

Friendly Bible Talks

death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid

“Now, read on Mr. Rogers, if you please, verse seventeen,” said Mr. Summers.

“Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then you shall be trodden down by it.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Summers. “You see from these words that it is vain to expect anything from death. The man who believes that death is a friend which will bring him enlargement of life, is going to find that covenants with death are worthless, and that the grave has nothing for him. He will perish utterly when the overflowing scourge shall pass through the land. Our efforts must be directed to save men from making their worthless covenant with death, and hiding under a refuge of falsehood. We must make known the truth concerning death and immortality to them, and tell them of the sure refuge which God has Himself provided for the time of storm.

“Therefore thus said the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.’ Christ is man’s only refuge, his one hope of escape from the grave. In Him alone is there any true promise of immortality.”

The Judgment

“This week,” said Mr. Summers, “I want to take up the subject of the judgment which will gather up what we have studied thus far about the reward of the saints at Christ’s coming and the fate of the wicked. There is a great deal to be said about it, much more than we shall be able to cover tonight, but we can at least try to get a few points clear in our minds. You perhaps know what it means to prepare for an important examination?”

“A little,” said Mr. Barker.

“Then you know,” replied Mr. Summers, “how one’s mind is fixed on the date appointed for the examination; how eagerly we seek for information as to the questions usually asked; with what care and diligence we prepare ourselves; and how interested we are in learning the disposition of the examiner and any other details we can get hold of about the ordeal.”

“And how glad we felt when it was all over,” said Mr. Barker, with a smile.

“Well,” continued Mr. Summers, “if an examination on which comparatively little depended was regarded with so much earnestness and anxious thought, how ought we to regard the examination in which our earthly life will be reviewed, to see if we have mastered the course of lessons assigned us here, and whether we are fitted to go up into the higher education of heaven!”

“I am sure we don’t think enough of the matter,” said Mr. Rogers. “Partly because we don’t understand it clearly.”

“Then let us see what we can learn,” said Mr. Summers, “about the great examination we are all entered for, which none of us can decline, in which we must appear and answer for ourselves, whether prepared or not. Let us see what the questions will be, who the examiner is, if any assistance can be had in the examination, when it will be held, and where. Let us see what the examination will deal with, what will be the rewards, and what the penalty of failure.”

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“You don’t mean to say that we can find information in the Bible on all those points, do you?” asked Mr. Rogers, with a look of wonder in his eyes.

“We shall see,” answered Mr. Summers. “You don’t think, do you, that God would judge us without giving the fullest information in all points connected with the judgment? That would not be fair, and it would not be like Him. Suppose we consider first what the judgment will pass in review. What material will be laid before it on which to give a verdict? Mr. Barker, will you read the last verse of Ecclesiastes for us?”

Mr. Barker turned to the book mentioned, and read: “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

“Can you tell us,” asked Mr. Summers, “what information is afforded by this verse?”

Mr. Barker thought a moment, and then answered: “Every deed of the life will be judged, whether good or bad, and every secret act will be judged also. So we shall be judged by our works.”

“Right,” replied Mr. Summers. “One fact that must be remembered in connection with the judgment is that secret things will then be dealt with. That is a very solemn thought. There may be secrets in our lives, known to no human being but ourselves. These must be considered if the judgment is to be a fair and exact one, and they will be revealed then. Deeds of kindness that the right hand had concealed from the left will appear; and deeds of shame, done in the darkness, will likewise come forth.

“Then, again, it is the acts of men that will be judged, not their professions. Because a man goes by the name of Christian, that does not ensure his passing the test. His acts will show whether he was truly a Christian or not, and by his acts he will be judged. But something more than deeds will be taken into account. Mr. Rogers, do you mind reading from the twelfth of Matthew, verses thirty-six and thirty-seven?”

Mr. Rogers found the place, and read: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

“In what sort of light does that passage show up the frivolous speeches we so often make?” asked Mr. Summers. “When a public speaker remembers that his words are being taken down by reporters, to be criticized, perhaps, by keen opponents, and that he may have to justify his language, it makes him careful. How much more should we weigh our words when we remember that every one of them is unerringly recorded, to be repeated in the judgment, and that by them we shall either be justified or condemned?”

“How are our secret thoughts, and words, and acts brought before the judgment-seat?” asked Mr. Barker.

“There are books kept in heaven which record fully and minutely the history of every man,” replied Mr. Summers. “When the judgment sits, its decisions will be based on the evidence contained in those books. Let us turn to the seventh of Daniel, where the judgment scene is described, and you will find that then the books are opened. Mr. Barker, you might read the ninth and tenth verses for us.”

Mr. Barker turned up the passage, and read: “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Summers. “Notice what these verses tell us. The thrones are placed, and the Father takes His seat. He is clothed with terrible majesty; the innumerable hosts of angels stand before Him. It is the day of judgment, and the books that have been kept by the recording angels in view of this very time are now opened. In the twentieth of Revelation, which describes another part of the judgment, we learn what purpose the books serve. Will you read verse twelve, Mr. Rogers?”

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Mr. Rogers read these words: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."

"What do the books contain, then?" asked Mr. Summers.

"The story of men's lives," answered Mr. Barker.

"That is what the Bible tells us," said Mr. Summers. "You and I may never be considered important enough to have our biographies written in this world, but each of us is the subject of faithful and minute history, recorded by an angel scribe in the courts above. There our daily acts are noted as carefully as those of the most powerful monarchs. We may forget the words we speak, and the acts we perform, but the record survives, and one day it will speak out the plain, unvarnished truth concerning us. But the books of heaven do not record only the idle words we speak. God preserves our more acceptable utterances, and He tells us so in Malachi, third chapter, sixteenth verse. Will one of you please find it and read it to us?"

Mr. Rogers turned to the place, and read as follows: "Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, said the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them,' as a man spares his own son that serves him."

"Then, too," continued Mr. Summers, "the Lord records the sufferings of His people. David prayed in the fifty-sixth Psalm: 'Thou tells my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy book?' So, you see, everything connected with our earthly experience is recorded in heaven. "Our sins, our temptations, our struggles, our victories, will all be made known in the judgment, when the books are opened. All will be taken into account. But there is still another book, the book of life, which seems to contain the names of God's servants. Jesus speaks of this book in the tenth of Luke, verse twenty. Will you read it for us, Mr. Barker?"

These were the words which Mr. Barker read: "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

"And now, Mr. Rogers, will you place beside this the words of Paul in Philippians, chapter four, verse three?"

Mr. Rogers read: "And I entreat thee also, true yoke-fellow, help those women which labored with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow-laborers, whose names are in the book of life."

"It is evident from these passages," said Mr. Summers, "that one of the books of heaven, called the book of life, contains the names of those who are numbered among the children of God. To have one's name written in this volume means to have a living connection with the Savior. The fact that names have once been written in that book, however, does not ensure that they will remain there. One of the tasks of the judgment will be to decide whether those whose names have been inscribed in God's book of life are worthy to be retained therein.

Only the over comer will have a place at last in that book. This we read in the third of Revelation and the fifth verse."

"So far as we have gone," continued Mr. Summers, "we have seen that the judgment is a very searching investigation of men's lives. Every thought and word and act, whether good or bad, is recorded, and will be weighted in the balances. Now the question arises, By what are our actions to be tried? We are not left without clear information on this point, as you will see if we read again the last two verses of Ecclesiastes: 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be

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good, or whether it be evil.' What do you gather, Mr. Barker, from these words, as to the standard of character in the judgment?"

"Well," said Mr. Barker, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "I can only see one answer. If the judgment is to determine whether we have done our duty, and the commandments contain our whole duty, all that the judgment will have to do will be to find out whether we have kept God's commandments or not."

"That seems to be the idea," assented Mr. Rogers.

"Well, then," replied Mr. Summers, "no-one can say that the rule of the judgment has not been made public enough. God Himself has spoken the Ten Commandments with His own voice, and moreover He wrote them with His own hand on tables of stone. There is no document in existence concerning which we have clearer proof that it came from God and contains His exact thought."

"But the heathen have never heard the law of God," put in Mr. Rogers. "Will they be judged by the commandments?"

"Yes, so far as they know them, for Paul tells us that even the heathen have some knowledge of God's law. Let us turn to the second of Romans, and read verses twelve to sixteen."

Mr. Rogers, having turned to the passage, read accordingly: "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another;) in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my Gospel."

"Thank you," said Mr. Summers. "How many, according to these words, have sinned in the law, and shall be judged by the law?"

"Everybody," replied Mr. Rogers, "that has any idea whatever of right and wrong."

"Yes," said Mr. Summers, "that is clearly stated. Wherever we find the most rudimentary conceptions of right, we can trace the writing of God on the heart; in every such case the man will be judged by the light he has had. The law of God, then, will be the standard of judgment for all. It comprises the whole duty of man in every walk of life. We will only read one more text on this point, from the epistle of James, twelfth verse of the second chapter."

Mr. Barker read the verse: "So speak you, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." "What law is that?" he asked.

"The preceding verses answer your questions," replied Mr. Summers. "It is the law that says, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not kill;' in other words, it is the Ten Commandments. But what about the judge?"

"I have been puzzling about that," said Mr. Barker. "We read in Daniel that it was the Ancient of days. But we have just read in the second of Romans that God would judge men by Jesus Christ. Is it the Father or the Son who is the Judge?"

"It seems impossible to separate them," replied Mr. Summers. "God does everything by Jesus Christ. The Father sits upon the throne of judgment, yet the Savior tells us in the gospel of John, chapter five, verse twenty-two: 'The Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son.' You might read also from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter seventeen, verses thirty and thirty-one. Will you read the passage, Mr. Rogers?"

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Mr. Rogers read as requested: “The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men everywhere to repent: because He has appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained; whereof He has given assurance unto all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead.”

“You see again,” commented Mr. Summers, “that all men are to be judged. Paul was speaking at Athens to a heathen assembly, but he has the same message of a judgment for them that he has for the Jews. And while no man is excused from the judgment on account of his ignorance of Christ, so no-one is excused because of his profession of faith in Christ. Peter writes to us, in his first epistle, that the Father, without respect of persons, judges according to every man’s work. Professions of faith in Christ will not be ignored in the judgment, but they will be weighed, and some of them, the Savior has warned us in His sermon on the mount, will be found only empty words. Here is what He says: ‘Not everyone that said unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.

“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, you that work iniquity.

“It seems that some will have a rude awakening in the day of judgment,” remarked Mr. Barker.

“Yes,” responded Mr. Summers. “Which reminds me that we have not yet touched on the question of when the judgment will take place.”

“I suppose that will be at the resurrection,” said Mr. Rogers.

“Let us see,” was the reply. “Did you notice, when we were reading from the seventh of Acts, what the text said on this question of time?”

Mr. Barker turned back to the passage, and quoted: “God has appointed a day.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Summers, “and that day was in the future for Paul, for when he was trying to make an impression on the stony heart of Felix, we read that ‘he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.’ But it will not always be ‘judgment to come’ that God’s servants will declare. In the fourteenth chapter of Revelation you will find a prophecy of a great world-wide proclamation of the everlasting Gospel a little before the coming of the Lord, and that proclamation has something new to say about the judgment. Mr. Barker, what do you find in the seventh verse?”

Mr. Barker turned eagerly to the passage, looked a moment, and then read: “The hour of His judgment is come.” “When does, that apply?” he asked.

“We shall see later,” was the answer. “But notice now that the judgment, which up to this time has been future, becomes present. What Paul said would come has come. Now we will look forward a little farther, and read a startling decree that is proclaimed just before the second coming of Christ. Mr. Rogers, read to us what you find in Revelation, the last chapter, verses eleven and twelve.”

These were the solemn words which Mr. Rogers read: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

“And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

“I want you to notice three things here,” said Mr. Summers. “First, every man’s character is then finally fixed. Second, the rewards of God’s servants are decided. Third, these decisions are reached before the Savior’s Second Advent, for He comes bringing the rewards with Him. Now, what follows from these facts?”

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“It must be,” answered Mr. Barker, “that the judgment is finished before Christ comes.”

“Partly,” rejoined Mr. Summers. “So far as His own people are concerned. And this agrees with numerous statements in the Scriptures. Read, for instance, the fourteenth verse of the fourteenth of Luke. Christ has been recommending to the wealthy that they call the poor to their feasts rather than their social equals: ‘And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.’ When do the just get their recompense, then?”

“At their resurrection,” answered Mr. Rogers.

“Right. One more text on this point,” said Mr. Summers. “Will you read in the fifth of John, beginning with the twenty-eighth verse, Mr. Barker?”

Mr. Barker did as requested, and these were the words he read: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

“Do you see,” asked Mr. Summers, “that it is not after the resurrection that the sheep and the goats are divided? Before the resurrection takes place it is known who have done good and who have done evil. When the Savior comes, it is already known who are accounted worthy of a place in the resurrection of the just, and it has already been decided what rewards are to be bestowed on the righteous. The Savior comes to awake His sleeping saints, bringing His rewards with Him. So it is plain that the judgment of the house of God, so far as the weighing of character is concerned, is over before the Savior comes. He that is holy remains holy for evermore. All that is left of the judgment of the righteous is the bestowal of the reward.”

“So the righteous are not present when -their lives are examined?” asked Mr. Rogers.

“Only by the unerring testimony of their life record,” replied Mr. Summers. “Whatever of failure and sin that record reveals is unfolded only before those who have known it already, the ministering angels. If the life record shows that faith in Christ has been genuine, and that there has been a sincere appropriation of overcoming grace, the Advocate appears on behalf of the penitent sinner, and pleads His own righteousness. The terms on which His services may be engaged are given us in the twelfth of Luke, verses eight and nine. Read them to us, Mr. Barker.”

Mr. Barker read as requested: “Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denies Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.”

“The terms are fair, are they not?” said Mr. Summers. “The Lord is in heaven, and we are on the earth. He needs our advocacy here: we need His there. If we will represent Him on the earth, He will represent us in heaven.

“We have only considered the resurrection of life, so far,” continued Mr. Summers, “but there is another, the resurrection of condemnation.”

“Are not both simultaneous?” asked Mr. Rogers.

“No,” was the answer. “We might think so from some references, but in the twentieth chapter of Revelation we are told that these two resurrections are a long way apart. If you look at the end of the fourth verse, you will see that the saints, after their resurrection, live and reign with Christ a thousand years. Now will you read us the next verse, Mr. Barker?”

Mr. Barker did so, reading: “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

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“How far apart, then, are the two resurrections?” asked Mr. Summers.

“A thousand years,” answered Mr. Barker.

“Now think for a moment,” said Mr. Summers. “When the righteous came up, in the first resurrection, it was because they were ‘accounted worthy’ of everlasting life. It follows that those who were not raised at that time were not accounted worthy. The ones who had a share in the first resurrection were blessed and holy, and on them the second death would have no power: the remainder are not blessed and holy, and over them the second death will have power. So, as far as being ranked among the lost is concerned, the wicked are already judged at the first resurrection. But there is something more to the judgment than merely the division into saved and lost.

The righteous were not merely pronounced worthy of life: some were made rulers over much, some over little. Rewards were given to each; in the case of the wicked there will be individual rewards also. The Savior has told us that some among the wicked will be beaten with many stripes, some with few stripes. When will these differences of punishment be decided, and who will decide them? Mr. Rogers, will you read us the first part of the fourth verse?”

Mr. Rogers took up his Bible, and read these words: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them.”

“That will do,” said Mr. Summers. “Who are spoken of in these words?”

“It seems to be the saints and martyrs, judging from the rest of the verse,” replied Mr. Rogers.

“Yes,” was the reply. “They it is who sit on thrones of judgment during the thousand years that follow their own resurrection, and mete out to the lost the measure of punishment that their sins have incurred. Once the martyrs stood before the tribunals of men, and suffered savage cruelties from their malice. Now the situation is reversed. Those who were once the great men of the earth now receive judgment at the hands of their one-time victims. And it is not only wicked men whose cases are thus dealt with by the saints. Look at the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter six, verses two and three. Please read the words, Mr. Barker.”

They were as follows: “Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know you not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?”

“Well, I never noticed that before,” said Mr. Rogers. “It will be a grand thing to sit in judgment on the devil, and give him what he deserves.”

“You must remember,” said Mr. Summers with a smile, “that we shall be wiser and more capable of sound judgment then. I fancy when we sit on thrones with the Savior, and delight in the bliss of heaven, and when we look over the dark story of sin, we shall be moved with more pity than wrath for those who chose the darkness. But it will be a wonderful experience, sure enough, to go through the history of this world, and trace the wisdom and the love of God through it all. We shall be wiser when that investigation is completed. Now when will the resurrection of the wicked take place, that they may receive the rewards which they have earned?”

“At the end of the thousand years,” answered Mr. Barker.

“Yes,” Mr. Summers answered; “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished, which is equivalent to a statement that the rest of the dead lived again when the thousand years came to an end. So if you read on in the chapter, you will find at the end of the thousand years there is a resurrection of all the wicked, like the sands of the sea for multitude. Then the great white throne is set up, ‘and I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.’

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“So you see the judgment begins before the second coming of Christ, and lasts for over a thousand years. The execution of its sentence against sinners is the end of the history of sin and of the present sin-cursed earth. A new earth is promised in which there shall be no more curse. But it is late, and we must close tonight’s study.”

A Breach In The Law

“LAST week,” said Mr. Summers, as the three friends gathered once more around the table in his sitting-room, with their Bibles before them, “we read some scriptures concerning the judgment, and learned something of its searching investigation of our lives, of the holy standard by which we shall be measured, and of the rewards that Christ will bring to His own. Tonight I would like to study with you about one particular point in which there is a grave and widespread departure from the law of God. Nearly all Christians, most of them unwittingly, are breaking one of the commandments, and the matter is one that calls for earnest study. If the course taken by the majority of Christians is wrong, a decided change ought to be made, for we cannot come up to the Second Advent of our Savior and be ready for Him if we are walking in sin.”

“True enough,” said Mr. Rogers. “Which commandment are you referring to?”

“Let us look at them, and you will soon see,” was Mr. Summers’ answer.

All accordingly turned to the twentieth chapter of Exodus, while Mr. Summers read one commandment after another. “Thou shall have no other gods before Me,” was the first.

“Perhaps that is the commandment you mean?” suggested Mr. Rogers.

“No,” was the answer. “This one is not kept as it ought to be. There are a good many forms of idolatry even in our own enlightened country, but Christians design, at least, to avoid them. So with the second, they do not bow down and worship graven images. Nor do they consider it right, to take God’s name in vain. But look now at the fourth,” Mr. Summers continued. “What does it say?”

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

“Do Christians profess to keep this commandment?” he asked. “We read it regularly in church,” answered Mr. Barker.

“But is the commandment itself actually obeyed?” inquired Mr. Summers.

“Well, of course we don’t keep the old Jewish Sabbath in this dispensation,” said Mr. Barker.

“The commandment does not tell us to keep the old Jewish Sabbath,” replied Mr. Summers. “It bids us remember the Sabbath of the Lord.”

“Christ changed the old Sabbath for the Christian Sunday;” put in Mr. Rogers. “That is why we keep the first day instead of the seventh.”

“Now we are getting at something definite,” said Mr. Summers. “Where do you read that Christ changed the day of the Sabbath, Mr. Rogers?”

“Oh, there are several texts in the New Testament,” answered Mr. Rogers. “I can’t put my finger on one just now. But I can bring you plenty next week.”