

## IS THERE A PLACE FOR GUILT? - Part 4

In this brief series of articles we have identified five objective points of reference by which guilt is to be understood: the fact of God; the fact of man's accountability to God; the fact of man's sin; the fact of God's grace; and the fact of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection. We have focused upon Creation and the Fall to see the universal character of human guilt and the universal relevancy of God's gospel. We are trafficking in more than Western Culture and a Judeo-Christian heritage. We are tapping into the essential stuff of our common humanness. It is right to speak of Jesus Christ in this regard because only He is the Savior of the world; only He has rectified Adam's rebellion; only He restores and reconciles sinners and a fallen cosmos to God. Numerous Scriptures come to mind, but consider 1 Corinthians 15:22 which compares Adam with Christ: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." Men are either judicially condemned to die in Adam, or pardoned in Christ to live. Such concerns are culturally bound only if death is culturally bound. All who face death have an interest in Christ.

Another aspect of our survey which begs further elaboration is the resurrection of Jesus. This defines reality for the Christian. Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation are components of one redemptive event. Having triumphed over Satan, sin and death, Jesus now reigns as Lord exercising universal sovereignty, building His church from people of nation. Today is the day of salvation as the gospel is being proclaimed to all men everywhere. This is the epoch of free grace as sinners are called to trust in Jesus and enter His Kingdom. As Lord of lords and King of kings, Jesus directs history to its appointed goal, which brings us to our sixth objective point of reference in our consideration of guilt: the coming final judgment and the commencement of the eternal state.

Throughout Scripture we read of "the Day of the Lord" - a visitation of God by which He simultaneously judges the wicked and delivers the righteous. Salvation is always couched in the context of retributive justice. Many such 'days of the Lord' have occurred which serve as pictures of the Final Day. The global flood during the time of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as God's discipline of the Old Covenant Israelites are numbered among such 'days'. The most recent 'day' was when Jesus died bearing the wrath of God in behalf of His people. That execution of judgment was also the believer's deliverance evidenced by His resurrection. We are now living in the time, or 'day of salvation' (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:2) which precedes the impending and Final Day of the Lord.

The coming Day of the Lord will arrive with a complex of redemptive events: the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the transformation of this present created order, and the commencement of the eternal state. In eternity, resurrected men will live forever either in a state of eternal death, separated from God, or eternal life, united to God. These events of 'eschatology' (the study of last things) pertain to guilt because The Final Judgment will reveal the character of men's faith evidenced by their deeds. Saving faith in Jesus demonstrates itself in deeds of repentance and obedience motivated by love. Damning and idolatrous faith also evidences itself by its fruit. Those who respond to the gospel in this the day of salvation are already pardoned in union with the risen Christ. Final Judgment for the Christian will be a vindication of faith to the praise of God's grace. The redeemed sinner will inherit a renovated cosmos, purged of sin and death. Eye has not seen nor ear heard the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But those who come to judgment relying upon their good works or some other savior, will discover the eternal futility of their 'fig leaves' and be confronted with the fact of their enmity against God. Not desiring God, they will be

resurrected to an eternal death, separated from God, cast into the place prepared for Satan and his demons. There they will have their god and live forever in angry animosity against God under the wrath of God. These are sobering, dreadful things. “Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11a).

There are only two places where God satisfies His wrath against sin and resolves the issue of our guilt. As guilty sinners we will go to either one of these two places: either to the cross of Christ where the wrath of God is satisfied by the death of Christ; or to hell where the wrath of God will condition an eternal death of the sinner. But God is not indifferent about this matter as though He could care less whether you go to the cross or to hell. No, He desires you to turn from your sin and to trust Christ. He sends His gospel to you so that you might be saved. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But He cannot compromise His essential holiness. The good news of the gospel is that today He is reconciling sinners to Himself through Christ without any compromise to His justice. The death of the Son of God is the legal equivalent to a sinner’s eternity in hell. Will you come to judgment in Christ or in your sin? I beg you in behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!

The seventh and last point of reference regarding the matter of guilt is, finally, a subjective one: the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the conscience of the believer. The Holy Spirit effects spiritual life in sinners as well as cleansing the sinner’s conscience. The Spirit applies the triumph of Christ’s death and resurrection to the heart of the Christian and internally assures him that he is right with God; that neither his sin nor any other created thing, can separate him from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; that he is now and forever forgiven and justified. Even when Christians sin (and Christians sin), we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse because we ever relate to God on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Christian’s conscience now hears the determination to be given at Final Judgment: “no condemnation!” “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1) “And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus... and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Philippians 4:7,9) Are you a guilty sinner? The God of peace will pardon and cleanse you if you, in repentance and faith, will trust and follow Christ. “Behold, now is the day of salvation!”