

THE VERDICT
By John Fast
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In Revelation 19 the apostle John introduces us to a heavenly angelic chorus that is praising God for His complete and final judgment of all those who have opposed Him and persecuted His people. One of the reasons given for this angelic praise is ~~%because~~ His judgments are true and righteous (19:2). In other words, God's judgment is fair, equitable, and commensurate with the level of sin committed in light of the amount of revelation given. The more revelation and truth to which a person is exposed, the greater the sin when he ignores or rejects that revelation, and the greater the condemnation. This is true even in our own judicial system. The punishment for a flagrant violation of a known law is usually stiffer than if someone violates an obscure, little known statute. A small child will not be punished nearly as severely as an adult even if they both commit the same crime. The punishment for an adult robbing a bank with a toy gun will far surpass any punishment a four year old might receive for attempting the same thing. The adult knows it is illegal as well as the consequences involved, but a child may just be acting out something he saw in a Western. The level of accountability is different because the level of awareness and knowledge of the law is different.

Jesus expressed this same principle in Matthew 11:21-24, ~~%~~Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless, I say to you, *it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you.* And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless, I say to you *that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.*"

Jesus proclaimed that on the day when God judges the world and the wicked are raised to a resurrection of judgment (Jn. 5:29; Rv. 20:11-15) the punishment exacted on these Old Testament cities will be more lenient than that inflicted on the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, but not because Sodom and Gomorrah were less wicked. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were nice Jewish towns full of very devout, pious, and moralistic Jews. The gross immorality which characterized the Old Testament cities was not to be found in these New Testament Jewish hamlets. The inhabitants of these Old Testament cities had flaunted their immorality openly and unashamedly whereas at least two of the New Testament villages contained synagogues that proclaimed and enforced strict adherence to the Mosaic and rabbinical law. The law was read every Sabbath. So why should the inhabitants of these New Testament cities who were leading morally upstanding lives face a harsher judgment than the infamously debauched cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? When Jesus sent His disciples on their first missionary trip he confined their ministry to ~~%the~~ the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt 10:5, 6). Jesus pronounced this same sentence of a harsher future judgment on all who rejected the disciples' teaching (Mt 10:14, 15). When the Pharisees demanded that

Jesus show them a sign, He declared that the wicked inhabitants of Nineveh and the Gentile Queen of the South would unanimously condemn the Jews of Jesus' generation for their unbelief (Mt 12:41, 42). The night before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples, "I had not come *and spoken to them* they would not have sin (i.e. "guilt"), but now they have no excuse for their sin" (Jn 15:22). The common thread that unites all these passages is the *principle that increased revelation brings increased accountability*. To whom much has been given, much is required. The judgment on these Old Testament cities will be less severe because they had less divine revelation to which they were accountable than the New Testament cities which Jesus condemns. Light rejected blinds.

Let's apply this principle to today. We live in a time and place in which people have unprecedented access to spiritual truth. The Bible is readily available in virtually any form; printed, electronic or audio. There are an abundance of resources available at no cost via the Internet to aid us in our study and understanding of Scripture. We can download accurate and biblical sermons without end. There are a plethora of commentaries, books, and theological articles at our disposal and more are being written and published every day. But despite this unprecedented availability of spiritual truth our age is marked by a level of biblical illiteracy and theological ignorance, even among professing Christians, not seen since the Dark Ages when the Bible was unavailable to the common man. And this profound biblical and theological illiteracy has produced a vacuum into which all sorts of error and heretical teaching has rushed to fill. False teaching can only grow and flourish in the soil of biblical ignorance. This makes spiritual ignorance today all the more sinful and inexcusable, because it is a willful and deliberate ignorance. And a willful and deliberate ignorance is no different than out and out rejection of divine revelation.

The apostle Peter warned the church that those who rejected the second coming of Jesus in judgment did so because "they escapes their notice" or more literally, "for they forget this *willingly*". Both verbs, "forget" and "willingly", are in the present tense, indicating a habitual, characteristic behavior. It is something they constantly do. So, what do these scoffers continuously and willingly reject? "That by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water." They willingly and continuously reject God's revelation concerning the biblical account of creation and His previous judgment of mankind by the flood (2 Pt 3:5, 6). Scoffers willingly reject any biblical truth that conflicts with their pursuit of self-gratification. Their rejection is not motivated by lack of information or evidence, it is not theological, but rather their rejection is for moral reasons. The truth conflicts with their pursuit of self-worship. Evolution is not a rejection of theism; it is a rejection of the God of the Bible because the God of the Bible holds them accountable for their sin and threatens to punish their sin. The God of the Bible would deprive them of their greatest love.

When people continue in sin because they refuse to take advantage of all the knowledge God has made available to instruct them in His will, their sin cannot be blamed on ignorance. People can know and may know if they want to know, but they do

not know because they do not want to know. A pastor by the name of Robert Chapman once said, "Neglect of Scripture is not from want of time, but want of heart; some idol taking the place of God." People will go to great lengths and spend enormous sums of money to grow in the knowledge of their worldly and temporal interests on which their earthly welfare depends, and even in trivial interests like their favorite sports teams or hobbies which provide no earthly benefit. But when it comes to growing in their knowledge of God and His will for their life and the eternal welfare of their soul, they will not exert a tenth of the energy they exert in keeping up with their favorite sports team or hobby or worldly interests.

Those who profess to be Christians need to step back and ask why they have so little, if any interest in growing in their knowledge of God and His will. And if they profess to have an interest, they need to consider why they expend so little effort in gaining this knowledge. People do not love what they do not know and what they do love they want to know better. The only way to know God and His will is through His revelation contained in Scripture. It is impossible to know whether we are in the will of God if we do not know His will. It is impossible to live a life that pleases God if we do not know *what* pleases God. We cannot know if we are living in sin or have sinful attitudes if we are not aware of what those sinful attitudes and actions are. It is impossible to keep from falling into error and even heresy if we do not know the truth. As truth becomes obscured or recedes error and falsehood increase. All knowledge either promotes truth or it promotes error. There is no such thing as morally neutral knowledge. As good and right withdraw they are not replaced with a different kind of good and right, but evil rushes in to take their place. Error crowds in as truth ceases and evil takes over as good declines just as darkness comes in as the light of day dims. What else but darkness comes when light recedes? Greater light brings greater responsibility and greater consequences for willfully rejecting the light. There is no excuse today for spiritual and biblical ignorance. According to this biblical principle it will be more tolerable for the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum in the day of judgment than for much of the professing church today.