

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 88.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #88. *What shall immediately follow after the resurrection?*

A. Immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men;¹ the day and hour whereof no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord.²

Question 1—*What proofs do we have of the final Judgment?*

Answer—Besides the fact that all men, by nature, observe a providence that declares that God is the governor of the world, *cf.* Eccl. 3:17; this fact that there will be a final judgment is plainly revealed in Scripture. It was foretold in the early ages of the world, as contained in the prophecy of Enoch, which though they might have a peculiar reference to the judgment which God would execute in the destruction of the old world, yet, the apostle says it looks as far as the final judgment, Jude 14, 15. This same truth appears likewise from what Solomon has said, Eccl. 12:14. There are, indeed, many displays of God's judicial hand in the present dispensations of his providence, Ps. 9:16. Yet, sin deserves greater punishments than what are inflicted here, even as the promises of God ought to make his people look beyond the present for a time coming when matters will be adjusted, Ps. 58:11.

Moreover, this doctrine is not only revealed in Scripture, it is impressed upon the consciences of men, though they take never so many pains to extinguish their apprehension of it, which explains the reaction of Belshazzar when he was made to know his impending doom, Dan. 5:6. The sense of a future judgment of God produces in men a sense of deep unease and fear, Acts 24:25. Thus, when Paul was disputing with the Athenians, though they mocked and treated what he said about the resurrection with ridicule, yet none of them had anything to object against the doctrine of the final judgment, Acts 17:31.

Question 2—*What should we know of the Person and appearance of the Judge?*

Answer—*First*, we read that the person who is to perform this great work of judgment is the Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Tim. 4:1; thus, it shall occur before his throne, 2 Cor. 5:10. If we consider his glory as a divine Person, knowing all things and judging the secrets of men, he is fit to engage in it, Rom. 2:16. Additionally, we must observe that this work is a branch of his mediatorial dignity, and is included in the execution of the kingly office, for it is contained in the commission he received of the Father, John 5:22; and, it is given him by virtue of his assumption of the office of Christ, John 5:27. This is a part of the work which was incumbent upon him in the application of redemption, which cannot be brought to its utmost perfection until the day of judgment, Luke 21:27, 28. Indeed, it is very expedient that he judge the world, since he was unjustly judged and condemned by the world, his cause shall have a second hearing that even his enemies be convinced of his right, Mark 14:61-64. Notice that in this place Christ applies to himself what Daniel the prophet said of his coming to judge

¹ 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6, 7, 14, 15; Matt. 25:46.

² Matt. 24:36, 42, 44.

the world as a most visible and incontestable proof of his mediatorial glory, Dan. 7:13. It is expedient, therefore, that this visible proof of his Sonship and mediatorial glory should be given, and that he should perform this great work which is incumbent upon him, as he brought them to expect, Rev. 1:7.

Second, the work being glorious, it cannot be surprising that he will appear with the ensigns of majesty and regal dignity which become his character as the judge of the quick and dead, Luke 9:26. His own glory respects the rays of his divinity shining forth, whereas appearing in his Father's glory denotes that this is the highest display of his mediatorial dignity, and the glory of the angels implies the reverence and homage that they shall pay him as his ministering spirits, Heb. 1:7. They shall not be employed in raising the dead, but shall make up his retinue in subservience of the glory of this solemnity, Matt. 25:31.

It is the honor of the angels to attend his coming with a shout, transmitting to the whole world the word of command first given forth by Christ, whereby all men shall be summoned to appear before him, 1 Thess. 4:16. The allusion to the trumpet points to that gathering of the hosts together, Num. 10:2. It is by these angels that the saints left alive shall be brought to meet the Lord in the air, 1 Thess. 4:17; and it is said that they shall gather in the elect from around the world, Matt. 24:31. Elsewhere, our Saviour speaks of the angels as reapers in that end time harvest when they shall sever the wicked from the righteous, Matt. 13:39, 49. At this time, Christ is represented as the Judge sitting upon his throne, Matt. 25:31.

Question 3—*Who then shall be judged?*

Answer—All creatures that are subjects of the moral government of God shall be made then to appear for judgment at Christ's tribunal, Gen. 18:25; 2 Cor. 5:10.

This shall include all of the angels of God who are subjects of moral government and capable of receiving the determination of judgment which shall occur for all at that day, Matt. 25:46. It is true the Scriptures do not speak as clearly regarding the disposition of the holy angels who are employed fulfilling his pleasure, Heb. 1:14. Nonetheless, the fact that some angels are called elect, 1 Tim. 5:21; and are elsewhere called holy, Mark 8:38; suggests that they will at that final day be confirmed in their heavenly glory communicatively and participatively in Christ giving their assent to his judgments and testifying to the good works of the pious, 1 Cor. 6:2. For though Christ is not their mediatorial head as he is with elect men, Heb. 2:16; yet, he is their mystical head and Lord because they have been given him of the Father for the advancement of the mediatorial kingdom, Col. 2:9, 10; Phil. 2:10; Heb. 1:6.

The final judgment respecting the angels is more clearly taught with respect to those who have fallen, for they are cast down to hell and reserved unto judgment, 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6, 7. Of this, they have a present apprehension such that they are said to tremble at the forethought of it, Jas. 2:19. Moreover, that they shall be judged at the last day may be inferred from what they said to our Saviour when he encountered some of them on earth, Matt. 8:29. The result of this final judgment is that they shall receive a greater degree of torment in proportion to the increase of their guilt, *cf.* Rev. 20:10.

What is more particularly of interest to us as men is that all men shall be judged at this time, for every work good or bad, 2 Cor. 5:10; whether alive at his coming or dead, 2 Tim. 4:1; whether righteous or wicked, Eccl. 3:17. This judgment shall be not only over those who possess the revelation of God in Scripture and the light of the Gospel but also to those who have only the light of nature, Rom. 2:12. The latter shall receive judgment proportioned

to their works so that they shall be exposed to a less degree of punishment than those who sinned against greater light, Matt. 11:22, 24; 12:41, 42.

Question 4—*What is the manner of this Judgment?*

Answer—The manner of this Judgment is that it shall be done in a public and visible way that demonstrates that the Judge of all does right, so he shall be seated on a throne of judgment, the judgment shall be set and the books shall be opened, Matt. 25:31, 32; Dan. 7:26; Rev. 20:12. It is likely that the holy angels, who are conversant with the affairs of this lower world shall give evidence, for they are present in worshipping assemblies, 1 Cor. 11:10; and observe the actions of men, 1 Tim. 5:21. So, too, the Judge himself shall be a witness against the criminals, Mal. 3:5. Whereas in human courts this might seem unjust, in this instance it will in no way savor of injustice for the consciences of men themselves shall confirm and self convict those against whom God judgeth, 1 John 3:20. The guilt of each established and confirmed by themselves, Rom. 2:15, 16; every mouth shall be stopped as they all make confession before God of the justness of their sentence, Rom. 3:19. There shall be a particular dispensation of providence whereby those sins long forgotten shall be brought to remembrance in support of the charges and sentence given, Luke 16:25; Ps. 50:21.

As to the things brought into judgment, or to be charged and proved, they are mentioned in a particular manner, Eccl. 12:14. So, he is represented elsewhere as executing judgments, Jude 15. Our Saviour particularly intimates, that their behavior, under the means of grace, shall be inquired into, and that what they have done against him and his interest shall be alleged against them, Matt. 25:42, 43. Even the smallest of sins shall be brought forth for judgment, Matt. 12:36.

The trial of the righteous shall be unto their acquittal and discharge, for no accusation against them shall stand, Rom. 8:33. It will be the time when the blessing is formally pronounced and the honor bestowed, Matt. 25:34, 35. Nor shall their former sins be made manifest, in contrast to the wicked, for they have been forgiven to be remembered no more, Isa. 43:25; Ps. 32:1; Mic. 7:19; Jer. 31:34.

Question 5—*What is the place and time of this Judgment?*

Answer—As to the place of this judgment, it seems most probable that it shall be upon the surface of the earth, for the Lord shall descend to this judgment, 1 Thess. 4:16, 17.

As to the time, it is called in Scripture a day, Acts 17:31. Though this “day” should be understood to be a “season” rather than a literal day, *cf.* Luke 19:42. As to the time, or when this glorious day shall begin, this is also a matter kept secret, not only from us, but from all creatures, Matt. 24:36. It is evident that if God had either revealed the time of Christ’s coming to judgment, or let men know how long they should continue in this world before that judgment which is passed on all at death, the corruption of our nature might have taken occasion to put off all thoughts, therefore Christ, in wisdom and kindness, places us in remembrance of the fact, Matt. 24:42. He represents his coming under the similitude of a thief in the night, 1 Thess. 5:2; and, accordingly, he admonishes preparedness for that day, Matt. 24:44.