

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 7-29-18

To Adult Teachers:

July 29 we will study John 5:24-30. Discussion questions are:

1. What examples of injustice in this life can you think of?
2. Agree/disagree: “We want justice but we don’t want a judge.”
3. How do you understand this statement: *“Many people in our culture believe we will evolve our way to justice and history will go on forever.”*?
 - a. What argument does Christianity have with that philosophy?
4. What did Jesus teach about Judgment Day in 5:28-30?
5. How do you reconcile the seeming contradiction between vs. 24 and vs. 29?
6. How does the following concept make you feel: “On Judgment Day God will reveal those who were only pretending to believe. He will use the sinful deeds of such people to reveal that they never believed in the first place.”?
7. In light of the following statement do you have a greater need for a sense of judgment in the future, the past or the present:
 - a. The future sense of Judgment ought to make us examine how we live.
 - b. The past sense of Judgment ought to make us grateful for what Jesus did to enable us to be judged “Not guilty”.
 - c. The present sense of Judgment ought to make us to want to look our best for our Lord every moment of every day.

Sermon: Judgment Day: Future, Past, Present

When the movie “Field of Dreams” came out in 1989 one reviewer said the reason this movie touched a vein was “...because there is a deep need for 60’s idealism in the cynical “me first” 80’s and 90’s and the need to believe in reconciliation beyond the grave.” Three decades later we still have a deep need to believe in ideals and to believe that the justice of those ideals works itself out because so much of life is unfair. We’ve all seen evil men prosper and thought to ourselves, “There has to be justice beyond the grave.” As you get older you keep a little mental list of great people who were treated unjustly as well as a list of undeserving people who got away with all sorts of misdeeds and prospered as a result of their ungodliness.

We have all been horrified when someone obviously guilty of a terrible crime was set free on some legal technicality. And we have all been horrified to discover someone who is innocent has spent years in prison wrongly convicted. Where is the justice in that?

We are outraged when an O.J. Simpson is not found guilty of murdering 2 people or when a Paris Hilton is sentenced to community service for possession of Cocaine. Such events offend our sense of justice.

We want justice but let me share with you a great irony. Our desire for justice is much greater than the belief Jesus will, at the end of history, come back to judge the living and

the dead. You know why? Because we want justice but we don't want a judge. We are a bit like the man who angrily took his photo back to the photographer and complained, "This photo doesn't do me justice!" The photographer looked at the photo, then looked carefully at the man, and said, "Fella, you don't want justice, you want mercy!"

Many folks in our culture believe we will evolve our way to justice and history will go on forever. Over time we will just evolve out of racism and into freedom and compassion and individual rights. Just give us time and we will one day have an ideal world. The Christian understanding of history is at polar opposites from that. Christians believe that history at some time will end suddenly, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call announcing the return of Christ to judge the world. Christians believe that one day the curtain will fall right in the middle of an act and the play will end suddenly and unexpectedly. Christians believe that when Judge Jesus appears all accounts will be squared and nobody will get away with anything. It's right here in this text: John 5:28-30 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

We have a judge like none the world has ever seen. All earthly judges make mistakes. But the great judge is coming one day and even his foolishness is wiser than the wisest of men. So let's listen to what Judge Jesus tells us about the doctrine of Judgment. He will tell us 3 things: There is a future, a past, and a present to God's judgment.

The future of judgment is Judgment Day. What will happen on Judgment Day? A lot! First, judgment will be just on that day. It's in vs. 30, "my judgment is just". The Bible says that on that day "...every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." – Romans 3:19. Have you ever accidentally overheard a just judgment of yourself? People generally say courteous things about your appearance. But once in a while you get a just judgment of your appearance and it can be sobering. When I was in my 30's and my hair first started taking a leave of absence from my scalp my mother told Judy privately, "Bud's hair is getting a little thin on top but don't tell him." Now a just judgment would have been for someone to go on national television and have one of those beeping noises go off that suggest a national emergency has happened and in a loud voice an announcer proclaim, "Bud is going bald!" That is a just judgment and that is what Judgment Day will be like. No kidding around. No sugar coating the truth. Just the plain precise truth about you and your sin. Every mouth will be stopped. No one will protest. There will be no comebacks, no excuse making, just silence.

There is a second characteristic of Judgment Day that we are a bit uncomfortable with. Jesus said it will be on the basis of deeds. Listen to vs. 29, "...those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." But, what about the idea that we are not saved on the basis of how good our works are? What about grace? Be sure you read the entire context before you decide what this passage means. Remember how this paragraph started in vs. 24, "...whoever hears my word and believes

him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned....” So how do we reconcile those 2 seemingly contradictory statements? Your deeds are an index to what is in your heart. The fruit on a tree does not give the tree life but reveals that the tree is alive. Here’s the deal – people who really believe have their hearts changed. Believers live differently. You can look at the deeds of believers and tell what is in their hearts. On Judgment Day God will reveal those who were only pretending to believe. He will use the sinful deeds of such people to reveal that they never believed in the first place. How do you know if you believe? Do you have love, joy, peace? Do you demonstrate patience, kindness, goodness? Are you faithful, gentle, and self-controlled? Those are the fruits that hang all over those who really believe. Look at your deeds. The Judge will. Are you more loving this year than last year? Do you practice greater self-control? Are you growing more patient? Look at your deeds. The Judge will. You are not saved by your deeds. You are revealed by your deeds.

Here’s a third characteristic of Judgment Day. The actual pain of Judgment Day will be separation. Did you notice the word “condemnation” that keeps coming up in this passage? The word “condemnation” literally means “separation”. If hell were nothing more than separation from God it would not need fire to be hell. If hell were nothing more than separation from good people it would not need brimstone to be hell. If hell were nothing more than separation from love, joy and peace it would not need to burn for eternity to be hell. What if hell is simply God giving people what they want? Can you imagine anything worse than living in a world where everybody gets what they want? I want your wife, so I take her. I want you to fall off a cliff, so you fall. I want to be happy and you to be miserable, so you are. Does that not sound like hell to you? Is that not what Romans 1 says God once did to mankind when he gave them over to whatever their hearts conceived?

Judgment has a future and it is designed to make us examine how we live. Judgment also has a past. Vs. 24 says Jesus was sent that we might not be condemned. When Jesus died on the cross he hung there judged guilty of every sin ever committed. Jesus is worthy to judge us because he has been judged himself. Jesus knows better than anyone what it feels like to be falsely accused and found guilty when you are totally innocent. You can trust a Judge like that to be fair and merciful. You can face the future of Judgment Day because you know the past of Judgment Day. He was crushed for our iniquities. With his stripes we are healed!

The future sense of Judgment ought to make us examine how we live. The past sense of Judgment ought to make us grateful for what Jesus did to enable us to be judged “Not guilty”. What about Judgment in the present tense? If you right now practice the doctrine of judgment in your life it will revolutionize your life. What do you do when you walk in one of those stores that have a camera on you? I don’t know about you but I don’t put my hand in my pocket. I think it will look like I’m stealing something and I don’t want to go through the embarrassment of being accused. Judgment in the present tense means you are very conscious that God is personally involved in every thought, ever action of your life. Awareness that principalities and powers are watching, that God is watching, that my sweet Lord is watching creates a sense of urgency in our lives. If a

young lady knows she is going to meet the man of her dreams today, she will spend extra time in front of her make-up mirror. She wants to look her very best today. Awareness of Judgment in the present causes us to want to look our best for our Lord every moment of every day. The doctrine of judgment means right now counts forever. Everything is significant.

Do you remember what Jesus said in the parable of the shrewd manager? He said, *“Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”* Imagine when you get to Heaven and people pour out of every corner saying to you, “The words you spoke to me. The Bible you put in my hands. The seeds you planted in my heart when I was a small child in your class. The kindness you showed me in the name of Christ. The money you spent to get the gospel to my ears. How can I ever thank you?”

If you’ve messed up your life really bad; if you have been pretending to be a believer but your works reveal you really don’t believe; if the last thing in this world you would want is for Jesus to come back today; all hope is not lost for you. It’s not too late for you to bring Christ your broken life, so marred by sin. He will create anew, make whole again. Your empty, wasted years, He will restore, and your iniquities remember no more.

You can leave here today singing, “There is coming a day when no heartaches shall come, no more clouds in the sky, no more tears to dim the eye; all is peace forevermore on the happy golden shore. What a day, glorious day that will be.”