
Your Day in Court



IT HAS BEEN SAID that it's better for 99 guilty men to go free than for one innocent man to be unjustly imprisoned. No one wants a guilty criminal set free—but do any of us really want an innocent person punished for something he didn't do?

Have *you* ever been accused of doing something you didn't do? (If you grew up with brothers or sisters—of course you have!) Maybe you were blamed for someone else's action, and you got the punishment they deserved. You knew you were innocent, and your sense of justice was mightily offended. We all want justice to be done—punishment of the guilty, exoneration of the innocent.

The bad news is, we're all guilty, and we're going to court. What terrible thing have we done, and what sort of court is this?

Thoughts to Remember:

- ♦ "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment has come'" (Revelation 14:6). This message is for everyone. God's judgment is not an earthly trial. It is the final drama in the great controversy between good and evil, when the destiny of each person is settled.

- ♦ "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:10). The books are opened, evidence is presented. Why?

- ♦ Remember the 2,300-day prophecy, which began in 457 BC with the decree to rebuild and restore Jerusalem and ended in AD 1844 with the cleansing of the sanctuary? Ancient Israel had a day of judgment for the people each year, the cleansing of their sanctuary, pointing forward to the real day of judgment at the end of time. God's Word says that since 1844—the end of the 2,300-day prophecy—we have been living in the time of the end, a period the Bible calls God's judgment hour. God "has appointed a day on which he will judge the world" (Acts 17:31).

- ♦ Why is God holding a judgment? Doesn't He know who's saved and who's lost? Of course. Remember that the Bible says God created Lucifer, an angel of dazzling beauty and brightness, the foremost of all the angels. And remember that Lucifer led the angels and humanity into

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rebellion against God. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer! For you have said in your heart, 'I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:12-14).

- Before the universe Satan has charged that God is unfair, not righteous, that His way isn't best and His law can't be kept. So God is on trial in His own universe. But when the books are opened, everyone in the universe will see God's justice. We will see that He did everything He could—everything—to save each person, except to violate their freedom of choice. "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). In your private moments, what are you reading or watching? In your innermost soul, what do you really love? "And there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

- If this is all true, how can we hope to pass the judgment and be saved? If you and I have to stand before God with nothing more than our own deeds, we will be lost. Some people think that in the judgment, their good deeds are put on one side or a scale and their bad deeds on the other, and if the good outweighs the bad, they're saved. "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). If even our good deeds are worthless to save us, then where is our hope? Here's where the good news comes in.

- "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24). Now this is wonderful news—when we choose to believe God, trust God, and make Him our Lord and Savior, we don't even come into judgment at all! We find that the judgment isn't a weighing of good deeds against bad; that's not what determines who's saved and who's lost.

Our personal choice to trust God or not determines whether we're saved or lost; and when we choose Him, He symbolically signs His own name over ours; our sins are covered over by His blood, His sacrifice on the cross. "He who overcomes [the who accepts Christ as his Redeemer] shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot his name from the book of life; but I will confess his name [stand up for him] before my Father and before his angels" (Revelation 3:5).

- "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). We find ourselves in a different kind of court than we've ever known on this earth: the Judge is on our side! He looks for that signature, the covering of our sinful life with Christ's perfect life—something Christ never does against a person's will—and when He finds it, He rejoices! You are saved through Christ. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

The "take-home" message for you . . .

- Are there sins you're clinging to and won't surrender? Only as we repent, confess, and open our hearts can Christ save us in this judgment hour. Time is short! "And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). Our decisions now will settle our eternal destiny.

Just between you . . . and God:

- When you come to the end of life, nothing else really matters but eternity. Where will you spend it? The bank account doesn't matter, social status doesn't matter, the clothes you're wearing won't matter. The only thing that counts is whether you have peace with God.

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