

# *Glorious...More Glorious*

## **A sermon about the Law, based on 2 Corinthians 5:10**

I've heard it said that the job of a preacher is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Just to give you a heads up, I may be doing a little more afflicting than comforting today. The last verse in today's epistle lesson gives church-goers problems. ***We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.*** There was a time in my itinerant preaching when I used to ask the congregation a question. The question is this: **Does God judge sinners according to good works?** I'd ask that question and every time people in the crowd would shake their heads no. No, God does not judge us sinners according to good works. But He does. Here it is: ***We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.***

This passage is not a fluke. There are many other passages that talk about judgment (Matthew 12:36; Matthew 18:23; Romans 14:12; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 4:-5). And then there's the passage that always rankles people, the last three verses of the Athanasian Creed: *At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, in everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.* The reason why my audiences shake like bobble-heads against judgment by works is that **this accountability, this idea that you'll be judged by your works afflicts us in our churchly comforts.** When I wrote this sermon, my spell-checker underlined Athanasian. I clicked and the spell-checker suggested "euthanasia." The idea that we church-goers are accountable, that we'll be judged is an idea that begins to euthanize our pious, puffed-up church-going egos.

***We must all appear...*** Ministers are not exempt from judgment. *We must all appear...* "But I'm a church-goer. I'm a good citizen, served in the military, put out my flag this weekend. I'm a good spouse, a good parent." *We must all appear...* "But I believe in Jesus!" What was it Jesus said? *Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). *We must all appear before the judgment seat....* **Are you thinking now that on balance you've been a pretty good person?** If you've ever had an argument with spouse or parent or boss or whomever, balance wasn't the issue. What you did wrong was the issue. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* (Deuteronomy 6:5). **Forget about trying to get off because on balance you've been a pretty good person.** *Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before You.* (Psalm 143:2) ***We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.***

**What would happen if people started to live each day more mindful that "We must all appear"?** This coming Friday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, is the anniversary of the day in 1804 when Aaron Burr, Vice President of the United States Aaron Burr, killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. In 1807 the troublesome Burr was indicted for treason against the United States. The indictment from the grand jury said this: *Aaron Burr...being...under the protection of the laws of the United States, and owing allegiance...(thereto), not having the fear of God before his eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil...(in James F. Simon, What Kind of Nation, p.*

245). What would happen if more people in government were mindful that they will appear in judgment? What would happen if more church leaders, not only at the national level but in the congregation, spoke and acted with the awareness that they will be judged? I wonder how many business debacles like Enron and World Com and what have you, how many business debacles would have been avoided... I wonder how many marriages would have been preserved... I wonder how many relationships between parents and children would be better off... I wonder how many friendships would have been kept... How different would things be in your life if you lived each day mindful that "*We must all appear...*"?

Here is a fundamental truth. The Law is good. **The Bible has two main teachings, the Law and the Gospel. The Law is whenever God points His finger at you and says, This is what you should be doing and if you don't, there'll be a day of reckoning. The Gospel, in contrast, points at Jesus and says, Look at all that He has done and still does for you.** I'm afraid that we preachers may have given you the impression that the Law is bad. The Law is not bad. It's good. It's good because it's God's Law and God is good. It's good because the Bible says so. *The Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.* (Romans 7:12)

**God gave His good Law to help us in three ways.** The Law of God is good because everyone knows you have to live by some rules in life. God put His Law into every heart, Christian and non-Christian. We're not always clear on what they are, but everyone knows instinctively that you have to live by some rules. That's why we have legislatures and courts. That's why parents "lay down the law." It's God who put that instinct into us. Without this inborn sense life would be chaos. Because it prompts us to orderly society, the law is good.

**God's good Law also helps show us Christians what to do.** Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on 1 Peter that the only reason God doesn't take us straight to heaven after baptism is because He leaves us here to do good works. *We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:10). And remember what Jesus said, *Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). The Law, all those thou shalt and thou shalt not, not just the Ten Commandments but all the times in the Bible when God tells you what you should be doing, all the Bible's instruction in righteousness is another reason why the Law of God is good.

**But the best way the Law of God helps you personally brings us back to today's text, *We must all appear....* The problem isn't the Law. The problem is sin.** The Law of God, all those commands of the Bible, all those instructions in righteousness, sticks the finger of God in your chest and in mine and says, "You're in trouble because you are a sinner." What's good about the "Good News," if it's not contrasted to some bad news? What good is forgiveness of sins if you, dear church-goer, don't think your sins are really all that bad? What good is a Savior if you, dear church-goer, are not convicted in your heart that you need one? Jesus is just another fine, exemplary person...until God through His Law has humbled you. *"Is not my word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"* (Jeremiah 23:29) **Born-again church goers need God's Law just like people outside the Church. The Law leads us to see that we need Jesus as much as anyone.** That's why St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 calls the work of the Law "glorious." The work of the Law is glorious because it shows how far you and I have fallen from the glory of God. **St. Paul adds that if the Law which brings condemnation is glorious, how much more glorious, how much more glorious is the work of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

*We must all appear....*

*Then He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatch from the fire?"*

*Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."*

*Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."*

*Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by. (Zechariah 3:1-5)*

**"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glorious dress.  
Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head."**

Glorious is the work of the Law which afflicts the comfortable. More glorious is the work of the Spirit of Christ who comforts us when we are afflicted by our sins, by death, and by the Devil. **Does God judge sinners by works? Yes. Will you be saved by good works? Yes, not by your good works but only by the good works of Jesus Christ,** by His coming, by His perfect obedience, by His passion, by His resurrection, by His pouring out the Holy Spirit. That's why we wrap ourselves in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's what faith is all about. **That's why the Law is glorious. It points us toward the far more glorious Good News of Jesus.** Amen.

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