



March 2011 - *Preparing for Judgment Day*

Jesus and the Apostle Paul tell us that a day is coming when each of us must stand before Christ and give an account of the life we have lived. This sobering reality had a great impact on how C.S. Lewis lived his daily life and provides sound spiritual direction for us as well:

Some day... an absolute correct verdict—if you like, a perfect critique—will be passed on what each of us is.

We have all encountered judgments or verdicts on ourselves in this life. Every now and then we discover what our fellow creatures really think of us. I don't of course mean what they tell us to our faces: that we usually have to discount. I am thinking of what we sometimes overhear by accident or of the opinions about us which our neighbors and employees or subordinates unknowingly reveal in their actions; and of the terrible, or lovely, judgments artlessly betrayed by children or even animals. Such discoveries can be the bitterest or sweetest experiences we have. But of course both the bitter and the sweet are limited by our doubt as to the wisdom of those who judge. We always hope that those who so clearly think us cowards or bullies are ignorant and malicious; we always fear that those who trust us or admire us are misled by partiality. I suppose the experience of the final judgment (which may break in upon us at any moment) will be like these little experiences, but magnified to the Nth.

For it will be infallible judgment. If it is favorable we shall have no fear, if unfavorable, no hope that it is wrong. We shall not only believe, we shall know, beyond doubt in every fiber of our appalled or delighted being, that as the Judge has said, so we are: neither more nor less nor other. We shall perhaps even realize that in some dim fashion we could have known it all along. We shall know and all creation will know too: our ancestors, our parents, our wives or husbands, our children. The unanswerable and (by then) self-evident truth about each will be known to all.

I do not find that pictures of physical catastrophe—the sign in the clouds, those heavens rolled up like a scroll—help one so much as the naked idea of judgment. We cannot always be excited. We can, perhaps, train ourselves to ask more and more often how the thing which we are saying or doing (or failing to do) at each moment will look when the irresistible light streams in upon it; that light which is so different from the light of this world—and yet, even now, we know just enough of it to take it into account. Women sometimes have the problem of trying to judge by artificial light how a dress will look by daylight. That is very like the problem of all us: to dress our souls not for the electric lights of the present world but for the daylight of the next. The good dress is the one that will face that light. For that light will last longer.

How shall we prepare for the coming Great Assize? First, prayerfully ponder Scripture and determine what you will want to be true of you when you stand at the judgment. The answer will be “Christlike.” Then start working backwards, identifying the changes you need to make now to be that person then. Daily seek to obey the words of Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to guide, lead and empower you to be transformed into his image and likeness.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1996), pp 112-13.