

THE BASIS OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

Even as believing Christians, we must not take the outcome of God's final judgment for granted. In every Divine Liturgy Orthodox Christians pray, "For a good defense before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ, let us pray to the Lord: Lord have mercy." Romans 2:2-16 describes God's judgment, showing how we can prepare ourselves for it. God's righteous judgment will be:

1. According to truth (Romans 2:2, 3): Nothing is hidden from God. She sees everything and knows the truth about each of us. One of mankind's great self-deceptions is to say, "Who sees us?" (Isaiah 29:15) and think there is no judgment.

2. According to impenitent hearts (Romans 2:4, 5): An unrepentant or hard heart despises God's goodness, treasuring up the wrath of God at the judgment. A repentant heart, on the other hand is grateful for God's patience and abides in Christ, practicing a lifetime of repentance, which produces confidence before Him at the judgment (1 John 2:28)

3. According to our deeds (Romans 2:6-15): The "doing good" referred to in 2:7 is not an attempt to gain merit with God. Rather, it is the unity of intentions with actions, faith with works. Even unbelievers are rewarded for good works, apart from spiritual understanding (Romans 2:14, 15). But note the following:

(a) "Doing good" means seeking God's glory (Romans 2:10), not our own glory; God's honor, not our own honor; the eternal reward of immortality, not reward here and now. "Doing good" is seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

(b) Good intentions alone, or faith without works, will not save (Romans 2:13). Simply to hear and not do is religion without reality. Those with true faith, "the doers" of the truth, practice virtue from pure and repentant hearts (James 1:21-27).

(c) "By nature" (v. 14) people are inspired by and cooperate with God's grace. Therefore, good deeds are natural to us, whereas evil deeds are contrary to nature. Because we all fail, we need God's mercy (Romans 3:9-19). The presence of God's law in our conscience (Romans 2:15) condemns anything we do contrary to true human nature. Therefore, even Gentiles - people not under the Law of Moses, those who do not know of Christ - have an internal law from God, the natural law written in their hearts, according to which God will judge them. Melchizedek, Job, and the Ninevites are Old Testament examples of non-Jews judged to be righteous. Jews, then, have two laws from God - the Law of Moses and conscience - and are accountable to Him for both (Romans 2:12).

(d) Those who are condemned choose to reject God. There is no automatic, fated condemnation: God's just judgment of us is based on our exercise of free will. Although sin impairs our powers, it does not destroy God's image in us or our free will.

4. By Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16): In the day of judgment we are not judged directly by God the Father, whom we cannot see, but by the incarnate Son whom we do see, Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31; see John 3:16-21, 35, 36). Christ will judge on the basis of the light He Himself has given to each of us (John 1:9) and our response to His light (John 3:16-21). "The secrets of men" (Romans 2:16) are "the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).