

(John - Part 23): Man's Accountability to God

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of human accountability to God, highlighting the qualifications of the judge and the role of Christ as the ultimate judge of mankind.

Duration: 40:15

Scripture: John 2:25, John 5:22, John 5:28-30, John 9:39, John 11:25-26, Hebrews 10:10

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the topic of judgment and the role of Jesus Christ as the judge. He emphasizes that Jesus is qualified to be the judge because he seeks the glory of God and has a sympathetic understanding of human experiences. The preacher also highlights that while society and human law hold people accountable, there is a higher accountability to God. He concludes by mentioning that even outlaws are subject to certain laws and judgments. The sermon references the Bible verse John 5:28-29 and emphasizes the importance of not skipping any part of the Bible in preaching.

Transcript

I have observed some of our trustees, ushers, and other dignitaries trying to catch that sparrow in the balcony. Such optimism deserves success. But I'm afraid it's slated for defeat.

However, I will give you, optimistic brethren, a tip. My father gave it to me when I was a boy. He said the way to catch a robin was to put salt on its tail.

And if any of you can get near enough to do that, possibly you can catch the sparrow which has so graciously come to our service tonight. If it starts flying around, pay no attention to it. I'm sure the Lord wouldn't care.

The Lord had to have at least one bird around when he said, Behold the fowls of the air, didn't he? Now, there had to be at least one bird, there had to be two. Behold the fowls of the air, he said. He looked at them, he said, they were there, so if one comes tonight, think, as if one gets busy here, he hides away somewhere in the balcony and then takes off.

And if he should do that, oh, I think about the birds and the sparrows and all the rest and don't let it bother you. Brother Erickson will catch him tomorrow. Now, in the book of John, the fifth chapter, I want to read verses 22 and 26 to 29.

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.

I can of mine own self do nothing. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. Now, I don't mind telling you that I would very much rather not speak on the topic which is mine tonight.

But in preaching through a book of the Bible, we must either preach it all or tacitly assume that some of it was not supposed to be preached. I don't believe that any of it should be skipped. And we come now to the matter of the judgment.

Christ Jesus our Lord, the Judge. I'm going to treat it like this. We'll talk a little about the basic concept of judgment and then point to some inadequate concepts of judgment and then show the qualifications which the judge of mankind must have and then show that Christ qualifies as the judge.

Now, the basic concept of judgment is very simple, and it has been believed by practically all religious people that have ever lived anywhere, with variations in detail. And it is that human beings are morally accountable. They are not self-created beings, nor self-sustaining.

They have their life as a derived thing from another and not from themselves. The Father hath life in himself, so nobody can judge the Father. He is not a derived being, he is the original being.

And he hath given also to the Son to have life in himself. No one can judge the Son. He is not a derived being, but is of the Father alone.

This concept of judgment is universal with, I say, variations in application, that human beings are morally accountable and that while they are free to make moral choices, they are nevertheless under necessity to account to some authority for those choices. Now, I have used a word and a phrase, and one seems to cancel the other one out. I have said free and under necessity, but there is nothing inconsistent here.

Men are free to decide their own moral choices. But they are also under the necessity to account to God for those choices. That makes them both free and also bound, for they are bound to come to judgment and give an account for the deeds done in the body.

Now, that's the basic concept of judgment. Some have tried to deny that. In your high school days, you read Emerson's famous Self Reliance, I believe it was, or Compensation, I think was the essay that contained this doctrine, that there is no such thing as a judgment, that everything is judged now and sentenced and rewarded or punished now.

This, of course, is not the universal belief, and it's not the belief of the Old Testament, it's not the teaching of the New Testament, it is not the teaching of the Church, it was hatched out of the head of the very great man who lived in Concord. Now, let us look at some inadequate concepts of judgment, and I think maybe we might mention that one first, that judgment is the operation of the law of compensation, that if you take it out of your left pocket, you'll have to put it in your right pocket, and that everything that you do in one direction is counterbalanced by something that's done in another direction. The thief steals from himself, says Emerson.

And the only punishment the thief will ever get is the knowledge that he is a thief. Now, that is true, but it's not enough. That's an inadequate concept of judgment.

There is another, and it is that we are accountable only to society. Now, it is true that we are accountable to society, but that is only a portion of the truth, not all of it. The rest of it is that we are accountable to God, which we'll mention later.

Now, we are responsible to public opinion, for instance, everybody here is responsible to public opinion, and public opinion is going to judge you, and indeed has already judged you. A rather silly, but nevertheless accurate definition or proof of what I'm saying, that we are judged by public opinion, is seen in some time ago, it's been some years ago now, I was walking down the street, and a little boy that just about came up to here, I would say, up to the lower part of this pulpit, and he took a good look at me as I walked along. Usually I'm friendly to children, but I was preoccupied that day, I must have been.

And when I got within hearing distance of him, he looked up at me and said, I said, hello, picky poos. He had me figured out already I was a picky poos. And I was responsible to human society for the very shape my face was in.

Now, I wasn't mad at anybody, but he evidently thought I wasn't as cheerful looking as I might have been, thought he'd needled me a little, which he did. So we're responsible for everything we do. You drive down the highway, and you're accountable to public opinion.

They're either going to conclude that you are a fine driver and a good man, or they're going to conclude you're a road hog, one or the other. You live beside your neighbor, and your neighbor's going to judge you as being a good neighbor or not being a good neighbor. Now, that's true.

But to say that that's all the judgment there is, is to argue like a backward child, because there's something more yet, and that is human law. We're also accountable to human law. Every nation makes its laws, from the most primitive tribes of New Guinea to the most civilized nation in the world.

They have their own laws, and everybody's responsible to those laws. But you say, how about the outlaw? And the answer is that the outlaw is an outlaw only in a few things. An outlaw will rob a bank in order that he might get money to pay taxes or pay something else.

He is keeping one law and breaking another one to get the money to do it. So the outlaw is an outlaw only in certain details. In the majority of his life, say that in 95% of his life, he's a keeper of law, not a breaker of law.

But he's an outlaw, nevertheless, in those details. A man is a murderer. Well, he's broken the law that says that we're not to murder our fellow man.

But he might have been up to that time a keeper of all the laws of the land. Another thing is that an outlaw is never a happy man. He's accountable to the law even while he is breaking it, and he's miserable even while he's flouting the law.

Now, there's a third thing here about this, that we're accountable to society. And it is that society cannot reach us in that sphere of our being where we're most vitally accountable. Namely, to God and to ourselves.

I am a human being, an American, living in Chicago. I am accountable to public opinion. I am accountable to the law of the land.

But I am also accountable to myself and my God. Human society can't touch me there. And in the very relations, relationships that are the most vital to me, human society cannot touch me at all.

A man wants to commit suicide, he turns a gun on his head and blows his own brains out. He is not accountable to society nor the law. He's accountable to some higher authority.

For society cannot punish him. A man stands up and says he's an atheist and turns his back on God. Society cannot punish him for that.

There isn't a country in the world that can punish a man for hating God. They can only punish him in some countries for not going to church, not paying his ecclesiastical tax, or not kowtowing to the host as it passes by. But he can hate God in his heart and never be punished because society cannot reach him in that important and vital realm.

Well, then there is a third inadequate concept of judgment. And it is that man's accountability is to himself alone. That every man stands before the bow of his own reason and of his own conscience.

And that the judge and jury of man will be man's reason and man's conscience. Now, this is the infamous relativity of morals that is taught in many of our universities. That each man is a law unto himself and that good is whatever brings social approval and evil is whatever brings social disapproval.

The answer to that, of course, is very simple. And it is that if that were true, then there would be as many moral codes as there are human beings. And each one of us would be our own witness, our own prosecutor, our own judge, our own jury, and our own jailer.

A man is accountable to himself. You know, that is so silly as scarcely to be worthy of consideration here tonight. But never underestimate the ability of human beings to get mixed up.

Any of you that are preachers or will be preachers, take a little advice and never overestimate the ability of people to get confused. And if a man with an eloquent tongue were to come to some of us and preach man's accountability to himself alone, some silly people would accept it, forgetting that it has no basis anywhere. How can a man be accountable to himself? You say, well, he's accountable to his conscience and I ask, to whom is his conscience accountable? How can I be my own prosecutor, my own prosecutor, witness on the prosecuting side, my own prosecuting attorney, my own judge, my own jailer, and my own executioner? All very silly and very poetic and very dreamy and sounds very learned and very mystical, but it's all ridiculous.

It's an inadequate concept of judgment. For I never knew anybody yet except Leonard Ravenhill. It would be hard on himself.

He's hard on himself. He's a judge and jury of himself and he punishes himself, but outside of Christians like that, and they're rare, God knows, in our day, I don't know anybody scarcely but what's pretty easy on himself. You're undersigned in truth.

I know that if I were to be a judge and jury and witness and prosecutor and executioner, I'd lose my axe. I wouldn't cut my own head off. I wouldn't have the courage to do it.

So God is not going to make this man accountable to himself finally. Neither is he going to make you and me accountable to the law finally, human society finally. We are accountable to the one who gave us being.

We are accountable to the one out of whose heart we came and who laid his laws upon us. We are accountable to God. And it was this, and it is this that makes Christians and makes men and makes character and makes nations.

And it's the absence of this belief that makes soft, spineless Christians and churches without any meaning in them. Someone's telling me of a young man in our Sunday school who went to a church down in Indiana that belonged to a denomination. The church was part of a denomination.

It used to be a holiness people. I know them. I know the people.

And he said he'd been there recently and they talked about books and your dreams and the effect they have on your life. And you know the topic when our friend was there? Peptic ulcers. Now, believe that or not, that was the religious topic of the day.

The church had backslid and was talking about peptic ulcers. I'd get an ulcer if I stayed around a church like that, or had to. My brethren, when we backslide from the truth and run away from the word of God and build up our own notions out of our own heads, there is no telling what truths God will make of us and how far we'll go and how silly it will all be and how foolish we'll become.

The city of Detroit some years ago, some of our Alliance preachers were walking down the street past the church and that preacher's subject was out on the board in front. And he announced that next Sunday morning at 10.45 the Reverend Doctor would preach on the theme Who Killed Top Robin? You see, when the old Greeks have a word, they said, Whom the gods would destroy, they first make man. That is driving crazy.

And when the judgment of God begins to fall on the church, when they cease to believe in the judgment of God, then the judgment of God begins to fall. And you never know what that church will get into next or where it'll go. It was belief in the accountability of man to his maker that made America great at one time.

One of the great leaders of America was Daniel Webster. That great bulging brow of his and those blazing eyes used to hold the Senate spellbound. His oratory used to, as he stood there and talked to them, were not silly quips, not funny remarks.

The Senate in those days was not composed of half-baked comedians, but of strong noble statesmen who carried the weight of the nation on their shoulders. And someone said, Mr. Webster, what do you consider

the most serious thought that has ever entered your mind? He said, the most solemn thought that has ever entered my mind is my accountability to my maker. And men who talked like that couldn't be corrupted and borrowed.

And they wouldn't have to be ashamed to have their telephone call read back to them. They weren't worried about what people thought so much as the fact that they were accountable to God. Now the third is that the judge of mankind must have certain qualifications.

And according to this that I have read to you, there must be an authority to execute judgment. That is, the ones that are to be judged must be accountable to the judge. In this tentative and provisional world in which we live, one group of men may make a law, and a judge born 100 or 200 years later may enforce that law and may not even be remotely acquainted with the person whom he is judging.

But it is not so in the kingdom of God to be a judge according to the scripture that judges those who are accountable to him and accountable to him not only not by a law imposed by another, but accountable to him morally and vitally rather than merely legally. And in order to be a judge, a righteous judge of mankind, the judge has to have all knowledge. Now let's look at it a little and sort of toss it around and let it get home to our hearts.

Point out here that the judge has to have all knowledge so there can be no error. Many an innocent man has been hanged, and if the truth were known, many a life-terminer who died in grave power behind prison walls was paying a debt he had never contracted, and a rascal who did the crime for which he was sentenced died in his bed surrounded by his friends. Human justice does its best, but because it is not all wise it makes mistakes.

But God Almighty is never going to judge the race of mankind and allow a mistake to enter. The judge must be one who has all wisdom. Therefore I appeal away from St. Paul.

I appeal away from Moses and Elijah. I appeal away from all men because no man knows me well enough to judge me finally. And I don't know you well enough to judge you finally.

I may pass brief judgment on you on some simple matter, or you on me, but when it comes to the placing of my eternal and everlasting soul somewhere, I don't want any mistakes made. The judge of mankind is going to have to be one that will never need the testimony of a third party. Nowadays they get witnesses in, and the judge sits solemnly and listens to the witnesses as the witness says, I saw him do this, I heard him say that.

And if the witness is lying, the judge is misled. But the judge of mankind is not depending upon the testimony of another. Listen to what he says.

Verse 30. I can of mine own self do nothing as I here I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which sent me. And there is another point.

The judge has to be disinterested. He must have no personal interest in the case. Many a judge has been severe because election time was coming up, or because public opinion was getting stronger, the newspapers were getting on him, and to save his own eye, he passed a severe sentence, or didn't pass a sentence, and his motives were ulterior and false.

But the Son of God says, I judge as one who seeks not mine own glory, but the glory of God alone. And therefore he can be the judge. He can be the judge because he is personally related, and yet disinterested and has nothing to gain or lose by his judgment.

But all the glory belongs to God. Jesus Christ, therefore, I say, qualifies as the judge. But more than that, he must have a sympathetic understanding.

I don't want to be judged by an archangel that never shed a tear. I don't want to be judged by a seraphim that never felt a pain. I don't want to be judged by a cherub that never knew human grief or disappointment or woe.

And the judge of mankind must be one of them. For Jesus said, The Father hath given the Son power to execute judgment because he is a Son of Man. And because he is a Son of Man, he not only can be their advocate above the Savior by the throne of love, but he can be their judge to sit upon the throne also.

Then there will be no dodging, no whimpering, no whining, no crying on our wrists, and saying, But Lord, you didn't understand. He does understand because he became one of us and walked among us. And never was a tear that he didn't shed, never a bit of disappointment he didn't feel, never a grief that he didn't suffer, never a temptation that did not come to him, never a critical situation that he wasn't in.

So because he's a Son of Man, he has authority to execute judgment. Christ qualifies on every count to be the judge of mankind. The tears that he shed and the pains that he suffered and the griefs that he bore made him not only a just but a sympathetic judge of mankind.

Now, his presence in the human race is our present judgment, our present judgment on sin. Listen, For judgment am I come into this world that they which see might, see not, might see, and they which see might be made blind. 939, the same book.

For judgment am I come into this world. Now, here is one of the forgotten doctrines of the Bible. Somebody could write a great and, I believe, important book on neglected Bible doctrines.

This would be one of them. That Jesus Christ is the judge of mankind. That the Father judgeth no man.

When the Lord, Son of Man, shall come in clouds of glory, then shall be gathered unto him the nations, and he shall separate them. It is he who is the judge. And when the judge of mankind shall appear, he'll have the shoulders of a man, and the face of a man, and be a man, the man Christ Jesus.

God has given him judgment, authority to judge mankind, so that he is both the judge and the Savior of man. That makes me both love him and fear him. Love him because he's my Savior, and fear him because he's my judge.

And if the ten cents store Jesus that is being preached nowadays by a lot of men, if the plastic-painted Christ, who has no spine and no justice, but is a soft and pliant friend of everybody, if he is the only Christ there is, then we might as well close our books and bar our doors and make a bakery out of this, or a garage. But that Christ that is being preached is not the Christ of God, nor the Christ of the Bible, nor the Christ we must deal with. For the Christ we must deal with has eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished brass, and out of his mouth come with a sharp two-edged sword.

He will be the judge of mankind. You can leave your loved ones that have died lost in his hands, knowing that he himself suffered, knowing that he knows all mistakes can be made. There can be no miscarriage of justice because he knows all that can be known.

It's said one time, rather as though it was an afterthought, sort of thrown in. It says that Jesus need not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man. That's 2nd chapter and 25th verse.

He didn't need anybody to testify about men, because he knew all that was in man. Verses 28 and 29, let me read them. Let me read them.

Marvel not at this, he said, for the hour is coming into which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, the Son of Man's voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. And this coming out of the graves will be at the invitation of the Son of God himself. Like a file officer he will command and they will stand on their feet, a great army, to receive judgment.

And the judgment will be based, strangely enough, upon the kind of life they lived in this world. That's another forgotten doctrine, but it's here. They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life.

They that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. This is the judge, the judge with the flaming eyes, so that Jesus Christ our Lord is one with whom we must deal. Cannot escape him.

They can shrug him off and drive away in a cloud of tombs, but we're going to have to come back and deal with him finally. You're going to have to deal with him, and I am. Be sure of one thing.

He'll either be my Savior now, or my Judge then. And the tenderness and sympathy of the Savior now will be laid aside while the justice and severity of the Judge then comes to the front. Without canceling out one, he will exercise both, so that Jesus Christ is both the Lord and the Judge of men, as well as the Savior of men.

Where's our book, Brother? Eight, nine hundred of these, and still I never can keep one somehow. 116, let me read it. Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.

Now, where is that taken from? The 10th chapter, the 8th chapter, the 10th chapter of Hebrews. But Christ, the heavenly Lamb, takes all our sins away. The sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, takes away all sin.

Then says the writer, My faith, and I want you to think yourself into this, My faith would lay her hand on that dear head of thine. Does anybody know where he got that? In the Old Testament, a sinner used to come to the priest, and he would say, I have sinned, and I bring a lamb, or some other creature. And they would take that creature, and the sinner would lay his hand on the head of the beast, and they would kill it and sprinkle its blood, and the sin which he had committed would be forgiven him.

My faith would lay her hand on that dear head of thine, while like a penitent, I stand and there confess my sin. Those of you who don't want him as a judge, you better think seriously now about him as a Savior, and stand like a penitent, or kneel like one, and confess your sin. My soul looks back to see the burden thou didst bear, while hanging on the cursed tree, and knows her guilt was there.

Do you believe that, brothers and sisters, that your guilt was there on that cursed tree? He that knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. And then he says, Believing we rejoice to see the curse removed. I've seen this song edited, and they've twisted it around, and some educated, sophisticated, who didn't like this word, curse and remove, he fixed it up, but I won't sing it.

I sing this one. Believing we rejoice to see the curse removed. What curse? The curse of the broken law, the curse of sin.

We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice, and sing his bleeding love. How wonderful all this is came to my heart tonight as I was upstairs by myself, there in my room, and I thought of this. What a wonderful invitation song.

What a wonderful song of triumph. What a song full of theology and meaning and gospel. That what blood of goats couldn't do, the blood of Christ is doing and has done.

So I would urge you tonight, if you are not now consciously forgiven, consciously forgiven, close your eyes, and by faith lay your hands on that dear head of his, and like a penitent confess your sin, and then the curse shall remove from your heart, and you will know your sins forgiven, and the blood will cleanse, and you will know you are delivered. Which is he going to be for you, Savior or Judge? He will be one or the other. If he is the first, he won't be the second.

But if he is not the Savior, he will be the Judge. I, for my part, can't afford to face him as my Judge. I must have his protecting blood and face him as my Savior.

Now, praise God, he knows too much about me for me to dare brazenly barge into his presence and let him judge me. Scripture tells us that certain ones who have sent their sins on before the judgment, you can send your sins on before the judgment, have been judged and settled and dispelled of. Now, while you are still on the earth, the Savior will cover your sins, cover them.

As the old brother said, if Jesus Christ had covered our sins with his life, when he took his life away, they would have been exposed, but he covered them with his death. And by his death forever he put my sins where they can't be found, for the blood of the everlasting come. Do you believe it? You certainly have powerful control over your emotions.

Amen. I get blessed when I get thinking about these things. What about you, my unsaved friend, my borderline friend, my doubtful friend, and my doubting friend? If there be such here, what about you? Right now, this is your opportunity, there'll never be a better one.

Bow your head, look back and see the burden you bore. Lay your hand of faith on his holy head and confess your sins, and the curse will remove. And you can say, Believing I rejoice to see the curse removed.

I praise the Lamb with cheerful voice and sing his dying love.

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