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FUTURE RETRIBUTION

While from past study of the Scriptures we have found that not the present age, but the age to come, is the world's judgment or trial day, the questions have doubtless occurred to many: To what extent are men of the world now accountable for their actions? and will their present actions be considered in their future trial? Will those of the world's children who are moral, honest, honorable, and even benevolent and charitable (for there are such) receive no reward in the future? and will those who are immoral, dishonest, selfish, and even criminal, receive no punishment for their evil deeds?

These are important questions, especially to the world, and well would it be for them if they could realize their importance and profit thereby. They are important also to the Church, because of our interest in the world, and because of our desire to understand and teach correctly our Father's plans.

We have learned that the sacrifice of Christ secures for all mankind, however vile, an awakening from death, and the privilege of thereafter coming to perfection and living forever if they will: "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust" (Acts 24:15). The object of their being again brought into existence will be to give them a favorable opportunity to secure everlasting life on the conditions which God requires—obedience to his righteous will. We have no intimation whatever in the Scriptures that in the awakening there will be any change in the moral condition of men; but we have much, both in reason and in revelation, to show, that as they went into death, so they shall come out of it. As there is "no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave" (Eccl. 9:10), they will have learned nothing. The Millennial Age is the time allotted for the world's awakening, discipline and trial under the reign of Christ.

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While strictly speaking, the world is not now on trial: that is, the present is not the time for their full and complete trial, yet men are not now, nor ever have been, entirely without light and ability, for which they are accountable. In the darkest days of the world's history, and in the deepest degradation of savage life, there has always been at least a measure of the light of conscience pointing more or less directly to righteousness and virtue.

At the advent of Jesus an increased measure of light came to men which increased to that extent their responsibility, as Jesus said: "This is the condemnation, That light is come into the world, and

men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). And for those evil deeds which men have committed against what light they had, or which it was their privilege to have, whether of conscience or of revelation, they will have to give an account, and receive a *just* recompense of reward in their day of judgment. And likewise to the extent of their effort to live righteously, they will receive their reward in the day of trial (Matt. 10:42).

The age of Christ’s reign will be a time of just judgment, and though it will be an age of golden opportunities, it will be a time of severe discipline, trial and punishment to many. The deeds of the present life will have much to do with the future. Paul taught this very clearly when, before Felix, he reasoned of justice and self-government in view of the judgment to come, so that Felix trembled (Acts 24:25. Dia.).

If men would consider what even reason must teach them, that a time of reckoning, of judgment, is coming; that God will not forever permit evil to triumph, but that in some way he will punish evil-doers, it would undoubtedly save them many sorrows and chastisements in the age to come. “Woe,” saith the Prophet, “unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?” (Isaiah 29:15.) Behold, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3); and “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.” Eccl. 12:14. He “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” 1 Cor. 4:5.

That the judgment will be fair and impartial, and with due consideration for the opportunities of each, is also vouchsafed by the character of the Judge (The Christ—John 5:22; 1 Cor. 6:2), by his perfect knowledge, by his unwavering justice and goodness, by his divine power, and by his great love as shown in his sacrifice to redeem men from death, that they might enjoy the privilege of a favorable individual trial.

The varied circumstances and opportunities of men in this and past ages, indicate that a just *judgment* will recognize differences in the degree of individual responsibility, which will also necessitate differences in the Lord’s future dealings with them. And this reasonable deduction we find clearly confirmed by the Scriptures. The Judge has been, and still is, taking minute cognizance of men’s actions and words, although they have been entirely unaware of it (Prov. 5:21), and he declares that “Every idle [“pernicious,” injurious or malicious] word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36); and that even a cup of cold water given to one of his little ones, shall in no wise lose its reward (10:42). The context shows that the pernicious words to which Jesus referred were words of willful and malicious opposition spoken against manifest light. Vs. 24,31,32.

Jesus also affirmed that it would be *more tolerable* for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom in the day of judgment than for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, which had misimproved greater advantages of light and opportunity. Matt. 11:20-24.

In the very nature of things, we can see that the future punishments will be in proportion to past guilt. Every sin indulged, and every evil propensity cultivated, hardens the heart and makes the way back to purity and virtue more difficult, and consequently sins willfully indulged now will require punishment and discipline in the age to come; and the more deeply the soul is dyed in willing sin, the more severe will be the measures required to correct it. As a wise parent would punish a wayward child, so Christ will punish the wicked for their good.

His punishments will always be administered in justice, tempered with mercy, and relieved by his approval and reward to those who are rightly exercised thereby. And it will only be when punishments, instructions and encouragements fail; in short, when love and mercy have done all that wisdom can approve (which is all that could be asked), that any will meet the final punishment which their case demands—the second death.

None of the world will meet that penalty until they have first had *all* the blessed opportunities of the age to come. And while this is true of the world, the same principles applies now to the consecrated children of God in *this* OUR judgment [trial] day. We now receive God's favors (through faith) while the world will receive them in the next age, viz.: instruction, assistance, encouragement, discipline and punishments. "For, what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons."

Therefore, we when we receive grievous chastisement, should accept it as from a loving Father for our correction, not forgetting "the exhortation which speaketh unto us as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Read Heb. 12:4-13.)

How just and equal are God's ways! Read carefully the rules of the coming age—Jer. 31:29-34 and Ezek. 18:20-32. They prove to us, beyond the possibility of a doubt, the sincerity and reality of all his professions of love to men: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?" Ezek. 33:11.

If men in *this life* repent of sin, and as the term repentance implies, begin and continue the work of reformation to the best of their ability, they will reap the benefit of so doing in the age to come;

they will in the resurrection age be to that extent advanced towards perfection, and their progress will be more rapid and easy, while with others it will be more slow, tedious and difficult. This is implied in the words of Jesus (John 5:29,30—Diaglott), “The hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life” [those whose trial is past and who were judged worthy of life will be raised perfect—the faithful of past ages to perfect human life, the overcomers of the gospel age to perfect life as divine beings], and “they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” [These are awakened to receive a course of discipline and correction—judgment—as the necessary means for their perfecting.]

The man who in this life, by fraud and injustice, accumulated and hoarded great wealth, which was scattered to the winds when he was laid in the dust, will doubtless awake to lament his loss, and bewail his poverty, and his utter inability under the new order of things to repeat unlawful measures to accumulate a fortune. It will be a severe chastisement and bitter experience with many to overcome the propensities to avarice, selfishness, pride, ambition and idleness, fostered and pampered for years in the present life. Occasionally we see an illustration of this form of punishment now, when a man of great wealth suddenly loses all, and the haughty spirit of himself and family must fall.

We are told (Dan. 12:2) that some shall awake to shame and age lasting contempt. And who can doubt that when every secret thing is brought into judgment (Eccl. 12:14), and the dark side of many a character that now stands measurably approved among men is then made known, many a face will blush and hide itself in confusion from others. When the man that stole is required to earn and refund the stolen property to its rightful owner, with the addition of twenty per cent. interest, and the man that lied, deceived, falsely accused, and otherwise wronged his neighbor, is required to acknowledge his crimes and so far as possible repair damages, on peril of an eternal loss of life, will not this be retributive justice? See the clear statement of this in God’s typical dealings with Israel whom he made to represent the world. (1 Cor. 10:11 and Lev. 6:1-7; also “Tab. Teachings,” page 52.)

“But they that be wise”—the little flock who are wise enough to accept the present favor of God which permits us now to be *joint-sacrificers*, and by and by *joint-heirs* with Christ, these “shall shine as the brightness of the firmament”—the Sun. These shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Dan. 12:2, and Matt. 13:43.)

And there will also be some others who have endeavored to live in this life according to the light and opportunity granted them, and who tried to turn others to righteousness. Of this class were the prophets and other justified faithful ones of past ages, and some others, such as Socrates,

Plato, Aristotle and Confucius, who enjoyed only the waning light of nature, but were faithful to that little light: These shall shine as the stars forever and ever. They will be notable, honorable and advanced because of faithfulness. These will always

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be bright ones—men and women of special honor because of their noble efforts to stem the tide of evil when the full force of the tide was against them.

As we are thus permitted to look into the perfect plan of God, how forcibly we are reminded of his word through the prophet Isaiah, “Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet (Isaiah 28:17.) We may also see the wholesome influence of such discipline. Parents in disciplining their children realize the imperative necessity of making their punishments in proportion to the character of offenses; and so in God’s government, great punishments following great offenses are not

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greater than is necessary to establish justice and to effect so great a moral reform.

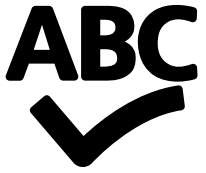
Seeing that the Lord will thus equitably adjust human affairs in his own due time, and knowing the outcome of his plan, we can well afford to endure hardness for the present, and resist evil with good, even at the cost of present disadvantage. Therefore “Recompense to no man evil for evil.” (Rom. 12:17-19.) “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The present order of things will not always continue; a time of reckoning is coming, and the just Judge of all the earth says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”; and Peter adds, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.” And as we have seen, those punishments will be adapted to the nature of the offences, and the benevolent object in view,—man’s permanent establishment in righteousness.

Other Scriptures corroborative of this view of future rewards and punishments are as follows: 2 Sam. 3:39; Matt. 16:27; 1 Pet. 3:12; Psa. 19:11; 91:8; Prov. 11:18; Isa. 40:10; 49:4; Matt. 5:12; 10:41,42; Luke 6:35; Rev. 22:12; Rom. 14:11,12.

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