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Please read all literature alongside your bible, so that you can see the accuracy and truth of the message for yourself

RESURRECTION AND JUDGEMENT

"EVERY ONE SHALL GIVE ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD"

THE word 'resurrection' may sound strange to anyone who has not read the Bible: it is not a word we use in everyday life in the twenty-first century. 'Judgement' is a more familiar word: it conjures up in our mind a law court and a judge handing down a sentence on a criminal. So what is a booklet on 'resurrection and judgement' about? If you are familiar with the Bible, you will know that - in a Bible context - 'resurrection' is the raising to life of people who have died, while 'judgement' has to do with God's assessment of men and women according to His standards.

This is a booklet to explain what the Bible says about a future time, which Christadelphians expect to be very soon, when God will send His Son Jesus Christ back to the earth to raise the dead and judge the world.

Life after death

Even those few sentences perhaps raise questions and problems in your mind:

- Is there really a God?
- Who actually is Jesus Christ?
- How do we know he is coming back?
- What has happened to dead people?
- How can they be raised from the dead?
- Will everyone be raised?
- Why does there need to be a day of judgement if God knows everything about us?
- What are the possible outcomes of that judgement?
- Where do I fit in all this?

Some of these questions need a booklet to themselves. In the following pages we shall try to deal with some of them - and you will find other booklets in this series which give fuller answers.

Let us start by quoting just two of the Bible's challenging statements about resurrection and judgement. First from the Old Testament (the Jewish scriptures which Jesus grew up with):

**"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt."
(Daniel 12:2)**

Here, the prophet Daniel (writing in about 550 BC) was inspired by God to foretell a future time when there would be a resurrection of the dead; and the fact that some would awake to "everlasting life" and others to "shame and contempt" tells us that there has to be a judgement - a process of deciding between those whom God accepts and those whom He rejects.

And now, from the New Testament, we have these words spoken by Jesus himself:

**"The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."
(John 5:28,29)**

The Lord Jesus Christ says the same as Daniel, though in different words. Clearly Jesus is talking about the same event, the same dramatic time, when there will be a resurrection and judgement for many, and when some are given life, and others are condemned.

Stark and searching facts

The two statements we have quoted are stark and clear. If the Bible is true, and if we claim to believe what it says, then we must accept that:

1. those who have died are in their graves; there is a prospect of life beyond the grave;
2. there is to be a day when many dead people are to be raised from their graves;
3. a judgement will take place;
4. some will be granted everlasting life;
5. some will be rejected and not be given life;
6. we have to do something about it if we want to be among those who receive the gift of eternal life.

These are very searching conclusions. We have so far looked at only two quotations from the Bible and already we are faced with the choice, either to take serious note of what this book says, or to refuse to believe what it is telling us.

There are many today, sadly, who refuse to take the Bible at face value. They suggest that the above statements from the Bible, and others like them, are not to be taken literally, that they were written in another time and with a different purpose, that Christianity has moved on, and fresh truths have come to light. These 'fresh truths' include the idea, not taught in the Bible, that when we die a part of us survives and goes to heaven, hell, or some other place. Modern thinking, heard in many of the churches of Christendom, would also insist that God cannot be a God of judgement, but loves and accepts all men and women - the very idea of a 'day of judgement' is abhorrent. We live in an age of tolerance, equality and freedom from

discrimination (all of which are commendable in the right circumstances), but these qualities do not necessarily describe how God deals with mankind.

Divine standards

It may not be a popular thing to say in the twenty-first century, but the God we read about in the Bible is a God who sets standards and who judges people according to those standards. God gave human beings a moral code of behaviour - both for their own good, and to give honour to their Creator. Today, 'old-fashioned' moral codes are rejected and, for many people, good behaviour is *'what you feel comfortable with'*. This is a view which is totally at variance with Bible teaching.

If we open our Bible at the first book, Genesis, we read as early as in chapter 3 how the first man and woman failed to live up to God's standards, as a result of which they were punished. They were banished from the Garden of Eden, the ground they cultivated was cursed, and they were declared to be mortal:

**"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."
(Genesis 3:19)**

Was that it? Was that God's irrevocable judgement? Adam and Eve had sinned but did God show no mercy? On the contrary, in this same chapter we find the beginnings of a message of hope concerning the forgiveness of sin, and life after death, which weaves its way like a golden thread through the whole Bible.

A God of goodness - and severity

These early happenings set the scene for the history of God's dealings with the human race, for we all share the fate of Adam and Eve. As we read on through Genesis and the whole of the Old Testament, and into the New Testament, we are made aware that God was constantly making a judgement between one person and another. He accepted Abel but rejected Cain who had disobeyed His instructions; He saved Noah, but destroyed the wicked world of Noah's time; He called Abram (later renaming him Abraham), and then selected his son Isaac and grandson Jacob (renamed Israel), but did not choose other sons and grandsons who did not please God. Of course, the ones God chose were not perfect, yet they were people who tried to serve God and He made a covenant (a binding agreement) with them.

The process continued throughout the times of the Old Testament. God worked mostly with Abraham's descendants, the Jews, though there were also converts from other nations, 'proselytes' like Ruth the Moabitess or Naaman the Syrian, who came to believe in the God of Israel. When God's Son Jesus came, he was born "King of the Jews" but preached the Gospel, the good news of God's purpose, to both Jews and Gentiles. God now no longer extends His saving purpose solely through the Jews but He still discriminates in the sense that He accepts only those who sincerely believe, confess their faults, and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile:

**"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."
(Mark 16:16)**

**"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved ... there is no distinction between Jew and Greek [Gentile or non-Jew] ... For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."
(Romans 10:9,12,13).**

God's plan of salvation

We have outlined very briefly how God from the beginning had a plan to help men and women who wanted to be released from their sins, and from the certain prospect of death. God is and always was a God of love, a God of mercy:

**"Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?' says the Lord GOD, 'and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"
(Ezekiel 18:23)**

**"(God) desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."
(1 Timothy 2:4)**

God is not vindictive but a just God who wants you and me to believe in Him. This is why He sent Jesus, His Son, born to Mary, to preach the Gospel - the good news of God's kingdom - and to die for the sins of the world:

**"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."
(John 3:16,17)**

Discrimination?

These last two verses are well known and frequently quoted. They tell us about God's love, and His desire that we should be saved and have everlasting life through His Son. But we cannot ignore the fact that these verses also make plain what the alternative is: if we do not believe, we shall perish; if the world does not believe, it is condemned. Such statements are seen as discriminatory today. But we have to look at things from God's point of view, not man's. We really have to make a choice, either to go along with the so-called wisdom of the age in which we live, or to accept the plain teaching of the scriptures that God is a holy God, who discriminates between good and evil.

God's purpose is to set up a kingdom on this beautiful planet earth. His plan down the ages has been to invite men and women to believe in Him and accept His way of salvation, so that they might fulfil their destiny to be "in God's image" (Genesis 1:27; Colossians 3:10) and reflect His character. To those who faithfully strive for that goal, even if their efforts have been imperfect, He has promised a change from mortality to immortality, and a place in His future kingdom. The death and resurrection of Jesus made that possible. After his

resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended to heaven but God promised that he will return to earth to reign as King. The citizens of the kingdom will be those who, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, have committed themselves to his service and are accounted righteous through his sacrifice.

The Second Coming of Christ

Great events are to take place on the earth when Christ returns. There will be a resurrection of the dead, and there will be a day of judgement. Just as God raised Jesus from the tomb after his terrible death by crucifixion, so the followers of Jesus, if they die, have the sure hope of resurrection at his coming:

**"Now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and authority and power."
(1 Corinthians 15:20-24)**

This chapter from Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a masterly account of the facts of resurrection and should be read in full. Paul was focusing on evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and using the resurrection of Jesus to prove that believers will be raised at the last day. He did not, in this letter, go into detail about judgement nor did he tell his readers what will happen to those who would be alive at Christ's coming (for whom a resurrection is not necessary). We need to look at other parts of the New Testament for information on those aspects.

The resurrection of Christ's followers

If we want to know about those who are still living when Christ comes, Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians is very helpful. In chapter 4, the apostle is trying to give comfort to disciples in the city of Thessalonica who were anxious about the fate of disciples who had died; and at the same time he answers questions they may have had about those who will be alive when Christ appears:

**"I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [that is, have died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."
(1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)**

These verses offer a marvellous prospect of the events that we can look forward to at the coming of Christ, but they include certain phrases which have led to misunderstandings. For example, it has been suggested that those who "**meet the Lord in the air**" are then taken up

to heaven with him (a happening referred to by some as 'the rapture'). This view, however, contradicts many other passages which quite clearly teach that Jesus Christ is returning to the earth, to set up a kingdom on earth, in the day when the words of the Lord's Prayer are finally fulfilled: **"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"** (Matthew 6:10). Confirming this, in the book of Revelation, we read of a song which will be sung in that future age, honouring the Lord Jesus Christ with the words:

**"You have redeemed us to God by your blood ... and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."
(Revelation 5:9,10)**

The phrase in the previous quotation, **"thus we shall always be with the Lord"**, must therefore refer to being in Christ's kingdom on an earth which has been purged from all evil and restored to the perfection it had at the creation.

"The dead in Christ"

Another question which may arise from the Thessalonians quotation is about the meaning of the phrase, **"God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus"**. It has been suggested that **"those"** are the souls of people who, according to commonly held beliefs, went to heaven when they died - and they are now being brought back. This is certainly not what Paul has in mind. There is no support in the Bible for the idea of an immortal soul which lives on after death. Three times in the above passage he refers to dead believers as those who **"sleep in Jesus"** or who are **"asleep"**; he also refers to them as **"the dead in Christ"**. They are not in heaven but in the grave. Death really is the end of life, but for those **"in Christ"** it is called a 'sleep' because the believer dies in the hope of being awakened at the resurrection.

Remember what Jesus said at the grave of Lazarus: **"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up ... Lazarus is dead"** (John 11:11,14). What Jesus said is unambiguous: Lazarus had died four days before, and had been laid in a tomb. The only hope the family had was in a future resurrection, which (as we saw at the beginning) their own scriptures taught. Martha was clear in her own mind:

"Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day'. Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live.'" (verses 24,25)

What happens to unbelievers?

So far we have concentrated on the hope of resurrection for those who believe the Gospel and seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We have not yet considered the fate of those who do not believe, who are just not interested in the teaching of the Bible or who frankly reject it. What happens to them? Earlier, we quoted the words of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel: **"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16). This verse plainly teaches that God will grant everlasting life to those who believe in His Son, Jesus. It also implies that those who do not believe will perish. But how is the distinction between believers and unbelievers going to be made? That is precisely the purpose of the 'day of judgement'.

The judgement seat of Christ

Elsewhere in the New Testament, it becomes clear that the one who will undertake that task of dividing between believers and unbelievers is the Lord Jesus Christ himself:

**"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left ... And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
(Matthew 25:31-46)**

**"(God) has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead."
(Acts 17:31; see also 10:42)**

**"We shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ each of us shall give account of himself to God."
(Romans 14:10-12; see also 2 Corinthians 5:10)**

In the Letter to the Roman believers, from which we have just quoted, Paul spells out the stark facts about what he calls "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God" (2:5). In chapter 1 he has presented a catalogue of the godless practices that were common in the Roman world. Now, in chapter 2, the apostle sets out his understanding of the punishment God will impose on such people, as well as the reward He will give to those who, because of their association with Christ, are judged to be righteous:

**"God will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil ... but glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."
(Romans 2:5-10)**

All this is to happen on "**the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ**" (2:16). From what we have learned so far, it is obvious that this "**day**" coincides with the time when Christ, the Judge, has returned to the earth and has raised the dead. Evidently, then, not just believers but also unbelievers come to life on the day of resurrection:

**"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out."
(Luke 13:28)**

**"There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust."
(Acts 24:15)**

The Bible passages we have just quoted make it very clear that the judgement to be conducted by Jesus Christ, when he returns, will result in a division into two groups. In Matthew 25, for example, these groups are referred to as "**the sheep on his right hand**" and "**the goats on his left**". In the quotation from Romans 2, we see the same division, now described in terms of those who are granted "eternal life" contrasted with those who receive "**indignation and wrath**".

Are "all" or "many" to be raised?

This is one question we have not answered. Does everyone appear before the judgement seat of Christ? Are all people who have ever lived raised and judged? The very first Bible quotation included in this booklet commenced with the words: "**Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake**"(Daniel 12:2). Yet our second quotation began, "**The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth ...**" (John 5:28,29). Is there a contradiction here? Which is correct?

We shall find the answer if we look a little more closely at the groups of people involved in the great judgement of the last days.

- The first group is made up of those called the "**faithful**", the "**just**", or (more picturesquely) as the "**sheep**"; they are accepted by their judge as worthy of a place in God's kingdom. They include men and women who were dead but are brought to life in the resurrection, as well as those living when Jesus returns.
- The second group - those rejected at the judgement seat - again includes those raised from the dead as well as those still living, but the Bible makes it plain that this group can be subdivided into:
 - Those who learned the Gospel, who began to serve Christ as his disciples, but then fell away; and
 - Those who heard and understood the Gospel but never accepted it.

Men and women in the second group will find themselves rejected by the Judge. But there is a further section of mankind not yet accounted for:

- The section of humanity that never knew the God of the Bible and had no contact with the message of the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ. Peter has these in mind when he writes:

**"It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them."
(2 Peter 2:21)**

Paul, too, makes it clear that those who are unaware of the promises of God are without hope:

**"At that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."
(Ephesians 2:12)**

In other words, people down the ages - and, indeed, those living at Christ's return - who have not heard of God's purpose and are not acquainted with His standards and commandments, will not be called for judgement; they will simply perish. Those, on the other hand, who have known the Gospel and either accepted or knowingly rejected it, will appear before the judgement.

Of course, it is difficult to say with certainty who has had that opportunity: if a preacher once knocked on your door and offered you a leaflet about the Christian faith, are you then responsible? It is for God, and not us, to decide how much understanding makes you answerable. However, the words of Jesus come to mind in this connection:

**"To whom much is given, from him much will be required."
(Luke 12:48)**

You may find all this analysis of the categories of people on the day of judgement difficult to imagine. But do you recall the Parable of the Sower? The Lord Jesus talked about seed being sown on the land, and how it fell "**by the wayside**", "**on stony places**", "**among thorns**", and "**on good ground**". He explains that the seed is "**the word of the kingdom**" (the Gospel); that the different sorts of soil represent the different reactions of people who hear the Gospel message; that, in the end, only the good ground bore fruit.

The different responses almost match the groups we have been suggesting: there are those on whom the Gospel makes no impact at all; those who respond briefly, but then wither; others who initially accept the call of Christ, but are later unfruitful; and finally those who believe the word of life and yield fruit-to varying degrees. (It is worth taking the time to read this parable in full in Matthew 13:1-23.) There are other parables, too, concerned with the day of judgement, and they all spell out details of that time of reckoning which is coming on the world.

So we come back to our question: are all raised? or are many raised? The answer should by now be obvious: all who have heard and understood the Gospel message will indeed be raised; they are responsible for their actions and have to give an account of themselves before the Judge. But it is also perfectly true to say, as the prophet Daniel does in chapter 12, verse 2, that "**many (not all) of those who sleep shall awake**", because Daniel is thinking of every person who has ever lived, from creation to the present day. Of these countless millions, many are accountable and will be raised to appear before Christ; but many more will remain in their graves, having never known of the God of the Bible. They are "**like the beasts that perish**" (Psalm 49:20).

Heaven and hell

Heaven and hell are both referred to in the Bible, but the Bible does not teach that these are places to which a person goes at death. There is no support in the scriptures for the idea that the 'soul of the departed' enjoys eternal bliss in the skies (often coupled with the notion that they can look down on those still living on the earth). Nor is there support for the idea of 'wicked souls' being sentenced to eternal torment in hell. The true reward of the righteous is eternal life on a renewed earth; and the punishment of the wicked is exclusion from the

kingdom of God. Heaven is the place where God dwells. Hell almost always refers to the grave where, as we have already seen, the dead sleep until the day of resurrection. (A more detailed examination of this will be found in another booklet in this series, Heaven and Hell.)

At the end of the thousand years

In our review of Bible quotations we have repeatedly found support for a day of judgement, and we may have implied that this is the only and final day of judgement. For most of us, that is indeed the reality: those living, together with those who are raised from the dead, will give account on the day of judgement at Christ's return. But there is a sequel and we now need to look again at our Bible. There are passages, in Revelation in particular, which take us forward in time, beyond Christ's return, beyond the first resurrection and the day of judgement, to the millennium. Revelation chapter 20 tells us about those who are accepted at the first resurrection: **"They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"** (Revelation 20:4).

It is usual to refer to the first thousand years of the kingdom as the millennium: a thousand years during which Christ, the King, subdues and cleanses the world, bringing peace, prosperity and justice at last to this polluted planet. But the chapter then considers what will happen to those who lived during this wonderful time for the earth but who died before the end of the thousand year reign of Christ. It explains that there will be a second judgement for them and that the outcome will depend on the way they responded to the opportunities God had given them during the millennium:

**"The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished ... Now when the thousand years have expired ... another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books ... Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."
(Revelation 20:5-14)**

Once that final judgement has taken place, death will be a thing of the past, for wickedness, illness and sin will all have disappeared. When that wonderful time has arrived, the Lord Jesus Christ will hand over the kingdom to his Father and the glory of God will fill the earth. God will be **"all in all"** (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

The gift of God

Before we conclude, there is one point that must be emphasised. Some of the statements and quotations in this booklet may give the impression that we can earn a place in God's kingdom. Certainly we are expected to do something - and we start by believing and being baptized - but in the end it is not so much what we do, but what God in His love, and because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, will do for us. Of course we must try to live up to the call of Christ; we must have faith and obey his commands. But, in the end, no-one will actually be worthy; none of us truly deserves the reward God offers; it is God's gracious gift:

**"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."
(Ephesians 2:8)**

What does this mean for me?

Bible teaching is challenging! If God's word said nothing about life after death, if it was silent on the subject of resurrection and judgement, then perhaps we could feel comfortable and not worry too much about our future fate. But the Bible has so much to say on this subject, a fact which is hardly surprising. The Bible, after all, is God's way of telling us why we are here, what His plans are, what He and His Son have done for us, and what the future holds - and the Almighty wants us to do something about it. As we have seen, God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires all men to be saved. Tragically, but inevitably – because God has given us freewill to choose - not everyone will respond to His offer of life, and they will have to face the consequences.

God is going to deal with this evil world, maybe in our lifetime. There will be judgements on the nations, and judgements on those who had the chance to believe the Gospel and who turned away:

**"See that you do not refuse him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from him who speaks from heaven ... For our God is a consuming fire."
(Hebrews 12:25-29)**

Those who reject God and want to have nothing to do with His purpose have reason to fear the judgements about to be unleashed on the earth. Those, on the other hand, who appreciate how good God is, and what a precious hope is offered in the Bible, have the glorious prospect of life in a renewed world.

Does that appeal to you? Then make this prospect your own, by repentance, belief, baptism and a full commitment to the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and wait for that great 'day' when the things we have discussed will be reality:

"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matthew 13:43; compare Daniel 12:3)

"I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one according to his work." (Revelation 22:12)

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