

(1.24) Judgment and Punishment

In the end when you appear before the Judge nothing will be hidden, all will be revealed. No enticements accepted and excuses allowed; judgment is rendered according to strict justice. *God will bring to judgment every work, with all its hidden qualities, whether good or bad.*¹ You may now fear to face an angry man who knows little of you but how will you fare before God who knows all your evil deeds. You will have much to answer to at that time so why not take stock of yourself now while you have the opportunity for change that will profit your soul. *Be repentant and sorrowful of your sinful ways and make changes, do what is right and just, be committed and your new virtue gives you life.*²

The patient man who suffers wrongs and is sorrowful over the wickedness of another rather than the injuries sustained is already in a redeeming purgatory; he prays for his enemies and is forgiving; he is quick to seek pardon from others; he is moved to compassion rather than anger; he disciplines himself in order to bring worldly aspirations under the control of spiritual authority.

The fires of judgment feed upon your sins so the more indulgent you are with yourself now and follow worldly pursuits so much more will you pay for it then. Wickedness and wrongdoing are paths to punishment. The slothful, gluttonous, pleasure seekers, the envious are creating a similar painful backlash upon themselves since each such vice will stir up its particular torment. For example, the proud shall only find shame and confusion while the covetous extreme indigence. *The wicked shall receive a punishment to match their thoughts, since they neglected righteousness and forsook the LORD.*³

There is no rest or comfort for the damned whereas right now we have respite from labor and enjoy the comfort of friends. Seek forgiveness for your sins now that on the Day of Judgment you may have safe haven with the blessed.

Then shall:

- + *the righteous one with great assurance confront his oppressors who set at naught his labors.*⁴
- + *those who humbly submitted to human judgment be asked to judge. Without inquiry he shatters the mighty, and appoints others in their place.*⁵
- + *the poor and the humble have abundant confidence but the proud shall be encompassed with fear and dread.*

¹ Eccl 12:14

² Ezekiel 18:21

³ Wisdom 3:10

⁴ Wisdom 5:1

⁵ Job 34: 24

- + it appear that he was wise in the world who *for Christ's sake learned to be a fool and be despised.*⁶
- + it be that poor are released from every tribulation borne with patience. *The upright see this and rejoice; all wickedness shut its mouth.*⁷
- + every devout man rejoice while the hypocritical lament.
- + the flesh that was chastised exult more so than if it had been spoiled with luxury.
- + the modest home be praised above the opulent mansion.
- + persistent patience be seen more beneficial beyond all worldly power.
- + simple obedience be exalted above all worldly shrewdness.
- + a pure and good conscience bring more joy than even scholarly philosophy.
- + the disdain of riches far outweigh all the worldly treasures.
- + you find that having prayed devoutly gives more comfort than gourmet feasting.
- + you rejoice for having kept silence than having talked too much and too often. *By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.*⁸
- + holy works be of greater value than many vain words.
- + a disciplined life and acts of penance be more pleasing than all earthly amusements.

Learn now to suffer in little things that then you may be liberated from more grievous pain. Try here what you can then endure in the hereafter for if now a little suffering makes you so impatient what will hell-fire be like?

Most assuredly you cannot have two heavens, i.e., the delights of this world and the Kingdom of God hereafter. Suppose that you have, to this very day, always lived with honors and in pleasures; what would all of that profit you were you to die this very day? *All is vanity except loving God and serving him only. What profit have we from all the toil which we toil at under the sun?*⁹

⁶ 1Cor4:10

⁷ Psalm 107:42

⁸ Matthew 12:37

⁹ Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

He who lives the *Great Commandment*¹⁰ fears neither death, nor punishment, nor judgment, nor hell; such love is a guiding path to God's Kingdom. But no wonder that a man who continuously delights in sin should fear death and judgment. If love cannot restrain you from evil then let the fear of hell do so.

The man who lays aside the fear of God will not be able to persevere in good but soon falls into the snares of the evil one. *By your stubbornness and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God.*¹¹

This article is based on Book 1, Chapter 24 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal (layperson's) reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. (rfm)

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¹⁰ Mark 12:28-34

¹¹ Romans 2:5