11). Thus the nations are intended to learn from the experience of Israel's condemnation (Hos. 2:10). The repentance of Egypt will be because "the Lord shall smite Egypt...and they shall return to the Lord" (Is. 19:18-22). "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people" (Dt. 32:43) is quoted in the NT (Rom. 15:10) concerning Gentile response to the Gospel. But they will rejoice and respond *because* of God's terrifying judgment of His enemies outlined in the context (Dt. 32:41-44). In some way, the harder side of God attracts, in that men see in truth that He is God and they but men. His rod and staff of correction are our comforts (Ps. 23:4). Israel will finally realize that God's judgments upon them have brought them to know Him: "They shall know that I am the Lord, in that I caused them to go into captivity" (Ez. 39:28 RV). It's rather like how the idea of conditional salvation, and that not for everybody but a tiny minority, I find both hard to accept and yet the very thing that clinches the actual reality of 'the truth' we hold. Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). And this book was in some way a joy and rejoicing to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). And when those that had already believed (Acts 19:18 Gk.) saw how the condemned sons of Sceva fled away from the spirit of Jesus naked and wounded, in anticipation of the final judgment, they ceased being secret believers and came out openly with their confessions of unworthiness and need for salvation. In the light of that foretaste of judgment to come, they realized that nothing else mattered. The image of them fleeing naked definitely alludes to Am. 2:16: "The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, Says the Lord" (NKJV).

The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as Jesus preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

The Purpose Of Judgment (2)

- When God arises in judgment "all men shall fear and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider of his doing" (Ps. 64:9) cp. Ananias & Saphira.
- "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Is. 26:9). Harder side of God attracts.
- After judgment "Then shall the Kingdom...be likened unto ten virgins" (Mt. 25:1)
- Rejected see themselves thrust out of the Kingdom, see themselves from outside themselves, as they really are (Lk. 13:28).

- Evil servant “cut asunder”, hypocrisy revealed to all (Mt. 24:51).

Judgment: The Articulation Of God's Name

God's Name is essentially His character. He *is* His character. In all He creates and destroys, in all He shows of Himself to man, this character is revealed, magnified and glorified. Lk. 17:30 says that at the last day, the Son of man will be “revealed”; and yet the other references to the Son of man being revealed refer to the way He is even now revealed to His true followers by the Father (Mt. 11:27; 16:17 etc.). At the second coming, the real nature of God’s Son, the essence of His character, will be revealed to all. At the very time that the Wicked One will be revealed, so will the Son of God (2 Thess. 2:8). In the way God judges man, His character is again glorified and revealed; for in the way He judges, His essential characteristics are revealed. It is therefore possible to see anticipations of the day of future judgment in how God has judged in the past- thus incidents like Adam and Cain's rejection, the Babylonian and Roman invasions and the subsequent condemnation of God's people, the flood... all these are prototypes of the future judgment. Take, for example, the prophecy of Obadiah against Edom. It is full of language elsewhere used about the judgment seat. Edom's judgments for hating their brother were a living out of God's judgment principles as they will again be articulated at the last day. Or take Nahum 1 concerning Nineveh. The day of God's vengeance on "those mine enemies" (cp. Lk. 19:27), the begging for acquittal refused, the presence of God, fire, being judged along with apostate Israel (1:5), inability to stand before God's presence, the fury of God, darkness, fleeing and being pursued by God... the elements of the last day judgment were all to be seen in Nineveh's condemnation. The Lord's miracles likewise showed forth God's judgment principles; in them He shewed judgment to the Gentiles, and sent forth God's judgments (Mt. 12:18-20 quotes Is. 42:1-3 concerning how the Lord will do this at the events of the second coming).

There are also examples, both Biblically and in our own experience, of where some men reap what they sow in this life (e.g. Jud. 1:7: "as I have done, so God hath requited me"). And yet there are examples galore, much lamented by men like Job and David, of where the wicked prosper, and the righteous have to be comforted that their day of judgment is yet future, and yet will surely come. David asks God to openly show His judgments *now*, so that men will glorify Him as they will in the end (Ps. 58:11). David understood that God *will* arise in judgment, but He *can* arise and judge our cause *now* (Ps. 7:6; 35:23,24). In some cases, He does judge now. He has judged and condemned in the past (e.g. 2 Pet. 2:6). And David, in his humanity, asked for God to work like this. As to *why* God sometimes shows His judgment now, and yet generally reserves the revelation of His judgments to the last day is a deep issue. And yet one response could be that this is in order to teach us what the future judgment will be like, and the basis upon which it will be conducted.

In the end, sin doesn't defeat God. His Name will be glorified in the condemnation of the wicked just as it will be in the acceptance of the righteous. The Lord Jesus spoke of how we as shoots on the vine tree are either ‘cut off’ or ‘trimmed / purged’ to be more fruitful (Jn. 15:2). There is a paranomasia here in the Greek text [i.e. a play on similar sounding verbs]- *airein* and *kathairein*. The point being that the purging process works through condemning oneself now; by going through the realization of our condemnation now, we are thereby purged so that we avoid condemnation at the day of judgment. This is a theme to which we shall often return in this study.

For Our Learning

So what is the purpose of the judgment? My sense is that it is for our benefit, not the Lord's, although an obsession with the figure of judgment may imply the opposite. In one parable, the Lord Jesus taught that *before* the actual judgment, the righteous will tell the Lord how many pounds the pound they were given has gained. In another, the Lord's picture was of the faithful *after* the judgment had been pronounced, questioning with the Lord as to whether they really had done what He had said. We get the picture of an initial account from us, the Lord's judgment, *and then a discussion with us after the verdict has been pronounced*. This of itself indicates that we are not to see the judgment merely as a method for dividing up the rewards and sorting out the punishments. Its aim is to glorify God through our response to the realizations which we are then driven to. The faithful and all their works are foreknown. From God's perspective there seems no reason why the faithful cannot be immediately transferred to immortality at the Lord's coming. They are, after all, seen by Him as being in Christ, who has risen again and received immortality. But how little appreciation of God's grace, what small self-knowledge would we have if this were the case. A few years of what we considered suffering, scratching around on the surface of our natures, almost spoilt by the constant care of our loving Father, then death, and then the next we know we are in the eternal glory of the Kingdom. The judgment seat will surely be a vital part of our spiritual education and preparation for receiving God's nature. There is a possibility that this is behind the record of the stones for the temple being "made ready when it was brought away", or prepared on the journey, so that they could be slotted in to the temple plan without need for further change (1 Kings 6:7 RV and Hebrew). Likewise Moses' speeches as transcribed in Deuteronomy prepared Israel for entrance to Canaan by reminding them of their weaknesses. And if we consider why the Kingdom will start with the Millennium, surely the answer must be that it is for *our* benefit, a preparation for us to enter the fully established Kingdom. Some of the mortals of the last generation will be given the opportunity to be the mortal inhabitants of the Millennium, whilst millions of others in previous generations have lived and died without hope. It seems one of the reasons why they will be there is for our benefit.

Immediately after the judgment, we are told, "the Kingdom...will be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1 and context), the implication being that *then* we will perceive the truths contained in that parable; only then will we fully appreciate the result of watchfulness and keeping oil in the lamps. The rejected will see themselves thrust out of the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28); as if somehow they see themselves from outside of themselves. What spirituality they thought they had they will see as it were taken away from them (Lk. 8:18 AV mg.). This will be the result of the judgment process. They will be convinced by the judgment process of all the ungodly deeds which they had not previously been convicted of, e.g. their hard words against their brethren (Jude 15). 1 Cor. 11:32 may also be a reference to the educative effect of judgment: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world". The world's condemnation will be at the second coming; the judgment and chastening to which Paul refers must therefore be that of the last day. However, in the context he is making the point that our self-examination at the memorial meeting and our response to the chastening hand of God in our present life is in fact a foretaste of that final judgment experience.

Then we will realize our sinfulness, then we will behold the greatness of God's grace and the supremacy of Christ's victory. Then we will realize how small our understanding was, how little of God we knew, and how great is the reward we are being given, how out of proportion it is to our present experience and responsibilities. We almost get the feeling that the servants thought they had done well when they presented the pounds they had gained as a result of how they had used the pound given them. The pound (mina) given was equivalent to at most

\$1000 (2005). Yet the reward was way out of proportion, both to what had been given, and to what they had achieved with it: ten cities! The Master's words almost seem to be a gentle rebuke: "Because thou hast been faithful in a *very little*, have thou authority over ten cities" (Lk. 19:17); "thou hast been faithful over a *few things*, I will make thee ruler over many things" (Mt. 25:23). The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little...a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

But judgment day is not only for our personal education and humbling. It is for the enlightenment of us all as a community, in that there is fair evidence that in some sense the process of judgment will be public, and all the believers will see the true characteristics of those with whom they fellowshipped in this life. Thus the unworthy will be revealed as being without a wedding garment, and the faithful will see him (for the first time) as walking naked and in shame (Mt. 22:11; Rev. 16:15). The evil servant will be "cut asunder" (Mt. 24:51), i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

Time and again, Israel were told that through the judgments of punishment they would receive, they would come to know God in truth (e.g. Ez. 25:7. Their own shame was made to appear before their own face by the judgment process (Jer. 13:26 RV). But it is possible for us to come to that knowledge now through a correct response to the word. If only in our self examination now we would "judge (i.e. condemn) ourselves, we would not be judged (condemned)" at the judgment seat (1 Cor. 11:34). The mental effort and organization of time which this requires must surely be worthwhile in the light of this promise.

Notes

(1) Kohler, Ludwig, *Hebrew Man* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), p.157.

1.2 Judgment Now

God's Present Judgment

The parable of the unjust steward suggests that there are times in this life when we are called to give an account of our stewardship- and how we react to those judgment calls is what will affect our ultimate destiny (Lk. 16:2). We have a tendency to consider God as passive to our failures and acts of righteousness, simply because His judgments are not openly manifest. We may forget that on, say, 6.6.96 we swore under our breath in anger...but God, in this sense, doesn't forget. The passage of time doesn't act as a pseudo-atonement for Him as it does in our consciences. The tendency for human beings to assume that God forgets our wrong actions and will never judge them is frequently commented upon in Scripture. "They consider

not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness", i.e. to judge them for it at a future date (Hos. 7:2). The day of judgment is likened to God 'awaking' (Ps. 68:1; 73:20). Not that He is now sleeping; but then, the principles of His judgment which now appear to lie dormant will be openly manifested. Peter warns that the condemnation of false teachers is given by God in an ongoing sense, and that damnation doesn't slumber (2 Pet. 2:3). Asaph laments how the wicked seem to be so prosperous, and then remembers that one day God will awake. More than this, he comes to see that "they...*shall* perish: thou *hast* destroyed them...how are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they *are* utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:27,19). The wages of sin *is* death (Rom. 6:23)- not 'it will be death at the judgment', it *is* right now the response God makes to sin. Because God is without time, the judgment has effectively happened to them. We are come to "God the judge of all"- even now (Heb. 12:23). He is right now enthroned as judge of our lives (Mt. 5:34; Ps. 93:2). We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it (Ps. 139:2); and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). "God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" in His mind (Ps. 75:7)- although the final putting down and setting up will be at the judgment seat (the basis for the parable of the man being asked to go up higher, Lk. 14:10). This same parable is also rooted in Prov. 25:7: "Put not forth thyself in *the presence* of the king, for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither: than that thou shouldst be put lower in *the presence* of the prince". We are in the King's presence both in this life- when we chose where to sit- just as much as when He returns and re-arranges the seating. The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now (Mic. 7:4 Heb.). Jephthah understood this when he said: "The Lord the judge *be judge this day* between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon" (Jud. 11:27). Because God *is* judge, this means we should realize that He will and does judge here and now. God told Israel that "Therefore *will I* [in the future judgment of the Babylonian invasion] discover they skirts upon thy face"; and yet effectively, "for the greatness of thine iniquity *are* [i.e. now] thy skirts discovered" (Jer. 13:22,26). "As the thief *is* ashamed when he is found, so *is* the house of Israel ashamed" (Jer. 2:26). They had not then been found out; but they would be, and so sure was their future shaming in condemnation that Jeremiah spoke as if it was already being experienced by them. We are to "be separate" in this life, as an act of choice in the myriad of daily decisions we face (2 Cor. 6:17)- and yet at the judgment, the Lord will "sever" (s.w.) the wicked from the just (IMt. 13:49), or "separate" the sheep from the goats (Mt. 25:32). But we are to live out the judgment now in our separation from wickedness. And if we do this, wicked men shall "separate" from us- the judgment is worked out ahead of time (Lk. 6:22).

We are told that whoever broke the Sabbath, "the same soul will I destroy from among his people" (Lev. 23:30). Yet there is no evidence of this ever happening; indeed, the prophets criticize Israel for repeatedly breaking the Sabbath. The idea of destroying from among the people, 'cutting off' from Israel, are parallel with being blotted out of God's book. That blotting out, that cutting off, happens *now* in God's sight; but that judgment won't be articulated until judgment day. There is no record of God zapping people dead for, e.g., offering their seed to Molech, which earned the condemnation of being 'cut off from among the people' (Lev. 20:6). It was God who cut them off in His own judgment, from amongst those whom He perceives to be His people. God's judgments are daily revealed, but the unworthy aren't shamed by them (Zeph. 3:5); they aren't convicted by them to the extent that they realize their condemnation and repent; and therefore they will be shamed in the final, unalterable verdict (Dan. 12:2). They could cover their shame now (Rev. 3:18)- but they chose not to. And yet, unknown to them, in God's eyes these people foam out their own shame (Jude 13). To Him, slanderers and false teachers within the ecclesia already are given their condemnation (Rom. 3:8). "The Lord shall judge the people...God judgeth (present

tense) the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day...he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows" (Ps. 7:8,11-13). God is now judging men, and preparing their final reward. For the wicked, the arrow is prepared in the bow, the sword is sharpened- all waiting for the final day in which the present judgments will be executed. Again, note how that the last day is not for gathering information, but for giving the result of present behaviour. The judgment process is ongoing, in that God right now (even while we sleep) is trying and judging our ways and motives (Job 7:18; Ps. 11:4; 17:3; 26:2; 139:23). He now weighs up the path / overall direction of our lives and will later openly show His judgments (Is. 26:7-9). Because of this, David asks God to judge him *now* (Ps. 26:1; 35:24; 43:1; 54:1). He wasn't so afraid of the future judgment; He knew that it will only be the pronouncement of how we have now lived. He had a good conscience, and so He asked God to show how He felt about him right now. "The Lord shall judge the people [at the last day; this is quoted in this connection in Heb. 10:30]: judge me [i.e. now], O Lord, according to my righteousness" (Ps. 7:8). This explains the Psalmists' *joy* that judgment is coming (Ps. 67:4; 96:12,13). The same spirit can be seen in the parable of the woman who keeps begging the unjust judge to open her case. She may have had her little piece of land taken away from her, whatever it was, she is confident she has a watertight case and this is why she so pesters the judge to judge her (Lk. 18:1-5). Now this is a powerful challenge to a brotherhood which underneath seems to *fear* the judgment process. David shows the same spirit in asking God to 'avenge my cause' (Ps. 35:23). There is the same confidence that by grace, he is in the right and longs for justice to be done. So much of Romans is dedicated to the images of the court room; we are justified, and we should be earnestly seeking the vindication of Spirit against flesh.

It should also be noted that "Yahweh shall judge (LXX *krino*, the NT word for judgment) His people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone" (Dt. 32:35)- when Israel are weak and under punishment, *then* God will judge them, i.e. save them. His judgment is more of salvation than condemnation, for judgment articulates the essential character of God. And He is above all, love and salvation. David speaks of God enthroned in the court of Heaven judging him and yet also maintaining his right; and yet in the same context, David speaks of how God's throne is prepared for future judgment, He *will* minister judgment (Ps. 9:4 cp. 7,8,19). The court of Heaven that was now trying him would sit again in the last day. Paul does the same when, under 'judgment' by his brethren, he calls God as a witness right now (2 Cor. 1:23 RSV), several times saying that he spoke "before God", as if already at judgment day. It is significant that David sees God as both His judge and defendant (as in 1 Sam. 24:15). "Arise O God, plead thine own cause" (Ps. 74:22) implies that God's cause was David's cause; He is His own advocate against His own role as judge. Thus God can both maintain our cause [as an advocate] and forgive, as a judge (2 Chron. 6:39). God is the one who will both plead our cause as an advocate, *and* take vengeance, i.e. order the sentence, as our judge (Jer. 51:36). Micah 7:9 speaks of how Micah has sinned against Yahweh, and yet He will plead his cause and also execute judgment. Likewise with Israel, "the Lord standeth up to plead, and (also) standeth up to judge his people" (Is. 3:13); even though He is also the witness against them (Mal. 3:5). David understood this when he asked that God would "judge [RV "give sentence"] between me and thee, and see [i.e. be the witness], and plead my cause [i.e. be the advocate]" (1 Sam. 24:15). These are Old Testament anticipations of the Lord Jesus as witness, advocate and judge. Note that the "sentence" is given right now; likewise Ps. 76:8 "Thou didst cause sentence to be heard from heaven" (RV).

Not only must we come to know the judgment mind of God now, but as we observe the judgment process, *then* we- yes, *we-* will discern between the righteous and the wicked (Mal. 3:18). We will come to know and share the mind of our Lord as we watch Him judge, as He discerns between the sheep and the goats. Knowing God's present judgment should have a powerful practical effect upon us. If we know the judgment of God against certain types of behaviour, we will keep away from them totally. It is only the rejected who refuse to know "the judgment of their God" (Jer. 5:4). We are living our lives under judgment. Knowing God's judgment-principles, we will wish to separate from all that will finally be condemned and destroyed. "Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God [at judgment day]: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men" (Ps. 139:19). With this spirit at heart, we must ask whether it is right to watch or read of wickedness which we know we will be crucially and eternally separated from in this last day. No longer need the outcome of judgment be a mystery. Although we have a quite right sense of our inadequacy, of our desert of condemnation, yet mixed in with this must be the faith that we will be saved by grace alone. It is almost impossible to articulate this paradox and get the balance right, either in our own feelings or in words. It has been truly commented: "He was raised again because of our acquittal" [Rom. 4:25] Paul joyously proclaims. The verdict of the last day need no longer be awaited in awful suspense; it is anticipated here and now. "Since we are justified by faith"- here and now in this present age- "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" [Rom. 5:1]. United with Christ a man could face the judgment unafraid, released from the paralyzing terror of wondering all through his life if he would be accepted or rejected at the last". For us, judgment ought to be perceived as salvation. Indeed, these two ideas are paralleled in Is. 59:16,17. Israel looked for judgment, but there was none; for salvation, but it was far from them (Is. 59:11). In this sense judgment to come is a comfort not a threat. Ps. 135:14 parallels the Lord judging His people with Him feeling sorry for them (Heb.).

I'd summarize Job 35:14-16 RV like this: "Your judgment is with God not man; so trust Him, be comforted by this fact. Therefore you don't need to speak words of *self* justification, this is vain speaking. For God doesn't *now* show His judgments, but He will do. If we believe this, then we will control our tongue from justifying ourselves and relax in the comfort of a true judgment to come".

There is another useful thing about knowing God's judgments. One thing that tends to hold back our self examination is the way we tend to rely solely upon the power of our own self scrutiny. This is why we can end up excessively blaming or praising ourselves. Yet if we are examining ourselves in the light of God's judgments then we will do it as God intends, and accurately. We will appreciate the parallel drawn in Is. 40:27 between our way in life, and our judgment- and we must never like Israel forget that how we are living right now, is living out our judgment: "Why sayest thou, O Israel, my *way* is hid from the Lord, and *my judgment* is passed over from my God?".

God's Present Judgment

- "They *shall* perish: thou *hast* destroyed them...they *are* utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:19,27)

- "The Lord *shall* judge the people...God *judgeth* the righteous, and God *is* angry with the wicked every day...he *will* whet his sword; he *hath* bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death" (Ps. 7:8,11-13)

- We are come *now* “to God the judge of all” (Heb. 12:23)
- God is *now* enthroned as judge (Ps. 93:2; Mt. 5:34 “the heaven *is* God’s throne”)
- We are now inescapably in God’s presence (Ps. 139:2); God’s presence = judgment language:

“Punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9)

“Before the presence of his glory” (Jude 24)

“...tormented with fire and brimstone...in the presence of the lamb” (Rev. 14:10)

- “God is the judge: he putteth down one and setteth up another” (Ps. 75:7) = Lk. 14:10.
- “The day of the Lord is coming, but it is even now” (Mic. 7:4 Heb.)
- “To every matter there is a time (*kairos*) and a judgment (*krisis*)” (Ecc. 8:6 RVmg.)

Christ's Present Judgment

The Lord Jesus in the last day will confess, or witness to in a legal sense, for His people "before the angels of God" (Lk. 12:8,9); and yet He uses the same language to describe how right now, He confesses us in Heaven in the presence of His Father (Mt. 10:32). Thus when we witness- or don't witness- to our relationship with Him, the Lord Jesus either confesses or denies knowledge of us before His Father. Right now. And this, therefore, is a foretaste of the final judgment. And we face these foretastes day by day in human life, as we encounter the choices of confessing or denying our Lord. And yet note the grace reflected in Jn. 12:42, where we read that some Jews were credited with having believed in Jesus, even though they did *not* confess Him (Jn. 12:42), presumably because those who confessed Jesus as Christ were excommunicated from the synagogues (Jn. 9:22). Those will not confess Jesus are antichrist (1 Jn. 4:3)- and yet the inspired record is so eager to note that these weak 'believers' were still believers, and their weak faith appears still to have been credited to them. This is a comfort to us in the weakness of our faith- and yet also a challenge to us to accept weak believers as believers.

The Lord speaks of how “to them that are without all these things are done in parables” (Mk. 4:11). But those “without” in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand “without” begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those ‘without’ in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord’s teaching, for whom it’s all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn’t mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires. The idea of the essence of judgment going on now is brought out by a sensitive comparison of the Gospel records. Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: “What will it profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?”. Mk. 8:36 has: “What does it [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”. Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of

judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally... this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

When we read of how we are now "justified", we can easily forget that this is a legal term. To be justified was to be given a not guilty verdict. And we have received that right now. The Lord Jesus was and is and will be the light of the world. Nothing is kept secret, but that it should come abroad, under the glare of the light that is Him. The more we sense His presence, the more we feel rather than know that He is the light of our world right now, the more we will realize that our every action and thought is already before His judgment. The judgment of God against wickedness is *immediate*; in His mind and consciousness, it is sure. One of the Hebrew words for "sin" also means "punishment"- sin is its own judgment. Thus Zech. 14:19 speaks in the AV of "the punishment of Egypt" but in the RV of "the sin of Egypt". The Hebrew word *mishpat* means [and is translated] both "crime" (Ez. 7:23) and "judgment" (Ez. 5:20). Every sin is its own judgment, and brings us immediately as it were before the judgment throne of God. And yet *mishpat* is also translated "ordinance", in speaking about the commands of God (Ez. 11:20). Acts of obedience are also acts of judgment; they too bring us positively before the judgment of God. The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'judge' mean both the process of discerning / summing up, and also the execution of judgment. Interestingly, Am. 7:8 describes Israel's condemnation as a plumb line, a measurement and assessor, being applied to them. Here the figure of weighing up evidence is made to mean condemnation; so immediate is God's judgment. He needs no time to draw a conclusion; being outside of time, He can see a situation and make the judgment immediately, and implicit within the information gathering process. The Lord Jesus likewise judged as soon as He heard (Jn. 5:30). His very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (Jn. 9:39). Bright light shows up every shadow. Whenever men were in Christ's presence, they were judged. The very presence of His light amongst men was their condemnation (Jn. 3:19; 5:27; 12:31; 16:8,11). In this sense He could say that for judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39), although He Himself came not to judge so much as to save (Jn. 12:47; "not" is also used in the sense of 'not so much to...but rather to...' in 2 Cor. 7:12: "I did it not [so much] for his causebut that our care...". Likewise in Mk. 10:45, the Lord came not *so much as* to be ministered unto, but to minister. He was and is ministered unto, but His focus is upon *His* ministering to us: Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). In response to Israel's attitude of "Where is the God of judgment?", and a genuine failure to realize their sinfulness ("wherein have we...?"), God prophesied He would send His messenger and then His Christ; His Son was by His coming alone the manifestation of "the God of judgment", the supreme judge of men by His very being (Mal. 2:17; 3:1). In His coming, God "visited His people" (Lk. 7:16); but the OT image of Yahweh visiting His people was one of visiting in judgment (Ez. 32:34; Jer. 23:2; Hos. 2:13; 9:9). By His very being amongst men He would convict them of their sinfulness. His light would show up the shadows of their sins. Mark begins his Gospel by quoting this Malachi passage, as if to say that the appearance of Jesus was the coming of judgment for men (Mk. 1:2). This judgment-coming of Jesus at His revelation to Israel 2000 years ago is then described as God coming near to men in judgment (Mal. 3:5). This is why a consideration of the Lord Jesus in bread and wine inevitably and naturally leads to self-examination; for He is, by His very being, our immediate and insistent judge.

Likewise Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 12:27). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world" (See *Types Of Judgment*). "I *am* he which searcheth the reins and hearts (in this life): and I *will* give unto every one of you according to your works" at the day of judgment (Rev. 2:23 cp. 22:12). And He is *now* (Gk.) ordained as judge of living and dead (Acts 10:42)- and we should preach Him as such. He *is* now the judge of the dead in the sense that His very being and victory is in itself the judgment of all men. Those who reject our message right now are judging themselves. The Lord taught His preachers that if people rejected their message, *in that day* when they did this, "it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city". But He repeats Himself later on: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the judgment* than for you" (Lk. 10:12,14 RV). "In that day" clearly refers to the day on which the preacher's message was rejected. But that day was effectively their judgment day.

But where and when and how the judgments of Father and Son are finally manifested and outplayed isn't the most important thing. The *essence* of their judgment is what needs to concern us. Tragically we as a community have all too often been like the foolish questioner Paul envisages in 1 Cor. 15:35; he was preoccupied with *how* the body would come out of the grave, rather than on the essence of the fact that as we sow now, as we now allow God's word to take root in us, so we will receive in the nature of the eternal existence which we will be given at the judgment (see Appendix 2 for more on this). I'm not saying that how we are raised etc. is unimportant; but it's importance hinges around its practical import for us. All too easily we can bat these questions around with no attention to their practical relevance for us.

Judged By Others' Presence

- Noah's example condemned the world (Heb. 11:7)
- The very existence of believing Gentiles condemns the Jews (Rom. 2:27)
- The very existence of repentant Ninevites condemns first century Israel (Mt. 12:41)
- The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24)
- The faith of the Pharisees' children in casting out demons condemned the Pharisees (Mt. 12:27)

In a sense, peoples' response to our preaching today is their deciding of the verdict at the day of judgment. The disciples were to shake the dust off their feet towards those who rejected their preaching, "for a testimony against them" (Lk. 9:5). "Testimony" is legal, courtroom language. Rejecting the Gospel is as it were choosing condemnation at the last day.

It will be observed in this study that John's Gospel especially makes many references to the idea of Christ's judgment being right now. Why is this? John was clearly written some time after the other Gospels. The early community of believers were expecting the Lord's return at any moment; but by the time John wrote, it was apparent that He hadn't returned as soon as they had hoped for. Perhaps his point was that much of what we are expecting at the second coming is in essence going on right now. The very 'coming' of Jesus was judgment (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 16:28). Those who refuse to believe have already been condemned (Jn. 3:17-21). Whilst the other Gospels stress that we will receive eternal life at the second coming (Mk. 10:30; Mt. 18:8,9), John stresses that the essence of the life eternal is our present experience; we have passed from death to life (Jn. 5:24). We will be made children of God at the last day (Lk. 6:35; 20:36); but the essence of being God's children has begun now, when we are born again (Jn. 1:12). Yet John brings out his continuity with the other Gospels by speaking of both future and present condemnation (Jn. 12:48 cp. 3:18; 9:39); of future eternal life and present eternal life (Jn. 12:25 cp. 3:36; 5:24); and future resurrection and present 'resurrection' to new life (Jn. 6:39,40,54 cp. 5:21,24).

Through John's Gospel, the Lord inspired an awareness that the *essence* of His coming, the day of judgment and the future Kingdom was in fact to be realized within Christian experience right now. John's Gospel brings this out clearly. The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion. In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now. As John Robinson put it, "the Last Assize is being accomplished in every moment of choice and decision... Judgment Day is a dramatised, idealised picture of every day"⁽¹⁾.

We have to see this fact of judgment day happening now within a wider context. Almost every major New Testament description of the Lord's coming and what He will bring with Him is also given an application to our experience in this life: the Kingdom of God, eternal life, salvation, justification, sanctification, perfection, glorification... and of course, judgment. All these things shall come; but the essence of them is being worked out in the life of the believer now. All this is brought to our attention whenever we attend the breaking of bread. That "table" at which we sit is a picture of the future banquet and table in the coming Kingdom. The "gladness" which accompanied the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46) is the same word used about the "rejoicing" at the future marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7) and the Lord's return (1 Pet. 4:13; Jude 24).

Knowing God's Judgment

God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders (Mt. 7:24-27). One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and

in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you". We *know* right now the principles on which God will judge us. We can judge what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:10- again, judgment day language). We can judge / discern those things which are excellent in His eyes (Phil. 1:10). We are *sure* of what the judgment of God is going to be against persistent sinners (Rom. 2:2); and yet if we condemn them, we can be equally sure that even now we are condemned of ourselves, seeing that if we condemn, we will be likewise (Rom. 2:1). The wrath of God is right now revealed, constantly disclosed, against sin (Rom. 1:18). Judas realized that he was right then condemned; it was as if he had an accurate preview of the future judgment, and realized that right there and then, he stood condemned (Mt. 27:3). The works of the flesh are already manifest (Gal. 5:19)- although they will be manifested again at the day of judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13). The children of God and of the devil in the ecclesia are already manifest, in a sense (1 Jn. 3:10). Whilst it may be hard to believe, Gal. 6: 4 says that we can prove / judge our own works, and thus have rejoicing in ourselves. Although self-examination is fraught with problems, and even our conscience can be deceptive at times (1 Cor. 4:4), there is a sense in which we can judge / discern ourselves now. We can judge brethren and find them blameless (1 Tim. 3:10; Tit. 1:6,7)- all the language of the future judgment (1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22). We cannot personally condemn them, but we can judge their behaviour against the judgments of God as revealed in the word. Some know the judgments of God against certain sins, and yet still do them, in the blindness of human nature (Rom. 1:32). Israel chose to be oblivious of what they well knew; there was no (awareness of) God's judgment in their way of life (Is. 59:8; Jer. 5:4) and therefore they lacked that innate sense of judgment to come which they ought to have had, as surely as the stork knows the coming time for her migration (Jer. 8:7). Judas knew in advance of judgment day that he was condemned (Mt. 27:3).

The idea of knowing God's judgments is frightening. Sin is its own judgment. Sins rise up to Heaven (2 Chron. 28:9)- and the judgment for them is spoken of as rising up to Heaven (same Hebrew words, Jer. 51:9). Sin and judgment are paralleled. Whenever we commit sin, we do so knowing (at least in one part of our brain) the judgment / condemnation which it is. The outcome of the judgment needn't be something mysterious to us; it isn't necessarily the great unknown to the thoughtful, self-reflective believer who *knows and loves and studies* God's judgments with the verve of David in Ps. 119. If we walk in the way of God's judgments, if this is the overall direction of our lives, temporal slips notwithstanding, we can look ahead to the final judgment with quiet confidence; or we ought to be able to. For the way of the just is the way of God's judgments (Is. 26:7,8). And yet there is good reason to think that few if any of the accepted will think they are worthy of their salvation. The solution to this paradox may be unattainable now; or it may be that now we should be able to have an overall sense of God's judgments of us, but in reality, before the judgment seat, we will simply be swamped by the holiness of God and the extent of our humanity. Or it may be that this quiet confidence is possible, but in practice the Lord foresaw in His parables that generally, we wouldn't get there (see *Sheep*). "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Because to every purpose there is time and judgment" - a time of judgment for every small and great action of daily life (Ecc. 8:5,6 cp. 3:1,17,18; 12:14), which is foreknown and understood by the wise man who knows God's judgments. This is why Bible reading and study may not always yield practical results; but it is all an exposure to God's principles, His judgments. Because all things will in some ways be judged, and are even now, *therefore* we must fear God and keep His commands (Ecc. 3:1; 12:13,14).

If we know God's judgments- and this is an ongoing process- then our self-examination will become closer and closer to the real picture of us which God has. It is apparent that God *now*

tries our hearts (Job 7:18; Ps. 11:4; 17:3; 26:2; 139:23), e.g. weighing up our motives in preaching (1 Thess. 2:4). In likely allusion to the these descriptions of God searching and trying our hearts in the Psalms, Jeremiah says that we should "search and try our hearts" (Lam. 3:40)- we should seek to know ourselves as God does. David's invitations to God to search and try him (Ps. 17:3; 26:2; 139:23) imply he has done so himself (cp. Ps. 77:6). God now searches and tries the hearts, and will [at judgment day] give every man as his work shall be (Jer. 17:10 cp. Rev. 22:12). The spirit of man is [i.e. is intended to be] the candle which God also uses for His examination of men (Prov. 20:27); there is thus a link intended between our self-examination and the way God looks at us. His judgment must be ours. As sin is condemned by Him, so we should examine ourselves to the point of self-condemnation. Not only in our own self-examination should there be this unit between our judgment and that of the Father; Jeremiah was told to "know and try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them. And further; if we know the judgments of God, then we will be more strongly motivated in our preaching and pastoral work, to pull men out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 23).

Above all, if we know God's judgment, and believe in His salvation, we can have a humble confidence of acceptance there. This makes the coming of the Lord and judgment something to look forward to. David not only looked forward to the judgment; he sung about it: "I will sing of mercy and judgment" (Ps. 101:1). By saying that, he recognized that the judgment day experience will be all about mercy. And foreseeing that, believing in it, he could sing joyfully about it- and again repeat his desire for that day to come: "O when wilt thou come unto me?" (Ps. 101:2). Note that the Hebrew translated "mercy" is *hesed*, the word usually used about God's covenant mercy. It's through our faith in that mercy which is all tied up in the covenants, that we can joyfully look forward to judgment day. This is a powerful example of doctrine having radical import in practice. There's another example of this theme in Ps. 98:3-9. Exactly because God has a history of *mercy* towards Israel, *therefore* we can "make a joyful noise unto the Lord... *for* he cometh to judge the earth".

The Proverbs

The Proverbs reveal God's "judgments", the principles by which He will judge at the last day. This explains why so many of the proverbs are simply not true in this life, seeing that in this age the wicked temporarily prosper (see especially Prov. 21:20; 22:1-11); but they will be ultimately true in the day of God's future judgment. The theme continues to some extent in Ecclesiastes; the apparently endless cycle of mediocre existence in this present world is thrown into sharp relief and becomes biting significant when it is accepted that there is a time set apart at judgment day for the judgment of every single action in this apparently repetitive life (Ecc. 3:17 and context).

Knowing God's Judgment

- God's word = His 'judgments' (Ps. 119:43,160)
- We can judge what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 5:10), judge / discern what is pleasing in His eyes (Phil. 1:10)
- We are sure of what the judgment of God is going to be against sinners (Rom. 2:2)

- The works of the flesh are already manifest (Gal. 5:19) although they will be manifested at the judgment: "Nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest" (Lk. 8:17); "every man's work shall be made manifest" (1 Cor. 3:13)

- We can prove / judge our own works and have rejoicing in ourselves (Gal. 6:4)

- We can judge brethren and find them blameless (1 Tim. 3:10; Tit. 1:6,7)- cp. "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22)

- Some know the judgments of God against certain sins but still do them (Rom. 1:32)

- Israel chose not to know the judgments of God (Jer. 5:4); "there is no [knowledge of] judgment in their goings" (Is. 59:8)

Giving Account- Today

The Lord taught that whatever bear's God's image must be 'rendered' to God, just as what bore Caesar's image must be rendered to Caesar (Lk. 20:25). Seeing that the human body bears God's image, He was clearly teaching that we should 'render' to God our whole being in the course of our human lives. But the same idea of rendering to God is picked up in 1 Pet. 4:5, where we are told that in the final judgment, we will 'render' [s.w.] ourselves to God. By the way we live now, the manner in which we render to God all that is not Caesar's, we are effectively rendering to Him our judgment account. And so we also find this Greek word for 'to render' in Rev. 22:12; Mt. 16:27; 20:8; 2 Tim. 4:8 and Rom. 2:6- at the day of judgment, where we render ourselves to God, He will "give" [s.w. 'render'] to every man according as his works have been. We're rendering ourselves to God right now, here in this life. And He will render that back to us in the last day- for we are right now giving our account to God. And there are times in life where perhaps God specifically intervenes in order to give us a taste of that final day of 'rendering' of ourselves to God- hence in the parable of Lk. 16:2, the man is asked to 'render an account' of his stewardship [s.w.]. It may be through illness, tragedy, loss, the intense introspection of depression, conviction of sin... in these things we are led to a specific preview of the 'rendering an account' which lies ahead. And we should be grateful that we have such opportunities.

The sense in which judgment is ongoing was to be an encouragement to God's "servant" in Is. 49:4. When despairing that he had laboured in vain, he was to remember that "my judgment *is* with the Lord, and my work *is* with my God (right now)". Notice how "my judgment" is parallel with "my work". Our works *are* in that sense our judgment, as our lives work out our judgment.

Notes

(1) John Robinson, *In The End God* (London: James Clark, 1950), pp. 66,69 .

1.3 Self- Judgment

Acceptance Now

Whoever truly works righteousness "*is* accepted" with God right now (Acts 10:35), as well as at the final judgment. Some faithful men experience condemnation for their sins now, with the result that they repent and therefore at the day of judgment will not receive that condemnation. The Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him. The Lord taught that we should cut off those parts of our lives that offend us, and "cast it [away] from you"- because in the end, the whole body of the wicked person will be "cast [away] into hell" (Mt. 5:29). What He's saying surely is that we must recognize those parts of our lives which are worthy of condemnation, and *we* must condemn them now in this life- for this is the meaning of the figure of 'casting away'.

1 Pet. 1:7 speaks of "our faith" being found worthy of praise at the appearing of Jesus. But in this life, choosing the life of faith as opposed to the legalism of neo-Judaism will also result in "the praise of God" (Jn. 12:43). Likewise Rom. 2:29 speaks of receiving praise of God for choosing to circumcise our heart rather than resting content with being a Jew outwardly. A healthy conscience provides some foretaste of the final judgment. He who does truth comes to the light, "that his deeds may be made *manifest*" (Jn. 3:21), the reproof of a healthy conscience makes our failings *manifest* (Eph. 5:13) as they will be made *manifest* at the future judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 1 Tim. 5:25). This is why Solomon when reflecting on the human seats of judgment so wished that God would *now* make men manifest to themselves, make them realize the animal depravity of their natures, because there would be a *future* judgment of every purpose and work (Ecc. 3:16-18). If we love darkness and refuse to come to the light that our deeds may be manifest (Jn. 3:20), then we will be returned to the darkness in the last day. Therefore willing self-examination and self-correction now, a true response to God's word, a realistic coming to the light- this means we will not be thrown into the darkness in the end. But the question of course occurs: do we *really* let God's word influence our behaviour to the extent that we *really* change? Or are we just drifting through the Christian, church-going life...? The children of God and those of the devil are now made manifest (1 Jn. 2:19; 3:10), even in the eyes of other believers (1 Cor. 11:19). His judgments are now made manifest (Rom. 1:19) in that we know His word, His judgments; in advance of how they *will* be made manifest in the future judgment (Rev. 15:4). We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat, but we are made manifest unto God (s.w.) even now (2 Cor. 5:10,11).

If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). The rejected in the last day will dine themselves in the dust and in the mountains from the terror of the Lord- but we are bidden do what they will do then, right now- in our self-condemnation now (Is. 2:10). Exactly because the Lord *is* right now our judge, we can say confidently that therefore "He will save us" (Is. 33:22). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] "cast out" the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the 'casting forth' of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation. We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). Isaiah foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the

glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into* the holes of *the rock*...for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). If we find a true, self-condemning humility now, it will not need to be forced upon us in the condemnation of the judgment.

Even in His life, the Father committed all judgment unto the Son (Jn. 5:22). The Lord can therefore talk in some arresting present tenses: "Verily, verily, I say unto you [as judge], He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation". According to our response to His word, so we have now our judgment. He goes on to speak of how the believer will again hear His voice, at His return: "The hour is coming, and [also] now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live". Our response to His word now is a mirror of our response to His word then. Hence the hour is yet future, and yet now is. 'The Son right now has the authority to execute judgment on the basis of response to His word. He will do this at the last day; and yet even as He spoke, He judged as He heard' [paraphrase of Jn. 5:27-30]. Because He *is* the Son of man, He even then had the power of judgment given to Him (Jn. 5:27). These present tenses would be meaningless unless the Lord was even then exercising His role as judge. When He says that He doesn't judge / condemn men (Jn. 3:17-21), surely He is saying that *He* won't so much judge men as they will judge themselves by their attitude to Him. His concentration was and is on saving men. The condemnation is that men loved darkness, and prefer the darkness of rejection to the light of Christ. Likewise Jn. 12:47,48: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to [so much as to] judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me...hath one that judgeth him: the word [his response to the word, supplying the ellipsis] that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day".

Pre-eminently, our love of the brotherhood will be the basis upon which we find acceptance, and in this lies the reason why the life of love is a living out of an acceptance before the Lord now. If we live in love, we are right now holy and blameless before Him (Eph. 1:4). "Before Him" is the language of judgment day (Mt. 25:32; Lk. 21:36; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:14; 1 Jn. 2:28; Jude 24; Rev. 14:5); and being holy and blameless before Him is exactly how we will be at the judgment seat (Jude 24). Yet right now, he who lives in love, a love unpretended and unfeigned, lives in the blamelessness and holiness of his Lord, whose righteousness is imputed to him. Paul so loved his Thessalonian brethren that he joyed "for your sakes before our God" (1 Thess. 3:9). "Before our God" is very much the language of judgment day; and he had earlier reflected: "what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye *are* [right now] our glory and joy" (1 Thess. 2:19,20). They were in this life his joy, as he lived out his life "before our God" and they would be again in the day of judgment.

So who we are is in reality our judgment. After death, our works "follow us" to judgment (Rev. 14:13). According to Jewish thought, men's actions followed them as witnesses before the court of God, and this is the idea being picked up here. There is a great emphasis in Hebrews 11 on the way that each man has a "witness", "testimony" or "report" as a result of his life (Heb. 11:4,5,14,39). Because of this the dead are still spoken for, in that God keeps and knows that testimony, and it speaks for them (Heb. 11:4 AV mg.). The souls under the altar cry out (Rev. 6:10). But those men and women of Heb. 11 are then described in Heb. 12:1 as themselves "witnesses". Who they were is their witness, the testimony which is given of them in the court of Heaven and upon which God's judgment is decided. We have the

witness in ourselves (1 Jn. 5:10), and yet it is a witness which is in fact God's witness / record to us (this is the context of 1 Jn. 5:6-11). The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we really are the Sons of God (Rom. 8:16). In this sense Paul's conscience bore him witness in the Holy Spirit, i.e. his testimony was that of the Spirit (Rom. 9:1). The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). Likewise Isaiah describes Yahweh as kindling the fire of judgment against those who have themselves kindled it (Is. 5:25 cp. 45:24 s.w., A.V. "incensed"). This is just the same spirit as the Lord's comment that He came to bring the fire of condemnation on the land / earth of Israel, but it was already kindled (Lk. 12:49). Israel defiled the temple, and therefore God defiled it by sending the Babylonians to defile it (Ez. 5:11; 9:7; 23:38). In essence and in heart, they had done what the judgment of the Babylonian invasion would do physically. Jerusalem "maketh idols against herself to defile herself" (Ez. 22:3; 37:23), and this gave rise to Yahweh's rhetorical question to Ezekiel: "Wilt thou judge the bloody city?" (Ez. 22:2), the implication being that she had judged / condemned herself, quite apart from Ezekiel's words of prophecy. The Assyrians led Israel away into captivity [s.w. to make naked], "they discovered her nakedness" (Ez. 23:10), and yet in their sin Israel made themselves naked (2 Chron. 28:19 cp. Ex. 32:25; Gen. 3:10). Again, the day of Yahweh's judgment upon them through their invaders was only a reflection of their own self-condemnation. Eli's sons *made themselves* accursed, and were only therefore [and thereby] judged by God (1 Sam. 3:13 AVmg.).

Self-condemnation

And so we too can judge ourselves unworthy. It's been observed that the tribe of Dan is excluded from the list of the redeemed tribes in Rev. 7. Dan didn't take possession of their inheritance; they despised it. And so they excluded themselves, rather than being excluded for e.g. bad behaviour. The other tribes all had their moments of terrible failures; but these didn't exclude them. The only one excluded was the one who didn't want to be there. The wicked will be "overthrown" in the final condemnation (2 Pet. 2:6)- but this is the very same word used for 'apostasy' (Strong's) or 'subversion' (2 Tim. 2:14). If we apostatize, we are overthrowing or condemning ourselves ahead of time. Israel in the wilderness "rejected" the land- and so they didn't enter it (Num. 14:31 RV). The condemned amongst the first century ecclesias "cast themselves away through the error of Balaam" (Jude 11 RVmg.)- and yet it is the Lord who will "cast away" the bad fish in the last day. Yet those He casts away have in fact cast themselves away. Those who lay in wait for others to kill them "lay wait for their own blood, they lurk privily for their own lives" (Prov. 1:11,18). There is a *direct* relationship, in God's judgment, between how we treat others and what will happen to us. This is to the extent that what we do to others, we do to ourselves. If we condemn others, we really and truly do condemn ourselves. Thus when Peter refused to fellowship Gentiles, Paul "withstood him to the face, because he stood condemned" (Gal. 2:11 RV). Just as Peter had condemned himself by denying the Lord, so he had done again in refusing to fellowship the Lord's brethren. Realizing the seriousness of all this, Paul didn't just let it go, as many of us

would have done in such an ecclesial situation. He realized a man was condemning himself; and so he risked causing a lot of upset in order to save him from this. Many of us could take a lesson from this. The Jews prostrated themselves before the idols, living out their future condemnation- for "I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols" (Ez. 6:5). They placed "the punishment of their iniquity before their face" when they set up their idols (Ez. 14:3 LXX). If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28). Israel rejected God's covenant, and therefore He rejected them in that He broke the unbreakable-by-Him covenant (2 Kings 17:15,20; Zech. 11:10). In reality, they had rejected themselves, and broke the covenant (Jer. 31:32). It could not and would not be broken by Him- it was only they who could break it. And so with us. They debased themselves unto the grave by their sins, just as Babylon was to be thrown down to the grave in the day of her judgment (Is. 57:9 cp. 14:15). If we let ourselves act against our conscience, we are *now* condemned (Rom. 14:23). If we judge another, "thou condemnest [present tense] thyself" (Rom. 2:1). We must not let false teachers "judge against you" (Col. 2:18 AVmg.) in the sense that by following them we can let them as it were pass the verdict of condemnation upon us, here and now. When God offered Israel a king, He did so with a series of warnings that this king would treat them just like the prophesied invasion of condemnation described in Dt. 28; he would take their sons, seed, vineyards etc. in just the same way. The links are unmistakable:

1 Sam. 8	Deut. 28
:14	:30,33
:11,14	:41
:15	:38
:17	:43

Through these allusions, Yahweh was saying to Israel: do you want the condemnation for disobedience? And they answered 'Yes!'. And yet, in His grace, Yahweh still worked through the system of human kingship to bring about His purpose of salvation with Israel. Thus through our unfaithful actions now we will be witnesses against ourselves at the final judgment (Mt. 23:31); indeed, in that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of himself* (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfill the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17). Yet the rejected will know that really, they should be condemned. The Lord will "profess" to them that He doesn't know them and they must depart from Him; but Strong understands the Greek to mean 'to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent'. The Lord will be agreeing with them, that they are worthy of condemnation. They will have condemned themselves, and the Lord will simply confirm this to them in His final verdict. If we are ashamed of Him now, we will be ashamed from before Him then (1 Jn. 2:28), and He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). Every time we are asked to stand up for Him and His words in the eyes of men, we are as it were living out our future judgment. Israel "set up their idols", and in so doing "put the punishment of their iniquity before their face" (Ez. 14:3 LXX; AV "stumblingblock" is s.w. "ruin"; the Hebrew has both senses, as if the cause of condemnation is the condemnation). They were staring at their own punishment and condemnation; but they were blind to this fact. By an interesting metonymy, the idol, the thing that facilitated their

sin, is put for their punishment / ruin. Sin and the punishment for it are inextricably linked. The Hebrew language reflects this identity in Lam. 4:6: "The punishment [AVmg. 'iniquity'] of the iniquity of the daughter of my people...". And so it is with all the things of this present evil world; pornographic material, televisions, videos, music, novels, the needle, the bottle.... there is nothing unclean in itself, but these things can all be put by metonymy for the condemnation that can arise from the sin they facilitate. It's a powerful thought.

Israel were driven away from God's face / presence because they had already hid themselves from His face by their sins (Is. 59:2; Jer. 32:33 cp. 33:5). "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos. 13:9) says it all. Ephraim daily increased his desolation, in that daily his deeds reckoned up for him condemnation; although that desolation would only be manifested at a future judgment (Hos. 12:1; 13:16). God said that He would try / judge the people with Gideon at the waters (Jud. 7:4)- but they effectively judged themselves by deciding with their own freewill whether to kneel down [as before an idol?], or lap. Whilst part of God's vineyard, they brought forth wild grapes, as if there was no protective fence around them. The hedge and wall were therefore broken down in judgment, so that there came up briars and thorns there (Is. 5:4,6). They brought forth fruit as if they were wild thorn bushes, and so their judgment confirmed this. The elder son would not 'go in' to the wedding (Lk. 15:28); and the Lord surely constructed that story to use a word which so often is used about going in to the Kingdom (in Matthew alone: 5:20; 7:21; 18:3,9; 19:17,23,24; 25:21). His point clearly is that those who don't enter into His Kingdom *chose themselves not to do* so, they keep themselves out of the Kingdom, because they cannot bring themselves to show a true love to their brother. In the end, the very end, we receive our dominant desire. The rejected will be told: "Depart from me" (Lk. 13:27); and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13). Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. The foolish virgins go, or depart, to buy oil- using the same word with which they are told by their Lord to depart from Him (Mt. 25:9,41). They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

The Jews by their attitude to the word "judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46); and we too can anticipate the judgment seat by the same mistake. The same stamp of Jews are described as 'gnashing their teeth' in furious rejection of Stephen's inspired words (Acts 7:54); such language must surely connect with the oft repeated description of the rejected gnashing their teeth at the judgment (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30); as if those Jews acted out their own rejection by their attitude to the word in this life. As He sent the 70 away on their preaching mission, the Lord commented that Capernaum was exalted to heaven, and yet at the judgment would be thrust down to hell; and yet when they returned, He said that He had seen Satan falling from heaven to earth (Lk. 10:15,18), in anticipation of how it will at judgment day (Rev. 12). The connection is not co-incidental. He was countering the disciples' joy at the superficial response by saying that He has seen it another way; He had seen the Satan of the Jewish system already condemned, hurled from heaven to earth, by their rejection of the Gospel preached. And consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In the day of judgment, that man will cry out "father...have mercy / pity on me", just as Lazarus used to cry out to him daily. The apparent terseness and indifference of Abraham's response in the parable is surely intended as a reflection of the attitude which the rich man had shown to Lazarus in his mortal life. A great gap had been *fixed* between the saved and the

rejected; and the language begs the question, 'Fixed by whom?'. Clearly, by the rich man in the attitude he adopted in his daily life. For it would not be God who fixed a gap between the damned and the saved; through His Son He seeks to save and bridge such gaps. The lesson is that whenever we hear the voice of the desperate, we hear inverted echoes of our own desperation at the final judgment. And how we answer now is related to how we will be answered then. We make the answer now.

We are to "cast out" the parts of our lives which offend us, and if we don't, we will be "cast" into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 5:29,30). The word play on "cast" is obviously intentional; the Lord clearly has the idea that we are to self-condemn those things in our lives which are sinful and worthy of condemnation. If we don't, then we will be 'cast out' in our entirety at judgment day. Sin is to be condemned; we either condemn ourselves for it now, or we will be condemned for it then. Note how 'casting out' is a common phrase for rejection by Divine judgment (e.g. Mt. 7:19; 13:42,48,50; Jn. 15:6; Rev. 20:15).

Looking at self-condemnation another way, it is apparent that "sin" is sometimes used as a metonymy for 'condemnation for sin'. Lot was taken out of Sodom lest "thou be consumed in the *iniquity* of the city" (Gen. 19:15). The AV margin rightly suggests that "the iniquity" of the city was the condemnation / punishment for their iniquity. And there are other examples in Ps. 7:16; Jer. 14:16 and Zech. 14:19. This isn't just a matter of cold exposition; the reality is that every sin we commit- and we sin daily- is in fact a self-infliction of condemnation upon ourselves. We rather than the Lord are the ones who in essence have demanded our condemnation; His judgment is merely reflecting our own choice. The idea of self-condemnation is perhaps behind the Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:6. If we offend one of His little ones, "it is profitable for [us] that a great millstone should be hanged around [our] neck, and that [we] should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (RV). This is the language of Babylon's future condemnation at the last day (Rev. 18:21). But how can such a condemnation be "profitable" for us? Remember that James teaches that in some things, we all offend someone (James 3:2). Maybe the Lord is saying: 'When you offend others, as you all do at times, then you're deserving of condemnation at the last day. But condemn yourselves for it, now, in this life; that will be profitable for you, and then you need not be condemned at the last day'. It's a sober thought, that deserves introspection. We all offend others- let's give James' words their full weight. And instead of going down the road of 'Yeah but it was after all *their* fault they allowed themselves to be offended...', let's just allow these Bible passages their obvious meaning. Our poor attitude to others at times shouts for our condemnation. And we need to recognize that, resolving to live life ever more sensitive to our colossal impact upon others.

Even in this life, those who will be rejected have "a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28)- they have the mind of the rejected, the unaccepted [Gk.]. The mindset the rejected have in that awful day, is the mindset which they have now. This is how important our thinking is. Our thoughts, the thoughts of yesterday and today and tomorrow, will either accuse or excuse us in the last day, when God shall judge us according to our "secrets", our inner thinking (Rom. 2:15,16).

Self-Condensation

- Christ came not to judge / condemn (Jn. 12:47)

- The wicked snare themselves, fall into their own pit (Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10)

- By our own words we will be condemned (Mt. 12:37); Out of our own mouths we are condemned (Lk. 19:22)
- "So they shall make their own tongues to fall upon themselves" (Ps. 64:8)
- So speak as they who will be judged; he who shows no mercy [in his words] will find none (James 2:12,13)
- "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his mouth calleth for strokes [condemnation- Lk. 12:47,48]" (Prov. 18:6)
- The tongue is the fire that kindles the Gehenna fire that will destroy us (James 3:6)
- A heretic is condemned of himself (Tit. 3:11)

"By your words..."

It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). Their condemnation, the nature of their punishment, will have been specifically prepared for them (Mt. 25:41). The bitter self-hatred and ineffable regret of the rejected will be their punishment; and in accordance with the specific, personal way they mistreated and neglected God's Truth in this life, so they will mentally torture themselves. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16). And yet perhaps even now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now. "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it" (1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. The specific words which some have spoken will be the reason for their condemnation. "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16)- not so much for their idolatry, their worldliness...but for their uncontrolled and cruel words. Those who speak strong words with Divine oaths will 'fall under judgment' for those words (James 5:12 RV); if they don't use them, they won't have to have them considered at the judgment. And thus "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life; but he that openeth wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3). The children of Edom will have their words against Zion remembered against them at judgment: "Remember, O Lord, against the children of Edom The day of Jerusalem; Who said, Rase it, rase it" (Ps. 137:7 RV). The link between the final verdict and the words we use today is that clear. When the Jews spoke out the judgment they thought should come on those who killed the Master's Son, the Lord cited their words back to them as description of their own forthcoming condemnation (Mt. 21:41,43). This is just as David was invited to speak words of judgment on a sinner, and was told: "thou art the man". God will remember against Edom the specific words they spoke when Jerusalem fell (Ps. 137:7 RV). Whatever we have spoken in darkness will be revealed for all to hear and know (Lk. 12:2,3)- our words will as it were be cited back to us before others in that day. The Lord says this in the context of warning us not to have the leaven of hypocrisy in the matter of our words- there's no point in saying one thing to one person and something different to someone else, because our words will be gone through at the judgment and will be open for everyone to hear. We should live, He implies, as if we are now before

the judgment; speaking things we wouldn't be ashamed for anyone to hear. Note in passing how he says that hypocrisy in our words is like leaven, that corrupts and spreads within an individual and a community. Once somebody starts being hypocritical with their words, someone else does. Even every word of murmuring against each other will be judged; and hence, James points out, it is bizarre that we should be doing this with the judge standing before the door (James 5:9).

The idea of dishonest words being like yeast, a source of corruption, takes us to Mt. 12:32-37: "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him... Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by *his* fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh... 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". The fruit of the tree equals the words (as in Prov. 12:14; 13:2); a corrupt man will speak corrupt words. And these will be the basis of his condemnation. By contrast "the fruit of *our* lips" should be praise (Heb. 13:15). "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29) refers to this passage- the corrupt fruit is corrupt words. But the idea is that we bear the fruit *now*- our words *now* are our fruit. The Lord puts it all another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may *say* to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, deaffirming them as believers, deaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade ...until they are corrupted.

We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this..." (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth

his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words can not reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

Speaking of the sudden destruction of the wicked at the future judgment, David reflected: "So they shall make their own tongues to fall upon themselves" (Ps. 64:8). Unsound speech will be condemned, or perhaps [will lead to our] condemnation (Tit. 2:8). By our words we will be justified or condemned. The false prophets were judged according to their words: "Every man's word shall be his burden" at the day of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 23:36). Gal. 6:5 alludes here in saying that at the judgment, every man shall bear his own burden- i.e., that of his own words. Concerning his enemies, he imprecated: "When they arise [in resurrection?], let them be ashamed; but let thy servant rejoice...let them *cover themselves* with their own confusion, as with a mantle" (Ps. 109:28,29). God said He judged His people 'according to their way...according to their judgments I will judge' (Ez. 7:27 LXX). A man's way, freely chosen, is his judgment. We truly 'make the answer now'. The Saviour came more to save than condemn (Jn. 12:47); it is men who condemn themselves as inappropriate to receive eternal life. It is *their* words, not His, which will be the basis of their rejection. We must so speak as those who will be judged, knowing that he who shewed no mercy in his words will receive none (James 2:12,13); our words of mercy or condemnation, and perhaps *the way we say them*, will be the basis upon which we will be accepted or rejected. "A fool's mouth is [will be] his destruction, and his mouth calleth for strokes [i.e. condemnation at the judgment, Lk. 12:47,48]" (Prov. 18:6). By our words we may be *shouting out for condemnation*. Those who condemned the Lord spoke "such gainsaying of sinners against themselves" (Heb. 12:3 RV), just as the idols "are their own witnesses" to their untruth (Is. 44:9). "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride [with which he will be beaten at the day of judgment]; but the lips of the wise shall preserve them" from such a fate (Prov. 14:3). Our words are as fire, and are to be connected with the fire of condemnation (James 3:5,6), which our words have already kindled (Lk. 12:49). Speaking of the last day Isaiah 33:11 had foretold: "your breath [i.e. words], as fire, shall devour you". Likewise wrongly gained wealth is the fire that will burn those who have it at the last day (James 5:3). James is picking up a figure from Is. 33:11, again concerning the final judgment: "Your breath, as fire, shall devour you". Their breath, their words, were as fire which would in the end be the basis of their condemnation. Nadab and Abihu kindled strange fire, and it was with that fire that God burnt them up, in symbol of

His destruction of all the wicked at judgment day (Lev. 10:2). "He that believeth not is condemned already" (Jn. 3:18). A heretic is already condemned of himself (Tit. 3:11); our heart can condemn us now (1 Jn. 3:20).

By our words we will be acquitted [Gk.] and by our words we will be condemned (Mt. 12:37)- but it is God who acquits, and therefore nobody but He can condemn us (Rom. 8:33; Is. 50:8). Yet how does and how will He do this? Surely on the basis of our acquittal or condemnation of others. The connection in thought surely shows that through our words, we form our own judgment of ourselves, to acquittal or condemnation.

The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us 'swear not at all' (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence.

When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

Response To The Word: Foretaste Of Judgment

The Jews will be judged by the word at the second coming (Jn. 12:48); but they were 'accused' (judgment seat language) by their rejection of God's word in the Old Testament during their lifetime (Jn. 5:45). The Jews in the parable "began to make excuse (saying)... I pray thee have me excused" (Lk. 14:18). The Greek word for "excuse" here is also translated "reject"- by excusing themselves from the requirements of God's word in this life, they were effectively rejecting themselves, as they will be at judgment. So as we read the word, we show our judgment. It could be that the reluctance of some to get down to reading the word is not simply because they lack time, but more subtly because they realize they are faced with God's judgments in it.

There is a purposeful ambiguity in Paul's comment that it is better to marry than to burn due to unlawful passions (1 Cor. 7:9). Is he referring to the burning 'fire' of judgment (e.g. Mt. 13:40), or of burning in lust (cp. Rom. 1:27)? Surely he intends reference to both, in that burning in lust is effectively condemning yourself, kindling the fire of condemnation yourself. David burnt in lust, and was then smitten with a disease which he describes as his loins being filled with burning (Ps. 38:7 RV). Or consider the Jonah type. He was disobedient and left the presence of the Lord of his own volition, and was therefore cast forth from the ship to the dark waters- in this little type of judgment, he condemned himself. The rejected

are told to depart, and yet in another sense they are cast away (Mt. 25:30,41). The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4).

Mutuality Between God And Man

God's present judgment of us is actually related to how we 'judge' God to be. There's a mutuality between God and man in this business of present judgment. This theme is played on throughout Hebrews 11. Sarah "judged" God as faithful, and He 'judged' her as faithful (Heb. 11:11). As Abraham "was offering up Isaac" (RV), with the knife raised, he was "accounting" God to be capable of performing a resurrection, just as Moses quit the riches of Egypt, "accounting the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb. 11:17,19,26 RV). And yet God 'accounts' us to be faithful, imputing righteousness to us. Through these acts and attitudes of faith, "these...had witness borne to them through their faith" (Heb. 11:39 RV). It was as if their lives were lived in the courtroom, with their actions a constant presentation of evidence to the judge of all the earth. Our judgment of God to be faithful thus becomes His judgment of us to be faithful.

The rejected with "loathe themselves" (Ez. 6:9; 20:43; 36:31); and yet in their lifetimes, God loathed them (s.w. Ps. 95:10); the process of rejection will teach them how God saw them, and they will perceive themselves how God did. Thus they will 'know the Lord' finally. Having spoken of how they will loathe themselves, God comments: "And they shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them" (Ez. 6:10). But the Hebrew word translated "in vain" is that elsewhere translated 'without cost', carrying the idea of 'not without personal disadvantage'. God will in that sense feel He has lost something, it has cost Him a lot, to see them in this condemnation. It isn't something that a vengeful deity wilfully and selfishly brings upon anyone.

Changing The Verdict

So whenever we sin, we are judged by the court of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation. The unfaithful now walk naked (Rev. 3:17); but they will do so in the final condemnation of Rev. 16:15. They can walk naked *now* and repent, clothe themselves so as to cover the nakedness of condemnation which they now have; but not then.

Here we see the urgency of our position as sinners; we are condemned now and yet we can repent; but not then. Heb. 4:13 makes the point that we right now are "naked" before the eyes

of Him to whom we right now give account [*logos*]. We will give that *logos* in the last day (Rom. 14:11,12); yet before the Word of God, as it is in both Scripture and in the person of the Lord Jesus, we face our judgment today, in essence. And we are pronounced “naked” before Him. Yet therefore, in this day of opportunity, we can come boldly before the throne because we have “such an High Priest”, as Heb. 4:16 continues. Lot suffered in the condemnation of Sodom when the neighbouring kings invaded (Gen. 14:12)- he was in the same situation as those who were warned to come out of Babylon lest they be consumed in her plagues. So he went through a condemnation process in this life- but later learnt his lesson and will be saved in the end. The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvelous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are “wandering” as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being lead away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment.

Bible minded Peter must surely have later reflected that he had said those very words: 'I know not this man'. He "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of condemnation- and yet he was able to repent and come back. Peter's self condemnation is brought out in yet finer detail by considering what he meant when he thrice denied that he either knew nor understood about Jesus (Mk. 14:68). By that time, everyone had heard about Jesus- after all, the trial of Jesus was going on, and all Jerusalem were waiting with bated breath for the outcome. And there was Peter, standing by the fire in the High Priest's house, with everyone talking about the Jesus affair. Peter hardly would've meant 'Jesus? 'Jesus' who? Never heard of him. Dunno who you're talking about'. What he therefore meant, or wished to be understood as meaning, was that he didn't 'know' Jesus in a close sense, he wasn't a disciple of Jesus, he didn't know nor understand Jesus, i.e., he wasn't a follower of Jesus. When Peter tells the maid: "I know not, neither understand what you say [about this Jesus]" (Mk. 14:68), the other records interpret this as meaning that Peter said that he didn't know *Jesus*. So we may have to interpret the form of speech being used here; for Semitic speakers don't answer questions in the same way and form as we may be accustomed to. The "what you say" was about Jesus; and therefore Peter is saying that he neither knows [closely] nor understands this Jesus. And yet time and again, Peter's Lord had taught that those who did not or would not 'know and understand' Him were those who were "outside", unknown by Him, rejected. And Peter was saying, to save his skin, 'Yes, that's me'. And yet... Peter repented, and changed that verdict. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny ⁽¹⁾. Again, this is the urgency of Hosea when he warns that in Israel's final judgment, they will repent, seek God and not find Him. Therefore he appeals for them *now* to seek Him, while He *may be* found...and Isaiah likewise. Lk. 12:9 says that whoever denies the Lord before men will be denied before the Angels. Two words are used

here, the first weaker than the second. If we deny Jesus, He will utterly deny us before the Angels- what we do now on earth is even more strongly reflected in Heaven and at judgment day. The Heavenly response to our words and actions is out of proportion to our words. This surely inspires us in our daily words and decisions.

The parable of the man coming to his friend at midnight and asking for loaves (Lk. 11:5-13) occurred in the context of the Lord's teaching about forgiveness (see the parallel Gospels). Yet the terms of the parable are replete with reference to the Lord's return and judgment:

11:5 At midnight- Christ comes "at midnight" in other parables (cp. Mk. 13:35)

11:7 Door now shut- the door is shut on those rejected, never to be opened (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25)

11:9 Knocking on the door in prayer, and the door is opened- the rejected knock on the door but it isn't opened.

Now, in this life, we knock on the door, knowing we are condemned, needing forgiveness, living out the situation of the rejected at the last day. But *now*, the door is opened. We are granted as much forgiveness as we need, which we accept shamefacedly and awkwardly, as the man receiving loaves at midnight for the visitor [note how Nathan describes David's lust for Bathsheba as a visitor arriving needing feeding].

Particularly by our attitude to our brethren can we condemn ourselves. If we hate our brother, we state we are already in darkness- the darkness to which we will be thrown in judgment day. If we go out from the fellowship of the brethren, we declare we are not of them (1 Jn. 2:19). Jude 19 speaks of those who separate themselves- those who *diakrino* themselves, judge themselves, by their separation from us. And yet this condemnation can so easily be undone by a studied application to brotherly love.

Condemnation is in that sense God's appeal to us. The Hebrew word translated "condemn", "judge" is also that translated "plead". Ezekiel often uses the word in speaking of how God will judge / condemn Israel. But he uses the same word when he speaks of how He will "plead" with Israel in their captivity in Babylon, i.e. in their condemnation experience (Ez. 17:20); how He will plead with them as He pleaded with them whilst they were undergoing judgment in Egypt (Ez. 20:35,36- s.w. "judge" Ez. 20:4); and how He will "judge" or "plead" with Israel's latter day invaders through the punishments He will bring upon them (Ez. 38:22). When God gives those wicked people to the sword, He will be pleading / judging with "all flesh" (Jer. 25:31); "For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead [s.w. judge] with all flesh" (Is. 66:16). They will be gathered to the valley of Jehoshaphat, so that the Lord can "plead [s.w. judge] with there for my people" (Joel 3:2).

The Example Of David

David was another man who like Peter was condemned in this life, but repented and received justification and salvation by God's grace. After David sinned with Bathsheba, the terms of the judgment pronounced against him are framed to echo the rejection and condemnation of Saul. Consider:

- David “despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil” (2 Sam. 12:9)- Saul likewise rejected the commandment of God (1 Sam. 15:29)
- “I will raise up evil against you out of your own house” (2 Sam. 12:11)- what happened to Saul (1 Sam. 20:30)
- “I will take your wives before your eyes and give them unto your neighbour” (2 Sam. 12:11). This happened to Saul- David is termed his “neighbour” (1 Sam. 15:28; 28:17), and David married Saul’s wives (2 Sam. 12:8).
- David’s “I have sinned” (2 Sam. 12:13) is word for word what Saul said at his condemnation (1 Sam. 15:24)

David then lies all night upon the earth, refuses to eat, people try to raise him up from the ground, and then they succeed in setting bread before him and he eats it (2 Sam. 12:16,17,20). David was consciously doing exactly what Saul did in 1 Sam. 28:20-25, the night before his death / condemnation. David was recognizing, of his own volition, that he was no better than Saul. And by doing this, he was saved. Unlike Saul, he altered the verdict of condemnation by meaningful repentance. Again we make the point, with Paul- if we condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned. Those who will have “cast off” the offending parts of their lives will not be “cast” into destruction (Mt. 5:29). The play on the word “cast” is surely to show that we are to condemn the actions of our own body and as it were cast them / those parts of ourselves into condemnation. And in this way we will “enter into life”.

... and Jonah

Jonah's yet another example. He utters a *tepillla*, an appeal for a favourable judgment from God- and received the answer in the answer to his prayer (Jonah 2:1,3,8). Note that Jonah did this from within the fish's belly- whilst undergoing a figurative condemnation for sin and rejection by God, having removed himself [as he thought] out of God's presence. But even then, a man could appeal to God's judgment seat for acceptance- and have his verdict changed. And thus the fish spat him out on dry ground, speaking of course of resurrection and acceptance by God.

Every Sinner

The Lord spoke of how when we sin, He 'takes account' of us and forgives us- and we are to respond by being frankly forgiving to those in our debt (Mt. 18:23,24). But the Lord uses the very same words and imagery in speaking of how at His return, He will "take account" of His servants and utter an unchangeable verdict upon them (Mt. 25:19). The connection of thought is surely to indicate that in our repeated experience of sin, coming before the throne of grace, receiving the judgment of condemnation, seeing it changed and responding by showing grace, we are living out the essence of the meeting with God which is yet to come. This is how God uses our experience of sin, repentance and forgiveness. The whole process is in order to give us an insight into the future judgment. The reality is that in those experiences of today, we can change the verdict. But in the last day it will be too late.

We can sum up our findings as follows:

Action In This Life: Israel hid themselves from God's face [cp. Adam] by their sins, they turned to Him the back and not the face (Jer. 32:33; Is. 59:2)

The Final Judgment : They were then driven away from God's face, He hid His face from them (Jer. 33:5)

Action In This Life : The elder son would not 'go in' to the feast (Lk. 15:28) (= the Kingdom)

The Final Judgment : The rejected are not allowed to 'go in' to the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3,9; 19:17,23,24; 25:21)

Action In This Life : Some *depart from* the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12); Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10)

The Final Judgment: "Depart from me...into everlasting fire" (Mt. 25:41); "He shall say, I know you not, *depart from me*" (Lk. 13:27)

Action In This Life: The foolish virgins *go* (s.w. "depart") to buy oil (Mt. 25:9)

The Final Judgment: "Depart from me" (Mt. 25:41)

Action In This Life: The nations gather themselves together against the Lord

The Final Judgment : He gathers them together for threshing (Mic. 4:11,12)

Action In This Life : "They began to make excuse (saying)...I pray thee have me excused" (Lk. 14:18)- s.w. reject

The Final Judgment : They will be rejected at the final judgment, although they rejected themselves.

Action In This Life: Burning in lust (1 Cor. 7:9; Rom. 1:27); riches (James 5:3) an the tongue as a fire (James 3:6) that now burns

The Final Judgment: The final burning up of the wicked (Mt. 13:40)

Action In This Life: If we hate our brother we are in darkness. If we go out from the brethren, we declare we are not of them (1 Jn. 2:19).

The Final Judgment Darkness = condemnation. We separate / *diakrino* / judge / condemn ourselves by our separation from our brethren (Jude 22).

Action In This Life We can bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15)

The Final Judgment As the Jews did in their day of condemnation in the Babylonian invasion (Is. 9:19,20 LXX; Jer. 13:14).

Action In This Life We can 'go back' from the demands of Jesus because we find them too demanding (Jn. 6:66).

The Final Judgment The same words are used of how the rejected will 'go away' from Jesus into rejection (Mt. 25:46; Mk. 9:43 s.w.).

Action In This Life I must *go away* and bury my father...young man *went away* in sorrow...people *go away* to their farm, trading (Mt. 8:21; 19:22; 22:5; Jn. 6:66), Judas *went away* to hang himself (Mt. 27:5)

The Final Judgment The rejected *go away* into everlasting punishment (Mt. 25:46)

Action In This Life The Jews gnashed their teeth against Stephen (Acts 7:54)

The Final Judgment As they will at the judgment (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51)

Notes

(1) There are other connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. He called down Divine curses *upon himself* if he knew Jesus of Nazareth- and thus brought the curse of God upon himself (the record of his cursing and swearing refers to this rather than to the use of expletives). One such Jewish oath would have been 'May God condemn me at the judgment if...'. The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12).

1.4 A Literal Judgment?

The Figure Of Judgment

It is hard to know whether the figures of judgment are supposed to be taken literally; e.g. will there be a literal throne? I offer three comments on this.

1. Maybe not *everything* in the judgment descriptions can be read literally. The figures are there to teach us essential truths concerning the nature of the judgment but not to explain what it will physically be like in every detail.

2. But the figures of judgment can be taken literally to an extent. However, the actual process will be slightly different for each of us. Thus for some, Christ gives his verdict immediately and then discusses it with them (Mt. 25:33,34,41). Others are apparently given the reasons for the verdict first, and then explicitly told the verdict (Mt. 25:27). Others tell the Lord of their spirituality and are then told his comment (Mt. 25:20). Others don't realize the spiritual growth they've achieved (Mt. 25:37), others see it quite clearly (Lk. 19:16). To some, Jesus speaks first; in other cases, the believer starts the dialogue (Mt. 25:41-44 cp. 11,12,24-26). Some sense their rejection coming and plead to be let in to the Kingdom (Mt. 25:11,12); others complain at their Lord's apparent unfairness, as if they're sorry, but they just have to make their point to him (Mt. 25:44).

3. However, the above figures are all capable of another interpretation. It is possible to gather all the teaching, types, parables and figures of judgment together, and construct from them a literal sequence of events which doesn't contradict. That this is possible is quite remarkable; so much so that I conclude that we are intended to construct this picture of judgment and understand that this is what will happen; because this order of events will articulate the principles of judgment which have been expressed in God's earlier judgments. This sequence is outlined in *Sheep And Goats* and *The Judgment Process*. This is not to say that each figure of judgment isn't to also be understood in a more general sense.

However, if we are to take the judgment figures literally, another the question arises: Does Christ know beforehand who will be accepted, and the degree of their reward? If we take the judgment figures to have a literal meaning, then it sounds as if He doesn't know. Lk. 19:15 suggests that perhaps He doesn't know; the Lord calls the servants "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading". He is ordained *to be* judge of all (Acts 10:42). However, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with all power given to him, this seems unlikely- although it must be remembered that in the same way as God is omnipotent and yet limits His omnipotence, so He may limit His omniscience. The shepherd sees the difference between sheep and goats as totally obvious. It needs no great examination. Surely the idea is that the judge, the omniscient Lord of all, will act at the judgment *as if* he needs to gather evidence from us and thereby reach his verdict. The parables give this impression because they surely describe how the judgment will feel to us. We demonstrate later how many of the parables imply that our acceptance at the judgment all depends on our attitude to our brother. But we know (or we ought to) that this isn't the *only* thing that our redemption hinges on; but the point of the parables is that this will be very prominent in our minds then.

1.5 Practical Effect

The very fact of judgment to come is in itself a demand for righteousness and temperance (Acts 24:25). Felix realized this and trembled, in anticipation of rejection at the judgment. As the Lord had explained in Jn. 5, when a man hears the word of the Gospel, he hears the call to go to judgment. And if he rejects it, he rejects himself from the Lord's presence in the future. Likewise Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent. At the Lord's resurrection, a day was appointed for human judgment, and therefore a knowledge of the Lord's resurrection means we are accountable to that day, and must therefore repent and prepare. It is by this logic that Paul argues that the Lord's resurrection is a guarantee that judgment day will come. "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord...[which involves that] we shall all [therefore] stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written...Every knee shall bow to me [as Lord and judge]..." (Rom. 14:9,10).

For the righteous, our acceptability before God now is related to our acceptability with him at judgment day. Our good works are manifest before we reach the judgment, which will manifest them again (1 Tim. 5:25). Thus David reflected on the experiences of his life: "Thou hast made my judgment; thou satest in the throne judging right...and he shall judge the world (at the second coming, through Christ, Acts 17:11) in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness" (Ps. 9:4,8 A.V.mg.). This shows the continuity between God's attitude to him in his mortal life, and God's attitude at the coming judgment. If Christ is glorified by us now, we will glorify Him in that day (2 Thess. 1:10,12). John 3:18 puts the issue clearly: "He that believeth on (Christ) is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already (before the judgment), because he hath not believed". It is in this

sense that in prospect we can be assured that we are saved by being in Christ. We can therefore live as "the sons of God, without rebuke...blameless" (Phil. 2:15) in God's sight (being so in the eyes of the world is almost impossible for a true believer!), in the same way as at the judgment we will be presented "holy and unblameable and unreprouvable". It must be significant that the language of forgiveness in the New Testament constantly alludes to judgment: justification, appeal, counsel for the defence, advocate, accusation etc. are common ideas, especially in the Greek. The point of this may be to teach that the experience of forgiveness now does stand related to the judgment which we will receive at Christ's return. Thus if we are convicted of sin now, but aided by Christ as our advocate and therefore justified, we will have the same experience at the judgment seat.

On Our Way To Judgment

The practical result of this understanding is fundamental. Each action and thought and word is *now* judged by God; and the result will be communicated to us on the last day. There is a *krisis* (judgment) *now* for every work (Ecc. 8:5,6 LXX). Every action and moment is a crisis. In this thought alone we see the crucial importance of life and living, every moment. As cotton wool clouds drift across the sky, we can lose this sense of urgency and vitality which there ought to be about every moment we live here. But we *know* His judgments; we *know* how He judges behaviour; and therefore we should live as men and women under judgment. Each act and thought is our judgment. It has been truly observed by John Robinson: "'To every matter there is a time (*kairos*) and a judgment (*krisis*)' (Ecc. 8:6 RV margin). And each particular moment of judgment makes its contribution towards the supreme consummation towards which it is all working- the final *kairos* which is also the final *krisis*" ⁽¹⁾. The judgment is the final crisis. That sense of crisis must not be lost on us. And yet we have a tendency to act and speak and think as if judgment day is not going to come: "Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him [in judgment], yet judgment *is* before him", right now (Job 35:14).

The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). "The things that shall come upon them, sealed up among my treasures, make haste" (Dt. 32:34,35 Heb.). We are on our way to judgment day, and that day is rushing towards us (cp. Lk. 14:31); the hearing of the Gospel is in itself a call to go forth and meet the Lord (Mt. 22:8). The believer is called to his Lord to receive his pounds, and is called to Him in judgment at His return (Lk. 19:13,15). The repetition of the idea of being called to our Lord surely suggests that our calling to Him in the first place is in fact a calling to judgment. We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). We are as fish *gathered* into the net, and yet also *gathered* into vessels at the judgment (Mt. 13:47,48). The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. When we go to judgment, we are not to look back as did Lot's wife; and yet we are not to look back having put our hand to the plough in this life. By starting on the way of

Christ, we are starting on our way to judgment. The Christian life is likened to a man on his way to his judge along with his adversary (Lk. 12:58); and evidently, he ought to settle his differences with his brother before he arrives, for this judge will be extremely hard upon those who cannot be reconciled to their brethren. This would suggest that the Lord foresaw that getting along with our brethren would be a major part in the development process of His people; and as they draw closer to the day of meeting with Him, the more urgent is the need to settle their disputes, as He will be unsympathetic towards them. The Lord prefaces this parable by appealing for His people to 'judge righteously' because His judgment is about to come (Lk. 12:57 Gk.). By forgiving our brother and reconciling with him, we are judging righteously; we are in essence deciding our own judgment which is to be revealed at the Lord's return. The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19:13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. At the point of conversion, the secrets of our hearts are in a sense made manifest (1 Cor. 14:25); but secrets are made manifest in the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18; 1 Cor. 3:13). The present judgments of God about us will be revealed at the judgment (Rom. 2:5). Our actions "treasure up" wrath or acceptance (Rom. 2:5). The materialistic believer heaps up treasure for judgment at the last day (James 5:3).

On Our Way To Judgment

- We are speeding towards judgment and should therefore watch what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12)
- "The things that shall come upon them, sealed up among my treasures, make haste" (Dt. 32:34,35)
- The army of the King is rushing towards us (Lk. 14:31)
- Men now are bidden to meet with the Lord in His wedding but found even now unworthy (Mt. 22:8)
- The guests are "gathered together" to the wedding (Mt. 22:10)- as if response to the Gospel is a gathering together to judgment (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)
- The Gospel is a net which gathers men together and drags them to the *sitting down* , the judgment division (Mt. 13:47,48)

The present nature of the judgment ought to powerfully motivate us. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things..." (1 Tim. 5:21) is full of judgment language: before God, Christ and the Angels of the elect (i.e. our 'guardian Angels'). 'Before God' is the language of the judgment in Mt. 25:32; Lk. 21:36; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:14; 1 Jn. 2:28; Jude 24; Rev. 14:5. It's as if Paul was reminding Timothy that he was present before the judgment already, and should therefore be obedient. 2 Tim. 4:1 makes the link even more apparent: he charged Timothy to preach as being before (Gk.) both the Father and Son, who *will judge* the living and dead at His appearing. Because we effectively stand before the judgment seat now, therefore preach now,

because preaching is one of those things that will be taken into account at the final judgment day (Lk. 12:8). As men being before the Lord's throne, who will be finally judged just as we are now being judged, therefore act according to the principles which we know will lead to acceptance then.

Judging Others

As recipients of God's grace through the experience of His way of working with us reflecting His character, we too must reflect those same characteristics to others. This is why we *must* judge- for in doing so, we have the opportunity to reflect God's character. We must judge righteous judgment (Jn. 7:24) in reflection of that of "the Lord, the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8). David was almost eager to replicate the principles of God's judgments in how he judged issues (Ps. 75:10 cp. 7; 75:7 cp. 2). And therefore Asaph poses the question to Israel's judges: 'Because God judges justly, why don't you?' (Ps. 82:1-3). As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the...fatherless and widow" (Dt. 27:79) because "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5). Israel were to reflect God's judgments in their judgments. And thus the leaders of the people were reminded: "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you: take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons" (2 Chron. 19:5-7). All Israel were to judge their neighbour "in righteousness" (Lev. 15:19; Ex. 1:17); and in allusion to this, the Lord bids us judge "righteous judgment". Our natural tendency is to flunk issues, avoid giving a judgment, leave it to someone else. And yet there is an imperative to judge others, for in doing so we reflect our experience of the Lord's gracious judgment of us. There are frequently cases in ecclesial life which thrust themselves upon us; not least in the area of marriage failure. We can't dodge these issues, for fear of the reaction of others. Whenever issues arise, even if we avoid publicly giving our comment, we have a reaction and position. We have each one experienced the Lord's gracious judgment of us, and trust to yet receive it. If this experience has truly touched us, we will surely respond in how we judge others. We know His judgment, but we also know there is an essential tension within the personality of God, in that His mercy rejoices against His judgment. And we must reflect this.

Notes

(1) John Robinson, *In The End God* (London: James Clark, 1950), p. 57.

1.6 The Logic Of Judgment

There is a powerful Biblical theme, upon which we have expanded elsewhere. It is that if we do not judge / condemn ourselves now, then we will be at the judgment. If we don't burn up the flesh now, then it will be at judgment day. When the rebels were burnt by fire, Moses commented: "This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me" (Lev. 10:4). Either we burn ourselves up in commitment now, or we will be burnt up.

God demands us from ourselves. The glaring logic is that seeing the flesh will be dissolved, it must have its judgment, therefore we ought to judge it now and thereby receive acceptance at the judgment; rather than omit to do so now and go through the same dissolution at the judgment, with the result that we will sleep eternally. Israel's cities were full of witches, Egyptian horses and chariots, and idols; and therefore those cities had to be destroyed in judgment. If those things had been cut off by Israel's own self-purging, there would have been no need for the process of condemnation to do it (Mic. 5:10,12,14). But they would not; and so "I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so [therefore] will I destroy [Heb. 'purify'] thy cities" (Mic. 5:14). This is where an understanding of the ongoing, present nature of the judgment is such a powerful imperative to spirituality; if we don't condemn sin in ourselves now, then God does, and will articulate His judgment at the Lord's return.

Here, then, are some examples of this logic:

- Jeremiah used it in appealing to Israel to humbly repent: "Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves: *for* (i.e. because) your principalities shall *come down* ", i.e. be humbled (Jer. 13:18). The pride of man will be humbled by Yahweh; if we refuse to humble ourselves, then God's condemnation of us in the day of judgment will humble us. Therefore it is logical to humble ourselves now.

- John the Baptist had a clear perception of this logic: "He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and...he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of the condemnation. This is the logic of judgment.

- The Lord Jesus picked up on the same idea. He spoke of the destruction of the unworthy in Gehenna fire, and went straight on to comment: "For every one shall be salted with (Gk. 'for the') fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted" (Mk. 9:48,49). Unless we become a living sacrifice, wholly consumed by God's fire, laying ourselves down upon the altar, then we will be consumed by the figurative fire of Gehenna at the day of judgment. Again, there's no real choice: it's fire, or fire.

- And it's bankruptcy, or bankruptcy. Paul spoke of spending and being spent in the Lord's service, alluding to how the prodigal spent himself in dissipation (Lk. 15:24). That sense of losing all must come- either in sin's service, or in that of the Lord.

- We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20).

- Is. 45:20 RV speaks of how some "carry the wood of the their graven image". We either carry the wood of the cross, or the wood of the cross of our idols. In the same vein Is. 30:17 says that the rejected will be left as a beacon (RVmg "mast") upon the top of a mountain, "and as an ensign on a hill". This is the image of the cross- a piece of wood on a hill. And so it's a cross, or a cross.

- God's people are likened to a hilltop vineyard, about which God "made a trench" (Is. 5:2 RV) in order that it would bring forth fruit; and it had a winepress in the midst of it. Yet ultimately, in the horror of condemnation in AD70, a trench was made around Jerusalem in

order to destroy it, and the city became a winepress of judgment. The logic of judgment again becomes apparent; we either respond now to the appreciation of our rightful condemnation; or we will be condemned.

- Legalism and human religion [of which our own brotherhood has its share] are a burden laid on men's shoulders. But the cross of Jesus is also a burden laid upon our shoulders (Mt. 23:4). The greatness of the demands of the cross free us from the burdens of man's legalism. But it's still a choice, between a cross and a cross.

- "I will judge [condemn] you...and ye shall know that I am the LORD", Ezekiel often warned (e.g. Ez. 11:9). Men must either know Yahweh now, or they will know Him in condemnation. And Ezekiel uses the idea of 'knowing' Yahweh in the sense of the knowledge that leads to a desire for responsive action. But Ezekiel plays on this logic even further; because Israel had not "executed my judgments", therefore in their condemnation Yahweh would "execute judgments among you" (Ez. 11:9,12). We cannot escape the moral requirements of Yahweh; if *now* we ignore the cutting of the flesh which they demand, then in the day of condemnation those judgments we have neglected to execute will be executed in us.

- We must have tribulation, either in the condemnation of the judgment (Rom. 2:9), or now, in order that we will enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We must bear the burden either of our sins (Am. 2:13; Is. 58:6; Ps. 38:4) or of the Lord's cross (Gal. 6:4 etc.). We will experience either the spiritual warfare of the striving saint (Rom. 7:15-25), or the lusts of the flesh warring in our members, eating us up with the insatiability of sin (James 4:1; Ez. 16:28,29). Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*...turn ye even to me...with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12).

- The sacrifices taught Israel that God especially valued the fat- the best parts of their lives were to be freely offered to Him. But the wicked at judgment day will be as the fat of lambs, consumed upon the altar (Ps. 37:20). We either give our best to the Lord's service now, or He will ultimately take it from us anyway. Cars, houses, flats, valued jewellery, banknotes stashed away, bank accounts, our innermost emotions, jealousy, love...we either give them now, or He will take them from us in the day of judgment.

- We simply must get down to serious self-examination. To him who orders his ways aright, the salvation of God will be shown. But for those who never reprove themselves, and think that God "was altogether such an one as thyself", He will reprove them "and set them in order before thine eyes" at the judgment (Ps. 50:21,23). We must face our sins, either now in our self-examination and genuine confession and struggle for self-mastery; or then, when the grounds for rejection are made painfully apparent.

- The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8; 1 Thess. 5:3). The Lord seems to have alluded to this when He spoke of how the faithful just before His coming would be like a woman in travail, with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of acceptance at Christ's return (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we chose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off at the last

day. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man...shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14).

- "Whosoever shall fall on this stone (Christ) shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Mt. 21:44). There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world. Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel...that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment.

- Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what he was suggesting: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross...*for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV "soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will be evident to all then (Rev. 16:15).

- The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!...for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!' . The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

- Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48:25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice. God will conquer sin, ultimately. When a man dies, it isn't just a biological, clockwork process. It is God's victory over sin in that individual. Either we must be slain by God; or with His gracious help, we must put sin to death in our members through association with the only One who really did this- and thereby rise to life eternal. The inevitability of God's conquest of sin is brought out in Ez. 6:4-6: "Your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken...in all your dwelling places, the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; *that* your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease...and your works may be abolished...I will lay the dead carcasses of the children of Israel before their idols". The people of Israel had to be destroyed because their idols had to be destroyed. *The inevitability of God's ultimate conquest of sin* is evident: and we are asked to side *with* Him, not against Him. *God will have His way*. The rebels amongst natural Israel were "wasted out" (Dt. 2:14)- using a Hebrew word which means 'perfected'. God will perfect us anyway, either by our destruction or by our salvation; He will have His way. This means we must put to death our sinful works *now*, not leave it for Him to destroy us so that He might destroy them. The secret sins of every human soul, those things we wrongly allow ourselves, those untackled, unacknowledged habits, will all ultimately be destroyed by the Lord: either through our response to His hand in our lives, or through His destruction of us so that they might be destroyed.

- There is reason to think that a latter day tribulation is to come upon us, which will really test our appreciation of this principle which is so embedded throughout God's revelation. Those who will refuse to worship the beast will be killed (Rev. 13:15); but those (responsible) who try to avoid this death will themselves be *tortured* to death by the Lamb, because they worshipped the beast (14:9-11; 16:2).

- Paul speaks of how sinful behaviour ends up in people doing things 'contrary to nature'; and yet he uses a similar phrase to describe how being 'grafted in' to the true hope of Israel, with all it implies in practice, is likewise "contrary to nature" (Rom. 1:26,27 cp. 11:24). We walk against the wind, go against the grain, one way or the other in this life. And, cynically speaking, it may as well be for the Lord's cause than for the flesh.

- In the end, all the enemies of Jesus will be placed "under His footstool" (Acts 2:35 etc.). Yet we were all His enemies, due to the alienation with Him caused by our sin (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). The Lord's footstool is the place where His people are figuratively located, praising Him there (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Lam. 2:1). Ultimately, all things will be subjected under Jesus, placed at the Lord's footstool, under His feet (1 Cor. 15:27). Submission to Him is therefore the ultimate end of both the righteous and the wicked; the difference being, that the righteous

submit to Him now, rather than in the rejection and final exaltation of the Lord over them in the condemnation process.

- The breaking of bread is intended to bring the logic of all this powerfully before us. The cup of the Lord is a symbol both of His condemnation, and also of His blessing and forgiveness. We take it, week by week, either to our condemnation, or to our salvation. There is no third way. We may as well realize this. The Lord Jesus *hates* the fact that some think there is a third road; He would that we recognized, as He does, that there is really no 'lukewarm' position- only hot or cold. He seems to ask us to realize this: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt" (Mt. 12:33).

2. Previous Judgments

We have shown in *The Judgment Now* that God's judgment is the articulation and public display of His judgments, His characteristics, the essence of His being. The final judgment has been typified by many occasions in which God has condemned sin and justified the righteous. Each of these types shed light on the final judgment to which we stand related. Where and when and in what exact chronological detail this last judgment will occur is not so important; what is crucial for our eternal future is that we understand the *principles* which will be articulated in it.

In passing, note that in all the following types of judgment, Angels feature prominently- as they will in the final antitype.

Adam in Eden (Rom. 5:16-18)

He heard the call / invitation of God to judgment (cp. Mt. 20:8; 22:3; 25:6; Lk. 14:17; 16:2; 19:15).

The Angel came for him in the spirit / whirlwind (Mt. 13:39; 25:31)

The presence of the Lord

Adam fled

Adam had no place to hide, although he sought it. Likewise the sinful deeds of the rejected will not be hid at the judgment (1 Tim. 5:25- surely an allusion to Adam's attempt to hide). Israel likewise wanted to hide from God but were searched out in His day of judgment (Am. 9:3). This corresponds with the foolish virgins not wanting to go to judgment.

Fear

Nakedness (Rev. 16:15)

Realization of their condemnation just by the very invitation to judgment

Questioned about his sin (Mt. 25:42)

Made excuses (Mt. 25:43)

Specific punishment given to Adam and Eve, appropriate to the failure of each of them, with an explanation (Mt. 25:42)

Sent forth from God's presence

Driven out- as if there were two stages.

Cain's Rejection

This is commented on under 'Sheep and goats'

Lot's Deliverance From Sodom

If Lot and Noah had not been saved, they would have perished in the judgment to come upon Sodom / their surrounding world. And so it seems the unfaithful will meet their end in the same way.

The Red Sea

This is described as the judgment of God, the day of the Lord etc. because God's people exited from the world whilst judgments came upon it; the Name of God was revealed through this process (Ps. 76:6-9; 103:6,7). Israel were brought out by "great judgments" (Ex. 6:6; 7:4), i.e. by God's stretched out arm (6:6). The way He acted was a manifestation of His judgment principles.

The Babylonian Invasion (Jer. 1:15,16; 4:12,13)

Their captivity would lead to men being humbled and Yahweh exalted (Is. 5:12-16), using the very language which Isaiah elsewhere uses about the final day of judgment (2:21). As Israel were "cast" out of their land and into another country (Dt. 29:28) so the rejected are cast out of God's presence. Zedekiah fled, was overtaken, wept (Ez. 7:27), judgment was given upon him (Jer. 52:9), he was punished in the presence of the king (Jer. 52:10), cast into prison (Jer. 52:11 cp. Mt. 5:25).

The Assyrian Invasion

When Sennacherib camped against Jerusalem and set up his throne there, this was a judgment seat. The judgment seat was brought near by Israel's sin (Am. 6:3). The faithful remnant had to go through some of the final judgments. But Israel were removed out of God's sight (2 Kings 17:18), rejected by God (:20).

AD70

The whole of Matthew 24, with its evident judgment and second coming reference, can be applied to the events of AD70. The AD70 judgment is described as the fiery trial which would try the saints, and as judgment beginning at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:12,17).

The Cross

The Lord plainly described His death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:30-32). Because there was "no judgment", therefore Jesus died on the cross (Is. 59:15,16). This was the ultimate judgment of this world. There the Lord God, through His Son, acted as judge in condemning sin (Rom. 8:3). The Lord "set his face" to go up to Jerusalem and die there (Lk. 9:51), but in doing so the record alludes to the way Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem in judgment (2 Kings 12:17). The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. "The prince of this world" (sin, the devil?) was judged by the victory of the cross (Jn. 16:11). There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The prophecy of Zech. 12:10 concerning looking on the pierced Messiah is quoted in Rev. 1:7 concerning the judgment seat; and yet in Jn. 19:37 concerning the cross. Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8).

As unworthy people wailed before Him on the cross (Lk. 23:27- the Lord knew they would be condemned in the AD70 judgment rather than obey his words and flee the city), so they will wail (s.w.) before Him at the judgment (Mt. 24:30). The cross and the judgment are definitely connected. Men's feelings at the cross are a foretaste of our feelings before the enthroned, glorified Lord. And hence there is a connection between the breaking of bread, the judgment, the crucifixion, self-examination... it all comes together. The suffering Lord committed the keeping of His soul to the Father "that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). He judged both His Son's righteousness and the world's rejection of it at that time. The lifting up of Christ on the pole resulted in all men being drawn unto him (Jn. 12:32); but this is taking language from Isaiah's prophecies of how the Lord Jesus at His return would be raised up like an ensign (s.w. pole, Num. 21:9), and all people would be gathered to Him for judgment (Is. 5:26; 11:10; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10). There is evidently a connection between the Lord's lifting up on the pole / cross and gathering all men to Him, and the way in which all men will be gathered to Him at His return. His cross was a foretaste of the judgment. Our feelings before His cross *now* will be those we experience before Him at the final judgment (see comments on the breaking of bread in *Foretastes Of Judgment*). At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

3. The Judgment Process

There is a lamentable amount of unclarity in thinking concerning the coming of Christ. There seems to be the idea that He will come to take us away, invisible to the world, and then

reveal Himself to them after judgment. Associated with this problem is considerable confusion concerning the Greek word 'parousia', translated "coming" in Matt. 24. This study aims to show that there is only one coming of Christ, and that this 'parousia' ("coming") refers to His literal, visible return. "The day of Christ" refers both to the time of the believers' judgment seat in Phil. 2:16, and to the lightning-like appearing of Christ to the world in judgment in Lk. 17:23,29,30. The coming of Christ in judgment will be at the same 'day' for both believer and unbeliever. But what evidence is there that the "*day* of Christ" is a period of 24 hours? We *must* understand that the meaning of time as we know it will be collapsed around the time of the second coming ⁽¹⁾. It is for this reason that we can only suggest *possible* chronological scenarios, of which there are as many versions as there are Bible students.

3.1 The Meaning Of *Parousia*

Jehovah's pseudo-witnesses have spread the idea that 'parousia' refers to an invisible presence of Christ. The point must be driven home that 'parousia' *always* refers to the physical presence of a person. There is another Greek word frequently translated 'coming' which is more flexible in meaning, but 'parousia' means 'a literal being alongside', and is always used in that way:

- "As the lightning cometh out of the east...so shall also the *coming* ('parousia') of the son of man be (Matt. 24:27).
- "The day that Noe entered into the ark...the flood came...so shall also the coming of the son of man be" (Matt. 24:38,39).
- "Afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:23).
- "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15).

The other uses of 'parousia' are also concerning the Lord's second coming, often in the context of judgment: 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1,8; James 5:7,8; 2 Peter 1:16; 3:4,12; 1 John 2:28. The Olivet prophecy speaks of the Lord's *parousia*, and therefore it is difficult to concede that this prophecy doesn't refer to the last days. This must be the main burden of the Lord's words, whatever local reference there may have been to the events of AD70.

The moment of the second coming ('parousia') is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This makes any application of 'parousia' to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Matt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Matt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Matt. 24: 30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16).

In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Matt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70.

Notes

(1) See 'Gehenna: Another Look', *The Way Ahead*, Sept. 1990 for some possibilities here.

3.2 Thief-like Coming of Christ?

There has been much confusion over the 'thief-like coming of Christ' mentioned in 1 Thess. 5:2. The context is concerning the state of the ecclesia in the last days, and is shot through with allusions to the parable of the virgins. The sleeping virgins represent the unworthy amongst the believers who will live just prior to the second coming. Paul's allusion to this fills out the details: the coming of Christ to this category of 'believers' will be like a thief in the sense that their privacy and spiritual house will be invaded by the reality of the second coming. This will be due to their attitude of 'peace and safety', which they will actively promulgate - 'Everything's great within the household, we're going from strength to strength spiritually, there's no need to fear failure in any form!' That "they shall say, Peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3) suggests that this is an attitude which they publicly disseminate amongst the brotherhood. Bearing in mind the many prophecies and indications that there will be a massive spiritual collapse within the latter-day ecclesia, it is reasonable to assume that the faithful minority will speak out against this - to be met by a barrage of 'peace and safety' reasoning.

Those who will stand ready for their Lord will be in the light, in the day, self-aware, spiritually sensitive and realistic, and therefore *not* saying "Peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3-8). Christ's coming as a thief to the unworthy is therefore in the sense of His coming being unexpected by them, rather than being as a thief to the world. The frequent application of the 'peace and safety cry' to the world of the last days never ceases to amaze the present writer. Prophecy after prophecy describes a time of global cataclysm around the time of the second coming, even though this may be mixed with a fair degree of material prosperity. In no way will it be a time of "peace and safety" for the world; and their ever-increasing escapism shows that they don't exactly see it like that either. Biblically speaking, their hearts are failing them for fear, apprehensive concerning whatever is going to happen to their planet earth (Lk. 21:26, see modern versions).

3.3 Gathering To Judgment

"The holy angels with him"

Practically and concretely, how will we be gathered to judgment? How? When? It seems that the Angels will suddenly appear to us in the course of our mundane lives, and invite us to go to meet Christ. "The reapers" of the harvest "are the angels"; it is they who will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42). As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together...shall men (angels) give into your bosom (at the judgment; ordinary men certainly don't do so in this life!). For with the same measure

that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"- very much the language of judgment to come (Lk. 6:38 cp. Mt. 7:1,2). This association of "men" (angels) with the judgment is fitting, seeing that our guardian angel will have been with us through every up and down of life. Speaking of the principle of responsibility upon which our judgment will be conducted, the Lord hints at this: "to whom men (our guardian angels?) have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:48). In a judgment context, Paul charges Timothy before the angels of the elect, i.e. our guardian Angels- as if to say 'They are watching over you now, they will be there again at judgment and look back to your present life; so behave as you should as a man under God's judgment' (1 Tim. 5:21). The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is (Mt. 24:28). It's possible to interpret eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek ouai would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

Angels And Judgment

- "The reapers" of the harvest "are the angels"; it is they who will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42)
- As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50).
- "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6).
- "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together...shall men (angels) give into your bosom (at the judgment; ordinary men certainly don't do so in this life!). For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lk. 6:38 cp. Mt. 7:1,2).
- "To whom men (our guardian angels?) have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12:48).

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Matt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and

Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The collapse of time around the events of the judgment would explain this equation between the gathering and the judgment. The wicked will "immediately" feel that the house of their pseudo-spirituality has totally collapsed, as soon as the rain of judgment comes down (Lk. 6:49). The 'rain' will be a symbol of blessing for the righteous, and of judgment for the wicked. Likewise the cup of wine is another double symbol- of blessing, and of condemnation. Yet we know that there will be a *process* of condemnation- they will argue back with their Lord, expecting a reward for their good works...but underneath, "immediately" from their first knowledge of the Lord's return, there will be this sense of total collapse within them. The judgment passages which speak of the rejected apparently confidently demanding a place in the Kingdom in reward for their good works must be read with this fact as background. In that day, "One will be taken, whilst the other will be left [behind]" [Lk. 17:34]. The Greek for "taken" is the same as in Jn. 14:3- the Lord comes again to *take* us to be with Him. Seeing this passage also speaks of the second coming, it seems to me on reflection to fit more logically that the faithful are taken away; and the rejected 'left behind'. The Greek word for "left" really has the idea 'sent away'. Whilst it's not the same Greek word, it is the same *idea* as in several pictures of the judgment- the rejected are 'sent away'; the idea of being 'left sitting' doesn't seem to be there. So in the very moment of the Lord's return, the essential division is made; the faithful are taken, whilst the rejected are "left", but their being "left [behind]" is actually their condemnation, their being sent away from the Lord.

It seems from Dt. 1:22 that if Israel had responded immediately to the offer of going in to inherit the Kingdom / promised land, then they would have entered it. But they refused; they wavered, and wanted the spies to go ahead of them. They would look back and "deem it a light / easy thing" to have entered the land (Dt. 1:41 RVmg.), just as the those rejected for disobeying the initial call will later realize how relatively easily they could've entered the wonderful Kingdom.

Loving His Appearing

Thus our Lord said that all those whom he finds *watching* will be welcomed into the marriage feast (Lk. 12:37). And 2 Tim. 4:8 is plain enough: "All them also that love his appearing" will

be rewarded along with Paul. Paul's own confidence in salvation was because he knew the earnestness of his desire to be "present with the Lord" Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8), such was the closeness of his relationship with him. Is this really our attitude too? Can we feel like Simeon, that we are quite happy to die after we have just seen our Lord with our own eyes (Lk. 2:29)? Is there really much *love* between us and our Lord? The faithful are described as "those that *seek* (God)...such as *love* thy salvation" (Ps. 40:16). None truly seek God (Rom. 3:11- the context concerns all of us, believers and unbelievers); and yet we are those who seek Him. We must be ambitious to do the impossible. Those who truly *love* righteousness and the Kingdom will be rewarded with it. Likewise Paul in 1 Cor. 8:2,3 describes the faithful man as one who accepts he knows nothing as he ought to know, but truly loves God. Heb. 9:28 is clear: "Unto them that look for (Christ) shall he appear the second time...unto salvation". Those who truly look for Christ will be given salvation. People from all over the world, the living responsible, will see the sign of the son of man, will know His return is imminent, and wail with the knowledge that they have crucified Him afresh and must now meet Him (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10). Their response to the certain knowledge that His return is imminent will in that moment effectively be their judgment.

The Master is so delighted that his servants are watching for Him that He immediately sits down and gets a meal ready for them, doing the serving Himself (Lk. 12:37). There is an arresting element of unreality here. Would a Master really do this, at such an unlikely time at night, would he really serve himself, and would he really be so glad that the servants were waiting up for him? But these elements of unreality serve to teach the lessons: that the Lord will have unspeakable joy at His return because of our expectancy of the second coming, and He will surprise us by His glee and enthusiasm for us.

The idea that whoever truly loves the Lord's coming will therefore be accepted by Him can easily be abused by those who reason that anyone who has the emotion of love towards Christ will be rewarded by him. We know that true love involves both having and keeping his commands. But for those of us in Christ, these verses are still a major challenge. If we truly "look for" Christ's second coming, if we "love his appearing", this will lead us to acceptance with him. So the point is surely clinched: our attitude towards the second coming is an indicator of whether we will be saved. Time and again in the Psalms, David expresses his good conscience in terms of asking God to come and judge him (e.g. Ps. 35:24). Was this not some reference to the future theophany which David knew some day would come?

3.3.1

Sequence Of Events At Christ's Return

Solomon's Girl

The fact is, our attitude and response in the split second when we know 'He's back' will effectively be our judgment. When the Lord speaks about knocking on the door of our hearts and our response (Rev. 3:20), He is picking up the language of the Song of Solomon 5:2-8, where the voice of the bridegroom (cp. Jesus) knocks at the door of the bride. The Song of Solomon appears to refer to a hopeless romance between King Solomon and a dark skinned Egyptian girl. Despite the passionate expressions both make to each other, there is a tension

in the Song, something unsatisfactory in the relationship. They meet in secret, keep disappearing, the Jerusalem girls mock the Egyptian girl, the girl wishes that Solomon was an Egyptian like her so that they wouldn't be despised; and rather than the Song culminating as we would expect in a wedding, instead the couple part from each other. There are some New Testament links which suggest that the girl can be seen as a type of the ecclesia [e.g. Song 4:7 = Eph. 5:27]. But Song 5 seems to give insight into the unworthy elements of the potential bride of Christ.

Notice the sequence there:

While she sleeps at night, the bridegroom comes and knocks [unworthy virgins sleeping instead of being awake; the Lord Jesus comes; Lk. 12:36 uses the same figure, of the Lord's return being like a knock]

She replies that she's not dressed properly, makes excuses about her feet, she can't come and open [the unworthy don't respond immediately]

He tries to open the door from the outside, putting his hand through the latch-hole [by grace, after the pattern of Lot being encouraged to leave Sodom when he hesitated, the Lord will be patient even with sleepy virgins in His desire for their salvation]

Her heart is moved with desire for him [the rejected still call Jesus 'Lord, Lord'; they love Him emotionally]

She starts dressing herself up, and then is overtaken by desire and rushes to the door, her hands dripping all kinds of perfume and make up over the lock as she opens it [cp. the virgins going to buy oil, the unworthy trying to prepare themselves all too late, not trusting that their Lord loves them as they are at the moment of His coming]

But he's gone, he *withdraws himself* [all too late, the door is shut, He never knew them]

Her soul fails [the shock of rejection]

She seeks him but doesn't find him, calls but he doesn't answer [Prov. 1:28; the rejected call, but aren't answered; they seek the Lord early, but don't find Him. Hos. 5:6 is likewise relevant: "They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to *seek* the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath *withdrawn himself* from them".]

She feels tired of her relationship with him ("sick of love").

She is persecuted by the world around her ["condemned with the world"]

The basic point is that if we don't immediately respond to the Lord's knock, we show ourselves to not love Him enough. If we don't open immediately, it's as if we didn't open at all. The Lord wants us as we are, bleary eyed and without our make up, but with a basic overriding love of Him, and faith in the depth of His love, which will lead us to immediately go out to meet Him. This will be the ultimate and crucial divide- between those who believe in the Lord's love for us, who have known the humanly unknowable love of Christ; and those who think they need to prepare *themselves* to make themselves good enough for Him. Solomon called to the girl through the keyhole: "...my undefiled...". But she doesn't want to

immediately come to Him because she doesn't want to meet him with 'defiled' feet (Song 5:2,3). She couldn't believe his words, that in his eyes, she was *undefiled*. And the enormity of the passion of Christ for us is likewise so hard for us to accept. In Song 3:1 we find the girl again at night, dreaming of having Solomon with her. But when one night he does actually come, she doesn't go to meet him immediately. And there's a warning for us. Like Israel we may 'desire the day of the Lord', study prophecy about it, write about it, enthuse about it. But when He comes, to what end will it be to us? Will we *in a moment* drop everything and go to Him, believing that He loves us just as we are? Or will we run off to buy oil, slap make up on...? The tragedy of Solomon's girl was that she started putting her make up on, and then her heart smote her and she opened the door, her hands dropping perfume all over the bolt (Song 5:5 RV). She finally realized that he had loved her for who she was, how she was. But it was tragically too late. He'd gone. We need to learn that lesson *now*, to know the love of Christ... so that in that moment when we know for sure 'He's back!', we will without hesitation *go to Him* with that perfect / mature love, that casts out fear.

We can so easily like the idea of Christ's return, and yet when He comes, will we be ready? This was Malachi's theme, when he warned Israel that they desired the day of the Lord, and yet to what end would it be for them when it came? The unworthy virgin of Song 5:3 sums up the attitude. She had been assured by Solomon-Jesus that he saw her as "undefiled"- and yet when he finally came to her, a coming she had dreamt about, she wouldn't go to meet him immediately because she feared she might be "defiled" (Song 5:2,3). She didn't believe enough in his love to go and open immediately to him. She 'seeks' him in her dreams and desires and words (Song 3:1), then he does actually come to her one night, but she doesn't open to him in time, he 'withdraws himself' from her, and then she is left in her rejection with the same feelings she had before- seeking him but not having him (Song 5:6). All this is a powerful warning to us, who claim to be eagerly awaiting the Lord's coming.

Meeting the Lord

The same Greek word translated "meet" in Matt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ occurs also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up...in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming.

It is necessary to side-track in order to show that Paul is speaking of the faithful believers in 1 Thess. 4 and 5 rather than all the responsible:-

- He comforts them that the dead believers really will be rewarded with immortality, and that they can take comfort from the fact that they would live for ever (1 Thess. 4:13,14,18). Paul is therefore assuming their acceptability at judgment.

- "Ye are all the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5) as opposed to the unworthy within the ecclesia, who were in darkness. This suggests that Paul wrote as though his readership were all faithful and assured of eternal life.

"Caught up"

Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up...in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

"So great a cloud..."

This cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) will then go with Jesus to judgment, which must be located on earth for the glimpses of the judgment seat which we are given to be realistically fulfilled. The Lord Jesus comes to judgment with His saints with Him (1 Thess. 3:13; Zech. 14:5; Jude 14). It is reasonable to guess that this assembly of faithful believers will visibly reflect God's glory, giving the impression of a 'shekinah' cloud. This may be due to the physical presence of the Angel with us during our time in this cloud. Such a picture is presented in Dan. 7:9-14; Jesus comes with the faithful, symbolized as clouds, along with the Angels, to the judgment seat. It is at this stage that the responsible from all nations come to the judgment (Matt. 25:32) so that there can be a separation of sheep and goats. The 'coming down' of the righteous responsible to Jerusalem will be at the same time as the judgment of the wicked nations in that same place: "Thither cause thy mighty ones to come down" (Joel 3:11) occurs in the context of Armageddon. The bride comes down out of Heaven as a prepared bride. "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau" (Obad. v 21), i.e. Israel's Arab enemies. The apparent confusion between our gathering to judgment in Jerusalem and the judgment of the nations there at the same time is explicable if we accept that the meaning of time will be collapsed around the second coming. The sequence of events here suggested chimes in with the thought so often expressed by generations of believers - that our initial reaction to the knowledge that our Lord is back will effectively be our judgment, although this will be formally confirmed at the judgment seat before which all the responsible must appear (2 Cor. 5:10).

With Jesus To Judgment

The key passage in our reasoning, 1 Thess. 4:15-18, begins with "For...". This is explaining 1 Thess. 4:14, which states that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring (up) with him". This will thus be true both spiritually, in that they will share His victory over death, and, literally, in that they will come with their judge to judgment. John 14:3 may also become easier to handle with this understanding: "I will come again, and take you to be with me" (N.I.V.). Initially, this will mean a literal ascent into the sky, followed by a return to earth to be with Christ eternally in the Kingdom. "That where I am, there ye may be also" may be the spirit's basis for 1 Thess. 4:17, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord". Rev. 14:4 may be

relevant here: "These are they which were not defiled [past tense] with women... they which follow the lamb [present tense] whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed [past tense] from among men...". My point is that the faithful are described in terms of what had happened to them in their mortal lives, but the present tense is used about them following the Lamb wherever He goes in the present tense- as if as they stand in glory at judgment day, they are there by virtue of their present following of the Lamb wherever He went, which in this case is to Jerusalem.

The idea of literally travelling through the sky to the judgment seat was plainly taught by our Lord in His explanation of how "one shall be taken (literally disappear) and the other left" at His coming; "Whithersoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke 17:36,37). The point of this allusion is to show that as the eagle travels through the air with a natural homing instinct, without fear or worry as to correct direction, so there should be no apprehension in the mind of the believer concerning the mechanics of how he will be taken away to meet his Lord. The objection that a carcass is an unseemly figure for the Lord Jesus surely becomes insignificant once it is recognized that the Bible often speaks of God and the things of His Truth in what we would consider inappropriate language (e.g. Mt. 13:33; Ps. 78:65). The Lord comparing His teaching to "dung" is another one (Lk. 13:8).

The chronology we have suggested can now be summarised:-

- Persecution of believers.
- The Lord is revealed; the resurrection.
- An Angel invites each of the responsible to go and meet Christ.
- The unworthy delay, whilst the worthy go immediately.
- The worthy are snatched away into the air, forming a cloud of glory which is visible to all. They are physically with Jesus.
- Along with Him they come to Jerusalem.
- The unworthy are then gathered there.
- There is a tribunal-style judgment. The sheep and goats are together before the judgment seat. They are then finally separated by Christ's judgment, and receive their rewards.
- The wicked are destroyed along with the nations then surrounding Jerusalem.

The time scale for all this is unimportant - it could well be just a few seconds, if the meaning of time is to be collapsed, although there presumably must be a period of time for the cloud of witnesses to be beheld, and for the unworthy to desperately try to slap themselves into spiritual shape. The collapsing of time which it seems there will be around the judgment is discussed in Appendix 1. The tremendous encouragement offered by the scenario here presented should not be missed: we will come with our judge, possibly already reflecting His glory, to the judgment. This in itself should give us a sense of humble certainty as we come before His tribunal. So much will depend on our reaction to the Angel's coming - our faith in

acceptance, our degree of concern for the things of this life - all will be revealed in that instant.

3.4 The Process Of Judgment

"Every tongue shall confess"

There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44). The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee...wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank?". The rejected are to be cut in two, shown as the two faced hypocrites which they were. But the idea of cutting in two was immediately associated in the Jewish mind with making a covenant. When Abraham placed the sacrifices in two parts and the Lord passed between them, the idea was really that God would cut in two the man who broke the covenant. Hence the Jews spoke of 'cutting a covenant'. Those who have made the covenant with God but not kept it will be cut in two, as they initially agreed. God will keep His side of the covenant.

Analysis

This leads on to the question of whether there will be a specific 'going through' of many (all?) our deeds. God even now judges and analyses even those in the world (1 Cor. 5:13; 15:3); and His attention is surely focused on us even more. Because "for all these things God will bring thee into judgment", we should therefore remove every "provocation" to sin from our lives, motivated by knowing that all sin will in some form be judged (Ecc. 11:9,10 RVmg.). However, the following passages would indicate that there will be a consideration of many (all?) the bad aspects of the rejected, and a similar mentioning of all the good points of the accepted, seeing that their sins have been totally obliterated through being in Christ.

- "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for there is a time there for *every* purpose and for *every* work...for God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:14). Note the emphasis on "*every*". Even what we have spoken in the ear will be shouted out (Lk. 12:3) -implying others will somehow observe our judgment, cp. Mt. 12:41. If the judgment is merely a yes/no statement which has been worked out taking our whole life into consideration, then this emphasis on every work having a time for consideration and judgment "there" is pointless. However, these verses must be considered in conjunction with those which speak of God's 'forgetting' of bad deeds on account of how people later chose to live. However, this need not mean that they are erased from God's infinite knowledge; all too often we perceive God's memory as a vast memory bank which can have our sins erased from it. But His knowledge

knows no such bounds of human perception; yet He is willing not to hold those things against us, and to therefore count us as having never committed them.

- Having spoken of how there is a *time* "to plant...pluck up...kill...heal" etc., we are then told that "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked (at the second coming): for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (Ecc. 3:1-8,17). Thus our actions in every department of life will be examined at "the place of judgment" (Ecc. 3:16).
- If we do not warn the wicked of their way, "his blood will I require at thine hand" (Ez. 33:8). Some will have to give an account of their specific lack of witness. Yet we can live day after day, saying nothing to our fellows, as if it doesn't really matter, because nobody notices...
- "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord" (Eph. 6:8)- at judgment day. Not in this life, when the righteous often suffer for their goodness. *Every* good deed will then have its recognition.
- Our actions in this life will be "required" by God (Dt. 18:19; 23:21; Josh. 22:23; 1 Sam. 20:16; 2 Chron. 24:22; Ez. 3:20; 33:6,8)- at judgment day, when an explanation for our behaviour will be "required". As an example, God will "require" the flock at the hand of the pastors (Ez. 34:10), or, as the NT puts it, the ecclesial elders must give an account at judgment day for their flock. The Hebrew word translated "require" in the above passages has the sense of to search / enquire- which suggests a process of discussion during the judgment process.
- Paul prayed that the fact the brethren in Rome hadn't stood with him in his court case "may not be laid to their charge" (2 Tim. 4:16). This sounds as if he expected their behaviour in this specific matter to be something which could be brought up with them in the last day and possibly be the cause of their rejection.
- Nehemiah several times asks God to "remember unto me" the good deeds he had done for Judah (Neh. 5:19 RV), and to likewise "remember" the bad works of the wicked (Neh. 6:14 RV). He clearly perceived judgment day as featuring the good deeds of the righteous being as it were listed, and the sins of the wicked being likewise recounted. Perhaps his prayer was heard in that in a restoration context, Mal. 3:16 comments that a book of remembrance was written by God to record the good deeds of the faithful at that time.
- Every past day of judgment reveals something of the future. Edom's day of judgment is described as: "How are the things [RV mg. "men"] of Esau searched out! How are his hidden things sought up!" (Obadiah 6). This may be alluded to by Paul when he speaks of how the hidden things of all the responsible will be revealed in that day.
- "If the wicked (wicked responsible, in the Israel context) will turn from all his sins...all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in (as a result of) his righteousness (good deeds) that he hath done he shall live (eternally)" (Ez. 18:21,22). This implies that there will be a mentioning (the Hebrew word means just that) of the man's sins to him at judgment, unless he repents. The rest of Ez. 18 and Ez. 33 show that the reverse is also true- if a man turns away from God, then all his previous good deeds which would have been mentioned to him at judgment will be 'forgotten'.

- "I will never forget any of their works" (Am. 8:7) was the Lord's judgment against the wicked in Israel. Their works would be mentioned to them again at judgment day.

- For those who suffer persecution, prison etc. for the Lord's sake, "it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Lk. 21:13). When? How? Surely in that these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness.

- At judgment God "shall bring forth thy righteousness (good deeds) as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6). The sins of the rejected and the good deeds of the righteous will be publicly declared at the judgment, even if they are concealed from men in this life (1 Tim. 5:24,25). This is how men will receive "praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; Rom. 2:29). The wicked will see the generous deeds of the righteous rehearsed before them; and will gnash their teeth and melt away into condemnation (Ps. 112:9,10).

- "Every tongue shall confess to God (in Christ)...every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:11,12). "Account" is the Greek 'logos'- we will 'logos' ourselves in the sense that we will verbally confess ("every tongue") the innermost essence of our spiritual lives. This will lead us to confess with our tongue that Christ is really our Lord (Phil. 2:11). Confessing our sinfulness will lead us to show our appreciation of His Lordship. That which has been spoken or thought in darkness will then be heard in the light- in that day "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed" (Lk. 12:2,3). He will confess our righteous acts, and we will confess our sins (Is. 45:23-25 cp. Phil. 2:10; Rom. 14:11). For the wicked, it will be the opposite. They confess their righteous acts, He tells them their sins. And in this way the good and bad deeds of all the responsible will come to the light.

- "We must all *appear* before the judgment seat" (2 Cor. 5:10) doesn't just mean we'll put in an appearance. The Greek means to be exposed utterly. We shall have "our lives laid open" (NEB). Then, the unshareable self will be revealed; that essence of personality which is unknown even to us.

- The sins of the wicked are written down against them, to be discussed with them at the judgment (Acts 7:60 Diaglott).

- Psalm 50 is an Old Testament prophecy of the judgment seat of Christ: "Our God shall come (in Christ)...He shall call to the heavens...that he may judge his people (cp. the call to judgment). Gather my saints together unto me (cp. Mt. 25:30-32)...for God is judge himself" describes how the specific words and actions of God's people will then be considered: "When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him (actions)...thou gavest thy mouth to evil (words)...these things hast thou done, and I kept silence (in this life)...but I will (now) reprove thee (at judgment day), and set them in order before thine eyes".

- Without in any way seeking to teach justification by works, it is also true that there are Bible passages which imply that there will be a reckoning up of a man's good works at the last day. The rich fool should have been "rich toward God" (Lk. 12:21); he should have hoarded up spiritual wealth and fruit against his last day rather than material things. Yet this of course will not have been consciously done; yet the judgment process will reveal the good works of the righteous to them and others.

- Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will be justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what

we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'Thou fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6). The sin of Judah was written- both on their hearts and in God's record (Jer. 17:1); their iniquity was "marked before me" (Jer. 2:22). Note how their sin was written both before God and on their hearts. As we've commented elsewhere, the state of our hearts is actually God's record of us; "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" through which He searches us (Prov. 20:27).

- "Charge them not with this sin" (Acts 7:60) certainly sounds as if Stephen expected that individual actions of human sin will be raised with them at the day of judgment. And yet the wonder of it all, is that our prayers now for our enemies can result in their not being charged with those sins. We are in that sense called to do the work of the advocate, to reflect the saving mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus in our prayer life right now. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon what will be raised with them at the judgment- for that's what Stephen prayed for in his time of dying. And are we to think that his wonderful prayer went unanswered?

There is one interesting practical outcome of there being a going through of all our deeds. Paul says that he wants to "seal" the fruit of good works from his converts (Rom. 15:28), as if he wants to give them the opportunity to do good deeds, knowing they will be considered in some form at the judgment. The simple fact is that we simply have to believe that the thousand hard and easy choices we make each day all somehow count in the ultimate, final analysis.

Analysis

- "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for *every* purpose and for *every* work...for God shall bring *every* work into judgment, with *every* secret thing, whether it be good or bad" (Ecc. 3:17; 12:4).

- "If the wicked will turn from his sins...all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in (as a result of) his righteousness that he hath done shall he live" (Ez. 18:21,22)

- All sin and righteousness will be publicly declared even if hidden now (1 Tim. 5:24,25)

- God "shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day" (Ps. 37:6)

- "Every tongue shall confess...every one of shall give account (*logos*) of himself to God" (Rom. 14:11,12)

- "We must all *appear* ['be laid open' NEB] before the judgment seat" (2 Cor. 5:10)

- Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36)

- "Gather my saints together...God is judge...when thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him (actions)...thou gavest thy mouth to evil (words)...these things has thou done, and I kept silence...but I will reprove thee [at judgment] and set them in order before thine eyes" (Ps. 50).

It is fairly certain that time will be compressed at the judgment seat; there will therefore be no problem in such an individual discussion between each of the responsible and Christ . All the above passages suggest a going through of *works* ; and yet we know that the basis of acceptability with God is not works but rather faith. The judgment of our works seems not to be related to as it were weighing up our salvation chances. For salvation is a gift, unrelated to works. That's what grace is about. But our use of our talents will be related to who and how we will eternally be. In the parable of the talents, the one talent man who kept his talent but didn't use it will have that talent taken from him; but Lk. 19:27 continues the story: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me". The implication seems to be that the one talent man is saved and doesn't share in the condemnation of the wicked which will happen at the final judgment. The 'going through' of works is therefore for our benefit, to teach us- not as a basis upon which the Lord decides worthiness. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the judgment is of works in order to teach us self-knowledge. And this is why there will be a 'going through' of our deeds. In this life, we see ourselves in a dark mirror; but only when the Lord appears will we clearly see ourselves face to face. This coming to true self-knowledge will only be possible through the judgment process.

3-4-1 Sheep And Goats

Two Distinct Groups

The parable of the sheep and goats clearly suggests that after the judgment, the worthy and unworthy will be in two distinct groups to the right and left hand side of the Lord. The group of "sheep" then enter the Kingdom all together, at the same moment. This explains how the Lord will address the faithful and unfaithful as groups (note "ye" in Mt. 25:37,39); how the men of Nineveh stand together in a group, as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will (Mt. 12:41; Mk. 6:11). In some way, there will be a collective sense at the day of judgment, as

well as an individual one. If there will be a collective sense then, before the presence of His glory...there ought to be now. Other passages support this idea of unity between the sheep:

- "They (dead believers) without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39,40)- i.e. all the believers are rewarded *together*, at the same time. Alternatively this may teach that the number of 'the believers' is completed only by our development of faith- implying that the sooner this happens, the sooner the united perfection of the faithful can occur.

- There is the implication in the words of Christ to the angel/reapers that the unworthy will also be destroyed together: "Gather ye together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles (i.e. together) to burn them". "*First*" here may well mean 'most importantly' rather than first in terms of time. It will be our Lord's desire to get the miserable business of destroying willful sinners over and done with as quickly as possible- a far cry from the orthodox belief that Jesus somehow revels in the punishment of sinners. He can then concentrate on the joy of having the wheat gathered (together) into his barn (Mt. 13:30).

- Christ "will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46), his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side- "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8).

- Thus "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment (cp. Dan. 12:13), nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" (Ps. 1:5)- i.e. the group ("congregation") of sheep at the judgment.

- "In a moment...the dead shall be raised incorruptible (i.e.) we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). "The dead" here refers to the group of dead believers who will be found worthy. Their immortality will be granted to them together, as a group, "in a moment". Yet in a sense we will each receive our reward immediately after our interview with the Lord- another powerful indicator that the meaning of time must be collapsed at the day of judgment. The words of Mt. 25:34 are spoken collectively: "Come, *ye* (not 'thou', singular) blessed...*ye* gave me meat...then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw *we* thee an hungered...". Yet we know that there must be an individual judgment. These words sound as if we are all judged together, at the same time. Again, the reconciliation of this is in appreciating that the meaning of time will be collapsed. In similar vein, the rejected going off to try to get oil and then turning up later at the judgment (Mt. 25:10) probably describes a process that occurs in the minds of the people, rather than something which occurs in real time- although it may *feel* like real time to them. The existence of these two groups at the judgment explains how the men of Nineveh and Sheba will "rise up in the judgment" and condemn the rejected Jews; if they are in the group of sheep facing the group of goats in which the faithless Jews will be. The wicked will walk naked, and the accepted believers will then see their shame (Rev. 16:15). The rejected will experience "shame and everlasting contempt" at the judgment (Dan. 12:2). Shame and contempt must be in the eyes of others- i.e. the group of 'sheep'? Likewise the words we speak about others in secret will *then* be spoken for all to hear; and therefore we should be open in our words now, without hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1-3). The RVmg. of Lk. 12:1 makes this warning even more urgent: "First of all beware ye of...hypocrisy". It really is a major feature of the sinful nature which should be watched out for.

- The man who starts building his spirituality but can't finish is to be "mocked" by those who behold him (Lk. 14:29)- and yet the world rather commends those who renege on their commitment to Christ. Surely this refers to walking naked at the day of judgment, and his shame being seen openly? "Everlasting contempt" suggests that the failure of the rejected and God's condemnation of their sin will be permanently in the consciousness of the faithful throughout the Millennium, or even the entire ages of eternity (cp. Is. 66:23,24). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3?

The question arises, In which group will you stand? The eternal chasm between them was foreseen by the Psalmist: "As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity [cp. the condemned goats]: but peace shall be upon Israel [the sheep, looking on at the rejection of the wicked]" (Ps. 125:5). Those who will want to cross the chasm then will be unable to (Lk. 16:26); the great gulf is fixed. In the context of describing the establishment of the Kingdom, we read that God's servants will eat, drink and rejoice, singing for joy of heart, at the same time as the rejected will be ashamed, hunger and thirst and howl for "breaking of spirit"- all the language of the rejected (Is. 65:13,14,17,18 RVmg.). It seems that this is a picture of the rejected watching the accepted eating with Christ as the Passover is eaten anew. Hence their howling and shame; for shame implies being naked in the presence of others. Thus the rejected will in some sense be in the presence of the accepted.

4. Goats

4.1 Fear Of Judgment: "The terror of the Lord"

Paul appears to justify speaking about the judgment seat by saying "knowing therefore the terror of the Lord (the terror of the thought of rejection), we persuade men; but *we* are made manifest unto God" (2 Cor. 5:11). This is to say 'A healthy fear of judgment can persuade men to a better way of life- but by our complete openness to God, through self examination, we can know ourselves to be personally unworthy, but justified through Christ; and so we don't need to think of rejection in the same way as faithless men do'. We will go through a process of 'persuading' our own hearts before the judgment presence of Jesus in the last day; and we should likewise persuade ourselves of His grace and justice now (1 Jn. 3:19 Gk.). The fear of judgment is again used by Paul as a motivation for obedience in Heb. 2:1-4; 4:1. An element of fear is not wrong in itself. Israel in the wilderness had the pillar of fire to remind them of God's close presence, and to thereby motivate them not to sin: "His fear (will) be before your faces, that ye sin not" (Ex. 20:20). Notice how Isaac's guardian angel is described as "the fear" in Gen. 31:42,53 cp. 48:15,16. The trumpet blasts which our call to judgment is likened to are based upon the Old Testament blowing of trumpets to mark "the day(s) of your gladness...your solemn days...the beginnings of your months" and also whenever the camp was to move onwards (Num. 10:10). This same mixture of emotions will fill us when we receive the call; a sense of solemnity, but also of gladness at a new beginning, a moving on towards the promised land.

"The knowledge that God is not mocked is a salutary thing in itself, and the propriety of His executing vengeance on those who cast His kindness back in His face is not to be questioned. But if the chastening of the Lord can stir slothful or rebellious souls into the path of obedience, then the prospect of judgment to come will have wrought a good work in those

who cannot at first be moved by love. But of course it is not the ideal condition. Many of us need to be warned, but none of us ought to need to live a life of dread with the judgment seat in prospect. If, starting as some will from fear, we can progress through obedience to pleasurable service, and so to live, it will even perhaps be possible for us to approach the judgment seat in the spirit which John exhorts us to: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. There is no fear in love, for perfect love casteth out fear" (1 Jn. 4:17,18). This is the spirit which overcomes the trembling of the sinner who knows that he is not yet ripe for grace and moves toward the confidence of the man who could write: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness...and not for me only, but also for all them also that love his appearing"".

Much of the Lord's teaching concerned judgment to come. It was a particular theme of His parables. An analysis of them reveals that:

1. He puts far more emphasis on the rejected than on the accepted.
2. There is the theme of surprise in many of the parables of judgment. Both worthy and unworthy are surprised at both the process and outcome of judgment.

The day of judgment was an important theme with the Lord. There is an element of unreality in the way he speaks of the King as being the judge (Mt. 25:40); the implication is that our judgment will be an extremely important event; the King himself is the judge (actually, the King of heaven and earth). This indicates that the Lord wishes to put before us the picture of those who have been called to the Kingdom but reject His offer. Sadly we seem to be shying away from this picture as a community, falling victim to the sloppy picture of God peddled by an apostate Christendom. This stress on rejection is only a continuation of the emphasis of the Old Testament. The real possibility of rejection at judgment day was evidently a motivator in Paul's life (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:27), and he used "the terror" of the coming day of judgment to persuade men in his teaching of the ecclesias (2 Cor. 5:11), and also in his preaching to the world (e.g. Acts 17:31). Paul's exposition of judgment to come caused Felix to tremble (Acts 24:25). I don't suppose he would if he walked into many churches today. The fact is, many will be rejected. The unforgiving believer will be delivered to the tormentors to pay what is due (Mt. 18:34); God is preparing torture instruments for the punishment of the rejected (Ps. 7:13). These are awesome descriptions of the self-inflicted mental agony in which the rejected will writhe. The matchless grace of God and His eagerness for our salvation should not be allowed to blunt the impact of these warnings- of what we can do to ourselves, more than God doing to us. Almost certainly, some of those you know today will go through the terrible rejection process which we are going to explore now. People from all over the world, the living responsible, will see the sign of the Son of man, will know His return is imminent, and wail with the knowledge that they have crucified Him afresh and must now meet Him (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7; Zech. 12:10). Our response to the certain knowledge that His return is imminent will in effect be our judgment.

Facing Our Fears

Condemnation is about having our fears brought upon us. Israel feared the sword, and so God brought the sword upon them (Ez. 11:8). Passively, subconsciously, for all the blasé nonchalance of some, every man who has even known the Lord fears His wrath and His condemnation. And their fears will be brought upon them. Job went through a condemnation experience and then repented, just as Peter did. He described it as the thing that he had feared coming upon him (Job 3:25). Prov.

1:27 uses the same Hebrew words to describe latter day condemnation- it is the fear of the condemned coming upon them. In fact, the Proverbs passage would appear to be alluding to Job, and holding him up as a pattern for all those who reject wisdom and thus find themselves condemned. Note how Jer. 48:44; 49:5 likewise describe condemnation as fear being brought upon people, and Is. 24:18 and other passages speak of the condemned fleeing from “the noise of the fear”. “The fear” is almost a way of saying ‘the judgment of God’ (Lam. 3:47). The torment of the rejected will be their fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Psychologically, we need to get in touch with our own fears now, face our fears of condemnation eye to eye, and work through them- in repenting and coming to believe firmly in God’s gracious acceptance, living in the spirit of the true love which casts out fear. I know men and women who knew God and walked with the Lord, but now say ‘it means nothing to me’. They shrug when I nervously mention to them the reality of judgment to come- and I’m not very bold at bringing the conversations around to that issue, because it is just so fearsome and of such magnitude. They tell me that they’re indifferent. But somewhere deep within them, no matter what good actors they are before the stage of our human eyes, there has to be a deep and awful fear. And it is that fear which will be revealed and which will grip them in that final day. Perhaps the greatest mental torment of the rejected will be realizing how they could have been in the Kingdom of God; they will then perceive how great was the potential which they had had in the brief years of their mortality. Thus Israel had their judgment from God “in the border of Israel” (Ez. 11:11), in Babylon, on the Euphrates, which was intended to be the border of the land promised to Abraham and themselves, his seed. They were made to realize the potential they had missed, and as it were they were taken to the gate of Eden, to the entry to the promised land, judged there, and thrown out of Paradise. They were made to realize that they had followed the judgements of this world rather than of God (Ez. 11:12 RVmg.), and that one of the reasons for their condemnation was the way in which they had told some of their brethren that unto *them*, and not unto those brethren, the land had been promised (Ez. 11:15). Thus they had acted as if some of their brethren were not really ‘of Israel’. They were made to remember their words and actions, and now they realized that they were themselves being thrown out of the promised land, the land they had tried to cast their brethren out of. Hence their judgment “in the border” of that same land. The forced recollection of such acts and attitudes of unlove, of ungrace, will be punishment enough.

4.2 The Chronology Of Rejection

The personal meeting of the wicked with God to answer for themselves is perhaps the idea behind the Old Testament maxim that God will repay the wicked "to his face" (Dt. 7:10). That doesn't happen in this life; but it will ultimately, at judgment day. The repayment idea would imply the conscious 'going through' of human behaviour. Different parables give different aspects of the judgment. It may be that we can put them all together and build up a time sequence of the process of judgment. Or it may be that the judgment will be different for each of us, and the parables reflect the different cases which the Lord (even in his humanity) foresaw coming before him at the judgment. It may not be possible to construct an exact chronology which is accurate ultimately; but we are invited to put the records together and come up with some possible process, which may be as follows. It is significant that all the

various details of the rejection process *can* be put together in a chronologically coherent manner. This encourages me to understand that we are intended to put together a realistic picture of the rejection process. However, it seems that the extent of punishment may be articulated in terms of how terribly hurt and self-destroyed the rejected feel, and therefore in how long they are enabled to survive after the pronouncing of rejection. Therefore not all the rejected (i.e. those more lightly punished) will make it to the end of the process outlined here. It would seem therefore that how long people live after being condemned reflects the extent of their punishment. Just to exist outside of Christ will be unbearable punishment enough. The members of the beast system have their lives "prolonged for a season and a time" as part of their condemnation (Dan. 7:12).

Much of the following evidence comes from parables, which have been misleadingly described as simple stories with a spiritual meaning. This definition would be more appropriate to allegory; the Lord's parables had quite complex and detailed meaning, to the extent that the majority who heard them failed to understand them. On this basis I feel it is acceptable to look for quite detailed meaning within the parables, and not see them as merely teaching some general principles.

An unwillingness to go to judgment. The foolish virgins want to go to buy oil; they make a foolish excuse, seeing the shops were evidently shut. They mourn and wail when they see the sign of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7). They want to hide from Him, as Adam and the rejected of Rev. 6:16. Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him (because later they are surprised).

So the foolish virgins knock on the door, i.e. ask for acceptance. At the second coming, the Lord knocked on their door, and they didn't answer immediately (Lk. 12:37). They had decided their own fate by their dillatory response.

The verdict of rejection is announced for the first time.

Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realisation of the Lord's verdict.

He points out their failings,

Then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44). There is an intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected within the Lord's parables of judgment in Mt. 25; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 44 cp. 25).

According to the type of Cain, he was questioned by God, answered back, and then changed his tune and begged for mercy (Gen. 4:9). Adam likewise began by answering back, blaming the woman and the fact God gave her to him (Gen. 3:12). So they go through three mood swings: 'Lord, Lord', assuring Him they have never omitted to serve Him (Mt. 25:44), then a more bitter feeling that He is unreasonable (Mt. 25:25), and now a desperate begging for mercy,

The Lord asks a series of questions, to which there is no answer. He asked Cain, rhetorically, "Where is your brother?", "What hast thou done?" (Gen. 4:9,10) in order to elicit from him the required self-knowledge. And Adam too: 'Where are you...?' (3:9) was surely rhetorical.

Then there is the speechlessness (Mt. 22:12),

The judgment is pronounced the second time. According to the Cain pattern: You are to be a fugitive / wanderer and leave My presence. "I know you not, depart from me". And Adam being sent forth (Gen. 3:23). And Zedekiah having judgment pronounced upon him (Jer. 52:9). Those who truly condemn themselves in their self-examination will have come to this point already.

Recognition of personal sinfulness will then swamp them, as it should have done in their day of opportunity. There may be with some a desperate further appeal for mercy, after the pattern of Cain, who tried to desperately reason with God: "My punishment (220 times rendered "iniquity") is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). "Bear" is the Hebrew word usually used for bearing away of sin. Cain finally recognized his own sin, and the need for atonement. Adam likewise confessed his sin as a result of God's questioning (Gen. 3:10). Realization of sin will finally be elicited (Num. 32:23 LXX; Ez. 6:9; Jude 15). Cain saw that he couldn't carry away his own sin. His words are surely a reference to the Lord's invitation to take hold of the animal sin offering that was crouching at the door (Gen. 4:7 Heb.). The Lord had offered Cain a way of escape through the blood of the lamb, a recognition that his own works couldn't save him. But he refused that knowledge; only to be finally and unalterably condemned, and thereby taught his desperate need to resign his own works and trust in the blood of the lamb. And so it will be at the last day. If men refuse to know their own desperation and need for the Lord's sacrifice now, then they will be made to realize it all too late. Zedekiah likewise wept in his condemnation (Ez. 7:27), knowing that he could have taken hold of God's offer through Jeremiah. Note how Cain is "cursed from this land" (Gen. 4:11 LXX)- the land / earth of Israel, the area of Eden before the flood. Being expelled from the land was his condemnation; just as Israel were later cast out of their land in condemnation. He left God's land and lived in the land of Nod / wandering, at the entrance to Eden (4:16). According to the RV margin of Gen. 4:16, Cain lived "in front of Eden"- he didn't go far away from it, he set himself as near to the entrance as he could. Likewise Israel chose to stay "many days" in Kadesh (Dt. 1:46), on the very border of the promised land, after their rejection from inheriting it. It is significant that Israel and Judah were taken into captivity in areas on the edge of the land promised to Abraham- Babylon, just the other side of the Euphrates, and to Egypt, just the other side of the Nile. The point simply is that the rejected will so want to get back into the land / Kingdom. Like Israel, hanging their harps on the trees by the rivers of Babylon, pining for the land they had been rejected from.

This dawning of reality will be followed by an ashamed slinking away from the judgment (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.),

A desire to escape but having no place to run (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). Rev. 20:11 likewise speaks of the rejected 'heavens and earth' fleeing from the Lamb's throne and finding no place to go. Before the whirlwind of God's judgment, the false shepherds of Israel "shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape" (Jer. 25:35). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31). They will be like the Egyptians suffering

God's judgments in the Red Sea, wanting to flee but having no realistic place to run to. Uzziah hastening to go out from the presence of the Lord after he was judged for his sin was a foretaste of this (2 Chron. 26:20).

After the pattern of Cain and Adam (Gen. 3:24; 4:14), and also the idea of the wicked being *cast* into the darkness of condemnation, it seems that the rejected will be forcibly driven away. Cain was driven out from the presence of the land of Eden, where the Lord's presence was (Gen. 4:14). Presumably this driving out was done by the Angels. We are left to imagine the ultimate tragedy of Cain going forth from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16 s.w. "face" 4:14), and the rejected 'going away into...' (Mt. 25:46). The tragedy of rejection is well reflected in the way the Lord speaks of how "great was the fall" of the poorly built house (Mt. 7:27).

We are invited to see worthy and unworthy walking away from the throne *into* different futures. The sheep will enter *into* the city (Rev. 22:14), *into* the temple (Rev. 15:8), *into* their rest (Heb. 4:11), *into* the Kingdom (Acts 14:22; Jn. 3:5; Lk. 18:24; Mt. 18:3); *into* life (Mk. 9:45; Mt. 18:9; 19:17); *into* the joy of Christ (Mt. 25:23).

The Chronology Of Rejection

An unwillingness to go to judgment.

They mourn and wail

They want to hide from Him

Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him

So they knock on the door, i.e. ask for acceptance: "Lord, Lord".

The verdict of rejection is announced for the first time.

Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realisation of the Lord's verdict.

He points out their failings,

Then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44).

They begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect.

According to the type of Cain, he was questioned by God, answered back, and then changed his tune and begged for mercy (Gen. 4:9).

The Lord asks a series of questions, to which there is no answer.

Then there is the speechlessness (Mt. 22:12),

The judgment is pronounced the second time.

"I know you not, depart from me" cp. Adam being sent forth (Gen. 3:23).

Recognition of personal sinfulness will then swamp them

There may be with some a desperate further appeal for mercy, after the pattern of Cain

This will be followed by an ashamed slinking away from the judgment (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.),

A desire to escape but having no place to run ; an unbearable limbo

The rejected will be driven away, their fleeing will be confirmed.

The wandering

and eventual destruction with the world.

Another telling chronology is suggested by putting together a few Scriptures. The foolish virgins will knock on the door, as it were, and be told by the Lord "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12). Lk. 13:27 says that He tells the rejected *after* they have justified themselves to Him: "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity". Mt. 7:22,23 describes a dialogue in which the rejected justify themselves by listing their good works, and the Lord will profess unto them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". All their good works He will see as works of sin, because they were not of faith. Mt. 25:41-45 gives more information: the rejected are told "Depart from me", but they argue back with self-justification, and then they are told that they had not shown love to the least of Christ's brethren, and are sent away to punishment.

Putting these strands of evidence together we arrive at something like this:

"Lord, open to us!"

"I don't know you"

"Yes you do! We ate with you and did great works for you!"

The rejected justify themselves by listing their good works as in Mt. 7:22,23

"Depart from me"

Then the self-justification of Mt. 25:41-45

Christ's last comment is that they had not loved the least of their brethren. This is, significantly, His last word to them.

They are then sent away.

We will now analyse some of these stages in more detail.

4.3 Desire For Acceptance

Those with spiritual problems are prone to reason that when judgment day comes, they will be able to just shrug their shoulders and walk away from their Lord to eventual death. However, there is every reason to think that the rejected will come to their spiritual senses then, and plead to be allowed to enter the Kingdom. Many will seek to enter into the Kingdom at the judgment but will not be able; and so we should strive now to enter into it (Lk. 13:24). The implication is that if we strive to enter in now, we will enter in then. Everyone will so earnestly seek to enter the Kingdom in the last day, and the urgency of that coming day should be ours today. Ezekiel's prophecies so often make the point that experiencing God's judgments leads men to *know* Him; thus at the day of judgment, the rejected will knock at the door of the Kingdom, knowing that they know Christ- to be told that although they may now know him, he doesn't know them. Thus the pain of rejection will be acutely mental rather than physical. Ezekiel is told to judge Israel, i.e. "cause them to know the abominations of their fathers" (Ez. 20:4). This is what condemnation will result in- a recognition of sin for what it is. "According to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they [the ways and doings] judge thee" (Ez. 24:14). It will be self-condemnation, but they will then *realize* this in terrible detail.

The rejected will not only see how they could have been in the Kingdom; judgment results in men knowing God's Name / character. When God's judgments had been poured out on Egypt, then they knew God's Name (Ex. 7:5). They will come to appreciate true spirituality- but tragically all too late. Is. 33:14-18 describes the feelings of the rejected in this regard. "The sinners in Zion" [the ecclesia] will realize that they cannot dwell with the devouring fire of Yahweh; then they will appreciate the qualifications of those who can enter the Kingdom ["he that walketh righteously...that despiseth the gain of oppressions...*he* shall dwell on high"]; their eyes "shall see the king in his beauty", they will appreciate the beauty of their Lord, and like Moses, their eyes "shall behold the land that is very far off", yet be unable to enter it. And the passage concludes: "Thine heart shall meditate terror". What other way to put it. When the rejected are finally consumed, they will be made to know "that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah." (Ps. 59:13). Then they will know themselves to be but men; then they will realize the frailty of their humanity (Ps. 9:19,20). Note the parallel: "Let the nations be judged...let the nations know themselves to be but men". The implication is that to not know God's judgments is to somehow act as if we are not mere men; we play God by taking His judgments into our own hands. "The wicked saith, He will not require it. All his thoughts are, that there is no God" (Ps. 10:4 RV). By thinking God doesn't really see, they despise Him (Ps. 10:11,13).

In judgment day, the priests will realize the wonder of the covenant relationship which they have; and therefore, Malachi drives home, why despise that covenant now, in the way we live (Mal. 2:4,10)? When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected (how else to understand Mt. 23:39?). Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them...they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the

purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace. Num. 32:23 prophesied of Israel in their time of condemnation: "You will be sensible of your sin when evil overtakes you" (LXX). Truly has Ez. 6:9 prophesied of the rejected: "They shall loathe themselves for their evils which they have committed in all their abominations". Jude 15 would even suggest that the purpose of judgment being executed is to convict the rejected of *all* their ungodly deeds and hard words. Through realising their condemnation they will realize in awful detail exactly *why* this had to be. Our own self-examination now will be stimulated by realising the depth to which we *deserve* condemnation, even though by grace we are saved rather than condemned.

Thus the foolish virgins of the parable awake from their spiritual slumber to frantically search for oil, knocking desperately at the door, pleading for acceptance. No shrugging of shoulders in *their* attitude! Song 5:6 RV perhaps prefigures their feelings: "My soul had failed me when he spake". Esau's great and bitter cry for blessing is quoted in Heb. 12:17 as typical of the attitude of all the rejected. He had earlier shrugged at the implications of selling his birthright, but now his self-rejection was being worked out in practice. The rejected argue back "When saw we thee...?". Surely they wouldn't have bothered doing so, unless they were upset at their rejection, and desiring to see the verdict altered. Israel's passing through the Red Sea is a definite type of baptism, and their largely unsuccessful wilderness journey therefore becomes a pattern of failed Christian lives. Yet when they were told that they were unworthy to enter the land, obvious as it must have been to them, they repented and were willing to make any sacrifice to enter it (Num. 14:40-48). When they disobeyed God's word and fled to Egypt from the Babylonians, they then so wanted to return to their land [cp. the Kingdom]- but it was all too late (Jer. 44:14). Cain is another type of the rejected- instead of going as far away from Divine things as possible after his condemnation, he went to live on the east of Eden- where the cherubim were, guarding the barred entry to God's paradise (Gen. 4:16). The Hebrews were warned not to follow Esau's sinful example (Gen. 27:34), otherwise at the judgment they would experience what he did: "Afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing (cp. our desiring the Abrahamic promises of entry into the Kingdom), he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears" (Heb. 12:17). In view of this, the weeping of the rejected at judgment may be as a result of desperate pleading with the Lord to change his mind (1). Earlier in Hebrews the point is made that "he that despised Moses' law died without mercy". The phrase "without mercy" is surely included to point out that the condemned would have earnestly pleaded for mercy, after the pattern of Cain, the foolish virgins pleading for entry... The next verse continues: "Of how much sorer punishment...shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God?" (Heb. 10:28,29), indicating that the sad picture of those condemned under the old Covenant, pleading for mercy, will be repeated at the judgment of those under the new Covenant. Note, in passing, that there are degrees of punishment. For some, the judge will pass them to the officer, who will cast them into prison (i.e. condemnation). For others, the judgment will pass them to the council and from there to hell fire (Mt. 5:21-25). Although the wages of sin will still be death at the judgment, it will be a "sorer punishment" for those under the New Covenant than those under the Old. Because there are, in some way, degrees of sin, there must also be degrees of punishment (2 Chron. 28:13,22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 5:18 note "according to thy estimation"; Judas had a "greater sin" than Pilate, Jn. 19:11). The punishment of the wicked at judgment will somehow take this into account. If the rejected are destroyed together (Mt. 13:30) and yet there are varying degrees of punishment, it follows that the punishment must be on a mental level; and "gnashing of teeth" certainly fits in with this suggestion.

This theme of the rejected later seeking acceptance is repeated elsewhere:

- "They (rejected Israel) shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find Him; He hath withdrawn Himself from them" (Hos. 5:6). Did the Lord quarry his parable of the rejected virgins from this passage?

- *Then*, in condemnation, Israel will return to their God in spirit, just as He had pleaded with them to do in this life (Mal. 3:17,18 cp. 3:7). Yet they had said "Wherein shall we return?". They didn't see the need for repentance. But in condemnation they will so so wish to repent, but find it impossible practically.

- "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you (quoted in Rom. 2:8 re. the judgment). Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (Prov. 1:27,28).

- The paralysed man sat by the pool of Bethesda, desperate for someone to take pity and take him to the water so that he might be saved from his pathetic plight. Jesus told him: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing (than those years of sitting by the pool) come upon thee" (Jn. 5:14). That "worse thing" was rejection at the judgment- which, it could be inferred, would be like earnestly desiring salvation but not finding it.

- The manna represented the word of God and the salvation which comes through its revelation of Christ (Jn. 6). Israel could gather it on six days of the week, but not on the seventh. The seventh day represents the Millennium / Kingdom (cp. how the manna ceased as soon as they entered Canaan, representing the Kingdom). Yet on the seventh day Israel sought to collect manna (Ex. 16:27), but found none- as the foolish virgins of the new Israel will seek the oil of the word when it is no longer available.

- "*Then* shall ye return, and discern [judge] between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal. 3:18) is spoken to the "ye" of Malachi 3 (e.g. v. 14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we *return*?" (3:7). But in their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: *they* will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "*then* shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now.

Desire For Acceptance

- When God's judgments had been poured out on Egypt, then they knew God's Name (Ex. 7:5).

- When the rejected are finally consumed, they will be made to know "that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah." (Ps. 59:13).

- When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins.

- Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected (Mt. 23:39?).

- Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud ...they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18).
- The foolish virgins frantically search for oil, knocking desperately at the door, pleading for acceptance.
- The rejected argue back "When saw we thee...?".
- Israel trying to enter land when condemned (Num. 14:40-48).
- Cain- instead of going as far away from Divine things as possible after his condemnation, he went to live on the east of Eden- where the cherubim were, guarding the barred entry to God's paradise (Gen. 4:16).
- Esau (Gen. 27:34): "Afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears" (Heb. 12:17).
- "They (rejected Israel) shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the Lord; but they shall not find Him; He hath withdrawn Himself from them" (Hos. 5:6).
- "When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you (quoted in Rom. 2:8 re. the judgment). Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (Prov. 1:27,28).
- On the seventh day Israel sought to collect manna (Ex. 16:27), but found none.

Asaph seems to have clearly foreseen how awful it would be for the wicked to finally come to seek God when it was all too late- he wishes upon his enemies that in the day when their faces are filled with shame [i.e. at the last day], they would "seek thy name... that they may know that thou alone, whose name is Jehovah, art the Most High over all the earth" (Ps. 83:16,18). Notice that he didn't gloat over any prospect of the wicked being physically tormented; rather did Asaph perceive that the mental torment of grasping the wonder of God's Name and His rulership *and yet being unable to have a part in it* was actually something far worse. And of course it carries with it the tremendous imperative to seek God's Name *now*. We should turn unto God *now*, because "In that day every man shall cast away his idols" (Is. 31:6). "In that day" nothing else will matter nor be important. So therefore, we ought to cast away our idols today and turn solely to the Lord, as we will do so then. Jer. 23:15 likens God's judgment to drinking wormwood. But homeopathy has discovered that wormwood is a cure for some forms of breast cancer and malaria- on the homeopathic principle that the actual trace elements of the illness can be the elements of the cure. God knew this of course when He describes His condemnation of men as a drinking of wormwood. There is something healing and therapeutic about judgment, even if it doesn't save the individual judged.

Notes

(1) If Esau's rejection by Isaac is indeed a picture of the rejection of the goats at the final judgment (Heb. 12:17), Isaac there becomes a hazy prefigurement of our future judge. And yet the record presents a scene of both father and rejected son as shaken and helpless, both

dearly wishing it could be different (Gen. 27:33). The sadness of Isaac becomes a figure of the pathos and sadness of God in rejecting the wicked. Note how the LXX of Gen. 27:38 adds the detail: "And Isaac said nothing; and Esau wept". We are left to imagine the thoughts of Isaac's silence. Truly our God takes no pleasure at all in the death of the wicked (Ez. 33:11).

4.4 Explanation

The 'judgment' will be a pronouncing of the verdict- but it will be accompanied, it seems, by an explanation. Yet that explanation will only be a re-enforcement of what is then apparent in the conscience of the rejected. God warned the Israelites long ago that if they were disobedient, then their sin would find them out; or as the Hebrew more literally reads, "you will know your sin" (Num. 32:23). Sin and its judgment can't be just forgotten by the wicked; they will know their sin, at judgment day. This is so that God's Name may be glorified, and also so that those who observe the process will do likewise. The Angels glorify God as they behold His true and righteous judgments in the earth; and so will all who behold the final judgment (Rev. 16:5,7). According to Lk. 19:23, the Lord will shew the unworthy how they could have entered the Kingdom. This is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that *at least the man should have done something!*

Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, our understanding of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrine, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending...And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind.

It may well be that the rejected are each given a punishment appropriate to their errors ⁽¹⁾, again showing forth the principle of the judgment manifesting God's Name, and in keeping with different degrees of punishment at the judgment (Lk. 12:47,48). Because Israel said "No; for we will flee upon horses [and not need Yahweh's protection]; therefore shall ye flee

[in the condemnation process]: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift" (Is. 30:16). Because Israel thought they could flee God's judgments on swift horses, therefore their judgment came to them on swift horses. If Israel broke through to gaze, Yahweh would break through upon them (Ex. 19:24); their punishment would be appropriate to their sin. Under the Law, every sin received an appropriate judgment, and this anticipates the final meting out of punishment at the last day (Heb. 2:2,3). Even in this life, the sexually immoral receive a punishment for their sin which is an appropriate recompense. Adam and Eve were punished in ways appropriate to their individual failures. The lazy servant was punished out of his own mouth (Lk. 19:22); and even in Job's time, this principle of Divine condemnation was known (Job 9:20; 15:6). The Judaizers too were to have an "end [that] will correspond to their deeds" (2 Cor. 11:14,15 RSV).

Then, the rejected will finally see their good works in context. They will realize how little works really meant. The faithful already knew that- for they objected when the Lord told them all the good things they had done. The list of works in Mt. 25:35,36 include the following: giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, a bed to the homeless, help to the sick. Yet these are the very things which Job claims he had done, when he clears himself from all his accusers (Job 31:17-20). But the voice in the whirlwind soon reduced him to realize "I am vile"; all his good works became as filthy rags before the supremacy of salvation by grace alone. The connection with the parable isn't merely incidental. Surely the Lord is saying that the self-righteous in the ecclesia may seem as righteous as Job was before his conversion; but they must either in this life realize the totality of grace, or the whirlwind of judgment condemnation will reduce them to the same realization. Job seems to oscillate between believing and not believing in the resurrection (consider Job 14:7-15). At the end, Job confesses he has not spoken the right things; and Yahweh then says that he has only spoken that which was right. The friends likewise said some true things and some false things; and yet because they did not repent, their bad words were remembered against them. The final revealing of Yahweh in Job was some kind of judgment day for all concerned. Job, the righteous, had only his good deeds and words remembered; whereas the wicked friends had only their bad words remembered. It seems it will take a while for the penny to drop for the rejected- that they're "out", and actually never were "in". This Jesus, in whose presence they had broken bread (although note the difference between this and Jesus breaking bread with us, Lk. 13:26 cp. Mt. 26:29), actually doesn't know them. The Lord has to repeat the very same words twice to the rejected: "I know not whence you are" (Lk. 13:25,27)- as if they are dumbfounded and slow to comprehend the eternal implications of His words.

In passing. The Lord foretells the spiritual culture which He will show even to the rejected, when He mentions how He will call the rejected "friend" (Mt. 22:12), using the same word as He used about Judas (Mt. 26:50). Vine describes it as a word meaning "comrade, companion, a term of kindly address expressing comradeship". If this is how the Lord will address those who have crucified Him afresh- surely there is hope, abundant hope, for us. The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father (Mk. 8:38). There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable

love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred.

Notes

(1) Bro Mark Vincent has pointed out the appropriateness of God's condemnation of the Babel builders. Their "go to, let us make brick" was matched by His "Go to, let us go down...". They wanted to reach God; but He came down to them in judgment. They feared being scattered; and this is what therefore was done to them. They 'made brick', using a Hebrew root L-B-N. But God 'confounded' their language, using a Hebrew word 'N-B-L'.

4.5 Slinking Away

We have shown previously that there will be a certain amount of discussion between Jesus and the responsible. It would appear that the wicked will argue back in protest against their rejection at the judgment ("When saw we thee?...Thou art an hard man"), and will desperately try to find acceptance. All this has to be reconciled with the silent dejection and grim acceptance of the 'goats'. 1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of them as being "ashamed from before him at his coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away in shame, after the pattern of Israel being *carried away* into captivity (2 Kings 17:6,11,23,33- Heb. 'to denude, make naked'). Another foretaste of this was in the way the condemned world of Noah's time [the flood was a clear type of the final judgment] were to 'pine away / languish' (Gen. 6:17; 7:21- AV "die"). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "...man that falleth back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. Note that Jesus Himself will be likewise ashamed of His unworthy followers (Lk. 9:26); there will be a mutuality in the natural distancing between the two parties. This is the scene of Rev. 16:15- the rejected being made naked in shame. This slinking back in shame will fulfil the prophecies of Is. 1:24,29 and Jer. 2:35,36, which speak of the rejected being made ashamed, becoming ashamed, of their idols. They will be made ashamed by the judgment process.

Thus we have the picture of them initially arguing with Jesus, growing less and less forcible, giving way to a pleading with tears for a change of mind, finally followed by a silent slinking away in shame. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6). Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to drawn oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away) to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:3-5). He went to the Potter's field (Acts 1:18), which was in the Valley of Hinnom. He went to Gehenna, the place of condemnation, of his own accord. His own legs carried him there. Ps. 112:10 has echoes of the scenario: "The wicked shall see it (the Kingdom) and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth (judgment day language), and melt away". In similar vein the apostle speaks of the rejected as those who even now "*draw back* unto perdition" (Heb. 10:39). The implication is that by our attitude now, we effectively judge ourselves; if we draw back from Christ in this life, we will slink away from him in the day of judgment. The types of judgment also stress this slinking away. As there will be a slinking away at the final judgment, so there was at the cross, which was "the judgment of this world". Early on in the crucifixion, the people hurled confident insults at Him. But we

get the impression that this died out over the hours; until "*all* the people that came together to that sight...smote their breasts, and returned" (Lk. 23:48). They slipped away, one by one, as those who brought the adulterous woman to the Lord (this was another type of the judgment; they slipped away from Him, self-condemned- (Jn. 8:9).

"Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). The ungrateful servant "went out" and condemned his brother- thus condemning himself (Mt. 18:28). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

The Shame Of The Rejected

The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there "ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

4.6 Casting Away

The rejected will of their own volition slink away from the face of their Lord. And yet the rejected are often described, both explicitly and in the types of judgment, as actively *fleeing* from the Lord's presence, and being *cast and thrown* by Him into condemnation. Korah and the rebels slipped down into the pit and were then *cast down* into destruction (Ps. 73:18; v. 17 refers to Num. 16:38,39). The rejected condemn themselves (as they did in their lives)- they slink away of themselves, of their own volition they end up fleeing, and yet all this is fulfilling the Lord's own fiat that they should be chased from Him. Israel were driven out of

their land by God in rejection, after the pattern of Adam and Cain being driven out (Jer. 23:8; 32:37).

Firstly, references to the rejected fleeing of their own volition:

- Zedekiah fleeing from the armies of judgment that came upon him
- Adam and Eve pining away from the Angel walking in Eden
- Unworthy Israel fleeing when none pursued whenever they faced judgment (Lev. 26:17)
- God's enemies, whoever they are, fleeing when He arises in judgment (Ps. 68:1)
- The humanly-strong fleeing away naked in that day (Am. 3:16)
- The terror of the rejected knowing they have no place to flee to (Jer. 25:35)
- Is. 17:13; 30:16

Now, references to them being thrown out or cast away by the Lord's edict:

- The wicked are *driven* into darkness (Job 18:18)
- "...in the day of trouble [judgment]...He will pursue His enemies into darkness" (Nah. 1:8 RV)
- The wicked "cast down" when God arises in judgment (Ps. 17:12)
- "Thrust out..." (Lk. 13:28)
- The bad tree cast into the fire (Mt. 3:10; 7:19).
- Cast into the furnace of fire, darkness, prison, hell fire (Mt. 13:42,50; 8:12; 5:25,29)
- Cast into the sea (Mk. 9:42; Mt. 13:48)

This may well be achieved by their guardian Angel chasing them, as presumably the Angels chased Adam from Eden. Adam was "sent forth" and then 'driven out' of the Garden (Gen. 3:23,24)-implying an unwillingness to leave, just as the rejected of the last day. The rejected will be "as stubble before the wind...pursue them with thy tempest...fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy Name...let them perish, that they may know...that thou alone...art the most high" (Ps. 83:14-18 RV). Tragically it will be in this chasing away, in their final moments before perishing, that they will know God and desperately seek Him. They will not be indifferent. It will be an awful end; finally grasping the real essence of spirituality and so desperately wanting to know God in the sense of having a loving relationship with Him- in the very last moments of their existence. The most Biblically emphasized reason for the Red Sea experience is "that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 14:4,17). It was surely only in Pharaoh's last few moments of life that he came, through his experience of condemnation, to know the essence of Yahweh. As the tidal wave crushed down upon him, as water filled his lungs...he desperately came to know Israel's God

in absolute truth. But it was all too late. We must know Him *now*... This is the chilling point of all this...

"Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark (cp. the rejected cast to outer darkness) and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them" (Ps. 35:5,6). "The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind (spirit- the Angels made spirits) driveth away" (Ps. 1:4; Job 21:18). The account of Gallio driving the Jews away from his judgment seat is maybe to enable to us to imagine the scene (Acts 18:16). The rejected are described as being cast into outer darkness. This is even an Old Testament concept: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness" (Prov. 20:20 RV). The rejected will be "pursued into darkness" (Nah. 1:8 RV). It is doubtful whether this darkness is literal, unless there will be a specific geographical location into which they are driven which is totally dark. Mt. 22:13 might imply this by saying that "there", in the darkness into which the rejected are cast, there will be weeping (Mt. 22:13). It perhaps more implies a depression so deep that everything loses its colour. There is no point in existence, no meaning to anything. It could be that "darkness" is to be understood as blindness, which is how it is sometimes used in Scripture. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no way to flee. And their hope shall be the giving up of the spirit" (Job 11:20 RV). This is all the language of the final judgment. They will seek death and hope for it, because existence in the state of condemnation is simply unbearable. But remember that outside of Christ, mankind is likewise in such an unbearable state, if only he will perceive it. He is even now in a figurative furnace of fire. Those who in that day will "seek death" (Rev. 9:6) are those whose materialistic behaviour in this life was effectively a seeking of death (Prov. 21:6). They were and are living out the condemnation experience right now.

And yet again, the rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so so unwillingly. The man who refuses to immediately respond to the Lord's call to service says that he must first *go away* from the Lord and bury his father (Mt. 8:21); the young man *went away* in sorrow (Mt. 19:22); people hear the Gospel and then *go away* to all their petty businesses of this life (Mt. 22:5). Those who couldn't handle the demanding Lord *went away* from Him (Jn. 6:66); and Judas *went away* of himself to hang himself (Mt. 27:5). He condemned himself. These are all the same words as in Mt. 25:46- those who of their own choice went away from the Lord now, although that isn't maybe how they saw it, will then go away from Him into condemnation. This point is made even within Mt. 25. The foolish virgins *went away* to buy oil- they didn't want to immediately go to their Lord (:10); the one talent man *went away* and buried his talent (:18). And then at judgment day they again *go away from* the Lord (:46).

4.7 Wandering

Judah was condemned to being tossed to and fro (2 Chron. 29:8 RV; Is. 54:11); and yet the spiritually unstable also allow themselves to be tossed to and fro (Eph. 4:14; James 1:6), and thereby they effectively live out their condemnation now, ahead of the gnashing of teeth which awaits them. The type of natural Israel being rejected in the wilderness must be instructive as to the position of those who are the "goats" of spiritual Israel. The thoughts of the condemned generation in the wilderness would have gone back to Egypt and their Passover deliverance, to the glorious experience of the Red Sea crossing. It would have been hard to accept that it had all been in vain for them. But the rejected of the new Israel will

likewise reason concerning their baptism and apparent salvation from the world. Significantly Dt. 2:1 records that after their rejection at the borders of Canaan, "we turned, and took our journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea". This would have reminded them of what had happened there- as the thoughts of the rejected will return to their spiritual beginnings at baptism? Likewise, God's messages of rejection and condemnation to Israel frequently reminded them of their spiritual beginnings in the events of the Exodus (e.g. Ez. 16,20; Am. 2:10). Heb. 3:17 RVmg speaks of their "limbs [which] fell in the wilderness"- the picture is of condemned men staggering on through the desert, discarded limbs wasted by some terrible and progressive disease. This is the picture of the condemned.

Israel wandering in the wilderness until their carcasses lay strewn over the scrubland of Sinai connects with Cain also being a wanderer after his rejection. He was made a "fugitive", from a Hebrew root meaning to shake, to totter, to reel. He was to wander, shaking with fear, reeling. The word is also rendered 'to bemoan'. It's an awful scene: bemoaning his lot, shaking, wandering, reeling, nowhere. The same image is found in Prov. 14:32: "The wicked is driven away [Heb. to totter, be chased] in his wickedness". And yet is this how Cain literally lived? Apparently not, for he married and built a city. He went through all the normal human functions, but in his soul, he was shaking, reeling, tottering, bemoaning his lot. And so it will be for the rejected. Jude matches this with "*wandering* stars, unto whom is reserved the blackness of darkness" (v.13). Rejected Israel were "removed" from their land (Is. 24:20)- although the Hebrew word is also translated to wander / stagger / be a fugitive. Even when in Babylonian captivity, living a fairly settled existence, Jeremiah lamented that even there they were wandering (Lam. 1:7 RVmg.); in their hearts, there was no rest, no fulfillment, always that desire to move on. David also describes the gradual death of the rejected through wandering: "Slay them not (i.e. immediately)...scatter them...consume them in wrath...that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth (through their living to see the Kingdom)...at evening let them return: and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. Let them wander (s.w. Gen. 4:12 "vagabond" re. Cain) up and down for meat" (Ps. 59:11-15). Ps. 59:11 RVmg. speaks of the wicked not being slain immediately but rather being made "to wander to and fro". Wandering up and down...drifting through Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, walking Orwell's *Road To Wigan Pier*.

Darkness

They will be sent to a mist of darkness (2 Pet. 2:17), as Paul walked about in a mist and darkness, not knowing where he was going (Acts 13:11). Thick darkness is associated with God's judgment (Is. 8:22; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15)- and recall how the judgment of darkness upon Egypt was so severe that human movement required 'groping' (Ex. 10:21). Perhaps there will be a literal element to this in the experience of the rejected. Be that as it may, the utter *pointlessness* of life without God will be so bitterly apparent. And yet they would not face up to it in their day of opportunity. This likening of the rejected to scavenging dogs in the rubbish tips outside Jerusalem lends further support to the suggestion that the punishment of the wicked will be associated with literal Gehenna, outside Jerusalem. 2 Sam. 23:6 speaks of how the rejected will be "thrust away" by the Lord. The Hebrew means to wander, to be chased [and is translated this way elsewhere in the AV]. Significantly in this connection, 2 Sam. 23:7 speaks of how the rejected will be consumed in "the same place" where the seed of David was to overcome wickedness. Literal Gehenna was in the same vicinity as Golgotha; and this in this sense His death was a foretaste of the future judgment, as we observe elsewhere.

Two Stages Of Condemnation

The rejected will be punished in the Lord's presence (Rev. 14:10), and then cast out of His presence (2 Thess. 1:9) into outer darkness. This suggests two stages of condemnation: the slinking away, within the Lord's presence, and then being cast out into outer darkness (perhaps literal darkness?). The rejected are handed over to the judge who then casts them into prison or fire. The branches are cast forth, and then (stage two) cast into the fire (Jn. 15:6). There are verses which speak of the rejected being slain before Christ, cut in sunder (i.e. slain with the sword) (Is. 63:1-6; Mt. 24:51; Lk. 19:27). This presumably suggests that some will be punished quite soon after their rejection (e.g. the unwilling Jewish 'subjects' of Christ's Kingdom, Lk. 19:27), whilst others will be punished and yet expelled from the Lord's presence to suffer the agony of existing without any relationship with the Lord they once loved. Again, Lk. 19:27 has an example of both. Surely these are the "many stripes" of Lk. 12:47,48, compared to the "few stripes" of immediate death. Likewise the degree of punishment for individual Israelites in the wilderness was surely reflected in how long they were kept alive until they were finally wasted away by the Lord's hand. Some of the nations / political systems of the world are immediately destroyed at the Lord's coming, whilst others have their suffering period extended for a season and time (Dan. 7:12). The rejected amongst the people of God will in some ways share the condemnation of the world which they loved. It may be that there will be different geographical areas of punishment; some are cast into fire, others into outer darkness, into prison (Mt. 5:25)... or are these simply saying that there will be different kinds of punishment? Or are they different figures for the same thing?

Gnashing Of Teeth

There will be "gnashing of teeth", the Lord seemed to really emphasise (in seven different places: Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once faint would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). This is alluded to in a telling way in 1 Cor. 10:13: for the righteous, they will never be tested more than they can bear, but a way of escape will always be made possible. But for the rejected, there will be no escape. It will be something too great to bear, and somehow they have to go on existing in that state. Thus the rejected will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), after the pattern of Judas bungling his own suicide after realising his condemnation [thus his bowels gushed, although he was attempting to hang himself]; they will also seek the Lord, all too late, and not find Him either (Prov. 1:28; Jn. 7:34). Israel will seek their lovers / idols and not find them (Hos. 2:7), and then seek the Lord and not find Him either (Hos. 5:6). They will seek death and not find it (Rev. 9:6), seek to their idols, see to the true God- and find none of them. They will exist in unbearable limbo. They will wander seeking the word of the Lord, but not find it (Am. 8:12). Tragically, it was so freely available in their lifetimes (cp. the foolish virgins seeking oil, banging on the door trying to hear their Lord's words and speak with Him).

Gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Their *folly* will be manifest to all- not least themselves (2 Tim. 3:9). Parables like that of the rich *fool*, the *foolish* virgins... they will all be crystal clear to them. *Then* the Kingdom of Heaven will be likened to wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1), after the judgment experience. The materialist "at his end [rejection at the judgment] shall be a fool" (Jer. 17:11). The utter *folly* of the rejected is a major theme (Prov. 14:8,18; Ps. 5:5; 49:13; Mt. 7:26; 25:8). Rejected Israel were made to drink the wine of astonishment (Ps. 60:3), and the rejected in like manner will gape: "When saw we thee...?". They will be turned back from the Kingdom "in dismay...clothed with shame and confusion" (Ps. 35:5,26). Confusion will then give way to panic and then to a level of agitated dementia well beyond the paradigms of present psychiatry. The way Judas "burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18) may not be only a description of a bungled suicide. "Bowels" is elsewhere *always* used figuratively. One wonders whether it doesn't also describe how he fell down headlong, as Saul did when he knew his condemnation, and burst asunder within him, and poured out his heart in desperation, in the very pathetic little field he had bought for the price of the Son of God. In an utterly terrible figure, Ezekiel describes the condemnation of Israel as them being a woman trying to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). This was and will be the extent of self-hatred and desperation. She will be alienated from her lovers of this world, and God's mind will be alienated from her (Ez. 23:17,18,22). The utter aloneness of the condemned is impossible to plumb.

Final Destruction

However, there are passages which imply that the rejected will be physically annihilated by the Lord. Given the foregoing descriptions, this would essentially be a merciful act. It may be that many will die in the judgments which come upon the world (see 4.8). But it could be that others are simply put out of their agony by the Lord. Some now in the ecclesia will be dashed to pieces by Him (Rev. 2:27). Mal. 4:3 speaks of them being ashes under the souls of *our* feet, as if the faithful will play a part in the destruction of their faithless brethren. After our judgment, *we* "will return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not" (Mal. 3:18). Then in our own understanding the Kingdom of God will be likened to wise and foolish virgins; then we will see the tares clearly. Then the apostate brethren in Philadelphia will worship before the feet of their faithful brethren (Rev. 3:9). It may be in this sense that we will judge Angels / ecclesial elders (1 Cor. 6:3 cp. Rev. 2:1 etc.). Or it could be that the rejected will destroy each other. The surrounding world with whom they will then be associated will destroy themselves, brother against brother (Zech. 14:13); and they will have a part in this destruction. If we bite and devour each other, we may be consumed by each other (Gal. 5:15)- this is the same idea of brethren killing brethren. Israel were condemned to destruction by brother being dashed against brother (Jer. 13:14). Indeed, biting and devouring each other is a quotation from Is. 9:19,20 LXX (although not apparent in the AV), where Israel in their judgment for unfaithfulness would bite and devour each others' bodies in the siege. Paul is saying that if we bite and devour each other with our words (and we are all guilty of this at times), we are acting as the condemned. If we do this, we may well be consumed of each other- and this *may* have a terribly literal fulfillment, in that as the world destroys every man his neighbour in the

confusion of the last day, so the rejected may do the same, living out the bigotry and passive anger they felt towards each other in their ecclesial life. This all needs some meditation. For there are very few of us not caught up in some division, personality clash, biting or devouring.

4.8 "Condemned with the world..."

Although the above points regarding wandering hold true, there is a major Biblical theme that the rejected will share the judgments of the world. The above descriptions may therefore apply in a spiritual / mental sense to the rejected in a way which they will not apply to the world. Thus the world cannot gnash its teeth because there will be no sense of the future which they have missed, or the grace they once stood related to. Or it could be that the rejected go through the above rejection / wandering process, and then, like Cain, come to the cities of men and join with them, to be destroyed in their futile rebellion against the Lord and His Christ.

Those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Thus Moses prophesied of an apostate Israel: "They have dealt corruptly with [God], they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Dt. 32:5 RSV). These very words are used by Paul regarding the Gentile world (Phil. 2:15). Likewise Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers", the Lord said to Israel (Mt. 23:32)- yet He was alluding to how the Gentile Amorites filled up the cup of God's judgments and then had to drink it. Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12). Prophets like Amos and Zephaniah spoke of the punishment of God's people in the same context, and with the same rubric and language, as they spoke of the judgment of the Gentiles. Thus God saw "Ephraim like as I have seen Tyre" (Hos. 9:13 RV), and therefore their condemnation is spoken of by the prophets in the same terms. Apostate Israel are spoken of as the pagan world; and therefore at the day of judgment the rejected of the new Israel will be condemned along with the world (1 Cor. 11:32); assigned their portion "with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46). If we are not separate from this world now, we will not be separated from them when the judgments fall. If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4). Zion lost her children and also her husband whilst still a young woman (Is. 49:21; 54:6), just as Babylon would (Is. 47:9). Each street of Jerusalem was named after an idol, just as was the case in Babylon (Jer. 11:13)- and thus Jerusalem shared Babylon's judgment. The world will be gathered to Jerusalem for condemnation as will unworthy saints (Rev. 16:14,16; 19:19). A read through Rev. 16:13-16 makes it evident that the 6th vial concerns the gathering of the nations to Armageddon; but right in the middle of this section we read: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked"- clearly relevant to the saints. It's as if the punishment of the unworthy believers and that of the nations is to be connected. The collapsing of time at the judgment would enable this to actually happen- the events used to punish the world could fall upon the rejected from the judgment seat. These unfortunate individuals will be threshed, as will the world be (Mt. 3:12; Rev. 16:16). This is foreshadowed by the way apostate Israel were treated like the surrounding Gentile world in the time of their judgments (Jer. 4:7). Thus in

the 'judgment day' of AD70, the 'rejected' Jews were sent back into Egypt as slaves. "They shall return to Egypt" had been God's earlier prophesy (Hos. 8:13; 9:3). Their condemnation was expressed in terms of an undoing of the redemption from the world which they once experienced. The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation.

The Language Of Apostate Israel

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. Consider all the times when God's apostate people are recorded as acting in terms of their Arab cousins:

Apostate Israel and the Jewish system were to be "cast out" (Jn. 12:31) just as Ishmael had been (Gen. 21:10).

- The description of Israel as Aholibah in Ezekiel 23:4 recalls Esau's wife Aholibamah (Gen. 36: 2), again associating them with the rejected Arab peoples.

- There is a connection between Israel's renegade king Saul and the Horite Zibeon, who should have been 'cast out' of the land too (cp. Gen. 36:24 and 1 Sam. 9: 3).

- David was persecuted by the apostate within Israel, and he asks God to judge them through 'visiting all the heathen' (Ps. 59:5).

- "The princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army?" (Jud. 8:6). Yet this was the exact spirit of Israel's suspicious cousins when they were on their way from Egypt to Canaan.

- "He is Canaan...he loveth to deceive" (Hos. 12:7 AVmg.) says it all. Israel acted as the Canaanites- because they let their 'Jacob' streak come on too strong.

- The prophecy of Hos. 2:23 about Gentiles is quoted in Rom. 9:24-26 about apostate Israel.

- "Egypt and Judah and Edom and the children of Ammon and Moab...all these nations are uncircumcised, and the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart" (Jer. 9:26) makes it clear right back then that circumcision was a matter of the heart more than the flesh; and that therefore there was no essential difference between a spiritually uncircumcised Israel and their apostate cousins.

- Some verses earlier, Jer. 9:4 had spoken to Israel as if they were *Esau*, being warned about the cunning of his brother Jacob: "Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant". Again, in a clever way, both Jacob and Esau are shown to be in the wrong, and Jacob is therefore treated as Esau.

- Apostate Israel were to be made as Sodom (Is. 1:10; Dt. 29:23); but this was the very fate of Moab and Ammon (Zeph. 2:9). They share the same judgment because in essence they did the same thing.

- When the Jews proudly said "Abraham is our father!" (Jn. 8:39) they were showing the very same spirit as Ishmael- in persecuting Isaac / Jesus.

- The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself (Mk. 3:23-26) in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

- Having spoken of the time when Israel's iniquity would have an end, Ezekiel goes on to describe the sin and judgment of Ammon in just the same terms (Ez. 21:25,29); a sharpened

sword was drawn against both nations (Ez. 21:10,28), which was not to return into its sheath (Ez. 21:5,30); both were to be judged in “the land of thy nativity” (Ez. 21:30 cp. 16:3).

- The Jews forbade or hindered the apostles from preaching to the Gentiles “to fill up their sins...for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess. 2:16). This is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 15:16 about the Amorites.

Babylon's Judgment

The Lord taught that the believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2). This is exactly Babylon's judgment (Rev. 18:21). The unloving in the ecclesia will be treated like the unloving world whose spirit they share. The rejected will weep and gnash their teeth (Mt. 25:30)- and be sent back into the Babylon-world, where they are also weeping and angry (Rev. 18:15,19). As the tree of Babylon will be cut down, so will the rejected be (Dan. 4:14,23 = Mt. 7:19). As Babylon is burnt with fire (Rev. 18:8), and indeed the whole 'world' too (2 Pet. 3:10), so will the rejected be (Mt. 13:40 etc.). The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19) is surely referring to these very words in Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

The devil and beast will be cast to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10), as will all the rejected (Rev. 20:15); they will go to the same place. As Satan is bound (Rev. 20:2), so will the rejected be (Mt. 13:30; 22:13). This will be the antitype of Zedekiah being bound in condemnation (Jer. 52:11). In all these things, we have a choice: to fall on the stone of Christ and be broken, or live proudly in this life without breaking our fleshly ways at all, until at the Lord's coming we are ground to powder (Mt. 21:44). This is an obvious allusion to the image of the Kingdoms of men being ground to powder by the Lord's return. The Lord was saying that if we won't be broken now, then we will share the judgments of the world, and be broken by Him then in condemnation.

- The rejected believers will slink away from the Lord's presence (1 Jn. 2:24 Gk.). The whole heaven and earth of this present world will likewise flee away from the face of the enthroned Christ (Rev. 20:11; Is. 2:21). Fleeing away is a characteristic of both the unworthy and also the world which they loved. In some sense the world will come before the judgment seat of Christ to be rejected (Dan. 7:9-14).

- The world will be broken to shivers, "as the vessels of a potter" (Rev. 2:26). But this is in fact quoting Jeremiah's words concerning the breaking of the individual believer who is rejected at the last day (Jer. 18:4-6; 19:11). The point of the Lord's quotation is surely that those He rejects will share the world's condemnation.

- Dan. 2:44 describes how the kingdoms of this world will be broken and scattered as the chaff before the wind. Yet this is exactly the language of Jer. 13:24 concerning Israel's latter destruction. They will be "dashed" (Jer. 13:14) as the nations of the world will be (Ps. 2:9). The same verse says they will be destroyed by brother being dashed against brother- again, the picture of the world's final destruction (Zech. 14:13). Rev. 2:27 speaks of the unfaithful in

the ecclesia likewise being dashed to pieces. The Lord's coming will be a stone that grinds them to powder (Mt. 21:44).

- 1 Jn. 3:13 (cp. Jn. 7:7; 15:8) teaches that *the world* will hate Christ's brethren. But in this very context, John warns about *some brethren* who hate their brethren, and who thereby abide in darkness (1 Jn. 3:15; 4:20). John's simple logic is evident: if you hate your brother, you're in the world, you've put yourself into darkness, you've condemned yourself. The place of the rejected believers is in the ranks of the world- nowhere else.

- Ps. 78:31 describes how Yahweh smote down the young men of Israel in the wilderness, in the very terms in which we read of how the young men of Egypt were smitten down (:51). The judgments of Egypt were poured out upon an apostate Israel.

- There is fair emphasis that the rejected saints will be cast into darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13). Yet darkness is a common symbol of the world (Eph. 5:11; 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9). And those amongst us who won't love their brother are already in darkness, self-condemned even before the day arrives (1 Jn. 2:9,11).

The structure of the book of Revelation reflects this theme- the first series of visions are of judgments on God's people Israel, whilst the second part of the book is judgments upon the Gentile powers of Rome / Babylon [however we wish to interpret them]. Likewise the plagues upon Egypt recorded in Ex. 7-10 are frequently alluded to in later Scripture concerning the judgments upon the apostate people of God. Quite simply, God's rejected people suffer the judgments of this world.

All this has a powerful imperative for us. If we love the world, we will be sent back into it. The Lord will effectively tell the rejected: 'Go back and watch telly. That's what you liked doing. Go back and sail your pleasure boat, take a holiday to Spain, go back to the guys at the bar and have another drink with them...that's what you always liked, compared to the things of My people and My Kingdom'. And the last thing, the very last thing, that the rejected will want is to go back to all that. But they will have to. For in their lives, they made their answer. The pointlessness of the life of the world will then be only too apparent to them. As Adam was made to realize he was made of dust and must tend that dust and then return to it, living a pointless existence, so the rejected whom he typified will realize all too late the vanity of life in the flesh. Rejected Israel in the wilderness had their years of prolonged existence "consumed with vanity" (Ps. 78:33). The faithless of the new Israel will go through the same. *So let us, while we have opportunity, learn the utter vanity of all else apart from the things of the Lord, His people and His Kingdom.*

The picture of the condemned is presented in Scripture in some detail. We are all condemned men and women before the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. If we are to be saved in that future day, we must judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination (1 Cor. 11:31). This means that we ought to have their feelings in some respects; as they will have no desire to go on living in the flesh, as they will so earnestly desire entry into the Kingdom, as they will then desperately not want to go back into the world... so we should feel now, grateful that for us there is entry into the Kingdom made possible. Thus Peter asked the Lord to depart from him (Lk. 5:8), with the very same words the Lord used about what He will say to the rejected (Lk. 13:27).

In conclusion we must ask whether we in this life do condemn ourselves. For those who do, will not be condemned. Have you wept for your wretchedness, for your miserable inadequacy? Then take heart. For of such is and will be the Kingdom. And let the picture of the condemned enable you to rejoice the more fervently in the simple fact that "we have been saved from wrath through Him".

A final thought about condemnation. What we have written about the toughness of God's condemnation may seem awful. But actually, the condemnation and judgment of God is far softer than that of man. It was men who created the concept of eternal torment, not God. It was men who created Auschwitz and similar perversions of 'judgment'. It is truly written in the context of God's final condemnation that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). But David said that he would prefer to fall into the hands of God rather than into the hands of man (2 Sam. 24:14). To fall into the hands of God is thus a figure for judgment / condemnation by Him. Fearful as it is, as the Hebrew writer says, it is actually far milder than the judgment of men. This is how cruel our judgment of others can be; this is how awful is human condemnation of each other. It is worse than God's. No wonder that the Lord established "Judge not..." as a foundation principle for His true people.

"Condemned with the world"

- "They have dealt corruptly with [God], they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Dt. 32:5 RSV) quoted re. Gentile world (Phil. 2:15).
- Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* quoted Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel.
- Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth cp. Egyptians swallowed at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).
- Prophets spoke of the punishment of God's people in the same context, and with the same rubric and language, as they spoke of the judgment of the Gentiles.
- "Condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32); assigned their portion "with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46).
- If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).
- Threshed, as will the world be (Mt. 3:12; Rev. 16:16).
- "They shall return to Egypt" (Hos. 8:13; 9:3).
- The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51).
- The believer who makes his brother stumble should have a millstone hung around his neck and be cast into the sea (Lk. 17:2 cp. Rev. 18:21).
- The rejected will weep and gnash their teeth (Mt. 25:30)- and be sent back into the Babylon-world, where they are also weeping and angry (Rev. 18:15,19).

- The tree of Babylon will be cut down, as will the rejected be (Dan. 4:14,23 = Mt. 7:19).
- Babylon burnt with fire (Rev. 18:8), and the rejected (Mt. 13:40 etc.).
- The rejected cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19) = Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5). All who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18).
- The devil and beast will be cast to the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10), as will all the rejected (Rev. 20:15)
- Satan is bound (Rev. 20:2) as the rejected will be (Mt. 13:30; 22:13).
- Fall on the stone of Christ and be broken or at the Lord's coming be ground to powder with the world (Mt. 21:44).
- Dan. 2:44; Ps. 2:9 cp. Rev. 2:27 : both the world and the unfaithful will be dashed to pieces.
- The rejected cast into darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Jude 13), = the world (Eph. 5:11; 6:12; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9). Those who won't love their brother are already in darkness, self-condemned (1 Jn. 2:9,11).

5. Sheep

5.1 The Lord's Joy

The shepherd instinctively knows his sheep from his goats; it isn't as if he has to weigh up what they are. And likewise the Lord will see us His sheep coming from afar, and it would seem inappropriate for Him to conceal this fact. "A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes...even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure" (Prov. 20:8,11) would suggest that the look in the eyes of the Lord will elicit from us our own sense of the outcome. And surely for the truly serious believer, who loves his Lord and believes in His grace, we even now know the outcome. The figure of judgment would suggest a grim faced judge, with all the dignity and soberness of the courtroom, whatever the verdict is. But there are elements of unreality in the pictures of judgment which are put before us in the parables. This judge is emotionally involved in each case (unheard of in a human court); and He is also the advocate and the witness who finds nothing bad to say; and He exalts: "Well done...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt. 25:23). The picture is of the happy judge, breaking down in joy at the verdict, inviting the hesitant believer to share his joy in their victory. The picture seems so imaginable; "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" suggests a reticence, an unbelief, at the outcome. Compare this with the one hour labourers receiving a day's pay (Mt. 20:9), and the faithful almost remonstrating with their Lord that they have not done the things he reminds them of (Mt. 25:38-40). Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, he will "make us" sit down at a table, and he will come and serve us (Lk. 12:37), knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves

(Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. Perhaps "*Come*, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) likewise suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this.

Perhaps this is typified by Joseph's revelation to his brethren; they slink away from him, and he has to encourage them: "Come near to me, I pray you" (Gen. 45:4). They absolutely knew that they ought to be punished and killed by him, and they obviously thought he would do it. Even years later, Joseph *wept* in frustration at their lack of full acceptance of his total forgiveness (Gen. 50:17). These scenes are so evidently typical of the future judgment seat of Joseph / Jesus. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph. And another type of judgment makes a similar point.

The *Bema* Judgment

In Nehemiah 8 LXX we have a *bema* (used in the Greek NT for the judgment seat) set up (8:4), with people on the right and left hand of it, the Jews weeping in guilt with their faces to the ground (8:9), in the eyes of all (8:5), sure they were condemned, yet then persuaded of their acceptance (8:9), learning God's principles (8:8), then sharing a feast with each other and drinking memorial wine (8:10). Note how this all occurred on the first day of the 7th month, the feast of trumpets, known by the Jews as Yom Haddin, the day of the *bema* judgment.

We will enter the Kingdom as shy children. This is the implication of Lk. 18:17: "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein". It doesn't just mean that we must *now* be as little children, but more that we will enter the Kingdom as little children. For Jesus had just said that "of such is the Kingdom". Children unspoilt by the hardness of this world and this flesh...this is how we will be as we walk away from the judgment seat into the Kingdom. And we should live the Kingdom life now.

But we will overcome our reticence; we *will* enter our Lord's joy; for we shall stand before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). Rev. 14:3 paints the picture of the righteous singing before the throne of judgment. In Him, in that day, will be fulfilled Zeph. 3:17: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee...He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful (us) for the solemn assembly", when the Lord will keep Passover with us again.

As stressed before, the purpose of the judgment is for our benefit, to develop our appreciation and self-knowledge. This is perhaps reflected by the ten pound man saying that Christ's pound had gained, had worked to create (Gk.) the ten pounds he could now offer (Lk. 19:16). The man who achieved five pounds uses a different word in describing how the pound given him had made five pounds (Lk. 19:18), while the men in Mt. 25:20,22 uses yet another word to say the same thing. This is surely a realistic picture, each of the faithful comes to the same conclusion, that what spirituality they have developed is an outcome of the basic Gospel given to each of us at our conversion; yet they express this same basic idea in different words. The place of basic doctrine as the basis for the development of all true spirituality should need no further stress, if the Lord's teaching here is appreciated. But in the present

easy-going attitude of the brotherhood, the importance of basic doctrine *does* need stressing the more. The man who didn't develop as he should have done accuses the Lord of reaping what he didn't sow (Lk. 19:21). But the Lord does sow the seed of the basic Gospel, as the parable of the sower makes clear. The point is that the unworthy fail to let that seed bring forth fruit, they fail to see that the Lord expects fruit from those doctrines they have been given. But they fail to see the link between the basic Gospel and practical spirituality; they feel he's reaping where he didn't sow. Christ will require his own, i.e. that which he has sown, the basic Truths of the Gospel, with usury (Lk. 19:23). The parable of the tiny seed moving the great mountain was surely making the same point; the basic Gospel, if properly believed, will result in the most far reaching things (Mt. 17:20 cp. 13:31). There is an element of unreality in the parable of the pounds: wise use of a few coins results in power over several cities. We are left to imagine the men marvelling in disbelief at the reward given to them. They expected at most just a few pounds to be given to them. And in their response we see a picture of the almost disbelief of the faithful at their rewards.

5.2 The Process Of Acceptance

As we struggle in our daily battle with the flesh, it is necessary to keep our eye on that split-second moment of total acceptance by our Lord. It is possible to build up a detailed picture of that moment of victory and complete spiritual triumph. We will burst out, mentally and physically, like stalled calves given freedom for the first time (Mal. 4:2). Ps. 68:1-3 speak of how the rejected will be chased away, but the righteous will "be glad" and "exult before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice", after the pattern of Israel's ecstasy after their deliverance at the Red Sea.

A realistic imagination of our coming before the judgment seat of Christ must surely involve the feeling that we will cast ourselves down prostrate on the ground before the glorious majesty of the Lord Jesus. In Biblical terms, this would appear to be realistic.

Dan. 10 describes what was effectively a figurative resurrection of Daniel. Having been "in a deep sleep on my face (cp. death)...an (angelic) hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands...I stood trembling...I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb...(the angel) touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said...how can the servant of my Lord talk with this my Lord?...then there came again (an angel), and he strengthened me, and said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong" (v.9-19). Such a seizing up with dumbness and desire to be on our knees before our Lord, averting his gaze ("my face toward the ground") will need the repeated assurance of our guardian angels to overcome. Angelic appearances to men have so often included an encouragement to "fear not" that we have every reason to imagine that those same words will be repeated to us when the angel calls. The Greek text of Lk. 21:36 further fills out the place of the angels in our judgment: "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy...to be stood before the Son of man". This creates the picture of our guardian angel literally standing us up in acceptance before our Lord, as happened to Daniel. Ps. 1:5 can now take on a literal aspect: "The ungodly shall not stand [up] in the judgment". It is so fitting that the angel who is with us now in our every situation, will be with us in that supreme moment too. We read in Jer. 42:2 of a supplication being "accepted", or 'to fall down before' (RVmg.). To fall down before the Lord Jesus is to be accepted of Him. Paul speaks of us all *standing* before the judgment seat of Christ after first of all casting ourselves down; and this in the context of saying that God is able to make the weak brother *stand* in His sight (Rom. 14:4 cp. 10,11). We will all be in the position of the weak brother. Don't "set at

nought" your brother- because the judgment seat of Christ is coming for you too (Rom. 14:10). We will *all* be "set at nought" then; that's the implication. We will all have to be made stand by God's grace. We will *all* be made to stand, i.e. be accepted (Eph. 6:11-13; Col. 4:12)- or at least, Paul is saying, that's how you should look at your brethren, as if they too will be accepted. For if we have no right to condemn our brethren; we must surely assume they will be accepted. In passing, note how Paul warns in this context that we can cause our brother to fall down or stumble (Rom. 14:13). Some at the last day will not be 'stood up', they will remain prostrate and then slink away. And why? Because they will have been made to fall by their brethren. Our faith and our community of believers is fragile, more fragile than we may think. In all the pressures of these last days it is so terribly easy to cause each other to stumble, to fall, with the ultimate consequence that they will not be stood up at the judgment. This is the evil of causing offence, stumbling, making another to fall down.

1 Jn. 2:28 speaks of our being able to have "confidence" at the day of judgment; but the Greek *parresia* means literally 'a saying of all'. This free telling of all will be when we list our sins to the Lord; and yet, in the greatest paradox, this will be our confidence before Him. That 'freedom of speech' in His presence will be the sign that we are accepted; and yet the freedom of speech begins with our free confession to Him of our unworthiness.

There are other passages which suggest that the accepted will *feel* as though they have been rejected. The judgment process will teach us our desperation and unworthiness.

- In our ecclesial judgments we should undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, break every yoke *because* "then shall thy light break forth as the morning [i.e. you'll have a part in the Lord's glory, Mal. 4:2], and thine health shall spring forth [cp. Mal. 4:2 springing forth as stalled calves]...and thy righteousness shall go before thee [our good deeds recited by the Judge]...then [at the judgment seat of Christ] thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am" (Is. 58:6-9). If we show mercy to the desperate now, we won't necessarily have our prayers automatically heard in this life. But in the poverty and desperate need of the judgment, our cries will be heard on account of our generous, forgiving response in this life.

- We will be condemned by the very presence of the excellence of the Lord's glory; but we will have judgment / condemnation with mercy (James 2:13); we will receive damnation, and yet be saved (James 3:1).

- The hopelessly indebted slave had the whole debt reckoned up with him and *then* the Lord wrote it off (Mt. 18:24,25).

- The accepted will be saved "yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). The fire of condemnation will as it were burn at them and remove all their surface spirituality. And as through death comes life, so through condemnation of the flesh comes salvation of the spirit.

- In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that

condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was, as we have shown elsewhere, a type of the final judgment.

- "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will *spare* them, as a man spareth his own son" (Mal. 3:17)- i.e. undeservedly, only because of his parental feelings and mercy toward the child.

- "Riches profit not in the day of wrath [the final judgment]: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 11:4) suggests that the righteous are faced with death at the judgment, but their righteousness in this life delivers them.

- There is surely an intended contrast between the accepted denying the righteous acts that the Lord reminds them of, and their telling Him how much they have gained (spiritually) by trading (Mt. 25:37-39 cp. 20,22). These quite different attributes of the accepted are recorded within the same speech of the Lord. He frames those parables as if He is getting over global lessons rather than describing the response of different people. Perhaps the point is that first of all, the accepted feel as if they have done no righteous acts, and feel their unworthiness so strongly that they even dare to genuinely disagree with the Lord's praise of them. But then they come to accept themselves as He sees them, and later on in the judgment dialogue, He teases out of them a realistic self-assessment of their spiritual growth. There is a similar intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 4 cp. 25).

The Sheep Feel Rejected

- Dan. 10: "in a deep sleep on my face (cp. death)...an (angelic) hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands...I stood trembling...I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb...(the angel) touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said...how can the servant of my Lord talk with this my Lord?...then there came again (an angel), and he strengthened me, and said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong" (v.9-19).

- "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy...*to be stood* before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36 Gk.) cp. Ps. 1:5; Rom. 14:10,11; Eph. 6:11-13; Col. 4:12.

- If you hear the cry of the desperate, "then [at judgment day] thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am" (Is. 58:6-9). We will call then...

- We will have judgment / condemnation with mercy (James 2:13); we will receive damnation, and yet be saved (James 3:1).

- The hopelessly indebted slave had the whole debt reckoned up with him and *then* the Lord wrote it off (Mt. 18:24,25).

- Saved "yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:15).

- Saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9).

- “They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will *spare* them, as a man spareth his own son” (Mal. 3:17)- i.e. undeservedly
- “Riches profit not in the day of wrath [the final judgment]: but righteousness delivereth from death” (Prov. 11:4)- the righteous are faced with death at the judgment.
- Argue with Christ that they aren’t worthy
- Tears wiped away from our eyes; sorrow and mourning flee away (Is. 51:11)
- The righteous “scarcely saved” (1 Pet. 4:18)
- Cast our crowns before the Lord’s throne (Rev. 4:10)

5. 3 Imputed Righteousness

Whilst we ourselves will feel the need to "confess to God" (Rom. 14:11,12) our failures and unworthiness, we have shown earlier how our Lord will not mention these to us, but instead joyfully catalogue to us those things which have so pleased him in our lives. This will be to our genuine amazement: "Lord, when..?". Keeping a subconscious inventory of our own good works now will surely prevent us from being in this category. 1 Cor. 4:5 speaks of us as receiving "praise of God" at the judgment, presumably in the form of praise for the good works which we are not aware of, as outlined in the parable (cp. Ps. 134:3). "Praise" suggests that our Lord will show quite some enthusiasm in this. Not he that commends himself will be approved [cp. The listing of good deeds by the rejected], "but whom the Lord commendeth" in as it were listing the good deeds of the accepted (2 Cor. 10:18). Our amazement and incomprehension at the judgment is also brought out in 2 Thess. 1:10, which speaks of the saints 'admiring' Christ in that day, using a Greek word meaning 'to marvel at in incomprehension'. This praise will also be on account of our being "presented faultless" before the judgment (Jude 24). The Greek for "presented" is the same word translated "stood" in Lk. 21:36, showing that our angel is able to stand us up in the august presence of the Lord, only by reason of our faults having been totally covered by Christ's imputed righteousness. Col. 1:22 has a similar message: "...to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable (Gk. 'free from accusation') in his sight". This freedom from accusation explains why none of our bad deeds will be mentioned to us then. One wonders if Paul's appearance before the judgment seat in Acts 25 is described as it is in order to help us imagine this; he has no accusers, and therefore can be acquitted. There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34), we are surely intended to make the connection to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is the dead ringer of every one of us.

Our consciousness of this imputed righteousness will be very great. Is. 45:23 "Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess" is quoted by Paul in Rom. 14:11,12 as being specifically concerning our position at the judgment seat. It is therefore fitting to read Is. 45:24,25 as being concerning our thoughts then: "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord (Jesus) have I righteousness and strength...and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed (cp. our earlier reconstruction of the rejected initially arguing with the Lord in anger, and then slinking away in shame). In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory".

In God's presence (judgment language: Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10) no flesh will glory, but will glory in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:29). The RV makes all this even more personal: "Only in the Lord, shall one say unto me, have I righteousness and strength" (Is. 45:24 RV). The words of grateful realization will be directed specifically by us to the Lord Himself.

The "righteous acts" of the saints will be publicly arrayed before all (Rev. 19:8)- by none other than the Lord. All their good 'acts' will be revealed to all. And yet that righteousness is what they are clothed with by Christ- perhaps suggesting that their good deeds will be presented in a heightened form, as imputed righteousness, which would explain why the righteous will be shocked that the Lord could speak so highly of them ("When saw we thee...?").

5.4 Still Human?

The theme of surprise at the process and outcome of our acceptance at the judgment ought to be a powerful influence on our thinking and behaviour. For all our study and preparation, that day will surprise us, it will shake us to the roots, as the newly built houses were rocked and battered to the foundations by the stormy wind and rain (representing Christ's interrogation of our conscience at judgment, Mt. 7:27). If that day is to be a surprise to us, we better have an appropriate humility now, recognising that ultimately our perceptions of many things will be shown to be wrong. There is even the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

This all suggests that even after our acceptance at the judgment, we may be more 'human' than we may now imagine. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the wise virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

5.5 Surprise At Acceptance

The sheep will feel worthy of condemnation. By a fascinating trick of the tail, the Lord's right hand is our left hand, and vice versa, if we imagine ourselves standing before Him. Those who put themselves to *their* right hand, i.e. justify themselves, are putting themselves at His left hand; and vice versa. There is another way of looking at 'first' and 'last'. Those who "are first" in their own eyes, those who think for sure they will be in the Kingdom, will seek to enter the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but be unable. Those who strive to enter the Kingdom *now* are "last" in their own spiritual assessment; and the first will be made last in the sense that they won't be in the Kingdom. Thus when those who will enter the Kingdom are described as thinking of themselves as "last", this must mean that they think of themselves now as being unworthy of the Kingdom, but as "striving" to be there now, in their minds (Lk. 13:23,24). The likes of Samson died with a confession of unworthiness on their lips- in his case, that he deserved to die the death of a Philistine (Jud. 16:30)- but he will actually be in the Kingdom (Heb. 11:32).

We have shown that all those who will be in the Kingdom will feel that really we should not be there, we don't deserve it, we will be hesitant to enter it and therefore Christ will have to almost make us go into the Kingdom. It's the same in the parables of Matthew 25, at the judgment Jesus will praise the righteous for doing so many good things, and then they will disagree with him, they will say 'No, we didn't do that, really we didn't', and He will say 'Yes, in my eyes, you did'. Their good works had not been consciously done. This is surely what the Lord was driving at in saying that our left hand must not know what the right hand does. We aren't to be self-consciously brooding on our own generosity. It would seem that with a spirit of amazement and surprise the man says 'Your pound has gained 5 pounds!'. It's the self-righteous, those who think they have done so much and therefore they must be in the Kingdom, who will be rejected.

The Evidence Of The Parables

There is a highly repeated theme in the Lord's parables. It is that he saw his people as falling into one of two categories: the sinners / spiritually weak, and the self-righteous. This isn't just the possible implication of one or two parables:

The sinners / weak	The self-righteous
The prodigal son (each of us) who genuinely thought he had lost his relationship with his father (cp. God) for ever (Lk. 15:11-32).	The elder son who said he'd never disobeyed his father (cp. God), and who in the end walks away from his father.
The sinner who hasn't got the faith to lift up his eyes to God, weighed down with the weight of his seemingly irreversible sins (Lk. 18:1-8).	The man who looks up to God with what he thinks is a good conscience and thanks Him that he is better than others, feeling that the sinful brother praying next to him is somehow too far gone.
The weak labourer (no employer wanted to hire him) who works one hour but is given a day's pay for it. We are left to imagine him walking away in disbelief clutching his penny (cp. the faithful with salvation at the judgment) (Mt. 20:1-16).	The strong labourer who works all day and complains at the end that the weak labourer has been given a penny. "Go thy way..." (Mt. 20:14) could imply he is fired from the Master's service because of this attitude. This would fit in with the way the other parables describe the second man as the rejected one.

	Note how the man alienates <i>himself</i> from his Lord by his attitude to his weaker brethren.
The builder whose progress appeared slow, building on a rock, symbolising the difficulty he has in really hearing the word of the Lord Jesus.	The builder who appeared to make fast progress (Mt. 7:24-27), who apparently finds response to the word very easy.
The (spiritually) sick who need a doctor, represented by the stray animal who falls down a well and desperately bleats for pity (Lk. 14:5 RSV).	Those who don't think they need a doctor aren't helped by Christ (Mt. 9:12)
Those with a splinter in their eye, from God's viewpoint, who are seen as in need of spiritual correction by other believers (Mt. 7:3-5).	Those with a plank of wood in their eye, from God's perspective, but who think they have unimpaired vision to see the faults in their brethren.
Those who guard the house and give food to the other servants (Mt. 24:45-51).	Those who are materialistic and beat their fellow servants.
The man who owed 100 pence to his brother (Mt. 18:23-35), but nothing to his Lord (because the Lord counts him as justified).	The man who owed 10,000 talents to his Lord, but would not be patient with his brother who owed him 100 pence. He had the opportunity to show much love in return for his Lord's forgiveness, on the principle that he who is forgiven much loves much (Lk. 7:41-43).
The man who takes the lowest, most obscure seat at a feast is (at the judgment) told to go up to the best seat. We are left to imagine that the kind of humble man who takes the lowest seat would be embarrassed to go up to the highest seat, and would probably need encouragement to do so. This will be exactly the position of all those who enter the Kingdom. Those who are moved out of the highest seats are characterised by "shame", which is the hallmark of the rejected. Therefore all the righteous are symbolized by the humble man who has to be encouraged (at the judgment) to go up higher.	The man who assumes he should have a respectable seat at the feast (Lk. 14:8-11). Remember that the taking of places at the feast represents the attitude we adopt within the ecclesia now. It is <i>directly</i> proportionate to Christ's judgment of us. Thus Mt. 23:11 speaks of he that is [now] the greatest amongst us will be the servant now; but elsewhere the Lord's idea is that he who <i>will be the greatest</i> must be servant now. But effectively, by taking the lowest position now, we are being given the highest place. When the disciples were concerned about who <i>would be the greatest</i> in the future, the Lord replied by speaking of who amongst them <i>is</i> the greatest- by doing acts of humble service (Lk. 22:24,26).
The spiritually despised Samaritan who helped the (spiritually) wounded man.	The apparently righteous Levite and Priest who did nothing to help (Lk. 10:25-37).
The men who traded and developed what they had (Lk. 19:15-27).	The man who did nothing with what he had, not even lending his talent to Gentiles on usury; and then thought Christ's rejection of him unreasonable.
The son who rudely refuses to do the father's	The son who immediately and publicly agrees

work, but then does it with his tail between his legs (Mt. 21:28-32).	to do his father's work but actually does nothing. The Father's work is saving men. Note how in this and the above two cases, the self-righteous are rejected for their lack of interest in saving others (both in and out of the ecclesia) ⁽²⁾ .
The king who realises he cannot defeat the approaching army (cp. Christ and his Angels coming in judgment) because he is too weak, and surrenders.	The king who refuses to realize his own weakness and is therefore, by implication, destroyed by the oncoming army (Lk. 14:31,32).
Those who think their oil (cp. our spirituality) will probably run out before the second coming (Mt. 25:1-10).	Those who think their oil (spirituality) will never fail them and will keep burning until the Lord's return.

It makes a good exercise to read down just the left hand column. These are the characteristics of the acceptable, in God's eyes. Reading just the right hand column above (go on, do it) reveals all too many similarities with established Christendom.

Those who enter the Kingdom will genuinely, from the very depth of their being, feel that they shouldn't be there. When we read that the Lord will "wipe away" tears from our eyes (Rev. 7:17), this is the same word used in Acts 3:19 to describe how our sins will be "blotted out" when the Lord returns. The conclusion seems to be, therefore, that the Lord Himself will comfort us with the reality that our sins and being unworthy of the Kingdom is all truly forgiven. The judgment will have achieved its end for us- a true realization of our sinfulness. The faithful will cast their crowns before the enthroned Lord, as if to resign their reward as inappropriate for them (Rev. 4:10). Indeed, they shouldn't be in the Kingdom. The righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18). The righteous remnant who spoke often to one another about Yahweh will only be "spared" by God's grace (Mal. 3:17). The accepted will feel so certain of this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment clutching their penny, thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly, genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel.

6. Love And Judgment

6.1 Attitude To Others

One of the themes of the parables of judgment is that our attitude to our brethren will have an impact on the outcome of the judgment. Those who will be in the Kingdom will therefore be powerfully taught at the judgment the utter supremacy of love. This will be the basis upon

which we enter the Kingdom. Mt. 25:45 seems to suggest that our attitude to the weak ones of the ecclesia will especially be considered by the Lord. Of course, he knows the verdict and why he has reached it already; but it seems that the parable is teaching that *we* will be brought to realize that our attitude to our weak brethren has such an impact on our position before the Lord. For then we will realize that we are all weak. Consider his repeated emphasis on the importance of our attitude to others:

- The 'unjust steward' was saved because he forgave others their debts after getting into a mess himself. He wasted his Lord's goods, as the prodigal did (Lk. 15:13 connects with 16:2). Seeing the prodigal represents all of us, the lesson is surely that we all waste our Lord's goods, therefore the basis of salvation is through our forgiving others as an outcome of our own faith in the Lord's grace. This is one explanation of why the parable of the steward flows straight on from that of the prodigal.
- The rich man was condemned for not helping Lazarus.
- The Pharisee was condemned not just for being self-righteous but especially for his despising of his sinful brother.
- The one talent man was rejected because he didn't give his talent to the Gentiles and earn usury for the Lord.
- The big debtor was rejected because he wouldn't forgive his brother. The Lord says that He will make such a person pay all the debt (Mt. 18:36). There is a connection here with an earlier parable, where He spoke of how unless a man agrees with his adversary quickly, the adversary will drag him to court and jail until he pays all that is due (Mt. 5:26). The adversary of the parable, therefore, is the Lord Himself. He is the aggressive invader marching against us with an invincible army (Lk. 14:31), with whom we must make peace by total surrender. Putting the Lord's teaching in context, He is showing Himself to be very harsh and demanding on the unforgiving believer, but very soft and almost unacceptably gracious to those who show forgiveness.
- The elder son went out of the Father's fellowship because he couldn't accept the return of the younger son.
- Elders must give an account for their flock (Heb. 13:17)- implying that there will be a 'going through' with them of all in their care.
- The drunken steward was condemned because he failed to feed the rest of the household and beat them.
- The lamp went out because it was kept under a bucket rather than giving light to others.
- Perhaps the hard working labourers were sent packing by the Lord because of their complaint at the others getting the same payment for what they considered to be inferior work to theirs. If the parable is meant to be read in this way, then it seems so sad that those hard working men (cp. brethren) were *almost* saved, but for their attitude to their brethren.

To keep the faith to ourselves without reaching out into the world of others was therefore foreseen by the Lord as a very major problem for us. And indeed it is. Disinterest in ecclesial

meetings and overseas brethren, unwillingness to really enter into the struggles of others, apathy towards preaching, all often as a result of an obsession with ones' own family...this is surely the sort of thing the Lord foresaw. We all have the desire to keep our faith to ourselves, to hold onto it personally on our own little island...and it was this attitude which the Lord so repeatedly and trenchantly criticized. And in his demanding way, he implied that a failure in this would cost us the Kingdom. He more than any other must have known the desire for a desert island spiritual life; but instead he left the 99 righteous and went up into the mountains (i.e. he prayed intensely, after the pattern of Moses for Israel?), in order to find the lost sheep (Mt. 18:12). In a sense the judgment process has already begun; Mt. 18:24 says that the Lord has "begun to reckon" now, and so now we must urgently forgive one another. He is watching our attitude to each other here and now. Mt. 18:33,35 teach that the attitude we have towards our brother deep in our heart will be revealed and discussed with us at the judgment.

The lighting of the candle is a symbol of our conversion (Mt. 25:1; Heb. 10:32). Our lamps were lit by the Lord Jesus (Lk. 8:16; Heb. 10:32) for the purpose of giving light to the house. The Lord lights a lamp in order to search for his lost coin, that weak brother or sister that means as much to him on a deep, indescribably personal level as a woman's dowry money in the Middle East (cp. a wedding ring; Lk. 15:8). But the lamp he lights is us. This is yet another example of his parables being intended to fit together. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward⁽³⁾? The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them.

If we don't shine forth the light, both in the world and in the household, we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we were called. Perhaps this is the meaning of Acts 16:10, where Luke says that they preached in Macedonia because they perceived that "the Lord had called us *for* (in order that) to preach the gospel (in this case) unto (the Macedonians)". Whether such an interpretation appeals or not, there are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.). Those who reap the harvest of the Gospel will be rewarded with salvation (Jn. 4:36). Such work *isn't* just an option for those who want to be enthusiastic about it. With what measure we give to others in these ways, we will be measured to at the judgment (Mk. 4:24 and context). 1 Cor. 3:9-15 likewise teaches that the spiritual "work" of "any man" with his brethren will be proportionate to his reward at the judgment. Paul certainly saw his reward as proportionate to the quality of his brethren (2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:19,20; Phil. 2:16; 4:1).

Our attitude to others is simply so eternally important. John's writings are characterized by seeing everything in terms of dualism, black and white, good and evil. He describes those who do not love their brethren as having not seen God, as not being a child of God. Martin Hengel has observed: "How one behaves towards a Christian brother at one's own front door is the deciding factor over faith and unbelief, life or death, light and darkness".

6.2 Responsibility For Others

Mt. 24:42-50 teach that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house", i.e. the senior slave who is responsible for all the others (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The "porter" was commanded to watch (Mk. 13:34); and he represents us all (Mk. 13:37). Yet the Lord was the porter (s.w. Jn. 10:1); we who are in Him are likewise. All that is true of Him is in some way true of us. Watching over God's household is an idea taken from Ez. 3:17; as the prophets were the watchmen of the house of Israel, so each of us are. When the Lord had earlier told this parable, Peter (like us) asked the obvious question: "Speakest thou this parable unto us (the twelve in the first century), or even to all?" (Lk. 12:41). The Lord's basic reply was "To all", although he didn't say so explicitly. Instead he said that if the Lord of the servant was away and came back unexpectedly, late at night, what a joy it would be to him if he found the lights on and the servant working diligently in caring for the others; *any* servant doing that is going to give his Lord joy; 'So, Pete, don't think about whether others are called to do the job, this is the ideal servant, you're all servants, so you get on and try to be like this ideal servant!'. The porter's job was to keep out wolves; the Greek for "porter" literally means 'the watcher' (s.w. Jn. 10:1, another example of how the parables fit together). An apathy in looking out for false teachers means we aren't doing the porter's job well, we are sleeping rather than looking after the household. Mt. 24:43-45 define watching for Christ's return as tending to the needs of our brethren; this is what will lead our hearts towards preparedness for the second coming, this is the result of our awareness of the imminence of the Lord's return.

Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God's judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have no "thank" (Lk. 6:32)- but we will have "thank", or "praise of God" ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters. Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light (Lk. 8:17 RV)- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank. Paul talks of an "account" of good works that is 'increased' by each good work- an account not kept by us, but by the Father (Phil. 4:17). And if we 'increase' in such acts of love, we increasingly have a heart unshaken by the prospect of judgment to come (1 Thess. 3:12).

6.3 The Judgment And The Quality Of Our Brethren

There are a number of passages which indicate that our reward at the judgment will take into account the spiritual quality of those with whom we have had close association. An appreciation of this will have numerous, sobering practical outworkings. To motivate us to rise up to these, we present the evidence:

- Paul explains how that in his preaching he laid the foundation of the Gospel of Christ, but other brethren were building on it, as in his earlier parable he spoke of his planting the seed of the Gospel and Apollos watering it. He warned these 'builder' brethren to "take heed how he buildeth thereupon", because "every man's work (cp. "ye are my work in the Lord", 1 Cor. 9:1) shall be made manifest: for the day (of judgment) shall declare it...the fire [of judgment] shall try every man's work, of what sort it is...gold, silver...wood, hay, stubble...if any man's work abide which he hath built...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" (1 Cor. 3:6-15). This clearly teaches that successful building up of brethren will have its specific reward at the judgment; and that to some degree their rejection will be a result of our lack of zeal, and we will thus lose the extra reward which we could have had for the work of upbuilding. No doubt if the brethren we have laboured hard with to help, are with us in the Kingdom, this will greatly increase our joy- as compared to the brother who has not had such intense fellowship with his brethren during this life, and whose close friends in the ecclesia have been rejected, he himself only barely passing through the fire of judgment himself ("Yet so as by fire").

- For this reason Paul could say that his great joy at the judgment would be to see his dear brethren enter the Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:19,20; Phil. 4:1; 2 Cor. 1:14); not just joy for his own personal acceptance. In this moment, "he that soweth and he that reapeth [will] rejoice together" (Jn. 4:36)- the letter writers, speakers, writers, travellers... Hence Paul "held forth the word of life" to his converts at Phillipi, "that I may rejoice in the day of Christ (through their acceptance) that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain". This explains the intensity of his efforts to strengthen his brethren: "As though God did beseech you by us: we *pray* you...be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). And later he could write from prison "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:10). Thus even in this life John could write: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth...I wish *above all things* that *thou* mayest (spiritually) prosper" (3 Jn. 2-4).

- Paul felt he would have "run in vain" if his converts didn't in their turn preach (Phil. 2:16). The quality of our converts affects the nature of our final reward- for Paul elsewhere uses the image of a race as a symbol for the Christian life which ends in the victory of the Kingdom. But whether he won or lost, he felt that the whole thing would be meaningless if they did not spiritually develop.

- The Spirit gifted elders of the first century "watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy (as they saw their growth) and not with grief" (Heb. 13:17). Now the miraculous gifts are withdrawn, we each have a responsibility for each other as those elders did then- and we may well have to give account of our stewardship of the resources God has given us to help our brethren. Thus in 1 Pet. 5:3,4 the reward for the elders who were good examples to the flock was to receive a great "crown of glory".

- Thus responsibility for those who fall away can only be discharged if we have made every possible effort to win them back. This explains the intensity of Paul's striving for the spiritual success of others:

"Ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable to any of you (at the judgment)".

Therefore "being affectionately desirous of you (i.e. their spiritual welfare?), we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls (cp. Moses' attitude) because ye were dear to us...ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a (spiritual) father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God". Because of their obedience Paul therefore thanked God "without ceasing" (1 Thess. 2:7-13).

"For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith" (1 Thess. 3:5)- such was his concern for their spiritual state.

"We preach, warning every man...that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (at the judgment): whereunto (to this end) I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me" (cp. being a labourer together with God for their salvation, Col. 1:28,29; 1 Cor. 3:9).

And thus when things went wrong: "I am afraid of you (i.e. what your position will result in for both you and me at the judgment?), lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:11).

Practical Response

Some of the practical results of this are now offered:

- To have little contact with one's brethren through isolation of whatever kind means that we cannot be taking this principle seriously. Remember that we can 'go into isolation' by putting in a scanty attendance at meetings, leaving early, avoiding discussion etc.- as well as going into geographical isolation.

- We will be on the look out for spiritual selfishness- building ourselves up through Bible study of our own interest to the detriment of others who cannot benefit, or by doing so to the neglecting of the responsibility to preach. Our Lord Jesus, with His supremely deep and spiritual mind, is surely the highest example of self sacrifice in this.

- It will become natural to truly desire from our hearts the spiritual growth of others in the ecclesia. So the empty conversations will stop, halted by our questioning 'What am I really giving this brother spiritually by this talk?'. The lengthy discussions about the peripheral things of the Gospel will give way to discussion of the Kingdom, the beauty of our Lord's character, how to overcome temptation, the nearness of the Lord's return. And as we talk and perhaps write, our planning, analysis of style and relevance of content will have a verve to it which is born of a desire to serve and give true spiritual help.

- Any we are privileged to 'bring to the truth' become our lifelong responsibility- constant letters, gifts of books and tapes, visits (especially), above all many prayers- especially when you feel tired and depressed yourself- will be a vital necessity. Those who have tutored students up to baptism on the correspondence course have a special responsibility here. There can be no rest for us until our spiritual children are safe in that Kingdom. Surely our love and

care for our spiritual little ones should be comparable with that for our natural children in the things of this life? This is setting a challenge. But the haggard faces of our Lord, his matchless disciple Paul, set us the standard. And surely the selflessness of that great, lonely shepherd Moses brings a lump to many throats: "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin-; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book (of life and salvation, Rev. 13:8) which Thou hast written" (Ex. 32:32). Misguided maybe- but matchless amongst men, glorious in selflessness for the salvation of his flock, a superb type of the Master Himself in this regard.

7. Foretastes Of Judgment

We have explained in *The Judgment Now* that the principles God will use in the final judgment are manifested now, and have been reflected in His previous judgments of men. In our very personal lives, there are foretastes of that future judgment. When we receive forgiveness. This gives a knowledge of the future salvation (Lk. 1:77). Indeed, whenever man meets with God, whenever His ways have contact with those of men (which so often happens in the life of the believer) there is a judgment experience; His holiness, His demands, the imperatives which lay within His very being, reveal quite naturally our failures. The Hebrew word used to describe God's 'meeting' with men is also used in the senses of 'summoning' or gathering to a trial (Ex. 30:6). And positively, the *degree to which* we have responded to Him will be revealed by our meeting with Him. Men fell down before Him when they realized who He was (Lk. 8:28,47), just as they will at judgment day (Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10; Rev. 4:10).

7.1 Trials

The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4). In our suffering for righteousness' sake at the hands of the world, we must "give an answer (s.w. 'a defence, clearing of oneself)... a reason (*logos* , cp. Mt. 12:36)... with meekness and fear... having a good conscience... let him not be *ashamed* " (1 Pet. 3:15,16; 4:16). This is all judgment seat language. And yet we must go through this now in our confrontations with the world. The trials of our faith are like fire which purifies us (1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12). And yet this is the language of the last judgment (Mal. 3:1,2). In our response to trials, we have the outcome of our judgment. We must rejoice *now* in our tribulations with the same joy which we will have when we are accepted by the Lord at the last day (1 Pet. 4:13). Job felt that his calamities were God entering into judgment with him (Job 14:3). If we react properly to trials, we thereby receive now "the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). Thus the question of the degree to which we now are 'saved' is connected with the fact that to some degree, the judgment process is also going on now. If we continue faithful under tribulation, this "is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer" (2 Thess. 1:5). it is a foretaste of judgment.

Trial can easily arise from within our ecclesial experience. Although sects and divisions should not be within the one body of Christ, in another sense there must be such sectarianism that they which are approved may be "made manifest" by their response to it (1 Cor. 11:29)- in anticipation of how we will all be "made manifest" (s.w.) at the judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor.

3:13). In this we see the Divine ecology; nothing is wasted. There must not be divisions; but because they do occur, they are used by God in order to manifest the righteous even now. The children of God and of the devil are manifest *now* by their behaviour; so that the future 'manifesting' of them into the children and angels of the devil and those of God is only a re-statement of the division they have already made in this life by their behaviour (1 Jn. 3:20).

The parable of the sower teaches that "tribulation" is inevitably part of our experience in this life (Mt. 13:21; 1 Thess. 3:3). And yet the same Greek word is used for the "tribulation" of the rejected in the process of condemnation at the last day (Rom. 2:9; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 2:22). It's a powerful logic- we go through tribulation now, or then, in condemnation. The logic of choosing for the Lord today is very powerful.

7.2 Prayer And Bible Reading

The experience of answered prayer is a strong confirmation that we are on the right track to the Kingdom. Prayer is spoken of as entering before the judgment throne of God, as if the prayer is a symbol of the one offering it, and is judged by God enthroned in glory, and then a sentence / judgment is passed by God which the Angels operationalize (Ps. 7:6; 17:2; 35:23; 54:1,2; 109:7; 143:1,2). This is all reminiscent of the last day judgment. Indeed, the Hebrew word for 'intercede' means also 'to meet'; every prayer is a meeting with God (Job 21:15; Is. 47:3; 64:5; Jer. 7:16; 15:11). Phinehas "executed judgment" or, as some translations, 'prayed / interceded' for Israel (Ps. 106:30). Judgment and prayer are linked. The "breastplate of judgment" enabled the High Priest to bear the names of all Israel before the Lord in mediation- and their judgment was carried by him, as it is by Jesus, in the process of mediating for them (Ex. 28:29,30). Romans is full of legal language, of interceding, pleading, finding a favourable verdict etc., and refers this to the judgment and also to the cross. But Romans 8 uses these very ideas in relation to prayer, for in coming before the throne of grace now on account of the Lord's sacrifice, we come in essence before judgment. Coming before the throne of God in prayer (Heb. 9:24; Ps. 17:1,2) is the language of the judgment seat. If we become before His throne and are accepted, it follows that this is a foretaste of the outcome of the judgment for us, were we to be judged at that time. Our boldness before the Father in prayer will be the same attitude we have to Him at the judgment throne (1 Jn. 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14 all use the same Greek word). Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The publican went home after prayer "justified rather than the other". It has been suggested that this reflects "a Semitic idiom which describes...an anticipation of his acquittal in the final judgment" ⁽¹⁾. When we call on the Father, we are judged according to our works (1 Pet. 1:17). Rachel felt that God hearing her voice was Him judging her (Gen. 30:4). The prayer of the poor is judged by God in His response to them (Ps. 10:7,8). Coming boldly before the throne of grace in prayer is again judgment seat language (Heb. 4:15). Our attitude to God in prayer now will be our attitude to Him at the judgment; we are 'bold / confident' before Him now, and we can be 'bold' then (1 Jn. 2:28). Marital strife results in prayers being "hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7), the same word translated 'hewn down' (Mt. 7:19) in a judgment day context. He who "says, Lord, lord" now "will say" the same words at the judgment (Mt. 7:21); our attitude to Jesus in prayer now will be the one we have then. The evidence that the experience of answered prayer is an indicator of God's pleasure with us is quite compelling- even if the answers aren't at all what we expect:

- "These things have I written unto you...that ye may know that ye have eternal life...and this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth

us" (1 Jn. 5:13,14). Answered prayer is the confidence that we have eternal life. Answered prayer means that our joy will be full (Jn. 16:24).

- God's face looks at the righteous if He accepts them (Ps. 11:7; 13:1)- and God turning His face toward men is a very common idiom for Him answering prayer (e.g. 1 Sam. 1:11). Thus acceptability with God and Him answering our prayers are related.

- Conversely, unanswered prayer is associated with God's rejection. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). Thus Nehemiah pleaded for God to unstop His ears and hear the prayer of the repentant remnant (Neh. 1:6).

- The Kingdom prophecy that "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24) is applied to us *now* (Mt. 6:8)- as if answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life. Thus we must believe that we *received* what we ask for already (Mk. 11:24 Gk.).

- "Thou answerest them, O Lord our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them" (Ps. 99:8) again associates forgiveness / acceptability with God and answered prayer.

- Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit, the token of God's acceptance (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). Having spiritual fruit is therefore associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognisance of the fact the righteous have prayed: Ps. 6:8,9; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

- Both David and Christ panicked when they felt their prayers weren't being answered; they felt that this meant they had sinned (Ps. 22:1-4; and consider too 17:15; 24:5; 27:4,8). Clearly they understood answered prayer as a sign of acceptability with God. Christ knew that God *always* heard him (Jn. 11:42). When apparently God didn't hear his prayer for deliverance on the cross, he for a moment supposed that he'd sinned and therefore God had forsaken him.

- The parable of the friend at midnight is surely to be interpreted like this: Friend coming = unexpected crisis; going to friend to get loaves = going to the Father in prayer; fact it is grossly inconvenient (children sleeping etc.) suggests that only because they are good friends will the man get up and give his friend the loaves (Lk. 15:5,6). This very nicely describes the way in which our answered prayers (for others' needs, in the parable) are a statement of the degree to which God counts us as His respected friends.

- Christ is a mediator between God and His people. The fact He mediates successfully for us means that we are His people. We know not what to pray for, but the Lord Jesus intercedes for the right things for us. Often we may pray for something, not receive it, and yet receive what is clearly Divine intervention in another way. This is proof that our prayers are being heard and Christ is mediating for us, even if we don't fully know God's will. Therefore this is proof positive that we *are* God's people.

The experience of answered prayer is therefore part of the upward spiral of confidence and spirituality experienced by the believer. "What things soever ye desire, believe that ye [did] receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mk. 11:24 Gk.) can be read as meaning that we should remember how we received things in the past, and therefore we should have faith that the things we now desire really will be likewise granted. It is for this reason that the prayers recorded in the Psalms constantly look back to previous experiences of answered prayer as a motivation for faith and Hope: Ps. 3:4,5; 44:1-4; 61:5; 63:7; 66:18-20; 77:4-16; 86:13; 94:5,7-19; 116:1; 120:1,2; 126:1,4; 140:6,7. Jeremiah likewise (Lam. 3:55,56). And even the fact other believers had received answered prayers inspired David's faith in prayer (Ps. 74:11-15; 106). "Nevertheless", despite the fact God answers prayer, "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith?" (Lk. 18:8). The implication is that the experience of answered prayer *ought* to develop faith, but such will be the spiritual perils of the last days and the lack of serious prayer, that there may well be no faith in the final generation.

But...?

Probably all readers will now be in a state of doubt; because they will know the experience of answered prayer, but *also* that of unanswered prayer. But let's remember the above reasoning; answered prayer really does indicate our acceptability with God. The unanswered prayers must therefore be the result of:

- Praying for the wrong things, i.e. those things about which we do not know God's will for sure
- Praying without faith, without really intending to receive the answer.

There is the repeated Bible teaching that what we ask for, we will receive. God hearing prayer is an idiom for Him *answering* it; and this is not just the inference of an isolated verse. Consider the parallelism of Ps. 6:8,9:

"The Lord *hath heard* the voice of my weeping

The Lord *hath heard* my supplication

The Lord *will receive* my prayer".

Hopefully we will all have had the experience of a crisis where we have prayed, really prayed, and the answer has miraculously come. Yet this is what real prayer is; and yet we simply can't sustain the intensity. The only real way out is to fall back on the fact that the Lord Jesus intercedes for us with that kind of intensity (Rom. 8:26). We have shown elsewhere that Biblical prayers rarely request things; if we ask according to God's will, we will receive (1 Jn. 5:14); and yet if God's word dwells in us, we will ask what we will, and receive it (Jn. 15:7). Thus if our will is purely God's will, we will receive answers to every prayer. And yet our will is not yet coincidental with His; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the finally unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer.

We earlier pointed out that the judgment will be the time when God 'requires' of us our behaviour. And yet the Hebrew word is used about our enquiring / searching to God in prayer now (Gen. 25:22; Ex. 18:15; Dt. 4:29; 12:5; 1 Kings 22:5), as well as His 'requiring' / searching of us at the last day (Dt. 18:19; 23:21; Josh. 22:23; 1 Sam. 20:16; 2 Chron. 24:22; Ez. 3:20; 33:6,8). There is a mutuality between a man and his God. We must keep and *seek* for His commandments and He will *seek* / *search* our hearts in response (1 Chron. 28:8,9- the same original words are used). The wicked don't *seek* for God because they don't think He will *require* their deeds of them; but because He will *require* them, we should *enquire* / *seek* for Him (Ps. 10:4,13,15- the same word occurs three times). We enquire of Him and He enquires of us, both now and in the last day. This entering into 'enquiry' with our God is what goes on in prayer. In it we have a foretaste of judgment to come.

How we are in life generally is reflected in how God sees our prayers. The prayer of a righteous man is heard; and those whose hearts are wrongly motivated are not (James 4:3; 5:16). Husbands and wives have their prayers hindered if there is tension between them (1 Pet. 4:7; 5:7). Our lives are read as a prayer- this is surely how Paul could speak of praying constantly. And therefore answered prayer reflects our standing in God's eyes here and now.

Bible Reading

Isaiah tells Israel that he personally has threshed them because "that which I have heard from the Lord of hosts... have I declared unto you" (Is. 21:10). Yet threshing is a Biblical figure for judgment. The point is that Israel's response to God's prophetic word was a foretaste of their judgment. Whenever we come before the call of God in His word, whenever we hear the 'judgments' of God, we effectively come before His judgment. 1 Cor. 14:24 speaks of those who hear the prophesied word of God as being "judged" and convicted, and the secrets of their hearts being made manifest, just as they will be at the final judgment. Indeed Paul uses the same words in 1 Cor. 4:5 to describe what will happen at judgment day, and repeats them in 1 Cor. 14:25 about what happens when a man in this life is 'judged' by God's word.

Reflect a while on two consecutive verses in Ez. 8:18; 9:1: "Though they [Israel] *cry in mine ears with a loud voice* [when they are under judgment for their actions, which I now ask them to repent of], yet will I not hear them. He [God] *cried also in mine* [Ezekiel's] *ears with a loud voice*, saying..." Do you see the connection? As we read and hear God's word today, He is passionately crying in our ears with a loud voice. Just imagine someone literally doing this to you! If we refuse to hear it, then we will cry in *His* ears with a loud voice in the last and final day of condemnation. The intensity of *His* appeal to us now will be the intensity with which the rejected plead for Him to change His verdict upon them; and God, like them in this life, will refuse to hear. What arises from this is a simple fact: as we read and hear the pages of Scripture, as we turn the leaves in our Bibles, God is crying in our ears with a loud voice. Our response to Him is a foretaste of our acceptance or rejection at the day of judgment.

The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life.

Notes

(1) F.F. Bruce, *The Message Of The New Testament* (Paternoster, 1994 ed., p. 30).

7.3 The Breaking Of Bread

There are times when for all the Bible reading in the world, the sincere prayer, the attendance of meetings- the flame of a true faith burns dim, the fire of real devotion flickers. And there may not be any particular omission or slip in our spiritual lives which is responsible for it; it simply happens. I would imagine every one of us are bound together by an assent to this. It's simply so. Reader and reader and reader, from Africans to the chain of believers strung out through the vastness of Russia, from little Indian congregations to the huge churches of Australia, from reader to writer- we're all bound together in this realization and admission. We hear words, read articles; and sometimes nothing can really reach us, nothing and nobody shakes us any more. And we are in that state of numb indifference more often and more deeply than we might care to admit. I read recently of how the Church of England interviewed people leaving church on Sunday mornings, asking them what they remembered from the sermon. The results were shocking. And when they were asked what was said the week before, or the month before, or how many sermons they remembered in their lives- it was pathetic. And we shouldn't be too complacent. People in the world around us don't remember sermons, and they don't act on them. And with us, for all our listening to and reading of Christian words, are we really better people? In this lies the limitation, it seems to me, of all platform speaking and article writing. We just don't remember, we rarely act- although, thankfully, we *sometimes* do. But it would be wrong to imply that our forgetfulness is of itself sinful. It would be like saying sneezing was a sin. It's just how we are. But all the same, realising this, we need something to shake us, right to the bone. Thankfully, there is just such a thing, something far beyond human words.

The Word Of The Cross

The blood of Christ is personified as a voice that speaks to us, a better word than the voice of Abel's blood which *cried out* its message (Heb. 12:24 NIV; Gen. 4:10). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on "the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony" (Num. 7:89 NIV). The blood of both old and new covenants enjoined the obedience of God's *word* upon those sprinkled with it (Heb. 9:19,20). The blood and God's word were linked. Rev. 19:13 draws a connection between Christ's title as "the word of God" and the fact His clothing is characterized by the blood of His cross. Hebrews 12:25-29 goes on to draw a parallel between the voice of the Lord's blood and the sound of the earthquake and voice of God when the Old Covenant was inaugurated, a noise that made even Moses exceedingly fear and quake. The voice of the Lord's blood shakes *all* things, the only thing unshaken by it is the Hope of the Kingdom. When 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of "the preaching (Gk. 'the word') of the cross", we have the same idea; the word of the cross, the word which is the cross, preaches to us of itself, as we behold it. Paul declared unto Corinth "the testimony of God", i.e. "Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). This message was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power", "the wisdom of God", "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:17,23,24; 2:4,5). Indeed, "the cross of Christ" is put for 'the preaching of His cross' (1:17). All these things are parallel. The cross is in itself the testimony and witness of God. This is why, Paul reasons, the power of the cross itself means that it doesn't matter how poorly that message is presented in human words; indeed, such is its

excellence and power that we even *shouldn't seek* to present it with a layer of human 'culture' and verbiage shrouding it. In the context of commenting on His impending death, the Saviour said that He came to bear witness unto the Truth; for this cause He came into the world (Jn. 18:37 cp. 12:27, where the cross is again "this cause" why He came). His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God. "The work that the Father gave me to finish...testifies" (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when "it[was] finished" in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God's word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). Beholding the cross and the water and blood that flowed from it, John struggled with the inadequacy of human language: "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true" (Jn. 19:35). Years later he described himself, in allusion to this, as he "who bare record [in the past tense] of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 1:2). He had earlier commented that the Spirit, water and blood of the cross bore witness (1 Jn. 5:8). John seems to be saying that the Lord's final death which he had witnessed was the word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. And as he had been a faithful witness to this, so now he would be of that further revelation he had now seen in the Apocalypse.

The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it. Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service.

The Lord was "the word made flesh"; having spoken to us through the words of the prophets, God now speaks to us in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2 RV). His revelation in that sense hasn't finished; it is ongoing. Right now, the Lord Jesus speaks with a voice like many waters and a sword of flame- according to John's vision of the Lord's post-resurrection glory. John exalts in the fact they touched and saw "the word of life"; the Lord Jesus personally was and is the voice of God's word. When John writes that "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:3), he doesn't mean to say that he is simply giving a transcript of the Lord's spoken words. He is telling men about the person of Jesus, the man he personally knew, and in doing this he was declaring God's word to them. If the very being of the Lord Jesus was the expression of God's word, it is little to be marvelled at that the cross, being as it is the crystallization of all He was and is, should be in an even more intense sense the voice of God to us. And the same process of the word becoming flesh must be seen in us too. We have the witness within ourselves; for the witness is the word and life of Christ, His eternal life, which lives in us (1 Jn. 4:10,11). The Lord Jesus didn't witness to His word by giving out bits of paper or teaching a catechism; He was, in person, the constant exhibition of the word He witnessed to. And with us too. I'm not saying don't write books, give out literature, speak words from platforms...but the more essential witness to men is that of our lives, that witness which wells up from the word and life of Christ within us. The way God's word is made flesh

can be seen in Hosea. His going and marrying a worthless woman is prefaced with the statement that this was the beginning of the word of the Lord (Hos. 1:2). The command to go and marry her was not so much "the word of the Lord" to Israel as his marriage and example of true love to his wife. Hosea's example in his marriage was the word of the Lord to Israel. He made the word flesh. The Lord did this to perfection, and yet like Hosea we in principle must do the same.

The Cross And Self-Examination

As a man or woman seriously contemplates the cross, they are inevitably led to a self-knowledge and self-examination which shakes them to the bone. A number of passages shed light on the way the cross leads to self-examination:

- As Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms, he saw in that beautiful little boy something terrible; for he looked ahead to how His soul would one day be pierced in crucifixion, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:35). The same word is used for how thoughts will be revealed at the judgment (Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). In the piercing of the Son of God, the thoughts of hearts would be revealed. But the question arises: revealed to whom? We may (rightly) assume: to ourselves. But Luke's Gospel emphasizes the ability of the Lord Jesus to know human hearts (5:22; 6:8; 9:2,6,47; 24:38). Could it not be that the cross is used by the Father and Son to know the minds of men? They see in our response to it the real you and the real me. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts" (Prov. 20:27); our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the exhortation, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe- then we simply don't know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 further suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the lord's judgment of us: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord". We expect Paul to say: 'But when we judged ourselves, we are chastened...'. But he doesn't; our judgment is what reveals us to the Lord, and is therefore the basis of His judgment of us. Even if we flunk conscious self-examination from an underlying disbelief that we will attain the Kingdom, then this of itself reveals our hearts to Him. Because of this connection between the breaking of bread and judgment, it would seem that the first century church experienced the physical chastising of the Lord in terms of being struck with sickness and even death *at the memorial meeting* (1 Cor. 11:29,30). Thus at ecclesial meetings- particularly the breaking of bread- the early church confessed their sins and prayed for healing from the afflictions some were smitten with as a result of their sins (James 5:14-16).

- Those who beheld the cross "beat their breasts", Luke records (23:48). The only other occurrence of this phrase is again in Luke, concerning how the desperate, sin-convicted publican likewise beat his breast before God in contrition (18:13). Does this not suggest that those breast-beaters were doing so because "that sight" convicted them of their own

sinfulness? And yet the record of the cross also leads to faith, not only conviction of our desperation (Jn. 19:35, "these things" = the record of the cross).

- Serious meditation upon the Lord's work ought to have this effect upon us. Can we really see his agony, his bloody sweat, without a thought for our response to it? It's impossible to passively behold it all. There is something practically compelling about it, almost in a mystical way. *Because* "Christ died for the ungodly", because in the cross "the love of God" was commended to us, *therefore* "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5,6,8). As the smitten rock gave out water, so the smitten Saviour gave out the water of the Spirit. This link between the shedding of the Lord's blood and the shedding of love in our hearts is surely because an understanding and relation to His sacrifice brings forth in the believer a response of love and spirituality. As the love of God was shown in the cross, so it will be reflected in the heart of he who truly knows and believes it.

- 1 Cor. 11:29 invites us to *discern* the Lord's body at the memorial meeting. The same word occurs in v.28: "let a man *examine* himself". It's too bad that the translations mask this connection. We are to examine / discern the Lord's body, and to do the same to ourselves [\(1\)](#). The two are inextricably related. Meditation upon and analysis of *His* body will lead to *self* examination and discernment. In this lies the answer to the frequent question: 'What should we examine at the breaking of bread? Our own sins, or the facts of the crucifixion / resurrection?'. If we think about the latter, we will inevitably be led to think of the former.

- In Isaiah 6:1-4 we have a vision of "the Lord high and lifted up", enthroned in the temple, with an earthquake, the temple filled with smoke, the doorposts that held up the veil being shaken (with the implication that the veil falls; 6:4). Note how Rev. 15:5-8, building on this passage, has the veil being removed, the Most Holy opened, and the temple filled with smoke. This sends the mind straight to the rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion and the earthquake (Mt. 27:51). The Lord "high and lifted up" (6:1) is a phrase that occurs later in Isaiah (52:13), concerning the crucified Lord, lifted up and exalted "very high" by the cross. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God's grace. So once again, the vision of the cross convicts men of their sin, and yet inspires them to go forward in service. In passing, it should be noted that the vision of Isaiah 6 has evident similarities with those of Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4. These likewise show something of the glory of God in the crucified Christ, and they likewise inspired men like Ezekiel and John in their work of witness and living the life of the spirit in the midst of apostasy. Rev. 4:9 alludes to the Isaiah 6 vision, and applies it to the future judgment. Yet silhouetted within the vision of the judgment throne is a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6), as if before the judgment, all will be aware of the Lord's sacrifice. The accepted will utter praise immediately after realizing the wonderful verdict pronounced for them- in terms of praising the Lord Jesus for his sacrifice, and recognizing their eternal debt to the blood of His cross (Rev. 5:9). The cross and the judgment and reward are connected. This is why the Sephardim called the Day of Atonement, with all its typology of the cross, "the day of judgment". Joel 2:1 speaks of blowing a trumpet to announce the coming of the final

judgment "day of the Lord". The phrase "day of the Lord" usually refers to a Jewish feast, and it was the day of atonement that began with the blowing of trumpets. Thus the day of judgment and the day of atonement are again linked. This day is to be one of "thick darkness", with the sun withdrawn and an earthquake (Joel 2:2,10), just as there was at the cross. Note how Lam. 2:7,22 RV describe the day of God's judgment as "the day of a solemn feast"

The Cross And The Judgment

So Isaiah 6 shows the Lord Jesus as *enthroned in glory* upon the cross. John says that Isaiah saw the Lord *in His glory* at this time. Yet He will sit on His throne of glory when He returns in judgment (Mt. 25:31). So there is a connection between the cross and the judgment. There the Lord sat (and sits) enthroned in judgment. There, "The Lord reigned from the tree" (Ps. 96:10 LXX- the context is of the final judgment, and yet the image is so appropriate to the Lord's death). This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him (cp. "all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28). It is possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24.

The language of Is. 63:1-5 applies with equal appropriacy to both the cross and the judgment. It is the time when the servant gains salvation and redemption for His people, alone, when all others have failed, with stained clothes reminiscent of Joseph's, with all their reference to the death and resurrection of the Lord... and this is far from the only example of where prophecies can apply to both the crucifixion and the final judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfillment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord. There seems to be a link made between the Lord's death and the judgment in Rom. 8:34: "Who is he that judgeth / condemneth? It is Christ that died...", as if *He* and His death are the ultimate judgment.

The cross leads to thoughts being *revealed* (Lk. 2:35); and the judgment process likewise will lead to thoughts being revealed (s.w. in Mt. 10:26; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5). When the disciples got carried away wondering where the future judgment would be and how ever they would get there, the Lord replied that where the body is, thither the eagles naturally gather. One of the

well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body...realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne.

One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn between:

- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in it's most crystallized form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this word is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a

standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain...an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, He would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the *ensign* / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to the Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3).

Is. 45:20-24 speaks of how "all the ends of the earth" will look unto "a just God and a Saviour [Jesus]" and be saved- evident reference back to the brazen serpent lifted up for salvation. The result of this is that to Him "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess" his moral failures, rejoicing that "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength...in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory". These words are quoted in Phil. 2:11 in description of the believer's response to the suffering Saviour. And yet they are quoted again in Rom. 14:10-12 regarding our confession of sin before the Lord at judgment day. The connections mean simply this: before the Lord's cross, we bow our knee and confess our failures, knowing the imputation of His righteousness, in anticipation of how we will bow before Him and give our miserable account at the judgment. And both processes are wonderfully natural. We must simply allow the power of a true faith in His cross to work out its own way in us. At the judgment, no flesh will glory in himself, but only in the Lord Jesus(1 Cor. 1:29). And even now, we glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14).

Is. 45:23-25 cp. Rom. 14:11,12, about our reaction at the judgment seat	Phil. 2, about our reaction to the cross of Christ today
:23 every knee shall bow	:10 every knee shall bow
:23 every tongue shall swear	:11 every tongue shall confess
:24 in the Lord	:11 Jesus Christ is Lord
:25 shall glory	:11 to the glory of God

Clearly our response to the cross is a foretaste of our response to the judgment experience.

There is a powerful practical result of this connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "*For* (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now.

The second coming will be our meeting with the Lord who died for us. To come before Him then will be in essence the same as coming before His cross. Rev. 16 describes the events of the second coming, and yet it is full of allusion back to the cross: "it is done", the temple of heaven opened (16:17); an earthquake (16:18), a cup of wine (16:19). We were redeemed by the blood of Jesus; and yet His return and judgment of us is also our "day of redemption" (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30). Yet that day was essentially the cross; but it is also in the day of judgment. Likewise, we are "justified" by the blood of Jesus. Yet the idea of justification is

a declaring righteous after a judgment; as if the cross was our judgment, and through our belief in the Lord we were subsequently declared justified, as we will be in the Last Day.

The Breaking Of Bread And The Judgment

All the Jewish feasts have some reference to the breaking of bread. The Hebrew writer picks up the image of the High Priest appearing to pronounce the blessing on the people as a type of the Lord's second coming from Heaven bearing our blessing. And yet they also all prefigure judgment in some way. Thus the Mishnah taught: "At four times in the year is the world judged" (quoted in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching Of The Cross*, 3rd ed., p. 266). Because the breaking of bread involves a serious concentration upon the cross, and the cross was in a sense the judgment of this world, it is apparent that the breaking of bread is in some ways a preview of the judgment seat. Our attitude to the cross *and all that is meant by it* is the summation of our spirituality. I normally dislike using alternative textual readings to make a point, but there is an alternative reading of 1 Cor. 11:29 which makes this point so clearly: "He who eats and drinks ['unworthily' isn't in many manuscripts], eats and drinks discernment [judgment] to Himself. Not discerning the Lord's body is the reason many of you are weak and sickly". The eating and drinking at the memorial meeting is a judging of ourselves. It's a preview of the judgment. 1 Cor. 11 seems to be concerning behaviour at the memorial meeting. Time and again the brethren are described as "coming together" to that meeting (:17,18,20,33,34). Believers 'coming together' is the language of coming together to judgment. Where two or three are *gathered*, the Lord is in the midst of them (Mt. 18:20) uses the same word as in Mt. 25:32 concerning our gathering together unto judgment. We should not forsake the "assembling of [ourselves] together" (Heb. 10:25)- the same word as in 2 Thess. 2:1 regarding our "gathering together unto Him". The church being assembled (Acts 11:26), two or three being gathered (Mt. 18:20)- this is all a foretaste of the final gathering to judgment (Mt. 25:32 s.w.). The command to *examine* ourselves (11:29) uses the same word as in 3:13 concerning the way our works will be *tried* with fire by the judgment process of the last day. If members of an ecclesia break bread unworthily, they "come together unto condemnation" (11:34). Yet we must judge ourselves at these meetings, to the extent of truly realising we deserve condemnation (1 Cor. 11:31). We must examine ourselves and conclude that at the end of the day we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 18:10), i.e. worthy of condemnation (the same phrase is used about the rejected, Mt. 25:30). This is after the pattern of the brethren at the first breaking of bread asking "Is it I?" in response to the Lord's statement that one of them would betray Him (Mt. 26:22). They didn't immediately assume they wouldn't do. And so we have a telling paradox: those who condemn themselves at the memorial meeting will not be condemned. Those who are sure they won't be condemned, taking the emblems with self-assurance, come together unto condemnation. Job knew this when he said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into the holes of the rock...for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment.

More positively, because we know God's judgment, we can have some knowledge of our acceptability with God as we face the emblems. Whilst it may be hard to believe, Gal. 6: 4 says that we can prove / judge our own works, and thus have rejoicing in ourselves. Although

self-examination is fraught with problems, and even our conscience can be deceptive at times (1 Cor. 4:4), there is a sense in which we can judge / discern ourselves now.

This connection between the breaking of bread and judgment day is in fact a continuation of an Old Testament theme. Three times a year, the Israelite had to 'go up' to present himself before the Lord at the feasts (Dt. 16:16). He was to 'appear' there- a Hebrew word elsewhere translated approve, discern, gaze upon, take heed, look upon oneself, perceive, shew oneself. His very presence before the Lord would have this effect: he would be revealed openly to God, and he would see himself as he was. This was the intention; and yet Yahweh went on to warn them not to appear before Him "empty", vainly, 'to no effect'. Behold the intense relevance to our appearing before the Lord at our Passover: we can *so easily* present ourselves there 'to no effect', when the intention is that we should be manifesting ourselves to ourselves and to God. The familiar order of service, the well known hymns, the presence of familiar and often family faces...these factors (not wrong in themselves) all encourage us to 'appear' there to no effect. David describes the going up to keep the feasts in unmistakable judgment-seat language: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go [up] into the house of the Lord...the tribes go up...unto the testimony of Israel [cp. the Lord Jesus, the faithful and true witness], to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. For there are set [AV mg. 'do sit'] thrones of judgment, the thrones [an intensive plural- the great throne] of the house of David [i.e. that of Christ]" (Ps. 122:1-5). David wrote this well aware that Messiah was to sit on his throne in Jerusalem at His return and final judgment. Is it going too far to suggest that David saw in the tribes going up to Zion a type of God's people going up to meet the Lord at the final judgment? If so, he understood their response to the invitation to go there as one of *joy*; we go to judgment to praise, joyful at the invitation.

A T-Junction

The very nature of the breaking of bread brings us to a T-junction in our lives. It brings us before the cross, which is in a sense our judgment seat. There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19) ⁽²⁾. Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads. The table of the rejected becomes turned into their recompense or judgment (Rom. 11:9). Indeed, the Lord's supper is a place to which the rejected are invited (Rev. 19:7), or the redeemed (Rev. 3:20). Like the cup of wine, being invited to the Lord's supper is a double symbol. The rejected are given blood to drink (Rev. 16:6)- yet John's record here makes one of his many links back to his Gospel, this time to the way the Lord spoke of giving the believers His blood to drink. This is particularly relevant to the taking of the wine at the memorial meeting. It's a double symbol- we drink either to our condemnation or to our salvation.

And there is no escape by simply not breaking bread. The peace offering was one of the many antecedents of the memorial meeting. Once the offerer had dedicated himself to making it, he was condemned if he didn't then do it, and yet also condemned if he ate it unclean (Lev. 7:18,20). So a man *had* to either cleanse himself, or be condemned. There was no get out, no third road. The man who ate the holy things in a state of uncleanness had to die; his eating would load him with the condemnation of his sins (Lev. 22:3,16 AV mg.). This is surely the

source for our possibility of "eating...condemnation" to ourselves by partaking of the breaking of bread in an unworthy manner. And so it is with us as we face the emblems. We must do it, or we deny our covenant relationship. And yet if we do it in our uncleanness, we also deny that relationship. And thus the breaking of bread brings us up before the cross and throne of the Lord Jesus- even now. It brings us to a realistic self-examination. If we cannot examine ourselves and know that Christ is really in us, then we are reprobate; we "have failed" (2 Cor. 13:5 G.N.B.). Self-examination is therefore one of those barriers across our path in life which makes us turn to the Kingdom or to the flesh. If we can't examine ourselves and see that Christ is in us and that we have therefore that great salvation in Him; we've failed. I wouldn't be so bold as to throw down this challenge to any of us in exhortation. But Paul does. It's a powerful, even terrible, logic. When the people ratified their covenant with Yahweh [cp. the breaking of bread], they had to confirm their agreement that they would be cursed for disobedience to it; and "cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them" (Dt. 27:26). They couldn't opt out of bringing this curse upon themselves for disobedience- if they did, they were cursed.

The Passover was another foretaste of the bread and wine service we participate in. If it was eaten unclean, the offerer ate condemnation to himself. He was to be cut off from the community if he opted out of keeping the Passover; and yet he was also rejected if he kept it unclean. So he couldn't just flunk his need to keep the feast. He *had* to keep it, and he *had* to keep in a clean state. And so with us. To simply not break bread is to deny our relationship with the Lord. But once we commit to doing it, we *must* search our houses for leaven, for those little things which over time will influence the whole direction and nature of our spiritual lives. The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it*, after that sign of the Lord's *especial love* for him, "Satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

Judging / examining ourselves is made parallel with discerning the Lord's body: as if discerning His body on the cross inevitably results in self-examination, and vice versa (1 Cor. 11:28,29). We must *discern* the Lord's body, and thereby *examine* ourselves (these are the same words in the Greek text). If we examine / judge / condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, God will not have to do this to us at the day of judgment. If we cast away our own bodies now, the Lord will not need to cast us away in rejection (Mt. 5:30). There is a powerful logic here. If we pronounce ourselves uncondemned, we condemn ourselves (Tit. 3:11); if we condemn ourselves now, we will be uncondemned ultimately. This is why the Greek word translated "examine" (1 Cor. 11:29) is also that translated "approve" in 11:19 (and also 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 13:7; 2 Tim. 2:15). By condemning ourselves we in a sense approve ourselves. Our self-examination should result in us realising our unworthiness, seeing ourselves from God's viewpoint. There is therefore a parallel made between our own judgment of ourselves at the memorial meeting, and the final judgment- where we will be

condemned, yet saved by grace (James 2:12; 3:1). If we don't attain this level of self-knowledge now, we will be taught it by being condemned at the judgment. This makes the logic of serious, real self-examination so vital; either we do it in earnest, and realize our own condemnation, or if we *don't* do it, we'll be condemned at the judgment. Yet as with so much in our spiritual experience, what is so evidently logical is so hard to translate into reality. The process of judgment will essentially be for our benefit, not the Lord's. *Then* the foolish virgins realize that they didn't have enough oil / spirituality; whilst the wise already knew this (Mt. 25:13). As a foretaste of the day of judgment, we must "examine" ourselves, especially at the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:28). The same word is used in 1 Cor. 3:13 concerning how the process of the judgment seat will be like a fire which *tries* us.

Practical Conclusions

So, in the light of all this, *break bread*. Many readers of these words are isolated or only occasionally meet with their brethren for formal memorial meetings. But *break bread alone*, weekly if you can. I know, from years in semi-isolation myself, how terribly tempting it is to let it slip from a weekly habit. 'I'll do it tomorrow, next week, well soon we'll have a visit / meeting, I'll do it then anyway...'. Whenever the Lord started to speak about His death, the disciples invariably turned the conversation round to another tack. And it seems, from a careful analysis of the crucifixion records, that those who came to behold Golgotha's awful scene couldn't watch it for too long, but went away. And so with us, we have a tendency to defer facing up to the message of the cross as the emblems portray it; and even while we are doing it, to concern ourselves with anything *but* the essential essence of the cross; the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the exhortation... all these things we can so eagerly crowd out the essence of the cross.

When you're in isolation, nobody ever asks you point blank: 'Do you break bread alone every week?'. We may meet together with others occasionally, and when we do we all act as if *of course* this is the norm of our spiritual lives; when it can so easily not be so at all. If the above reasoning has been followed, the breaking of bread is a vital, God-designed part of our spiritual growth. It should shake us to the bone, as it brings us face to shame-bowed face with the crucified Saviour. It isn't a ritual which somehow shows us to be a keen Christian; it's a vital act within our very personal spirituality. And so I will ask you point blank: 'Do you break bread each week?'. Not that actually there's any specific command to do it weekly; but it's so evidently a vital part of our relationship with the Lord that we must ask ourselves why *shouldn't* we do it weekly.

And break bread *properly*, not just to salve your conscience or because it's expected of you, or because it's your psychological routine. Be aware that there is a psychology of religious experience; all religious people like to have some physical symbolism (e.g. bread = body, wine = blood), and especially, some solemn rituals that they observe; and they feel calmer, satisfied, fulfilled after keeping them. On one level, we are religious people like any other religious people, and have the same features. But on another level, true Christianity is *the one and only ultimately true religion*, which by grace we have come to know. Our breaking of bread is *far far more* than *just* religious ritual, although on one level it is that. But we must rise well above this. Israel kept the Passover (cp. the breaking of bread), and yet to God they never *really* kept it. The Corinthians took the cup of the Lord and that of the idols; they broke bread with both (1 Cor. 10:21). But they were told they *could not* do this. They took the cup of the Lord; but not in the Lord's eyes. They ate the Lord's supper; but they had to be told that they were *not* really eating it (1 Cor. 11:20). They turned *His* supper into their *own* supper.

They did it, but for themselves. And so in spiritual terms, they didn't do it (1 Cor. 11:20,21). And so we must just accept the real possibility that we can break bread on the surface, but not break bread. We've probably all done this. Don't let it become the norm. Likewise Israel had to be asked the rhetorical question: "*Have ye* offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years?" (Am. 5:25). Because they *also* worshipped Molech, their keeping of the feasts wasn't accepted. So I can ask again: Do you *really* break bread?

So not only must we break bread by all means; we must allow ourselves the time and collected mind to enable us to do it as we are intended to. Like baptism, we can't keep in mind at the same time all the wonderful, high things which the service means to us whilst we perform it. But we should try, as far as we can, to be as aware as possible of all these things. So may I say some things which ought to be obvious:

- Don't noisily dash in to a memorial meeting late. Try to take your place with as little disturbance of others as possible. Bring your kids with you by all means; but try to make every reasonable effort to keep them from unduly distracting others. Try to remove all distractions, as far as you can, and minimize the possibility of interruption if you are breaking bread alone at home.

- Prepare your mind before the meeting. Realize something of what you are about to do. We could *all* ensure we sit in silence for at least five minutes before the meeting starts.

- If you are making comments on the readings or giving an exhortation, or simply seeking exhortation for yourself from the readings, concentrate on the things of the Lord Jesus and His cross. He is to be found in all the Scriptures. Don't use this time as a platform for airing your crotchets or hang ups about others (even if only within your own mind).

- Don't start talking (or thinking) about the things of this life the moment the last prayer finishes.

- Be sober, in view of the seriousness of what we are doing. Don't allow a spirit of levity to creep in to the proceedings. We are going through a dummy run of judgment day. We stand before the Lord's cross.

- And yet be joyful, as far as you can be. But don't let the expression of that joy in music take you away from the focus of the meeting. Intricate part-singing in the Western world and repetitive, rhythmic choruses used elsewhere aren't wrong *per se*; but if glorified in themselves they *can* take us away from the focus, the Head, which is the Saviour Lord Himself, and our desperate gratitude for His love.

- Don't hold yourself back during the meeting; allow yourself to make those mental commitments you are moved to. Our flesh almost makes us feel embarrassed or insincere if we resolve to make a major (or minor) change in our lives. Let true devotion and response rise above this. We must just accept that the memorial meeting *is* an emotional experience; it can be nothing else, to the devoted heart. And there's nothing wrong with this. Don't be too proud (brethren) to shed a tear.

And especially. *Don't separate the act of breaking bread from the rest of your life.* It should be the natural flow-on from your daily meditation on the Lord's love. The mind set we have in that quiet hour should in principle be that which we have all our hours and days; for we

live as men and women under judgment, ever confronted and comforted by that love of the Father and Son, so great, so free. It demands by its very nature and existence our self-examination and response, far more than just one hour / week.

Notes

(1) In the Corinthian context, the body of Christ is to be understood as the ecclesia. 1 Cor. 12 is full of this figure. The need to discern the Lord's body at the breaking of bread means that we must go beyond reflection upon His physical body. We must recognize / discern His ecclesia too. The immediate context of 1 Cor. 11 is of unbrotherly behaviour at the memorial meeting. If we fail to recognize / appreciate / discern the Lord's physical body, we will fail to recognize His brethren. And if we do this, we have made ourselves guilty of His body and blood, we have crucified Him again. This is why I plead with those who use the breaking of bread as a weapon for division within the Lord's body to think again. The body which we must discern at the breaking of bread evidently has some reference to the ecclesia. We thereby place ourselves in a dangerous position by refusing to share the emblems with others in the body, and disfellowshipping those who do so.

(2) The very structure of the Hebrew language reflects this. Thus the Hebrew 'baruch' means both 'blessed' and 'cursed'; 'kedoshim' means both 'Sodomites' and 'saints'.

8. SUMMARY: Wise And Foolish Virgins

The chapter division between Matthew 24 and 25 is unfortunate. The description of the rejected at the judgment given in Mt. 24:51 is followed straight on by Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (i.e. entry into it) be likened unto ten virgins...". This may suggest that the rejected will have time for reflection - *then* they will see the 'likeness' between their position and the parable of the virgins. This parable follows that of the negligent steward who will be rejected at the judgment (Matt. 24:45), implying that a lack of proper spiritual care by the elders of the latter-day ecclesias results in the lack of oil in the lamps of the rejected.

There can be little doubt that the parable is intended to have a specific latter-day application. The virgins "took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1), but settled down to slumber due to his unexpected delay. Then "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matt. 25:6). Obviously there is a general application of the parable to all believers who at the time of their baptism have oil in their lamps - which needs continual topping up by our freewill effort. The whole of the believer's probation should therefore be in the spirit of a journey to the judgment / wedding, believing that Christ is at the door. The 'arising' of the virgins in Matt. 25:7 would then refer to the resurrection.

"The time is fulfilled..."

However, a more detailed interpretation is possible when the parable is applied to the last days. The virgins going forth to meet Christ more comfortably fits the scene of the time of the second coming. The parable would suggest that after this first definite intimation of the

Lord's return there is a period of unexpected delay before the midnight cry is made. This great cry presumably equates with the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:17 at the Lord's return and the resurrection. From this it follows that the faithful will have a separate gathering to judgment than the unworthy; Christ "shall gather together his *elect*" (Mt. 24:31), the unworthy then wish to be with those who have oil, putting their noses in a Bible for a change, and *then* come to the judgment. The wise trim their lamps and go to meet Jesus. The same Greek word translated 'trim' is rendered 'adorned' in Rev. 21:2, concerning the bride of Christ (the wise virgins) "coming down from God out of Heaven (a literal descent from the sky, having been snatched away in clouds?), prepared as a bride *adorned* for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The intimation that the second coming is imminent could be due to a number of factors:

- The open presence of 'Elijah'. The cry of the watchman would be in the spirit of the Elijah prophet.
- The possible possession of the miraculous spirit gift by the Elijah ministry.
- The onset of active persecution
- The Arab domination of Israel
- Possibly the appearance of a literal sign in the heavenly bodies heralding the Lord's coming; the sign of the Son of man.

"The bridegroom *tarryed*" (Mt. 25:5) uses the same Greek word as in Mt. 24:48, "My Lord *delayeth* his coming". The bridegroom/Lord *will* delay - what was wrong with that statement was the attitude with which it was made. The implication is 'The Lord's definitely delaying, so I have ample opportunity to indulge in worldliness and take out all my grievances against my brethren'. It would seem that the holocaust period (3.5 years?) follows the intimation that the Lord's coming is imminent. The spiritual high that all the believers will have at the time of this intimation is indicated by all the virgins initially having enough oil. However, the ensuing holocaust period will be a time of strife within the ecclesia, the stewards beating the fellowservants, the oil (i.e. true spirituality developed by the word) running low. Present trends amongst us indicate that if the community were highly pressurised, such a scenario could quickly occur. Thus the position in spiritual Israel will match that among Jewry.

Oil?

At this juncture it is necessary to define more closely what the oil represents. The ten virgins each having lamps may connect with the parable of the ten servants each having the talents of the true knowledge of God (Luke 19:13). Those who were "wise" had oil in their lamps; our Lord earlier defined "the wise" as those who truly obeyed the word (Mt. 7:24). By contrast, the "foolish" without oil are those who only superficially respond to it (Mt. 7:26). The parable of the talents following on from that of the oil lamps suggests that the talents - symbolic of our appreciation and application of the word - are to be equated with the oil. Those whose spiritual lamps go out during the tribulation "took no oil with them" after the first intimation that the second coming is about to occur (Mt. 25:3). Thus they will rely on the feeling of hope that this intimation gives rather than on the continual study of the word during the delay period. These contrasting attitudes are perhaps hinted at by the wise taking their oil first, *then* their lamps; whilst the foolish grabbed their lamps but discounted the need for more oil (Mt. 25:3,4). Thus those who presume too much upon their own personal

worthiness, thinking that they are spiritually in "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3), fail to properly apply themselves to the oil of the word.

Sleep And Slumber

Both wise and foolish "all slumbered and slept" (Mt. 25:5). This slumbering can only be seen in a bad light. The exhortation at the end of the parable is to "watch", i.e. to keep awake rather than be sleepy (Mt. 25:13). We have earlier commented on the many parallels between 1 Thess. 5 and Matt. 24 and 25. 1 Thess. 5:2,6,7 speaks of the unworthy in the last days as being surprised by the midnight coming of Christ due to their being asleep. Their being "drunken in the night" (1 Thess. 5:7) matches the similar description of the weak elements of the latter-day ecclesias in Matt. 24:49. And yet 1 Thess. 5 goes on in this context to say that Christ died for us so that whether we wake or sleep, we may be accepted with Him. This is positivism beyond measure; He *wants* to save even those who slumber.

"Let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6) matches our Lord's "Watch, therefore" (Mt. 25:13). This command to watch seems to have a conscious connection with the Lord's urgent plea to the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane to "watch and pray" (Mt. 26:38), indicating that they at that time typify the latter day believers; about to fellowship their Lord's sufferings during the holocaust period, confused, failing to see the urgency of the situation. The disciples doubtless started to obey their Lord's command to watch and pray, but then drifted off into sleep. Watching and praying are often associated; a real *knowing* of God through dynamic prayer is the real way to be watchful for the second coming. The foolish virgins realize this all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer...they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge". Having a laid back attitude to developing a real knowledge of the Lord through the oil of the word is therefore effectively hating knowledge.

Candles In The wind

Apparently the "lamps" which the parable is based upon had to be replenished every 15 minutes or else they went out. The "wise" - relative to the foolish, anyway - can therefore be pictured as dozing for five or 10 minutes, then jolting back into consciousness and refilling their lamps, while the foolish snored on. This presents a powerful picture of the frail spirituality which will characterise the faithful remnant just prior to the second coming. The Lord asks the faithful remnant to "look up, and lift up your heads" (Lk. 21:28) when the signs of the last days just *begin* to come to pass. There seems a designed connection with this parable of the virgins, spoken only minutes later: in actual fact, he foresaw that *even at his coming*, even the faithful would be sleeping. Even now our real faith is but as candles in the wind. There is an urgent need for us each to analyse and appreciate what real spirituality is, to spotlight the few times and ways in which we show it, and to work on these. Such self-knowledge and realisation will be worth its weight in diamonds during the delay period.

This said, it will ultimately be the midnight cry which reveals our true spiritual state to us. Each virgin arose and with heightened awareness analyzed the state of their oil. The wise will have the faith to quickly prepare themselves to meet Christ - they "trimmed their lamps", pulling out the burnt strands in the wick and adding oil. The foolish panic - "Give us of your

oil"! In that moment it will be evident to all in the ecclesia who has been wise and who foolish.

Those who have consistently dashed through their Bible reading, or skipped it completely, will then realize their folly; the parable even suggests that they desperately try to associate themselves with those they know to be spiritually strong, somehow hoping that they might be covered by their spirituality. "Our lamps are going out" (Mt. 25:8 R.V.) shows that they are not totally without oil, but they feel the oil - what faith they had - ebbing away as the reality of Christ's return and the judgment dawns upon them.

"Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9) may well be obeyed by the foolish in the form of getting their noses down to some serious, personal Bible study for a change. The point has to be made that there appears to be a frightening lack of this kind of oil-gathering amongst a considerable section of our community. "Go...and buy" is surely rhetorical- the rejected know it's too late for them to actually rectify their position, but the process of judgment day will show the rejected how it would have been possible to enter the Kingdom. Likewise the Lord will tell the one talent man: 'Why didn't you, for example, put the money into the bank...?'

Loving His appearing

The foolish virgins, for all their initial spiritual confidence shown by not taking oil with them, lacked that true love for Christ's appearing which enabled the wise to immediately go forth to meet him. This accords with the description of the righteous as opening the door *immediately* in response to the 'knock' of the second coming (Lk 12:36). "Lord, Lord, open to us" (Mt. 25:11) being met with the response "I know you not", connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not...in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ.

By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. Through our correct response to the oil of the Word, our Lord knows us. The rejected will have done many works for Christ without really knowing Him. Having insufficient oil in their lamps, they have but a semi-spirituality rather than a total dearth of oil. Only by a personal knowledge of our Lord, through having the oil of His Spirit and His word in our hearts, can we be accepted.

Appendix 1:

God And Time

As we meditate on the implications of the basic doctrines of the Gospel of the Kingdom, a number of questions arise which, in my opinion, all have basically the same answer:

- *Will the judgment seat involve us all queuing up, waiting to be judged? How will we all come before Jesus individually?*

- *Why does the NT often speak of "the resurrection" as if it means resurrection plus judgment plus immortalization, rather than just referring to the physical act of resurrection from the grave? Why do passages like Is. 26:16 speak of the resurrection as if it is the reward, with no mention of the judgment?*

- *Why do so many of the prophets, Isaiah especially, appear to 'jump around' in their prophecies, from (e.g.) prophecies concerning their own time to the Kingdom to the first coming of Jesus etc. These breaks in context often seem to make the prophecies appear disjointed. The well known prophecy of Christ's birth in Mic. 5:2 is prefaced by a statement that Messiah would be smitten upon the cheek with a rod (Mic. 5:1). In our linear way of thinking, we'd expect this to be the other way around- Messiah is born, grows up, suffers, dies... but God doesn't think and write like that!*

- *Why does the Bible text keep changing tenses so quickly (e.g. Isaiah 53)?*

My comment on all of these questions is that God is beyond the limitation of time, and therefore He expresses Himself in a time-less way. The Hebrew language reflects something of God's character; and it has no word for 'time' in the sense of duration- thus phrases like 'the days of x' are used to describe a lifetime, reign or period of activity. God existed 'before eternal times', i.e. before time began to be reckoned by aeons (Tit. 1:2). This is very difficult for us to even begin to understand. There is no shadow caused by turning with God (James 1:17 Gk.); He is beyond the concept of time as created by the revolving of our planet round the sun. "...They that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end..." (1 Cor. 15:23,24) is an example of where 1000 years of human time is skipped over between two verses. God simply doesn't see time as we do. With Him, time can not only be compressed so that a thousand years is as a day, but also dilated so that one day becomes one thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8). What God plans and purposes is effectively done at that moment of planning, so certain is His will and power. Therefore He speaks of those things which do not exist physically as if they do (Rom. 4:17). What will be, is now, from God's perspective. The Angel commented that God's words of future prophecy are "true and faithful...they are come to pass" (Rev. 21:6 RV). They are as good as done as soon as they are uttered, so certain are they of fulfillment. Thus 1 Kings 14:14: "The Lord *shall* raise him up a king...but what? Even now". This is the way to understand those passages which appear to teach that both Jesus and ourselves existed physically before our birth. God doesn't completely express Himself in our terms and language (although of course to some degree He does). There is a degree to which God is God, and He expresses Himself as He is. We must bring ourselves to accept His perspective. Indeed, faith is the ability to believe that what God has said will actually happen physically, and that therefore we can live as if we see that future physical event as actually having happened. In other words, faith is about adopting God's time-less perspective. Israel were told to separate themselves from Babylon because God had purposed to destroy that nation; they were asked to believe that what God had planned, He would actually do (Jer.

51:12), and therefore they should treat Babylon accordingly in their attitudes. Appreciating that God is beyond time, not just an everlasting being but without time, helps us to understand a whole range of Biblical issues.

The Judgment

We are taught that we must each appear personally before the Lord Jesus at the judgment, and have some kind of two-way dialogue with him concerning events in our lives. He is our Lord, and He will be our judge; Christ, not Angels, has been appointed by the Father as our judge. It is hard to believe that He will delegate authority for judgment to the Angels. He will confess our name to them after our meeting with him, and in any case, he will be our judge on account of the fact that he was the son of man, that he had our nature, not that of Angels. It would seem inappropriate if He delegated our judgment to Angels. If we must each appear personally before the Lord Jesus, we have two options: either time is collapsed so that we all appear before Christ individually, *or* we appear before him in real time, in which case there must be some kind of queue for judgment, and a period of several months at least. This creates so many Biblical and practical problems (e.g. what will we wear or eat while waiting) that I would reject it in favour of the idea that the meaning of time will be collapsed at the Lord's coming. Indeed, it seems that the whole process of resurrection, judgment and immortalization may take place in a split second, although it will seem far longer.

If we could break this split second into real time, there would be the process of mortal emergence from the grave, judgment involving a period of time, then the righteous being grouped at Christ's right hand side, and then they would all be immortalised together. "Come...inherit the Kingdom" is spoken to the whole group of sheep; we will be immortalised together, at the same time. If we are all judged individually in real time, this is impossible. Some would be immortalised months or years after others. This collapsing of time at the Lord's return would explain why "the resurrection" is sometimes used as a description of the whole process of resurrection, judgment and immortality (even in the OT-Ps. 1:5 LXX; 24:3), and why 2 Thess. 1:7-9 speaks as if the judgment of the wicked and the coming of Christ from Heaven are simultaneous. We are the firstfruits (Rev. 14:14), and yet in some ways the Lord Jesus was the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20,23). Because we are in Him, and because God sees the gap between His exaltation and ours as irrelevant, we are called "the firstfruits" too. This is why Rom. 1:4 Gk. and 2 Cor. 5:14,15 RSV speaks as if ultimately there is only one resurrection: that of the Lord Jesus, in which we had a part as being in Him. The appearing of Christ is paralleled with our appearing with Him in glory (Col. 3:4)- because effectively, when He returns, we will appear with Him in the same moment. And the collapsing of time would explain difficulties such as how we can come before the judgment throne of glory when we ourselves are seated there (Mt. 19:28 cp. 25:31); and how the judgment of the world seems (from some Scriptures) to be simultaneous with the judgment of the household.

The collapsing of time would also mean that the place of judgment is irrelevant. There are practical problems with the idea of judgment in Jerusalem or Sinai. If it all happens in real time, Christ would come, raise the responsible dead, take us to (e.g.) Jerusalem, assemble us there for several months or years, and one by one grant us immortality. There seems no space for this in the Biblical description of events of the last days. Christ will sit on David's throne in glory; but this is where the judgment will occur.

If the judgment is in real time, we must be judged before Christ is enthroned, i.e. the Kingdom is established. But Mt. 25 teaches that we will come before Him *already enthroned* for judgment. The idea of "meeting" Christ at judgment employs a Greek phrase which distinctly means to go out to welcome a respected visitor ⁽¹⁾. Its three Biblical occurrences are all in this context (Acts 28:14,15; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Mt. 25:6,10). This would suggest that the faithful go out to meet the Lord and accompany Him to the judgment. But this is rather difficult to square with the idea of good and bad coming together before the judgment and being separated from each other *there*. It is almost as if these descriptions are designed to push the thoughtful reader away from seeing the judgment as occurring in real time! Christ comes with the saints to save Israel from their enemies. Unless there is a secret coming of Christ to gather and judge the saints and then he is revealed to the world, this just isn't possible. And the idea of a secret coming of the Lord of glory just cannot be reconciled with the clear descriptions of his coming in the NT. The coming of Christ in glory with the saints with him to establish the Kingdom *is* the coming of Christ.

Therefore it would be fitting if the whole process of Christ coming, resurrecting and judging his people, all happens in a moment of real time. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: "The morning is come and also the night". This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence. If indeed time is collapsed, this would enable all these prophecies to come true, but not in real time. Babylon is to be punished with famine in one day; yet famine is a process (Rev. 18:8). In one day her judgments come, and yet also in one hour (18:10). Surely the lesson is that time is compressed. The events around Christ's return were prefigured by those at the time of Joshua's conquest of the land. Some of the records of his campaigns require a huge amount to have been achieved by his soldiers within around 36 hours. The comment that so much was achieved "at one time" (Josh. 10:42) may hint at a compression of time to enable it. "The sun stood still" may well be intended to teach that the meaning of time was collapsed by God, rather than that the sun literally stood still (Josh. 10:12,13). And the sun standing still over Gibeon is mentioned in Is. 28:21 as typical of the time when Yahweh will do "His strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act" in the last days. The same may be true when the shadow went back for Hezekiah. The movement of the planets need not have been altered; the meaning of time was simply suspended. Rev. 8:12, also speaking of the last days, says that "the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise". Could this mean that one day and one night last only two thirds of their usual length, whilst the judgments of the fourth Angel are poured out upon the land? I would suggest that the Lord had in mind the suspension of time when he asked that "the hour might pass from him" in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:35); rather than asking to escape the cross in this request, he was perhaps asking for it all to happen in only a moment of real time.

Let us not think that the collapsing of time here suggested only means that what would otherwise take a long time actually takes a short time. It may be that what is in fact a very short time feels like much longer. Thus Mt. 25:10 describes the rejected as foolish virgins going to get oil, and it taking so long that the door was shut and they were eternally outside

the marriage. In real time, this may just be a momentary desire to have been more filled with the Spirit in the day of opportunity. But the whole process of realising this will *feel* to them as if it takes a long time to work out.

One final point concerning the judgment. God being beyond time, He is also beyond space. In terms of metaphysics, if one dimension is collapsed (e.g. time), so is another (e.g. space). The whole judgment process could take place on the head of a pin, or in a large desert. Space as well as time can be collapsed. Ezekiel in his visions and contact with God's people both in the land and in captivity moved at ease within both time and space. And this also needs to be remembered as we try to meditate upon what might actually happen at the day of judgment. These things must be borne in mind when we consider the references to the graves being opened and the dead coming forth, or the sea giving up the dead to be judged. This doesn't necessarily mean that dead bodies will come floating up through the oceans. We are not helped in our perception by orthodox pictures of sleepy saints coming out of their graves yawning and rubbing their eyes. The descriptions of graves opening and bodies floating up through the oceans are surely expressing the ultimate reality of literal resurrection and re-creation of our bodies in human terms. The Lord's promise that He would not break bread again until He did it with us in the Kingdom (Mk. 14:25) seems to require a literal fulfillment. In a non-literal sense He breaks bread with His people even now. Therefore His statement that He would not do it again until the Kingdom seems to refer to His literal taking of bread and wine. Likewise His promise that He would literally gird Himself and come forth and serve us at a future banquet has to be linked in with this (Lk. 12:37). If all the faithful are to be gathered together to a meal, and literally eat bread and drink wine with the Lord, this suggests all sorts of logistical and practical 'problems'. It is easier to understand that space and time will have different meanings at the judgment and after.

Light On Other Areas

God being beyond time sheds some light on a number of otherwise difficult issues:

- Grasping God's view of time means that we will see the Kingdom as immortality, not everlasting life. The eternity of our future existence is not the big theme of the Bible; it is "God manifestation, not human salvation", in the words of John Thomas. The process of eternity, the life and Kingdom of God, is already going on now; the tree of life *is* now (not 'will be'; Greek tenses are precise) in the midst of the paradise of God, at least from God's perspective (Rev. 2:7). We will have no need of the sun, for the light of God's glory will replace our concept of time (Rev. 21:23). Indeed, "the time of the end" can be read as "the end of time" (Dan. 12:4,9). There will be "time (Gk. *chronos*, the idea of time) no longer" (Rev. 10:6). The image of Dan. 2 is destroyed together by the Lord's return; each metal in some sense exists at his coming. Rather than meaning that each of those empires must have an end time revival, this may be teaching that the whole concept of human history and time will be ground to powder by the advent of the Kingdom. One day, when we are then with the Lord, will be like a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8)- there will be no comparison between our present view of time and what will then be. Even in the Millennium, the plowman shall overtake the reaper (Am. 9:13)- which may refer to the collapsing of time, rather than just being a figure of fecundity. Before people pray, they will be heard (Is. 65:24- although this is our present prayer experience too, Mt. 6:8). Our focus should therefore be more on the *quality* and *nature* of the Kingdom life, rather than the mere eternity of it.

- At the frontier of scientific investigation, modern physics has discovered that 'time' varies; time warps have been linked to the nature of matter in the material cosmos. Consider some of the conclusions of Paul Davies in his book *God And The New Physics*:

"The revolution in our conception of time which has accompanied the theory of relativity is best summarised by saying that, previously, time was regarded as absolute, fixed and universal, independent of material bodies or observers. Today time is seen to be dynamical. It can stretch and shrink, warp and even stop altogether at a singularity. Clock rates are not absolute, but relative to the state of motion or gravitational situation of the observer...Modern instruments are so sensitive that even the Earth's gravitational timewarp can be detected by clocks in rockets...Time really does run faster in space, where the Earth's gravity is weaker. The stronger the gravity, the stronger the timewarp...There is no universal present moment...One inevitable victim of the fact that there is no universal present moment is the tidy division of time into past, present and future. These terms may have meaning in one's immediate locality, but they can't apply everywhere...time is not simply there, but is itself part of the physical universe. It is "elastic" and can stretch or shrink according to well-defined mathematical laws which depend on the behaviour of matter. Also, time is closely linked to space, and space and time together express the operation of the gravitational field. In short, time is involved in all the grubby details of physical processes just as much as matter".

To these ideas may be linked the discovery that the universe is expanding, growing outwards from a beginning of matter which we would understand as the creation of Gen. 1:1. This would suggest that the meaning of time has likewise changed; before creation as we now know it, time as we now experience it simply didn't exist. The connection between space and time also explains why if time is collapsed at the judgment, space likewise will be.

- William Barclay (*New Testament Words*) has a very interesting section on the word *aionios*. He cites examples in contemporary literature where it is used not of indefinite continuance, but simply of that which is beyond time. "To attach eternity to the created was impossible. So He (God) made time as a moving image of eternity...the essence of the word *aionios* is that it is the word of the eternal order as contrasted with the order of this world...the word can be properly applied to no one other than God...the life of God". This helps us understand how 'eternal punishment' is not in fact punishment of unending continuance. And yet eternal punishment is set as the antithesis to eternal life (Mt. 25:46); this itself shows that "eternal" is not to be understood as unending continuance. For the wicked will not be punished for ever—they will die and cease existing. The Lord Jesus *is* eternal life (1 Jn. 5:20); this alone points us to see "eternal life" as more a description, a quality of life, rather than indefinite continuance. Those who "seek for glory, and honour, and immortality" are granted eternal life, as though "eternal life" comprehends all these things for which they seek (Rom. 2:7).

- During the judgment upon Egypt, "at Tehaphnehes also the day shall withdraw itself" (Ez. 30:18). This will occur when Egypt comes to know the Lord through His judgments (Ez. 30:19)—and this can only refer to the last days. So again, it would seem that some sort of collapse of time will occur during the judgment period.

- The way in which we are seen by God as if we are already saved on account of our being in Christ is also explicable by appreciating His timelessness. Rom. 8:29 says that the whole process of our calling, justification and glorification all occurred at the foundation of the world. In God's eyes, those of us in Christ are already saved and glorified. The Lord spoke of

"other sheep I have" (Jn. 10:16) when at that time we never existed. Likewise in God's eyes there was only one resurrection, that of the Lord Jesus. The resurrected Lord is compared to the sheaf of firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20), as if those in him rose with him and were glorified together, in God's eyes. Perhaps Jesus had this in mind when he said : "I *am* the resurrection". Of course in real time there is a gap between the Lord's resurrection and our own. To God, this gap is unimportant, in some sense it doesn't even exist. And to the eye of faith at a believers' funeral too. This explains why Paul so often speaks of the resurrection as meaning the whole process of resurrection, judgment and glorification (e.g. Rom. 8:11), and why he speaks of the dead being resurrected incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:42-44,52), and writing as if they presently exist (e.g. Heb. 9:15 "are called" rather than 'were called'). Indeed, the NT speaks of the whole resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus as if it were one event- even though there was a gap between them (Acts 2:32,33; 5:30,31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; 1 Pet. 3:21,22); and the Lord Himself speaks of how Messiah would suffer and enter into glory (Lk. 24:26), apparently skipping over the mechanics of the resurrection. And this is how our glorification is spoken of- there will be a resurrection and judgment, but the focus is not always upon them. It explains how Paul saw the trumpet blast as the signal of both the call to judgment (1 Thess. 4:17) and also the moment of glorification (1 Cor. 15:52). And yet God actually saw us as saved right from the beginning of the world; He purposed, and effectively it was done. Perhaps this is the hardest thing our faith has to grapple with. "Knowing the time, that for us, the hour already is to be aroused out of sleep" and be resurrected (Rom. 13:11 YLT) may mean (contrary to the implication of the AV) that for us who are with God now, the time of resurrection and salvation is now with us, and therefore we should live lives which answer to this fact. The day of salvation is in that sense *today* (2 Cor. 6:2 Gk.). So sure is God's word that it is as if the concept of a delay between its utterance and the fulfillment is something not to be considered. Thus "the vision" is an ellipsis for 'the fulfillment of the vision' in Hab. 2:3. Although our day by day spirituality fluctuates, God is beyond time. He sees us either as an essentially good tree bringing forth good fruit, or as essentially bad (Mt. 7:23). Let's try to adopt this perspective in how we view the daily failures of our brethren, our partners, our children...

- Bible students have long recognized a 'prophetic perfect' tense in Hebrew, whereby the future is spoken of as having already happened. This not only reflects the utter certainty of God's words coming true, it also reflects God's way of looking at issues without time, in the sense that God is beyond time. Thus when He told Abraham that He *had made him* (not 'will make you') a great nation, this reflected the way that God already saw Abraham as a father of many. Things which don't yet exist for us do *actually* exist for God (Rom. 4:17). The Law was a *shadow* of Christ (Col. 2:17) even when Christ didn't physically exist. Yet a shadow implies the real existence of the object. The Law reflected God's knowledge of the Lord Jesus; to Him, the Lord did in that sense pre-exist, although we know that literally He didn't. Likewise Levi was seen by God as paying tithes whilst he was still as it were within Abraham's body (Heb. 7:9,10), and the dead believers are likened to spectators in a stadium, cheering us on as we race the race of this life (Heb. 12:1) ⁽²⁾.

- There are some passages which imply the Lord Jesus was somehow conscious during His three days in the grave. Evidently this was not the case. And yet the resurrection loosed the birth-pangs of death, Peter said (Acts 2:34). Those three days are likened to labour, in the Lord's case bringing forth life through death. Yet He was dead and unconscious. But to the Father, He saw things simply differently. Sometimes God speaks from His timeless perspective, at other times His words are accommodated to us. Likewise from the Father's

perspective, the spirit of Christ went and preached to the people of Noah's day at the time of His death. Yet this didn't happen in real time in such a way.

- It is difficult to understand the Biblical descriptions of the pillars of fire and cloud that accompanied Israel. Ex. 13:21 says that there was a pillar of cloud in the day time and a pillar of fire by night. But at the time of the Exodus, there was a pillar of cloud for the Egyptians and a pillar of fire to give light in the night for the Israelites (Ex. 14:20,24). Could this mean that the meaning of time was collapsed at this time? It was night for the Israelites but daytime for the Egyptians? Is. 42:16, amidst many exodus / Red Sea allusions, speaks of how God makes the darkness light before His exiting people. The many Johanine references to the Lord Jesus being a light in the darkness for His followers would then be yet more elaborations of the idea that the Lord Jesus is the antitype of the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt (Jn. 8:12; 12:35,46). Num. 9:21 says that the pillar of cloud was with the Israelites at *night*, and sometimes it was taken up in the night and they therefore had to move on. Does this mean that there were times when the meaning of time was collapsed during their journey, and the night was made as the day (perhaps Ps. 139:12 alludes to this experience)? When Yahweh came down on Sinai, He was enveloped in a *cloud of fire*- suggesting that there was no day and night for Him (Ex. 24:15-17; Dt. 5:22). Yahweh's theophany to Ezekiel included a similar feature of cloud, glory and fire together (Ez. 1:4), as it will in the future (Is. 4:5)- perhaps another indicator that time will be collapsed around the time of the Lord's return.

- For the elects' sake, the days to the second coming *will be* shortened (Mt. 24:22); but the Lord also said, perhaps in the same sentence, that the days *have already* been shortened (Mk. 13:20). This alone shows that God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion.

- Greek (unlike Hebrew) uses tenses in a very precise way. There are some real problems in understanding exactly why the Lord changes tenses so often, e.g. in Jn. 7:33,34: "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am [we would expect: 'Where I will go / be'], thither ye cannot [not 'will not be able to'] come". He saw Himself as both with the Father, already glorified, and yet also still in mortal life. Another example is in the way He speaks of how the faithful *are* equal to the Angels, *being* the children of the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36- in the context of explaining how 'all live' unto God)- we would rather expect Him to speak of how the faithful *will be* equal to Angels, *will be* resurrected etc. But He pointedly speaks in the present tense. It must have raised a few eyebrows amongst His more thoughtful hearers.

- There are some real difficulties in understanding the record of creation. There can be no doubt that we are intended to understand the Genesis account as referring to literal 24 hour-days. But there are problems with this- e.g. there appears to be a longer period than a few hours required for Adam to name all the animals, find them unsuitable, long for a wife, be provided with Eve... One explanation may simply be that time *felt* different; it all took 24 hours of our time, but time then had a different meaning.

- "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3) is not true in real time. But for timeless God, this is His perspective on them. Likewise in other cases He expresses His timelessness in ways which men can only understand as predestination.

- Ez. 32:30, Rev. 6:10 and some other passages give the impression that the dead are somehow alive. And yet we know from an impregnable array of Bible passages that the dead are unconscious. These 'difficult passages' are surely giving us a window on God's timeless perspective. Apart from the death state, there are other examples of where future things are spoken of as having already happened (e.g. Ez. 39:29). God's future actions are simply spoken of as having already happened (e.g. Ez. 32:18). Living believers are called "martyrs" even before they are killed, because God foresees that they will be killed (Rev. 11:7).

Prophecy

Because God is beyond time, His prophecies appear to jump around in time. They only appear disjointed to us who read them with a background insistence that everything must be chronological. Thus the tenses change freely throughout Isaiah 53. And throughout Isaiah, prophecies of the Kingdom are often introduced by the rubric "in that day"; and yet the preceding context is often quite different (e.g. Is. 3:7,18; 4:1; 5:30; 7:18,21; 10:20,22; 11:10; 12:1; 17:9; 19:6; 22:20,25; 25:9; 27:13; 28:5; 29:18). It makes an interesting exercise to go through Isaiah 9 and decide to which time each verse applies. Some of the verses are quoted in the NT and given specific fulfillments. They refer to Isaiah's day, the Assyrian invasion, the birth of Jesus, the beginning of His ministry at age 30, and to His future Kingdom. And yet the verses aren't presented in this order; they move from one to the other at ease, with no linking rubric or explanation. Likewise Daniel's prophecies seem to have a big hiatus in their fulfillment (Dan. 2:34; 8:23; 9:24; 11:39); and Zechariah is another good example. Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfillment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples).

These principles are all brought together in the way Peter interprets Joel 2. The comments in brackets reflect the interpretation which Peter offers later in his address. He gives each part of it a fulfillment not in chronological sequence with what has gone before: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [i.e. you are seeing a fulfillment of this prophecy before your eyes]: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [fulfilled by the apostles after Christ's ascension]...and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath [the miracles of the Lord Jesus during His ministry]...the sun shall be turned into darkness [the crucifixion], and the moon into blood [also referring to an unrecorded event at the crucifixion?], before that great and notable day of the Lord come [the second coming; or the resurrection?]: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [fulfilled by the crowd accepting baptism on the day of Pentecost]" (Acts 2:16-21).

Not only do the prophecies 'jump around' in time. Often Scripture alludes to or quotes other Scripture which may seem out of context, if we insist on seeing everything from our viewpoint of time. Thus Lk. 19:40 quotes Hab. 2:11 concerning the stones of apostate Israel crying out, and apparently applies it to the acclamation of faithful men. Matthew particularly

seems to quote Scripture which is relevant to the Lord's second coming as applying to His first coming. Indeed, the way the NT quotes the OT apparently out of context is a sizeable problem. There are times when we may quote or allude to the words of a Bible passage quite out of context, just because the words seem appropriate. And it seems the NT sometimes does just the same. Search and try as we may, the context seems just inappropriate. This may be explicable by understanding God to have the ability to take words from one time-context and insert them into another, in a way which to us is not contextual. *We* have no authority to do this; but He can. *He* can speak as if "the resurrection is past already"; but for us to do so is to deny the Faith.

Our difficulty in accepting God's view of time is in my view reflected in the obsession some have with the continuous-historic view of the book of Revelation. It is insisted by some that prophecy be fulfilled in a linear way. Chapter 1 verse 1 of prophecy X has to be fulfilled on such a date; chapter 1 verse 2 ten years later; chapter 1 verse 3 has to be fulfilled five years after that. Not only is this view obviously unworkable when it comes to interpreting many Old Testament prophecies; but it assumes that God, the author of prophecy, thinks and writes with our view of time. Gerhard von Rad writes powerfully about this: "The question of the specific way in which Hebrew thought understood time and history brings us to an area of great importance for the correct understanding of the prophets. Earlier exposition was quite unaware that there was a problem here, and uncritically assumed that its own Western and Christian concept of time also held good for Israel...the attitude of Western man to linear time is, generally speaking, naive; time is seen as an infinitely long straight line on which the individual can mark such past and future events as he can ascertain. This time-span has a mid-point, which is our present day. From it the past stretches back and the future forwards. But...this concept of absolute time, independent of events, and, like the blanks on a questionnaire, only needing to be filled up with data which will give it content, was unknown to Israel" ⁽³⁾. God is outside of time as we know it, and so we shouldn't assume that His prophetic word is so neatly linear, or continuously historic, simply because this is how *we* tend to think of time.

God's patience with Israel (and us too) was partly because even in the midst of their perversions, He saw the day when they would be obedient. Thus He mixes criticism and judgment of them with visions of their future glory. Hos. 14:8 exemplifies this: "Ephraim shall say [in the time of her future repentance], What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him and observed him [this is God's comment: He observed Ephraim as she would be, even at Hosea's time, while she was yet sinning]. I am like a green fir tree [these are the words of Ephraim]. From me is thy fruit found" [this is God's comment: He imputed fruit to the otherwise prickly and not very fruitful fir tree]. Our patience with each other, not least those we know well, will be enhanced by a bit more timelessness: not reacting to the words and immaturities of each other as they are uttered at this point in time, but looking ahead to what they (and we) will one day mature into.

Conclusions

Although God is outside time, this mustn't lead us to conclude that He is somehow static and unfeeling; He reveals Himself as accommodating Himself to men to the extent that He has feelings of joy at the moment of our repentance (consider the Father rushing out to the returning son) and sorrow and anguish at the times of our apostasy (consider the Almighty "rising early and sending" the prophets). Although He is outside time, yet He limits His omniscience (as He evidently limits His omnipotence). It could even be that although He

could see every possible future and foresee our behaviour well before our birth, He somehow ignores this possibility. This is why He is described as being disappointed at Israel's level of response to His love, shocked at their sins, surprised at their perversions (e.g. Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

All this may sound rather philosophical. I'm sorry if it does. Because we are dealing here with an essentially practical issue, relating to the very essence of faith; the ability to see God's promises as He sees them, as already fulfilled, to see our prayers as He sees them, i.e. as already answered; and ourselves just waiting in faith for the day of physical realisation of them. This is what day-by-day faith is all about.

Notes

(1) See Alan Hayward, 'The Judgment Seat: An Unresolved Problem', *Watchman* Vol. 5 No. 9, September 1995 and subsequent correspondence; also Alan Hayward, 'Be wise on words', *Gospel News* November / December 2000.

(2) These points are taken from A.P. Launchbury, *Beyond Our Time: Metachronology In The Bible* (Epsis, 1995).

(3) Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965) pp. 99-102.

Appendix 2: "Raised incorruptible" (1 Cor. 15:52)

The One Body of believers has been divided over the interpretation of this passage. Some see in it clear teaching that we emerge from the grave immortal, and therefore the judgment is only for the dividing up of rewards rather than the granting of immortality to mortal bodies.

Biblical Objections

There are a number of objections to this interpretation from other parts of Scripture:

- "We shall all be *changed*...the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is *swallowed up* in victory" (1 Cor. 15:51-54). The rebuilding / raising up incorruptible is the "change", the mortal putting on immortality, death being swallowed up. All these phrases are rather uncomfortable within a scenario of immortal emergence from the grave. If the mortal bodies of saints are even further humbled before the piercing analysis of the judgment seat and *then* swallowed up in victory, clothed upon with immortality- these words find their natural fulfillment.

- Paul speaks of us being *clothed upon* with immortality at the judgment (2 Cor. 5:2,4,10 RV), as if we exist in a form which lacks the clothing of immortality, but is then 'clothed upon'.
- At the Lord's coming, our vile body will be changed to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:20,21).
- God will quicken our *mortal bodies* (Rom. 8:11). The mortal bodies of Paul and the Romans have yet to be quickened; therefore they must be resurrected mortal and then quickened. However, it could be that Rom. 8:11 is one of several expectations of the second coming within the lifetime of the first century believers.
- At the judgment seat, we will receive a recompense for the things we have done, in a bodily form (2 Cor. 5:10). Of the flesh we will reap corruption, of the spirit: life everlasting (Gal. 6:7,8).
- We *will be* justified and *be* condemned by our account at the day of judgment- not at resurrection (Mt. 12:36,37).
- The nobleman came, called his servants, reckoned with them, and only then was taken from the slothful servant even that which he seemed to have- at the judgment, not the resurrection (Lk. 19:12-26). The unprofitable are cast into outer darkness at the judgment, not the resurrection.
- The sheep go away *into life eternal* and the goats *go away into death*- after the judgment process. It is hard to square this with immortal emergence before the judgment.
- "Come, inherit the Kingdom" (Mt. 25:34) is spoken at the end of the judgment process. Only then will the faithful inherit the Kingdom and thereby receive immortality.
- The Lord will raise up the dead and quicken (i.e. immortalise) whom He will of those He has raised up (Jn. 5:21).
- 1 Thess. 4:17 teaches that the dead are raised and go with the living to the judgment, where sheep and goats are divided finally. It seems inappropriate for already immortalised believers to be judged and rewarded.
- When a man is tried (always elsewhere translated "approved") he will receive the crown on life- the crown which will be given at the last day (James 1:12 cp. 2 Tim. 4:8). The approval is surely not in the physical fact of resurrection- for the rejected will also experience this.
- If immortality is given at the resurrection rather than at the judgment, we would have to read 'resurrection' as a one off act; and yet it evidently refers to a process, something more than the act of coming out of the grave. The fact there will not be marriage "in the resurrection" is proof enough of this- it refers to more than the act of coming out of the grave. Also, if immortality is not given at the judgment, this creates a problem in respect of those who are alive at the Lord's return. Are we to believe that they will just be made immortal in a flash when the Lord comes, with no judgment?

- Immortal emergence inevitably means that men live with no fear of judgment to come. And yet the very fact of future judgment is an imperative to repentance (Acts 17:31; 2 Pet. 3:11). Admittedly, there is the danger that judgment can be over-emphasised to the point that God seems passive now, reserving all judgment until the last day. Both extremes must be avoided.

What Does It Mean?

Taking the passage as it stands, it is quite possible to place it alongside several other Pauline passages which speak of the whole process of resurrection-judgment-immortalization as one act (see Appendix 1, *God And Time*). This may be because he sometimes writes as if he assumes his readership will all be worthy of acceptance into the Kingdom, and will not be rejected. If we see our brethren as truly in Christ and therefore acceptable with Him, clothed in His righteousness, and seeing we cannot judge in the sense of condemning them, this ought to be a pattern for us. Judgment in the sense of condemnation will not pass upon those who will be in the Kingdom, although this doesn't mean that therefore they will not stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The Gospels likewise speak of both the resurrection and the judgment process as occurring at "the last day" (Jn. 11:24; 12:48); as if the "resurrection" includes the judgment process. The way 'the resurrection' can be 'better' or 'worse' (Heb. 11:35) and of two kinds (Jn. 5:29) further indicates that the term cannot be limited to just the emergence from the ground.

However, there is another reason why Paul wrote as he did. We have shown in Appendix 1 that the meaning of time will be collapsed at the period of the Lord's return and judgment. It is therefore quite possible that in terms of real time, the resurrection-judgment-immortalization process will take place in a micro second. To an onlooker, there would appear to be immortal emergence (cp. how the record of creation is described as an onlooker would have seen it). But if we were to break the process down, there would be the resurrection, coming forth as a mortal body, gathering to judgment, discussion with the judge, giving of reward, immortalization- of all which we have written at length in this study.

Against the proposition that "raised incorruptible" in 1 Cor. 15:52 means an immortal emergence in theological terms, the following points should be considered:

- Paul doesn't say 'the dead are resurrected incorruptible', but rather that they are raised (Gk. *egeiro*) incorruptible. If he referred to actual resurrection, he would surely have used the word *anastasis*. But he doesn't. *Egeiro* is used of rising up from sickness (Mk. 1:37), rising in judgment (Mt. 12:42), the raising up of men as prophets (Mt. 11:11), raising up a Saviour (Lk. 1:69), the raising up of Pharaoh to do God's will (Rom. 9:17), to rise up against, to raise up a building. These are all processes leading to a completed action, not a simple one time action. Therefore it is not unreasonable to interpret Paul's words as does Bro. John Thomas: 'the dead shall be rebuilt incorruptible', referring to the whole process rather than just the coming out of the ground.

- The seed is sown "a natural body" (1 Cor. 15:44)- a *psuchikon soma*, a living body. This raises a question as to whether Paul is really talking about a *dead* body going into the grave and then coming out immortal. 1 Cor. 15:36 speaks of the seed as being sown, being scattered, right now (*speiro* in the active voice). This is almost certainly one of Paul's many allusions back to the Gospels- this time, to the parable of the sower. The seed is being sown now, and we respond to it. The seed is sown in the corruption, dishonour and weakness of

this present nature (15:42,43). But that seed ("it") will be raised / rebuilt in an incorruptible, glorious body; this is the power of the seed of the Gospel.

All this reasoning is in the context of 1 Cor. 15:35,36: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool...". To max out on the exact form in which we emerge from the grave is *foolish*, Paul says. And yet some of us have done just that. Surely Paul is saying 'Don't get distracted by this issue as a physicality *in itself*'. The point is, as the seed of the Gospel is sown in you day by day, so in a corresponding way you will be rebuilt in the glory of the resurrection. So sow to the spirit, for as you sow you will reap (cp. Gal. 6:7,8)'.

Appendix 3:

"God the judge of all"

One feature of the parables of judgment calls for attention. They often speak of the Lord Jesus as if He is in the role of God. This shows the intensity of God manifestation there will be in Christ at the day of judgment; and yet the way Christ manifests God so closely is seen in other parables too. Thus Mt. 15:13 speaks of the Father as the sower, whilst Mt. 13:24,37 applies this figure to the Lord Jesus. Likewise in the parables of Lk. 15, God the Father lost the Son, but Christ, the seed of the woman, lost the coin, and he was the shepherd who lost the sheep. In constructing these parables as he did, surely the Lord was emphasizing that the Father and Son are absolutely united in their attitude to us; it is on account of this that the Father can really know our feelings as Christ does, even though He has never been human. Many of the descriptions of Christ in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37) is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be!

Appendix 4:

Summary Statement

1. The Lord Jesus will return and resurrect those He considers responsible to Him.
2. This will be followed by judgment.
3. He will grant them their rewards, of eternal life or eternal death, at the judgment.
4. At the judgment, the meaning of time as we know it will be collapsed.

5. Therefore the whole process of resurrection and judgment will take place in a split second of time as we know it, but it may feel to those participating as if time is elapsing.

6. However there are Bible passages which seem to imply that resurrection, judgment and immortalization for the faithful occur simultaneously. These passages would seem to be describing the resurrection / judgment / glorification event as it will appear to an onlooker, i.e. it will appear to be instantaneous in time as we know it. In this sense there will be an immortal emergence, but if we could break the process down, the dead would be raised mortal, judged, and then given their reward.

7. We leave judgment to "God the judge of all".