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I REST MY CASE

A confession of faith by one who was once troubled at the thought of his name coming up in judgment

How do you react when you read such solemn pronouncements of the coming judgment as these: “The judgment was set, and the books were opened” (Dan. 7:10)¹; “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come” (Rev. 14:7); “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14); “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment” (Ps. 1:5).

Are these passages good news, or do they have an unsettling effect? I have not always considered the judgment as part of the assuring good news of the gospel. While growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I used to shudder at the mention of the investigative judgment. The prospect of my name coming up in the heavenly court, with all my sins brought before God

and the onlooking universe, made me think, *I’ll never make it! I hope my name doesn’t come up today.*

Imagine my surprise when I first came across a number of prayers in the Book of Psalms in which the psalmist seemed actually to welcome and even long for the judgment. The plea for judgment appeared shocking enough: “Arise, O God, judge the earth” (82:8). Even more startling were the expressions of joyous exuberance at the coming judgment: “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; . . . Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is

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Scripture consistently upholds the seriousness of sin and the certainty of the judgment. But it also reveals that the Lamb of God, our Substitute, has been accepted in our place. As we receive Christ, we are covered with the robe of His righteousness. God says to the great accuser, “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan” (Zech. 3:2). We are acquitted, pardoned, and cleansed.

coming to judge the earth” (96:11-13, NRSV). But simply beyond my comprehension were the passages in which David longed for *his own case* to come up in judgment. Numerous times he prayed, “Judge me, O Lord” (7:8; 26:1; 35:24; 43:1). He seemed to be saying, in effect, “Hurry up, Lord! Send the judgment. Let my name come up. I can’t wait!”

Is the judgment good news for you in the way it seems to have been for David? Perhaps a practical test of whether or not it is good news in your life is to ask yourself: *Have I ever prayed David’s prayer? This morning, did I pray, “Judge me, O Lord; please let my name come up in judgment”?*

How could David pray such a prayer? With his record of heinous sins—adultery, murder, lying, to name a few. Did he not understand the sinfulness of sin, the seriousness of the judgment?

He understood. Note his prayer of deepest repentance after the affair

with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband: “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment” (51:3, 4, NRSV).

David certainly comprehended the heinousness of his sin and the reality of the judgment. But he also understood the message of righteousness by faith. He recognized that, sinful though he was, his sins could be cleansed by the blood of the Substitute. He prayed: “Purge me with hyssop [the agent used to apply the blood of the sacrifice], and I shall be clean” (vs. 7). In joy he could cry out, “Blessed is he whose transgression *is* forgiven, *whose sin is covered*” (32:1).

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place. As we receive Christ, we are covered with the robe of His righteousness. God says to the great accuser, “The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan” (Zech. 3:2). We are acquitted, pardoned, and cleansed. We no longer are “anxious about what Christ and God think of us, but about what God thinks of Christ, our Substitute.”²

Assurance of Vindication

When we belong to Christ, the tables are turned in the judgment. No longer do we stand there an accused defendant. As Christ has paid the full price for our acquittal, we become the plaintiff, calling for vindication against the false charges of Satan. Now, with David, we can long for and welcome the judgment. We can pray, “Judge [“vindicate,” RSV] me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness” (Ps. 35:24).

The outcome of this judgment is certain. It is “in favor of the saints of the Most High” (Dan. 7:22, NIV). Not only is Christ our Substitute, but He also is our Advocate, our Lawyer, who never has lost a case that has been committed to Him. Eloquently and persuasively, He pleads our case in the heavenly assize. Note that the word *plead* here and in Ellen White’s descriptions of the investigative judgment, is a legal term and does not refer to “begging” the Father for mercy, as some have construed it. The Father does not need to be

begged! He has placed Christ there to be our Representative. He is on our side. Those illustrations that picture the repentant sinner standing by himself in the midst of the heavenly tribunal miss the point. “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). For those in Christ, the heavenly courtroom is a friendly place.

Our Lawyer stands beside them with His arm around them, as it were; He “does not excuse their sins, but shows their penitence and faith, and, claiming for them forgiveness, He lifts His wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying, ‘I know them by name. I have graven them upon the palms of My hands.’”³

Christ is both our Substitute and Advocate and the star witness in our behalf! As the Faithful and True Witness (Rev. 3:14), He brings evidence that vindicates us before the heavenly jury and silences the false accusations of the adversary.

To top it all off, as if that were not enough good news, consider that in this heavenly court, Christ also is our Judge. This Judge has never made a mistake, and He is on our side. He is not a stern, harsh magistrate seeking to damn all He can, but a loving, gracious God, seeking to save all He can. In order to exonerate us, He tenderly urges us to accept the provisions of the court.

“Therefore I will judge you, O

house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin.

“Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live” (Eze. 18:30-32, NRSV).

God’s multiple function in the judgment may seem strange to our modern Western legal system, but it is entirely in keeping with the biblical concept of administering justice.⁴ At the city gates, the same elders could convene the judicial proceedings, argue as advocate, give testimony, and render the verdict. At the Israelite sanctuary, the priest not only did all this (Deut. 17:8-13) but also bore the penalty of the sins (Lev. 10:17).

With Christ as our Substitute and Surety, our Advocate and Mediator, our Witness, Friend, and Judge, what better news can we ask?

This incredibly good news about assurance of vindication in the judgment will become increasingly precious to us as the fires of persecution are kindled, as false witnesses accuse God’s people of causing all the calamities in the land, and as the highest earthly tribunals render

guilty verdicts against them. In the face of such a bleak outlook, we can have hope and confidence that in the investigative judgment the truth will come out. Like Job, who in a setting of investigative judgment was faced with false accusers, we can proclaim confidently: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!” (Job 19:25-27, NRSV).

“John in holy vision beholds the faithful souls that come up out of great tribulation, surrounding the throne of God, clad in white robes, and crowned with immortal glory. What though they have been counted the offscouring of the earth? In the investigative judgment their lives and characters are brought in review before God, and that solemn tribunal reverses the decision of their enemies. Their faithfulness to God and to His Word stands revealed, and Heaven’s high honors are awarded them as conquerors in the strife with sin and Satan.”⁵

Thus the investigative judgment reveals to the universe the saints’ standing before God. It does not put the salvation of God’s people in jeopardy. While it is a fearful thing to those who have neglected and rejected the provisions made for their

Vindication in the judgment and assurance in the judgment is good news—almost too good to be true. I hardly dared to believe it, even as a theology major in college, as a seminary student, and as a young pastor. Finally the sublime promise jumped out at me from Scripture: “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.”

salvation, for those in Christ the investigative judgment is a reason for singing. Since 1844, God’s saints can proclaim, “Finally it’s here!” Since the death of Abel, the blood of the martyrs has been crying out, “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?” (Rev. 6:10, NRSV).

At last the time has come. Yom Kippur is here. The final judgment has begun—the process of investigation, followed by the millennial review and the final execution of the sentence. At last, Satan is to be silenced. The truth will be seen that vindicates God’s people. Truly the first angel’s message, “the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7, NRSV) is part of the “eternal gospel [good news]” (vs. 6, NRSV).

Vindication in the judgment and assurance in the judgment *is* good news—almost too good to be true. I hardly dared to believe it, even as a theology major in college, as a seminary student, and as a young pas-

tor. Finally the sublime promises jumped out at me from Scripture: “Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes *has* eternal life” (John 6:47, NRSV, italics supplied). “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, NRSV).

“If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ’s character stands in place of your character, and you are *accepted* before God just as if you had not sinned.”⁶

The marvelous news that I am “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6), that Christ is my righteousness, brought to my soul a joy and peace like that described by those who heard the gospel message in the wake of the 1888 General Conference session. Ellen White captured my feelings as she depicted the experience of many at the Ottawa, Kansas, camp meeting in 1889:

“Light flashed from the oracles of God in relation to the law and the gospel, in relation to the fact that Christ is our righteousness, which seemed to souls who were hungry for truth, as light too precious to be received.”⁷

I felt like the young pastor at that Kansas camp meeting who “saw that it was his privilege to be justified by faith; he had peace with God, and with tears confessed what relief and blessing had come to his soul.”⁸

Since that experiential introduction to gospel assurance when I was a young pastor, the beauty of righteousness by faith has grown ever more precious. I must confess that sometimes it still seems almost too good to be true. I catch myself unconsciously falling back into old habit patterns of trying to be good enough to deserve salvation, and

have to discover anew the joyous truth of “laying the glory of man in the dust” and trust wholly in Christ’s righteousness.

How precious is the doctrine of Christian assurance! With joy and confidence, I rest my case on the atoning blood and intercessory merits of Christ. □

REFERENCES

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references in this article are from the King James Version.

² *Selected Messages*, Book 2, pp. 32, 33.

³ *The Great Controversy*, p. 484.

⁴ Hans J. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1980), pp. 34, 35.

⁵ *Our High Calling*, p. 361.

⁶ *Steps to Christ*, p. 62. Italics supplied.

⁷ *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 356.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

