

Principles of Judgment.

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THE New Testament is pervaded not only with the gentleness of grace, but also with the austerity of judgment. The most careless reader cannot miss the recurrence of these dominant qualities of its teaching. They are so persistent that we may say it is concerned with two great subjects, and with these only—the fact of a Gospel and the fact of judgment. The prominence of these facts in the New Testament is due to the importance which they received in the teaching of Jesus. It is He who is the author of this striking characteristic which meets us everywhere in the Epistles as well as in the Gospels, that mercy and judgment are both emphasized—that there is a revelation of the love and grace of God, and a revelation of the certainty and severity of judgment.

If we consider the general character of much of modern teaching, it would seem as if the fact of future judgment had ceased to be of vital importance—as if the Great White Throne had faded away from the vision of mankind. The note of the Gospel is repeated with growing passion, but the note of judgment is rarely heard, and when it is heard it is spoken with hesitancy and uncertainty. Perhaps we are suffering from a reaction against the materialistic forms in which the fact of judgment was presented in a bygone age. The methods of impressing, upon rude and ignorant people, the certainty and severity of judgment have ceased to be usable. The presentations of judgment which once made men tremble are now as unimpressive as a fairy-tale. The results of this one-sided teaching are most disastrous. The seriousness of life is lost, the need of the Gospel is not recognized, the most solemn event in the ultimate experience of life is obscured, the testimony of the human heart, and the urgent warnings of Christ are alike ignored. It may be that the preaching of the Gospel at the present time has lost much of its power to arrest and convince,

because it is preached without the urgent note of judgment with which it is always associated in the New Testament. One of the most pressing necessities which lies upon the Christian Church of to-day is the recovery of the fact of judgment as a prominent element of its teaching. We may not yet be able to speak of it as we should, but we ought to speak of it as we can.

The picture of judgment which is given in Matt. xxv. 31-46 is the only elaborated representation of a universal judgment which we have in the words of Jesus. It may not be a complete presentation of all that the judgment meant to Him, but it is so full and particular that it should be studied with the greatest care. Too much attention has been given to the question as to whether it refers to the judgment of the heathen or the judgment of Christians. What should be the supreme consideration is the fact that it presents certain great principles of judgment which are universally applicable. It contains many surprises. It is only our familiarity with the general movement of the story which hides them from us.

1. It is Jesus Himself who is to be the Judge of men. Before Him are to be gathered all nations. The Judge is one who knows our life because He lived it, and was tempted like as we are. The Son of man is to be the Judge of man. He is—may we say it?—one of ourselves. He is not unknown to us. His words and ways, His principles of judgment have been revealed in His life on earth. It is not a Rhadamanthus or an Osiris, but Jesus, who had pity on the sinful and mercy for the fallen, before whom all nations are to stand. The "same Jesus" that we see in the Gospels we are to see on the Great White Throne. This is one of the surprises of the revelation of Jesus Christ—that all men are to be measured and judged by Him. He, who was Incarnate Love, whose name is Saviour, is also the Judge of human kind.

2. We notice, next, the absence of many things in this picture of judgment which men regard as of the highest importance. Nothing is said of faith or belief, or of things done in the name of Christ. Yet, for the sake of orthodoxy,

what have not men done to men? And "for many wonderful works" have they not crowned some with honour? But the Lord Jesus passes by all these things. He "seeth not as man seeth." We should not have been surprised at the absence of the things which men count as of greatest value, if we had sufficiently noticed that in His life on earth He continually overlooked the great things of men, and sought for others which they regarded as of little worth. Men have always been ready to tithe the mint, the anise, and the cummin, and to neglect the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith. It is chiefly because of the absence of any reference to what men think of great importance that this picture of judgment has been interpreted as a judgment of the heathen.

3. Our next surprise lies in the fact that the destiny of men appears to be determined by things which they do not remember. Those who are accepted do not remember the good they had done, and those who are rejected do not remember what they had left undone. Both are unconscious of merit and demerit. Both cry, "When saw we Thee athirst?" etc. It seems as if the eternal destiny of men was decided by the presence or absence of unregarded and unremembered acts of charity. But is it so? What reasonable principle of judgment underlies this strange fact, that it is by uncalculated and unconscious actions that the future of men is fixed? *May it not be that it is because such things are revelations of essential character?* There is something deeper in man than the conscious, willing self. Acts which are done consciously or under the compulsion of recognized reasons may not be in accordance with the deepest and truest wish of the heart. They may have no relation to the essential character. We may do many deeds of kindness without being kind; we may speak the truth without being true; we may keep from sin without being holy. We are only kind when we are kind without thinking; we are only good when our goodness is unconscious. We are only true when truth is our instinctive habit. It is not the doing or the not doing of acts of charity which is the crucial matter, but the doing or the

not doing of them *instinctively, unconsciously, without calculation or reason*. That is the point to be emphasized. It is then that they are the revelation of what we are. They are the outcome of our nature. They infallibly indicate whether we have the Spirit of Christ or not.

4. We further notice that men are rejected for things they did not do. This again surprises us, for we constantly lay stress on acts of commission, and forget that acts of omission are equally significant. The sins which we confess are for the most part sins of action. It is these which bulk most largely in the memory and lie with heaviest weight on the conscience. But we are only following the light of Christ which shone on earth when we think that omissions are equally sinful. The searching words which say, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin," have never received the attention which they deserve. But what if we do not know? What if we do not see? Is not our ignorance significant? Blindness may be both our blame and our doom.

No one who has read Walter Pater's "Marius the Epicurean" can forget the judgment, which the young seeker after truth and light passed on the Emperor Marcus Aurelius as he saw him sit impassively at the gladiatorial shows. "There was something in a tolerance like that, in the bare fact that Aurelius could sit patiently through a scene like that, which seemed to Marius to mark him as eternally his inferior on the question of righteousness. . . . Surely evil was a real thing, and the wise man wanting in the sense of it—where not to have been, by instinctive election, on the right side, was to have failed in life." Not doing is as significant as doing.

5. Further, we notice that the principle of acceptance and rejection is man's relation to the Law of Love. The moral law is not in view. Men are not tried by any moral standard. The great crimson sins of the world are not so much as mentioned. These are all sins against the Law of Love, but they are not made the tests of character. Shall we say that they are not sufficiently delicate and decisive tests of the essential qualities

of life? Who can tell what influence external things may have had in leading to their commission? Men and women may have done what they never in their inmost being desired to do, through the pressure of circumstances, the sudden onset of temptation, or the momentary flood of passion. Every man who commits a crime is not a criminal. Gross breaches of the moral law are not absolute tests of character or nature. It is little things—unnoticed, impulsive, continued—which reveal the essential qualities. And it is especially the little things of love—our unregarded, “unremembered acts of kindness”—which make it manifest in the eyes of “Him with whom we have to do” that we have the Spirit of Christ. We should not be surprised that Jesus judges men by their relation to the Law of Love, if we notice that when He was in the world it was love that He sought and commanded. Dives was judged by the presence of Lazarus at his door. The priest and the Levite were judged in their passing by the wounded traveller. To Jesus all the law was summed up in this: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Love was the principle of His judgment when on earth, and it is the same Jesus who judges thus in heaven. Men may examine themselves by the Ten Commandments and say: “All these things have I kept from my youth up,” and forget that Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

6. The last fact to be noticed is that Jesus identifies Himself with the needy and the poor—with all to whom love can be shown. What is done or left undone to them is done or left undone to Him. The ultimate principle of judgment is, how men have acted towards Christ. Not without meaning is He called the Son of man. As he stood for man, the just for the unjust, so the poor and needy now stand for Him. It is by our conduct to Christ, as represented by those with whom He identifies Himself, that we are to be judged. A thought like this opens our eyes to the significance of life, to the opportunities of service, to the meaning of what we do or leave undone in relation to the Law of Love.

When these things are seen in this picture of judgment, men will cease to ask who is to be judged in this way. We shall recognize that these principles of judgment are universal.



Studies in Texts.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMONS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

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[Suggestive book: Dr. G. Milligan's "Commentary on Thessalonians" (=M.). Others quoted: Lightfoot's "Colossians" (=L.¹); "Notes on St. Paul's Epistles" (=L.²); "Biblical Essays" (=L.³); Trench's "Synonyms" (=T.); Farrar's "St. Paul" (=F.); Hastings' "Dictionary" (=H.); "Expositor" (=E.); "Expositor's Greek Testament" (=E.G.T.); Weymouth's "New Testament" (=W.); Aristotle's "Politics" (=A.).]

I. SLACK CHRISTIANS. TEXT: 1 and 2 Thess. (*passim*): "*Disorderly, working not at all*" (2 Thess. iii. 11). "Disorderly" (ἀτακτος and cognates), four times in Thessalonians; not elsewhere in New Testament. Originally, "a soldier who leaves the ranks." The word in papyri indicates laggard, rather than mutineer¹ (as A.V. and R.V.). Applied to slack war-office, truant scholars, idle apprentices (M., 152-154). The idea is "careless," "inefficient" (see E., January, 1909, p. 2). Four passages give four lessons.

1. *Slackness is to be recognized*: "that work not" (2 Thess. iii. 11, R.V.). Causes: idleness; generosity of wealthy made the lazy take advantage (L.², 60); perverted theology² too (2 Thess. ii. 2). Yet symptoms always plain: "they work not."

2. *Slackness is to be reproved*: "admonish" (1 Thess. v. 14); "advice with warning" (L.¹, 28); "admonition with blame" (T., § 32).—The call plus the crack of the whip. Guilty of "profound and hopeless blunder" (E., January, 1909, p. 13). Yet avoid rancour (2 Thess. iii. 15).

3. *Slackness is to be resented*: "withdraw" (2 Thess. iii. 6).—If reproof fails, duty to rest of family demands isolation of infected case. Individual carelessness lowers general tone.

4. *Slackness is to be retrieved*: "imitate us" (2 Thess. iii. 7, R.V.).—We were independent, not lazy. We worked; so must every Church member (2 Thess. iii. 12).

II. STRENUOUS CHRISTIANS. "*Vie with one another in eagerness*" (1 Thess. iv. 11, W.). These six words represent a single Greek one

¹ A recent discovery, however, shows that "contumacy" is still the meaning sometimes (E., October, 1908, p. 274).

² A recent letter tells me of one who, through false Advent views, "has given up preaching the Gospel for some years, and is more anxious to listen than to teach."