

Matthew - Commentaries by Cyrus Ingerson Scofield

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, True Believers and Mere Professors (23:28,33)

Ever since God has had a people of His own on this earth, they have been troubled by the presence of those who profess to be of them, but were not. Beginning under the very gate of Eden, this state of things will continue until "the Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity... then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:41-43).

Scripture plainly tells of this mingling of tares and wheat of mere professors among true believers. Yet this greatly confuses many Bible students, who apply the warnings meant only for the self-deceived or hypocritical to the children of God. Such admixture is abundantly recognized in the Scriptures. (See Gen. 4:3-5; Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4-6; Neh. 7:63-65; 13:1-3; Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 2:4; and 2 Peter 2:1-2.)

It is impossible, in a brief Bible reading, to refer to all the passages which distinguish true believers from mere formalists, hypocrites, and deceived legalists who are working for their own salvation instead of working out a salvation already received as a free gift (Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 2:8-9). The following, however, will sufficiently indicate the line of demarcation:

True Believers Are Saved

"He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:50).

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28).

"All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

"I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine" (John 10:14).

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47).

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Mere Professors Are Lost

"But Peter said unto him... Thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:20-21).

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

"But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him. And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father. From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John 6:64-66).

"Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:28,33).

"Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23).

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. 6:4).

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38).

Closing Thoughts

Some texts are not free from difficulty, but with prayer, careful study, and never using a doubtful or obscure passage to contradict a clear and positive one, light will surely come. Do not use an if passage, such as Heb. 6:6, to contradict a verily one, such as John 5:24.

The cases of Judas Iscariot and of Peter should present no difficulty. Judas was never a believer, as John 6:68-71 points out. Peter never ceased to be one, as Luke 22:31-32 clearly indicate.

Finally, remember that these principles are to guide us only in rightly dividing the Word of Truth, but are never to be applied to professors. The judgment of professors is not committed to us, but is reserved to the Son of Man (Matt. 13:28-29; 1 Cor. 4:5).

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Five Judgments (13:40-41)

Neither the expression, "general judgment" nor the idea conveyed by that expression is found in the Scriptures. Dr. Pentecost well says: "It is a mischievous habit that has led the Christian world to speak of the judgment as being one great event, taking place at the end of the world, when all human beings—saints, sinners, Jews and Gentiles, the living and the dead—shall stand up before the Great White Throne and there be judged. Nothing can be further from the teaching of the Scriptures."

Scripture speaks of five judgments, and they differ in four respects: subject, time, place and result of the judgment.

As to Believers

Time: A.D. 30

Place: The cross of Calvary

Result: Death for Christ and justification for the believer

"And He bearing His cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha: Where they crucified Him" (John 19:17-18).

"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree"

(1 Peter 2:24).

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

"For He (God) hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"

(2 Cor. 5:21).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

The Judgment of Sin in the Believer

Time: Anytime

Place: Anywhere

Result: Chastisement

"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:31-32).

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Heb. 12:7).

The Conduct, or Works of Believers Judged

Time: When Christ comes for His own

Place: In the air (1 Thess. 4:17; Matt. 25:24-30)

Result: To the believer, reward or loss of reward, "but he himself shall be saved"

Although Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and God has entered into covenant with us to "remember them no more" (Heb. 10:17), every work of the believer must be judged.

"Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him. For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:9-10 1w).

"We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10).

Both passages are limited by the context to believers. In the first, the apostle has just written of us as in one of two states: either we are at home in the body and absent from the Lord, or absent from the body and present with the Lord language which could not be used of unbelievers. "Wherefore we make it our aim," either with the Lord, or in the body, to please Him, "for we must all be made manifest" (2 Cor. 5:8-9).

In the other passage the word "we" limits it to believers. The Holy Spirit never commingles the saved and the unsaved. Then, lest it should seem incredible that a blood-cleansed saint could come into any judgment whatever, Paul quotes from Isaiah to prove that "every knee shall bow," and adds, "so then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God."

The following passage gives the basis of the judgment of works: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, 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. 3:11-15).

The following passages fix the time of this judgment:

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

"And thou shalt be blessed... for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14; 1 Cor. 15:22-23).

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5).

It is comforting, in view of that inevitable scrutiny of our poor works, to learn that in His patient love He is so leading us now that He can then find something in it all for which to praise us.

"Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:8).

The Judgment of the Nations

Time: The glorious appearing of Christ (Matt. 25:31-32; 13:40-41)

Place: The Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:1-2, 12-14)

Result: Some saved, some lost (Matt. 25:46)

Basis: The treatment of those whom Christ calls, "My brethren" (Matt. 25:40-45; Joel 3:3, 6-7)

These "brethren" are believed to be the Jewish remnant who have turned to Jesus as their Messiah during "the great tribulation" which follows the taking away of the Church, and is terminated by the glorious appearing of our Lord (Matt. 24:21-22; Rev. 7:14; 2 Th. 2:3-9). The proof is too extensive to be put forth here. It is evident, however, that these "brethren" cannot be believers of this dispensation, for it would be impossible to find any Christians so ignorant that they do not know that acts of kindness to believers are really ministries to Jesus Himself.

As this judgment of the living nations is sometimes confounded with that of the Great White Throne in Rev. 20:11, it may be well to note the following contrasts between the two scenes.

Living Nations

Great White Throne

No resurrection

A resurrection

Living nations judged

The dead judged

On The earth

Heavens and earth fled way

No books

Books were opened

Three classes: sheep, goats,

One class: the dead

brethren

When Christ appears

After He has reigned 1000 years

The saints will be associated with Christ in this judgment, and hence cannot be the subject of it (1 Cor. 6:2; Dan. 7:22; Jude 14-15). In truth, the judgment of the nations have but one thing in common: the Judge.

The Judgment of the Wicked Dead

Time: A determined "day" after the millennium (Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:5,7)

Place: Before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11)

Result: Judged, cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15)

Some may be troubled by the word "day" in Acts 17:31 and Rom. 2:16. In the following passages "day" means a lengthened period: 2 Peter 3:8; 2 Cor. 6:2; John 8:56. The "hour" of John 5:25 has now lasted more than nineteen hundred years. The scriptures also speak of a judgment of angels (1 Cor. 6:3; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4).

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Salvation and Rewards (10:42)

The New Testament contains a doctrine of salvation for the lost, and a doctrine of rewards for the faithful service of the saved. It is of great importance to the right understanding of the Word that the student should make the clear distinction between these.

Salvation: a Free Gift

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

"Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John 4:10).

"Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1).

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

But in contrast with the freeness of salvation, note that those works that are pleasing to God shall be rewarded.

Works to Be Rewarded

"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42).

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

"And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17).

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, 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. 3:11-15).

Salvation: a Present Possession

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36).

"He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath eternal Life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Tim. 1:9).

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5).

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11). But rewards are for a future time.

Rewards Bestowed in the Future

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

"For thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4).

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me" (2 Tim. 4:8).

God's purpose in promising to reward the faithful service of His saints with heavenly and eternal honors, is to win them from the pursuit of earthly riches and pleasures, to sustain them in the fires of persecution and to encourage them in the exercise of Christian virtues.

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