



Time for Judgement

Vance Havner:

"For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin with us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1Peter 4:17,18

Peter wrote his letters to Christians in a day of testing and suffering to build them up for greater trials yet to come. In these troubled days, when Christians think it strange concerning the fiery trial which testing so many of the saints, we do well to fortify ourselves with these words from the great apostle.

When I read this text, my mind goes back to the days of Ezekiel. He was another great preacher Having in captivity in a sad and bewildering day. In the eighth and ninth chapters of his book, we read that God gave him a vision, turning time backward in its flight and carrying Ezekiel to show him the reason why Israel was now captive in Babylon. In his retrospective revelation, God showed him through a hole in the wall the elders engaging in idolatry, women giving themselves to phallic cults, and men worshipping the sun. It was as though God said to the prophet, 'Ezekiel, when the young generation now growing up in exile wants to know why I allowed my chosen people to go into captivity, these chapters from the past will explain it. It is righteous judgment for their sin.' Then, in the ninth chapter, six men come forth, and a man with a writer's inkhorn by his side is sent out to mark all who are burdened for the sins of the people. Then the men with weapons are sent after him to kill all that are not marked, and they were told, "BEGIN AT MY SANCTUARY." So here judgment begins at the house of God. Judgment begins. Surely we live today in an age that bears all the marks of the days of Ezekiel. Idolatry, phallic cults and sun worship have nothing on America. We can match the filthiest corruptions which Ezekiel saw any day and we don't have to look through a hole in the wall to see them.

The man with the writer's inkhorn was to mark all who were burdened over the sins of the people and all others were to be slain. If that procedure were followed in America, no massacre in history could compare with it, for few there be who care that we have forsaken God. Amos lamented in his day that no one was grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Jeremiah asked, "Is nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" In the days of Malachi the people met his condemnation of sin with a cynical "Wherein?" Isaiah lamented that he dwelt among a people of unclean lips. Paul could wish himself accursed for the sake of his brethren. Moses asked to be blotted out of God's book for the sake of Israel. Our Lord was grieved over Jerusalem. We need today the spirit of a Knox crying, "God, give me Scotland or I die!" We need the heart of a Brainerd wrestling in prayer for the Indians. Not only do we not care for the souls of sinners, alas, we care not for our own. The man with the writer's inkhorn would not be overworked today marking all Americans who are concerned on account of sin. He wouldn't need much ink to brand the burdened among us.

God has a striking figure in the Old Testament to describe human hearts that have grown indifferent to God. In Zephaniah we read: "And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with candles and punish the men that are SETTLED ON THEIR LEES, that, the Lord will do on good, neither will he do evil" (1:12). Jeremiah says of the Moabites: "Moab have been at ease from his youth and he hath SETTLED ON HIS LEES and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him and his scent is not changed"(48:11).

The figure "settled on their lees" is that of vinegar, for instance, that has been allowed to set until a scum has formed over it; or of milk that has turned to curds. It describes the same spiritual state as "resting at ease in Zion"; It is the lukewarm state of the Laodiceans. And it is the condition, not only of sinners, but of thousands of Christians today. Our churches have settled on their lees. They have been let alone so long, they have been undisturbed by real conviction and repentance, until a scum has gathered over the saints It is disastrous to be let alone too long. God has a way of shaking up His saints. He pours them from vessel to vessel to prevent their turning to curds. Sometimes sickness will stir them up. Financial reverses, even a death in the family, may be necessary. If we judged ourselves, we should not be judged, but we settle on our lees and God as to jolt and jar us loose. That is why we need revivals.

A good old revival is always a blessing because it pours the saints into a new vessel. "It is high time to awake out of sleep," and, however much they may resent it, better disturb the Sunday- morning sanctuary sleepers

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and empty them from vessel to vessel than let them come to judgment settled on their lees. Too many sermons are bedtime stories to lull the saints to sleep instead of morning reveilles to wake them up!

The men who carried weapons were to follow the man with the writer's inkhorn and kill everyone whom he had not marked and **THEY WERE TO BEGIN AT THE SANCTUARY**. Peter says, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." God begins with His own people: judgment, like charity, begins at home. Much of the blame for world conditions lies at the door of the church. Our indifference, our neglect, our failure to cry out against iniquity have encouraged the devil. Unfaithful preachers, modernism, formality, worldliness, unholy living have disgraced the house of God until He must like the Savior of old, first cleanse the temple. God's house has become a den of thieves and it is time for the whip of judgment.

Two kinds of judgment appear in our text: **CORRECTIVE JUDGMENT FOR THE SAINTS, CONDEMNATORY JUDGMENT FOR THE SINNERS**. "If it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner. (Prov. 11:31).

We are entering upon the last days and God is sifting His people. There is beginning right now a separation between the great crowd of Sunday-morning church goers and those who really mean business with God. On one hand, we have the mass of nominal Christians who belong to church because the family does or because it is the nice thing to do, who draw nigh to God with their mouths and honor Him with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him. These will soon be shown up in their true colors: they will trim their sail to catch the breeze and end up in one great apostate aggregation in league with the powers that be, the world, the flesh and the devil. On the other hand, is the faithful remnant who hear the Lord and speak often one to another, saints from all the church bodies, drawn together by a common love for Christ. These will be melted together in fires of testing with a comradeship like that at the early Christians in the catacombs of Rome.

This drawing together is a work of the Spirit, but when we try to do it we fail. This union of Bible Christians does not lend itself to our systems and plans, and when some man tries to head it up or put a tag on it, he fails, but the movement goes right on. We would do better to exalt Christ and preach the Word and not try to engineer the work of the Spirit too closely.

Truly, the time has come that judgment has begun at the house of God, and the best advice I can give is in the first part of this same chapter from First Peter. There is an Old Testament exhortation, "Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow." It is a timely word now. If you are a lukewarm Christian, out of fellowship and out of tune with God, I beseech you, set your house in order, for the storm is upon us and even the righteous will scarcely be saved. Return to God, confess your sin, claim the cleansing blood. Get back to the Book and watch unto prayer. Straighten Out your affairs with your fellow men. See that you have a conscience void of offense toward God and man. Commit your soul to God, rest in the Rock of Ages, where neither bombs nor blackouts can disturb. Learn the joy of abiding in the cleft of the Rock and learn how to sing:

When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea-billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well with my soul.