**Foundations (58 of 60) The Final Judgement - RC Sproul**

Will God judge Christians for what they've thought and done in this life? Our topic today is the final judgment on Renewing Your Mind. Welcome to Renewing Your Mind, where we're studying systematic theology and the foundations of the Christian faith. Our teacher is the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R.C. Sproul.

The topic before us today is the biblical notion that God will weigh the merit of our thoughts and actions at the end of time. That's a frightening thought for many people, especially when we think about the consequences for those who are not in Christ. But what about believers? Will God judge the elect as well as the non-elect? Here's Dr. R.C. Sproul with a lesson titled, The Final Judgment.

It was in the 19th century that the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche announced the death of God. And in the 19th century, we saw an unprecedented and unbridled spirit of optimism emerge in the intellectual world that had a tremendous impact on European and subsequently on American culture. Not everybody was as pessimistic and gloomy as Nietzsche was in his nihilism, but people welcomed the announcement of the death of God because the news indicated a major victory for humanism, and humanism said that we no longer need reliance upon some supernatural deity to improve the human condition, but we are now in an evolutionary mode, moving from the alpha to the omega point of history, where things are getting better and better with new equipment, new tools, new technology, and particularly with advances in education.

The hope and anticipation was that the world could be rid of disease, of warfare, of ignorance and all of these things that plague human civilization. Well, part of the so-called joy that spawned such movements as the positivist movement of Auguste Comte, who said that history is divided into three stages, infancy, adolescence, and adulthood, and he said the infancy stage of Western civilization is that stage when people define their lives in terms of religion, and then people grew to adolescence when they replaced religion with metaphysical philosophy. He said, but they don't really enter into adulthood until you come to the age of science.

And this, again, unbridled optimistic view of what science was going to produce led people to this view of joyful anticipation. And when World War I broke out, it was seen to be a tremendous stumbling block to this whole view of evolutionary optimism. But even those who disappointed with this turn of events said at least this will be the war to end all wars, the last war before civilization reaches its maturity.

Of course, no one anticipated the Holocaust of World War II when after that was all discovered from the continent of Europe came the most bleak and pessimistic philosophies that had been known in atheistic existentialism and the writings of Sartre and Camus and others. But at the heart of this nineteenth-century optimism, the death of God and all of that, and the emergence of mankind to His adulthood, was the good news that since God does not exist we never ever have to worry again about facing a last judgment. That sort of Damocles that Jesus and His followers have held over the heads of people since the first century, that there would come a day when God would hold everybody in account and judge them for their behavior, sending some to heaven and others to hell, that we can dispel with and no longer be concerned about it.

The song of people in the nineteenth century was something like the song of children at the end of the school year, no more studies, no more books, no more teacher sassy looks. I mean, now we don't have to worry about Yahweh standing up there with His Ten Commandments saying, Thou shalt not do this and Thou shalt do that, and if you break My law I'm going to punish you forever. That was the good news.

Then the good news was simply this, that we are not ultimately accountable. Now what has happened in this shift from that optimism of the nineteenth century to the pessimism of our own day? We don't believe anymore that we are moving towards this manifest destiny, but rather the origin of man is seen to have been a cosmic accident growing up out of the slime, moving inexorably to the bottomless pit of the nothingness, the nihil. And the discovery of the nihilistic existentialist is this, it's time to turn the card over and read the price tag.

If you are not ultimately accountable for your life, that can only mean that ultimately your life does not count. So, Jean-Paul Sartre would say that man is a useless passion, and his final verdict for the significance and meaning of human existence is found in one word, nausea. So the optimism has turned to bitter gloom and to a culture filled with drugs and all kinds of means of escape to avoid the horrible idea that our lives are an exercise in futility.

Over against all this is the clear teaching of the New Testament and of Jesus that our lives do count and that they count ultimately, but that that means that we are accountable. And I would say quite apart from philosophical investigation and reflection, every human being knows, they have that sense of God within their hearts, they are given a conscience by their Creator, and you know, as well as you know that you are alive today, that you will be held accountable for how you live your life. That there will come a day when God will judge every man and every woman by the standards of His sacred law.

In the seventeenth chapter of the book of Acts, when Paul is discussing matters with the philosophers of Athens, he makes this comment. He acknowledges that they have constructed a temple to an unknown God, and he said, Therefore the one whom you worship without knowing, that is, the one whom you are worshiping in ignorance, Him I declare to you, the God who made the world and everything in it. And he goes on to say about this God, this, that the former times when people were worshiping God in forms of idolatry, he said, These former times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

So Paul gives a command that is universal in its scope. He is saying that the former days God put up, He forbore with, persevered, and was tolerant for a long period of time with the manifold disobedience of people in this world. But a critical moment in redemptive history has now taken place, and the apostle says, But now God commands all men everywhere to repent.

And here's what he goes on to say, Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained, and He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. Now, listen to what follows, And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. Things haven't changed.

Today, when we tell people that God has appointed a day by which He will judge the world in righteousness, and He will judge it by that one whom He has demonstrated to be the judge through the evidence of His resurrection, people laugh at that. They mock that. While others said, We will hear you again on this matter.

And so Paul departed from among them. However, some of them joined him and believed. Among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Domarus and others with them.

There were only a few, a handful, who took Paul seriously there in Athens when he made this announcement. But I want us to see in this text that integral to the apostolic testimony is this declaration that God has appointed a day of judgment. Now, I want us also to understand that this idea of a day of judgment was not initiated by Paul or by the apostles.

In fact, it wasn't even initiated by Jesus, though Jesus spoke about it frequently, and it has its roots deeply in the Old Testament that warned the people then of the day of the day when the judge of heaven and earth will bring all things into account. I had an occasion where I was teaching philosophy in a university setting over thirty years ago, and I was teaching the history of philosophy and a course in modern philosophy that went from Descartes through Immanuel Kant, and when we got to Kant, I looked at Kant's critique of the traditional arguments for the existence of God and then showed the students his substitute argument for God, which was Kant's moral argument for the existence of God based upon his understanding of the categorical imperative. Now, if you're familiar with that, you know that Kant said that every human being has a sense of oughtness built into his conscience.

And he said this sense of oughtness is what drives or impels ethics. And then he raises this question transcendentally. He said, suppose this sense of oughtness doesn't make sense or is meaningless.

If there is no foundation for a moral sense of oughtness, then any attempt to construct a meaningful ethic perishes, and without a meaningful ethic, civilization cannot be preserved. And so then he asks the questions, what would there have to be for this moral sense that we all have, this sense of right and wrong, for that to be meaningful? And Kant speculates from a philosophical perspective and said, first of all, for a sense of oughtness to be meaningful, there has to be justice. That is, righteousness must be rewarded and wickedness must be punished.

However, Kant observed, we look at the world around us and we see that justice does not always prevail. Like David centuries ago, he asked, why is it that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? We see it every day. And so Kant said, for this ethical sense to be meaningful, there must be justice, and since justice doesn't take place in this world, there would have to be some kind of survival beyond the grave.

And then he reflected on that and said, not only would there have to be continuity of existence for us, but the purpose of that initially would be so that there could be a judgment, so that justice could be distributed. And from there, he speculated further. I remember that class vividly, giving that lecture, because to my surprise, I learned later that one of the students in the class was converted to Christianity, just listening to Kant's speculation about a last judgment.

But for Jesus, it wasn't a matter of speculation. It was a matter of divine declaration. And He warned people constantly about this certain reality, where He said that those things that you do in secret will be made manifest on that day, where God will reveal the secrets of every man's heart.

And He says every idle word will be brought into the judgment. Boy, that terrifies me, because you think of how we sin with our lips, the things that we say, the promises that we break, the slander that we utter, the lies that we tell, and so on. Remember Isaiah, when he confronted the holiness of God, he was immediately overwhelmed by his unworthiness.

And he said, woe is me, what, I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And Jesus said, every idle word will be brought into the judgment. Those are the things that we say off the cuff, without thinking, will be brought before us on the judgment day.

If that's true, how much more true is it that every sober word and every intentional word that we say will be brought into the judgment? I had a student back in that class that was taking philosophy who, after graduating from college, went on to medical school. And after medical school, he got his degree in psychiatry at Harvard. And he was doing post-doctoral research at Harvard in the field of neurology and the science of the study of the brain.

And I ran into him several years after he graduated, and I'd had him in that class. He said, remember that time you were talking about Kant, and you were talking about coming into the last judgment? And I said, yes, I do. And he said, you know, it's an amazing thing to study the physiology of the brain with the synapses, the connecting tissue, and all of that thing.

And he says, and how incredible it is that every single experience that we have in this world is recorded in our brain. To make a computer today, with the sophistication of data that they have and with how small they are, it would take a computer by today's standards the size of the Empire State Building to be able to hold and record all the data that can be recorded in a single human brain. This is what he was telling me.

And he went on to say, he said, here's what I think is going to happen at the last judgment. I said, what? He said, I think God's going to have some kind of machine where He's going to take the brains of the people right out of their skulls and put it on a playback machine. And the record of every thought that we've ever had, every word that we've ever spoken, every deed that we've ever done will be right there in incontrovertible evidentiary proportions.

And he said, that's why, he said, I think what the Bible means when it says that on that day every mouth will be stopped, because the evidence will be so clear, so overwhelming that we will recognize the utter futility of trying to argue with it. Now, of course, he was only speaking in a manner of illustrative metaphor when he talked about taking brains out of the skull and putting them back. But what he was getting at was, the record is there.

But even if it weren't in the brain, it is in the mind of God, because God is aware of everything that we've ever done and everything that we've ever thought and everything that we've ever said. Now, in Matthew's gospel, I've said frequently that part of the scariest teaching that we ever hear from the lips of Jesus is found in the Sermon on the Mount. And everybody thinks of the Sermon on the Mount as being an upbeat, positive, wonderful sermon, the greatest sermon ever preached, and one that positive thinkers would want to emulate, because he begins with the Beatitudes, blessed are those who do this and do that.

But most sermons, when they're constructed, have a punchline or a climactic point to them. And if we go to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we hear Jesus making these comments, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. And every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. Let me just say this, that when Jesus spoke of the final judgment, something that I'm surprised that many evangelical Christians are not aware of, He says that in that judgment, every person will be judged according to what? According to their works. Now, we have pressed so hard on the Protestant doctrine, biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, that sometimes we allow our excitement of understanding that we are redeemed by faith, not by our works, to think therefore that works don't matter to God.

But yet the judgment will be according to works. And the punishment that people will receive from that judgment will be based upon their works, and the rewards that God distributes at the last judgment to His people who are saved by faith will be distributed according to works. There are at least twenty-five passages in the New Testament where Jesus and the apostles say that there will be a great reward given to those whose works are numerous and so on.

And we are encouraged, even as Christians, understanding that our works don't get us into heaven in the first place, nevertheless, the reward that we receive there will be distributed according to our degree of obedience. So works are extremely important, both good and bad, because they will all be brought into the judgment. And then Jesus says, And it's not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father.

For many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. This, I say, is one of the most scary statements that Jesus ever makes, because He says on that day of judgment, people were going to come claiming to know Him, emphatically addressing Him in the personal way of saying, Lord, Lord. They're going to claim that they have done all kinds of good works, that they were religious, that they were engaged in church activities, and Jesus says, I'm going to look at those people in that day, and I'm going to say to them, depart from Me, please leave, I don't know your name, you who are workers of iniquity.

Now that's what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7. In Matthew chapter 25, He tells the story of the kingdom of heaven that is like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. You know the story, five were wise, five were foolish. Those that were foolish took their lamps, but no extra oil with them, and those who were wise took oil in their lamps.

But the bridegroom was delayed, and during the delay, the guests slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard, Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him. And all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish said to the wise, Please give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.

The wise answered saying, No, lest there should not be enough for us and for you, but go rather to those who sell, buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was shut. Now listen, verse 11, afterward the other virgins came saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

The same language that Jesus uses earlier in Matthew's Gospel at the Sermon on the Mount. Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming. These are sober warnings that our Lord gives to us and to the world that God has appointed a day, and He has appointed a judge, and the judge is the Lord Himself. And when we stand before that judgment, we better have oil in our lamps.

Dr. R.C. Sproul, with a lesson on the final judgment. You're listening to Renewing Your Mind. I'm your host, Lee Webb.

You know, many people worry about standing before God at the end of time. Most religions teach people to store up good works so that their merit will outweigh their sin. But such religions offer no assurance of salvation.

The Bible teaches that our righteous deeds are like polluted garments. And Jesus said that even our thoughts make us guilty. Who could possibly stand before God and be declared clean? Praise God for the mercy and grace of Christ, who offers us His righteousness in place of our own, so that those who are in Christ will be judged according to His merit.

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Again go to facebook.com slash Ligonier. Next weekend we'll look at the topic of eternal punishment. What is hell? Is it a literal place burning with real flames? Or is it merely separation from God? We'll discover what the Bible says on this topic next weekend on Renewing Your Mind.