

# ***SAVING JUDGMENT***

## **Study 9**

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As we pursue the study of P.T. Forsyth's book, *The Justification of God*, we look at the matter of salvation – and the apostolic desire for all people, including the kings of the world, to come into the Kingdom of God, and be saved. As Forsyth says: *The more we believe in the Kingdom of God the more we must believe in judgment.*<sup>1</sup>

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

God our Saviour desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. God saves his people. The Israelites groaned under their slavery in Egypt, and cried out to God (Exodus 2:23). They were rescued – or saved by passing through the red sea. Salvation involves coming out into a large place - a place of freedom and space. Salvation involves the joy of daily life within creation. Salvation involves liberty and the joy of community life; salvation involves the future glorious freedom, which is given from sin and death. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death* (Romans 8:2). Salvation extends to the future of creation, set free from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:21). Salvation is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

## **SALVATION THROUGH JUDGMENT**

Many people think that the cross of Christ is a sort of legal device designed for avoiding judgment. This is not so. Rather, salvation comes, not in bypassing judgment, but takes place by passing *through* judgment. The judgment of the cross cuts right through us, and we, by faith, pass through it, in Christ. *I have been crucified with Christ* is our true claim. *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

P. T. Forsyth says:

What is judgment but the setting out in true and full light (*i.e.* in just relation to the whole) of the actual state of things between the soul's case and the ruling power of the world? Unless Christ be a dream or a dreamer, that power is God's grace. That is our final judge. To it we stand or fall. The gospel of grace, in the Cross and its preaching, is the real ultimate judgment of the world, the real and final power at work now.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, NCPI, 1988, p. 170

<sup>2</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 184-185

Our salvation cost the Father his own Son. We may think this was but for a moment. That view would be a misreading of the gospel message. That Christ was utterly forsaken – is a fracture, or deep break, within the love-unity of the Triune God himself, and is of immense importance. Paul sees this action as a totally gracious giving to the human race.

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

Forsyth presses us in the opposite direction in order that we might grasp something of the judgment process both in the cross, and in the course of human history. God who is prepared to forsake his Son, for the sake of humanity's future, is also prepared to us the most dreadful of circumstances, to further his good purpose for creation. Forsyth is referring particularly to the tragic world war he was experiencing in 1917.

If God spared not His own Son He can bear to see, and rise to use, the most dreadful things that civilisation can produce. History is a long judgment process; but it is not in the course of history with its debacles that we find the last judgment of God, and fix our faith in it, but at a point of history, in the Cross of Christ. It is there that we find the justification of God at first hand, and His own theodicy.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE LOOSING AND BINDING ACTION OF LOVE**

Hearing the gospel message is not a neutral exercise. It is a crisis, a moment of decision. It has consequences. The disciples understood their actions were not neutral, and learned this from their Lord, when Jesus said: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah (Matthew 16:19). In John we read: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'. (John 20:23)

Their power to forgive is of course ministerial only, and not magisterial. The disciples are heralds of the gospel, servants and agents of Christ, But only God, in Christ, as King has the right to forgive, and pardon. God acts in love, in sending Christ, to reveal this love:

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1John 4:10).

The great Christian message to the world is not simply love. That is too general, not to say vague. Christianity does not produce only love to God, but also hate.<sup>4</sup>

Our message is never neutral. Forsyth said of gracious loving, direct preaching:

It not only produces faith but it also deepens unfaith, and hardens impenitence. If it loose it also binds; and it can do the one only if it do the other—action and reaction

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<sup>3</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 170

<sup>4</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 170

being equal. If it draw some near to God, it repels others into distance and estrangement. There is such a thing as the repulsive power of a great affection.<sup>5</sup>

Perfect grace was and is final judgment. It is condemnation to ignore salvation. Full and final judgment is not something super-added to the Gospel. It is no corollary, no by-product. It is intrinsic to it. It is an element of Fatherhood, and not a device.<sup>6</sup>

John's Gospel warns people not to ignore this salvation. Following on from the most used evangelical appeal from Scripture, is the warning sound as well. We should weigh it carefully in our minds and hearts.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; (John 3:16-18a)

but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.' (John 3:18b-21)

Forsyth writes:

The same Church that evangelises the world in the very act judges it. It not only divides each soul, but all society, electing and rejecting.<sup>7</sup>

The Cross did not, indeed, come directly and expressly to judge (John viii. 15-16, xii. 47-48). It did so only in the course of exerting ...God's love, grace, and forgiveness. But judge it certainly did. It brought to a head for the world the sin of an elect nation—a nation whose sense of privilege and merit repudiated moral for national interests, scouted Christ's word of mercy and His call to repent, and found no public meaning in His Word of love and humility. It thus became, more than Rome, incarnate Antichrist. It sinned against pure light.<sup>8</sup>

The Cross, which that nation inflicted filled up the measure of its guilt and brought it death. And this was not against Christ's will but with it. He knew He was Israel's doom. The Holy One knew that the soul of man or nation that chose to sin must go on to die, and that every word of greater love might become a word of more wrath. But He never judged them in the sense of avenging, far less of revenging. Their

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<sup>5</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 170

<sup>6</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 171

<sup>7</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 171

<sup>8</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 171

judgment was the reaction on them, from God's holiness...<sup>9</sup>

### THE PERSON OF CHRIST IS NOT KNOWN APART FROM HIS WORK

Sin is deceitful, as are the works of the evil One, which Christ came to destroy. Indeed, the powers of Satan and his minions are poorly considered, by our humanistic culture. As Geoffrey Bingham has pointed out: *There is quite a bit of shoulder-shrugging in regard to this subject.*<sup>10</sup> Forsyth describes deficient teaching in his day as:

‘... defective insight into the final nature and victory of the Cross over the diabolism and perdition in the world’.

It reflects a certain moral amateurism due to the abeyance of a theology of the Cross. Such religion, certainly, loves the person of Christ. It is in love with His love, and with His Cross as the summit of that love in self-sacrifice. But it has no room nor need for judgment there. It does not feel there God's judgment on sin, and the crisis of the moral world and of a holy eternity. It needs moralising from a deeper experience of life—an experience older, more secular, more tragic. For want of a theology of conscience such souls do not know the world nor gauge its redemption. Their belief in Christ is impaired for want of a belief in the Satan that Christ felt it His supreme conflict to counter-work and destroy.<sup>11</sup>

The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil (1John 3:8b). And that he did by bearing our sins, dealing with our guilt, pronouncing God's word of forgiveness and peace, thus saving humanity from Satan's deadly accusations.

The grace of God is the greatest judgment ever passed on the world. That is the nature of the Cross—God's grace (and not God's law), in moral, saving judgment on man. When we have entered the kingdom through the great judgment in the Cross, we do not escape all judgment; we escape into a new kind of judgment, from that of law to that of grace. We escape condemnation, for we are new creatures, but chastisement we do not escape. Our work may be burned, to our grief, that we may be saved (I Cor. xi. 32). We are judged or chastened with the Church to escape condemnation with the world. And at the last must there not be some great crisis of self-judgment, when we all see Him as He is, and see ourselves as His grace sees us?<sup>12</sup>

We are afraid that if we find that moral ground and destiny of the world in the historic Christ and His Cross, and if we say 'we see not yet all things put under righteousness, but we see Jesus,' and rest, we shall be called Biblicists instead of historians, more theological than ethical. Well, we must take the risk. The judgment of the world accordingly is not the history of the world, but its Saviour.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 172

<sup>10</sup> G.C. Bingham, *The Clash of the Kingdoms*, NCPI, 1989, p. 10

<sup>11</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 175

<sup>12</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 181

<sup>13</sup> P. T. Forsyth, p. 186