



I'm guessing some of you are familiar with the TV segment where Charles Shultz depicts his character Charlie Brown as he goes trick-or-treating. It seems like Charlie Brown always gets the short end of the stick. Charlie and some other children are going from door-to-door trick or treating. They all have costumes. Right after every house they all excitedly tell the group what they got. One says, "I got a candy bar." Another says, "I got a stick of bubble gum." Followed by "I got a lollipop." Then the last voice, the voice of Charlie Brown says, "I got a rock." Poor Charlie Brown. He somehow still gets the worst end of things, even when everyone is disguised. The costume couldn't hide Charlie Brown from his fate. How do we know that God will always dish out what is right for everyone? We see the answer as we look at Jesus' depiction of the final Judgment of all people found in Matthew 25.

Scripture is most clear on the matter. There will be a judgment. The last judgment is an inescapable truth which the world strives to deny. Satan desires to lure the world into thinking there will be no accountability and no justice from God. You see in the non-Christian world there is a general uneasiness and fear of death. But is there a fear of judgment after death? But God makes it clear, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust will rise." We won't be looking like ghost or zombies either. Our bodies will be brought back to life to stand in judgment. You can't escape it with death. All peoples will be brought back to life for judgment. The Pharaoh's of Egypt will discover their tombs could not hide their bodies. The poorest of martyred Christians will know their bodies were not lost to ash in the fire of persecution. If you are not still alive when the judgment comes, will be raised for it. All will stand before the Lord for judgment.

And the judge will be one many had rejected. Most are very familiar with hearing about the baby Jesus, the philosopher and teacher Jesus, and even the crucified Jesus. This is the Jesus who is often belittled and mocked by the unbelieving world. But the Jesus of Scripture is the Lord God Jesus. The same Jesus who took on flesh to save us also is now risen and in all glory. If the thought of everyone that ever lived standing resurrected for the judgment is astounding, even more astounding will be the sight described by Jesus in Matthew 25. Jesus will come in glory and with all his armies of angles. Everyone will see him, just as we read in his Word, "*even those that pierced him will see him.*" Even those who denied him will see him. Consider the picture of the last judgment we read earlier from the Old Testament: (Da 7:9-10) "*As I looked, 'thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.'*" God himself, who made us, will raise us all to judge us for every deed done in the body.

The final scene Jesus depicts of this world is the crowd before him in all his glory. Then he will divide the world's people. Everyone will be found to belong in only one of two groups. "*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*"

We look at this and wonder: Is God that simplistic? Doesn't he at least have a ten-tier grading system? If we are going to be judged for every deed whether good or bad, shouldn't there be a million tiers of judgment? Many would like to picture a judgment where one can just blend in. "I'll find myself somewhere near the middle." Or "I'm somewhere below the middle, but not at the bottom of his list of evil" or "I'm most certainly in the top half somewhere." God doesn't present it that way. There are only two groups on the last day. God will only see one type of person on the last day and another. Nobody will belong to a third "half-way" group. A shepherd, you can well bet, has no difficulty separating and finding the difference between a sheep and a goat. They are altogether different creatures. There are no geeps or half-goats, half-sheep. You are either one or the other. This is how it will be for God on the last judgment. Simply put: There is no gray area, no middle ground in the judgment.

And consequently, there will be no middle area-no shades of gray in the sentencing on the last judgment. Just as the division is extreme, the sentencing will be extreme. Not only will the verdict be decisive and unexpected, but it will also be eternal. Hell is not a trail or temporary fate. It is the everlasting punishment for the ever-remaining enemies of God. Your inheritance is not a short ride, it is an eternal kingdom prepared to last forever. An opposite and everlasting verdict will be dished out to the two different groups.

How can this be? We see lots of people who do both good and bad. Who doesn't do a good deed now and then? Who doesn't slip and cause some selfish damage every now and then? How do we know which side of the fence someone is on if we see everyone doing good and evil things? How can it be so black-and-white, "sheep verses goat"?

And if it is so extreme and so permanent, how will it be known that God judged it right? On the last day he will point to the external evidence: He won't have any trouble identifying us on the last day. He knows his own when he sees them.

But you might wonder? “How!? I haven’t done a lot of good. I haven’t been the most holy person. I haven’t done what my God demands for eternal life.” But the king will say, *“You saw me hungry, thirsty, a stranger, needing clothes, sick, in prison, and you served me.”* The believer will wonder how and when they did these things. They know they weren’t pure and perfect. They know they haven’t done all these things. But the judge will say, *“Whatever least of these things you did for the least, you did for me.”* The smallest act done in faith is evidence of faith in Jesus. We cannot, we will not, we will not enter heaven because of our works. What was the believers’ attitude toward works? I haven’t kept record. I haven’t met the requirements. I can’t lay claim to the great and rich blessings of eternity –everlasting joy and the bliss of heaven. The believer will be astounded with the inheritance and only ask, “When did I ever earn this?”

They haven’t earned anything like this! But the blessing and gift is theirs! Listen to the pronouncement that the King will say on the last day to those on his right: *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”* Works have nothing to do with the king’s pronouncement. It is an invitation to receive a blessing: *“you who are blessed by my Father.”* You see God’s plan since before the world’s foundation was to bless his creation. His plan was to bless mankind. He desired in his grace to freely give us an “inheritance.” An inheritance isn’t something you earn. It is given because of your birth and belonging to a family.

You didn’t make yourself a sheep. You were born one. Or I should say born again as one. God has an inheritance in store for those who have been born into his family. “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” In your baptism you have been born again. You may not see it stamped on your forehead, but God has placed his name on you. You are his own dear child, an heir. You will receive his promised inheritance. He calls you his own sheep and knows you by name, just as you know and recognize his voice. On the Last Day God will not look at what you deserve and pay you according to your deeds. He will give his eternal blessing. This is the blessing he prepared for you. *“The kingdom prepared for you.”* This is what God wants for all people. He wants all to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth. He wants all to look to Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. Notice how he doesn’t even mention the things that are done wrong by the sheep. Their sins have been removed.

So should we be thinking “I better do enough good, I better do these things for the least, so I can be sure I’m a sheep, belonging to God, his child and heir.” **No. We will not be saved by works.** If we ever begin to count on our works, we have lost sight of the blessing and inheritance that is ours by grace. All who thought they were saved by works were cursed. They pleaded as they relied on their own selves, *‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’⁴⁵* *“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’* They were not under grace. They remained judged by the smallest failure because they were still under the curse, relying on their own works.

The saddest part of the condemnation of all those on his left is that hell was not prepared for them. ⁴¹ *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”* Heaven was prepared for God’s people to inherit by grace. Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. And hell receives all who will not receive God’s kingdom. All who do not believe are condemned.

There is the dividing line. Not works, but faith in Jesus. And the slightest failure to do the slightest good deed is enough to send the one who doesn’t have Christ to hell. The smallest omission of the slightest good deed damns the sinner who does not have Christ. We will not get to heaven by our own works.

Notice how Jesus didn’t mention to any on his right what they failed to do? It’s not fairness that they received, but mercy and grace. They were keenly aware that they failed, but they are called “the righteous.” They have the righteousness of Christ. Their sins of failure were wiped clean, forgiven. It is only by mercy that they stand with a clean slate and in the righteousness given by God. They were made fit for heaven once for all by Jesus Christ. They were born again to inherit it by the rebirth and washing of the Holy Spirit! In the end, it is only by God’s working –not any self-serving attitude that any unremembered, scattered, good deeds are done. And it is only through faith in Jesus as our redeemer from sin that any of the slightest deed is considered pleasing to God in Christ. It’s not fair. Its grace. Christ took the condemnation and paid the price in your place. It’s not fair. It’s mercy. God will not hold your failures against you since Christ took them all away once and for all on the cross.

There is no “half-way’ saved on Judgment Day. You won’t have to wonder, “Did I make it to the sheep camp? Am I one who will be on the right side of my God when all are judged?” You will hear the invitation in grace, “Come you who are blessed.” It is a blessing indeed! You see, on Judgment Day, you won’t be “half-saved.” You are his own. He knows who his own are –those who trust in Christ. He knows you. He will set you apart on that last day as completely and absolutely saved by grace.

In Christ you won’t get the short stick or the hard outcome. He knows his own who trust in him. He promises the blessing prepared for them will be theirs when he returns. It won’t be him dishing out what is right and fair for you, but what is merciful and gracious. Until the Son of Man comes again in all his glory, don’t rely on yourself. Rely on the mercy of Christ, our glorious and eternal king.