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A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbet-01.php

RECOVERING THE PROSPECT OF FINAL JUDGMENT.

DICK DOWSETT

'The fear of God is being airbrushed out of Scottish preaching.'

Stanley Smith was one of the Cambridge Seven, a much publicised group of wealthy young graduates who determined to live and work as pioneer missionaries in China. Deeply immersed in Chinese culture, by the 1890s Smith had become a 'Larger Hope' universalist, unable to cope with the traditional view of the lostness of those who are not Christians. He was finally asked to resign from the China Inland Mission in 1904. Henry Frost, at that time North American Director of the mission, wrote of the tragedy that Smith had made 'the unintentional mistake of interpreting the Scriptures by heathenism rather than heathenism by the Scriptures.'¹ That same mistake is increasingly made by 21st century Christians, profoundly moulded by our post-modern, post Christian culture. Nowhere is this more so than in thinking about the seriousness of God's judgment, the lostness of humanity, and the dangers of hell.

FINAL JUDGMENT: ONCE A MOTIVATION FOR WORLD MISSION

For previous generations one of the most significant motivations for world mission was the belief that those who did not trust Christ were dreadfully lost for ever. Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), whose writings influenced many who became missionaries, at the age of twenty wrote a letter to his sister. He told her he had decided to work his passage to China immediately rather than to save for two years to pay the fare and travel in comfort. His reasoning was that in two years twenty four million Chinese would die without Christ.² His belief in their lostness engendered a sense of urgency rarely seen today. He later wrote: 'I would never have thought of going out to China had I not believed that the Chinese were lost and needed Christ.'

Similarly, Amy Carmichael (1867–1951) was motivated by a vision of multitudes of blind people heading for a precipice while those who could see sat unconcerned making daisy chains. Her tract 'Thy Brother's Blood Crieth' helped many to see the urgency of mission. But few evangelicals

¹ Henry W. Frost, *The Days That Are Past* (typescript memoirs in CIM/OMF Archives, Toronto, 1888 onwards), p. 653.

² Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, *Biography of James Hudson Taylor* (CIM/OMF, 1965), p. 34.

of that era doubted that judgment and hell was the fearful prospect for unbelievers.

The influence of such missionary heroes was still felt in the early 1960s when I was a student wondering what to do with my life. While the vision of judgment had long faded in theologically liberal circles, evangelical Christians were largely firmly convinced about the awful reality of final judgment and of the eternal perdition of the unbelieving world, though they were never drawn into the sort of speculations about the detailed timetable of judgment that divided evangelicals in the U.S.A.

BRITISH CULTURE AND ATTITUDES TO JUDGMENT DOCTRINE 1960S–2017

The 1960s were, however a turning point in western popular culture. Prior to that, it was commonplace to talk in terms of right and wrong, black and white, duty and responsibility. After that, subjectivism and experimentation, free expression and personal choice, relativism and the denial of authority, pluralism and the denial of any meta-narrative became normal, no longer avant garde or confined to academia. And increasingly the Church allowed the world around it to squeeze it into its own mould.³ By 2017, despite some attempt to resist the flow of the tide, Christians have at worst turned their backs on doctrines of judgment and universal lostness, or at best become intimidated so as to rarely mention them.

What does it mean to be a *British* (or even just a Scottish) Christian? We pride ourselves in being *tolerant* people. In practice, however, this means that we disapprove of all strong convictions that rule that anyone else is wrong or sinful. We are relativistic: we speak of ‘what is true for them’, easily accepting that something incompatibly different may be ‘true for me’. We are uncomfortable with ideas of retributive justice, preferring therapeutic justice which aims to make criminals better. As a society, we endlessly seek to pass the buck of blame, like Adam, blaming first his wife and then God for giving her to him, we blame parents, social workers, advertisers, schools, even structures rather than accepting responsibility for our actions.⁴ At the end of life, we are piously optimistic that our departed relatives are ‘looking down on us’, are ‘stars in the sky’, have ‘gone to their reward’ — even though in our more rational moments we affirm that ‘there is nothing there’ after death while more and more of us also believe in reincarnation — the ultimate conviction about recy-

³ J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (London, 1960). Rom. 12:2.

⁴ Gen. 3:12.

cling. In such a society Christian concepts of God's judgment of all, his wrath against sin, and his holding people responsible for their lives are under siege.

CHEAP GRACE AND CLOSET UNIVERSALISM

There is little doubt that the content of much 21st century British preaching has been affected by this. As early as 1937, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was warning about the dangers of 'cheap grace' which he defined as 'grace without discipleship'⁵. Later in the 20th century John Stott warned of the dangers of a preaching a false Christ of 'love but never judgment [...] comfort but never challenge'.⁶ Today, perhaps one of the most common popular pulpit statements is 'nothing we ever do can make God love us more and nothing we ever do can make God love us less.'⁷ And this is gloriously true, but it is only one side of the coin, like the Epistle to the Romans with the first three chapters removed, it is incomplete.

This emphasis on grace, so often cheap grace, has led in many circles to a loss of evangelistic imperative. In 1988, in his important discussion with David Edwards, published as *Essentials*,⁸ John Stott wrote:

I am imbued with hope. I have never been able to conjure up (as some great Evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but will inevitably perish. On the other hand, as I have said, I am not and cannot be a universalist. Between these extremes *I cherish the hope that the majority of the human race will be saved*. And I have a solid biblical basis for this belief. [emphasis mine]

The biblical basis he then added was unusually thin by his standards,⁹ but, as perhaps the most significant leader among British evangelicals,

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (SCM Alva, English translation; 1959), p. 36.

⁶ John Stott. Langham Partnership Daily Thought, 17 February 2017. Email newsletter <<http://langham.org/get-involved/sign-up-for-email-updates/>>.

⁷ Philip Yancey, Richard Rohr, Nicky Gumbel, et al. I am not suggesting that all these authors fail to preach about judgments and lostness. In a soundbite age, single sentences are often quoted with little regard to context or qualifications made by the speaker or writer. It is the soundbite that now moulds mindsets. Theologies are built on them!

⁸ David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: a Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (IVP London, 1988), see pp. 312–29.

⁹ Acts 17:25–28; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Luke 13:29; and Rev. 7:9. Though none of these passages explicitly teach that the majority of the human race will be saved.

his opinion carried huge influence. The popular evangelical mindset changed: shifting to a belief that the majority of the world's people could be saved even if they never heard the gospel.

When, in 1982 I wrote *God That's Not Fair!* for students, it was commissioned as a response to the reportedly widespread closet universalism amongst evangelicals. Since then, evangelical universalists have increasingly moved out of the closet, influenced by popular speakers, like Rob Bell, the former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan, U.S.A., who argued that universalism was a biblical option.¹⁰ Far fewer church members really believe in the necessity of evangelism any more.

As a result, many now talk of holistic ministry, but their holism does not include evangelism. People urgently need clean water supplies, good education, health care, and freedom from oppression and justice — and that is, of course, correct. The gospel is no longer regarded as the most urgent need of people everywhere: it has become just an option, a preference, a luxury that can wait until later.¹¹ The Bible Training institute in Glasgow used to be the most important training ground in Britain for cross-cultural missionaries. The global significance of BTI graduates was impressive.¹² By 1980, the culture of the college had changed. Mission, though on the agenda of the lecturers, was not to be found on the agenda of almost all of the students.¹³

We live today in a post Christian society where Christians are under pressure and often theologically compromised as a result. Nowhere is this more so than in thinking about the judgment of God and the lostness of humanity without Christ.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IN SCRIPTURE AND TODAY

The God who is revealed in Scripture is pictured neither as a cuddly therapist nor as an honourable gentleman. Certainly, he is described as being as carefully wired to his children as a breast-feeding mother and his commitment to his promises to us are not all all iffy, but totally reliable. He is also a roaring lion, an awesome judge, a consuming fire. The default position of human beings who experience anything of his glory is terror and a desire to hide. The sinful Adam and Eve hid from him, people at the

¹⁰ Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (London: HarperCollins, 2011).

¹¹ Tearfund is often a notable exception in that many of its workers include evangelism in their holistic approach.

¹² Rose Dowsett: unpublished research.

¹³ As a visiting lecturer on cross-cultural mission, I was congratulated that I gained the ear of students who invariably read or slept through mandatory classes on world mission.

foot of Sinai backed off in fear, Gideon feared for his life, as did Samson's father Manoah. Isaiah cried: 'Woe to me! I am ruined!', shepherds were scared out of their lives, Peter asked the Lord to go away from him, John fell at his feet as though dead.¹⁴ Moreover, these were all people who had experienced God's blessing and would experience more of it.

The fear of the Lord, though known to be the beginning of wisdom,¹⁵ is rarely to be experienced in contemporary services. Neither cheerful singalong services, nor the more serious and structured alternatives acknowledge the awesomeness of dealing with the living God.¹⁶ We neither worship nor live in the light of judgment.

JUDGMENT IN APOSTOLIC EVANGELISM

Undoubtedly the preaching of final judgment was a normal part of the apostolic gospel. The Acts sermons are strikingly confrontational: Christ's enemies will become his footstool, anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off, and people are declared to be betrayers and murderers of God's Christ. Italians are told that Jesus will judge the living and the dead: even Greek pagans are warned that God 'has fixed a day when he will judge the world by the man (Jesus) he has appointed,' giving 'proof of this by raising him from the dead.'¹⁷ As a result, many asked what they should do to be saved, while others ridiculed the message or were profoundly angry.

Clearly the apostles believed that people urgently needed to be reached with the message of the gospel. They were in trouble, and needed to be told the way of salvation. The Epistle to the Romans, never written as an evangelistic tract, may be helpfully read as a justification for the missionary enterprise, a diagnosis of the human race and its dangerous condition. It is like a medical textbook, designed to help doctors successfully treat patients rather than to help sick people self-medicate.¹⁸

¹⁴ Gen. 3:8; Exod. 20:18; Judg. 6:22, 13:22; Isa. 6:5; Luke 2:9, 5:8; Rev. 1:17.

¹⁵ Prov. 9:10.

¹⁶ The exception is found in some of the Hebridean isles, where the Lord is feared and the seriousness of sin is profoundly acknowledged, but assurance of salvation is often sadly missing. Today's church has great difficulty in holding the love of God and the holiness of God in wholesome balance.

¹⁷ Acts 2:23, 35, 3:13–15, 23, 4:10–12, 7:51–53, 10:42–43, 17:30–31.

¹⁸ Reading Romans as a rationale for world mission makes sense of the text. Paul stated his commitment to world mission at the beginning of the epistle (1:14–15) and then justified this by his long exposition of the gospel. At the conclusion (16:25–27) he restated his ambition that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith.

INTERPRETING THE TEACHING OF JESUS ON JUDGMENT AND HELL

Much of the biblical material on judgment comes from the Gospels and from the teaching of Jesus himself.

He described judgment as inescapable, like an unexpected and unwanted thief or a snare that suddenly springs and there is no release. He spoke of people perishing, of being destroyed. He warned of being cast out, disowned, rejected. He spoke of no way back and of painful regret and personal torment.¹⁹

Evangelicals have traditionally believed that Jesus taught that unbelievers would suffer conscious, everlasting torment in Hell. However, throughout at least the last seventy years, many orthodox evangelicals have questioned this conviction, as various others did before throughout the Christian Era. Michael Green wrote with his customary candour that Christians 'should reject the doctrine of conscious unending torment for those who have never heard the gospel just as firmly as they reject universalism.'²⁰ They variously question whether the immortality of the soul is really a Christian doctrine rather than a gospel gift to believers, whether people can be condemned to eternal destruction without ever being destroyed, whether the different degrees of punishment that Jesus taught makes sense if all suffer terribly for ever.²¹ Much annihilationist theology argues that unbelievers simply cease to exist at death, a position hardly distinguishable from that of contemporary atheists. These evangelicals call their conviction 'conditional immortality'. They believe in the final judgment and in the reality of divine punishment and of hell. And as such they show an exemplary enthusiasm for preaching the gospel. John Wenham claimed that belief in conditional immortality freed him

Of course, the epistle may also be seen as a pastoral letter to help Christians in a multi-cultural congregation appreciate and value one another and live in harmony together. Even this is grounded in Paul's longing that multi-cultural mission should work well.

¹⁹ Matt. 24:34; Luke 21:34; John 3:15–16; Matt. 7:13, 7:23, 8:12, 13:41–42; Luke 16:26; etc.

²⁰ Michael Green, *Evangelism through the local Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton; 1990), p. 70. Relevant and readable books include: John Wenham, *Facing Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998); *The Nature of Hell: A report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals* (Carlisle: Acute; 2000); Edward William Fudge & Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell — A Biblical & Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 2000).

²¹ Luke 12:47–48.

up to preach strongly about the dangers of judgment and of people's need of Christ.

Some have dismissed such questioning as a flirtation with the heresy of Jehovah's Witnesses, it seems to me to be worthy of more serious investigation and more charitable dialogue. Thirty years ago, John Stott wrote of the issue: 'I do plead for frank dialogue among Evangelicals on the basis of Scripture. I also believe that the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.' I agree with his generosity, but would also plead for something more than frank dialogue. When discussing different honest interpretations of Scripture, we need to learn to engage in kind and gentle dialogue, which the Scripture commands and evangelicals too frequently fail to obey.²²

LEARNING CHRISTLIKE EVANGELISM

It is significant that Jesus was never described as the hounder of sinners, but was well known as their friend. He spent time with them, he partied with them, he valued them and they knew that he loved them. He was frequently accused of giving sinners preferential treatment. His theology of final judgment did not result in a judgmental attitude towards those with ungodly lifestyles.²³ Moreover, there is remarkably little of his teaching about judgment in his dialogues with the 'sinners' he encountered. That was largely reserved for the Pharisees who heard his teaching and aggressively rejected him.

The call to follow Christ must include a commitment to imitate him in his evangelistic ministry. His commitment to rescuing lost people cost him his life. He saw them as lost, helpless and perishing, understanding profoundly the dangers of judgment and hell. Yet with this understanding, he never treated them with disregard for their temporal and physical needs. His ministry was to the whole person, completely holistic. Although not part of the sin-problem of humanity, he was never detached or uncaring, condemning of those who sought him out, but full of compassion. He loved people, and they felt loved. A measure of true discipleship must involve a similar burden for people's salvation, and a compassionate commitment to them in all their needs. Loveless, condemnatory evangelism is unworthy of our Saviour. Perhaps it was because lost seekers were already aware of their sin and shame before God that he barely mentioned the subject to them. Similarly, the evangelist might not need

²² 2 Tim. 2:24–25.

²³ Luke 7:34–50; Matt. 15:21–28, 20:29–34; John 4, (8:1–11), 9:1–7, 34; etc.

to labour the consequences of sin and judgement with those who already understand something of their great need.

Yet Jesus did speak with anger and aggressive condemnation to those who opposed him and the good news that he brought, and he taught his disciples in their mission to graphically convey the grave danger that those who rejected the message were in, shaking the dust off their shoes.²⁴ There is a place where strong preaching on judgement is a dominical necessity.

Some of the great evangelists of the past were powerful preachers of judgement and hell, seeing considerable numbers 'fleeing from the wrath to come'. Jonathan Edward's famous, or perhaps notorious sermon of 1741: 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' was typical of many preached during the Great Awakening of 1730–55. His graphic descriptions of the horrors awaiting the unrepentant were the verbal equivalent of the cartoon-like paintings of judgment by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525–69) and Michelangelo (1475–1564) communicating a warning to the impenitent of a more illiterate age. Both painters and preachers exercised considerable imagination in depicting the much less graphic teaching of the Gospels.

Hanging sinners over the mouth of hell does not appear to have been the preaching method of Jesus. It could be argued that, in the era of Christendom, most people claimed to be Christians and knew much more of the teaching of the Gospels but often refused to let it affect their lives and moral values. As such, they were more akin to the Pharisees of the time of Jesus and therefore needed the warnings, even the threat of judgment and hell. In today's terms, if we are those who confine our evangelism to those who attend church each Sunday without ever coming to Christ, we may find it appropriate to follow Jesus in his preaching to the Pharisees. If, however, we are reaching out to the majority of our population who never set foot inside a church, we might choose a different approach, learning more from Jesus' encounters with seeking 'sinners'.

As we consider the loss of traditional teaching on judgment, we might profitably consider why Western theology has focused on the law court model of guilt and condemnation and paid so little attention to the parallel more relational and subjective model of shame and dishonour and exclusion. The Chinese-American theologian Jackson Wu's work²⁵ has highlighted the fact that the legal model, while being clearly biblical, is not the *sine qua non* of gospel preaching.

While his concern is that the honour and shame model is more culturally appropriate for Chinese, it is also more in tune with the mindset of

²⁴ Matt. 21:33–46; 23:1–39; Luke 11:37–53; 14:15–23; John 12:47–48.

²⁵ Jackson Wu, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualisation of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena CA: WCIU Press, 2012).

our post-modern contemporaries who look at life through a more subjective and experiential window than previous generations did.²⁶ Judgment may be approached effectively, using the subjective language of shame and rejection rather than the more objective concepts of guilt and condemnation. Many now identify with feeling cut off from God, with shame and even fear in his presence, and with a sense of helplessness to put it right. It is important to reclaim the doctrine of judgment and hell for the present generation, but not in a way that speaks to the present as though the mindset of people was stuck in the 18th century.

PREACHING JUDGMENT SENSITIVELY.

Judgment teaching may yet be effectively used with seekers, but it needs to be done with compassion and gentleness. In 2016, I was asked to speak at St Andrews University Events Week on the subject of ‘Hell and a God of Love’. After the apologetic but also firmly evangelistic address, I expected hostile questioning. Instead I was met by a queue of students asking for prayer. It is wrong to argue that today’s generation reject judgment teaching out of hand.

However, there is prejudice to be overcome. The biblical God of Judgment has been frequently mocked by the opinion-formers of contemporary media. Richard Dawkins, Oxford professor for Public Understanding of Science, wrote in *The God Delusion* (2006): ‘The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak.’ The comedian Stephen Fry describes God as ‘utterly evil, capricious and monstrous.’²⁷ Such blasphemy can easily provoke a vindictive and argumentative approach in the Christian preacher — and that is counter-productive.

It is important to reflect on what might be called the trauma of judgment and Hell — for God. The God of the Noahic flood is not petulant, but filled with grievous regret. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather longs for people to repent and live. He is not willing that any should perish: he loves people. Nowhere is the trauma of God shown

²⁶ Andy Crouch, ‘The Return of Shame’, *Christianity Today*, March 10, 2015 at <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/march/andy-crouch-gospel-in-age-of-public-shame.html>>. See also the website <honorshame.com>. Accessed March 2017. While these sites are based in USA, the articles are largely relevant to British culture too.

Jayson Georges, ‘The Good News for Honor-Shame Cultures’, *Lausanne Global Analysis*, March 2017, Volume 6/Issue 2. <<https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-03/the-good-news-for-honor-shame-cultures>>. Accessed March 2017.

²⁷ *The Meaning of Life*, RTE One, broadcast on 1 February 2015.

more clearly than in the tears of Jesus over unresponsive Jerusalem and his almost maternal longing to cover and protect them, like a chicken with her chicks.²⁸ Jesus chose to die in our place, taking the consequences of our sin and rebellion. Such is God's commitment to save people from the horrors of judgment. The compassion and utter winsomeness of the Lord of judgment is a picture ignored by apologists of atheism, but is attractive to a generation that takes emotions seriously.

If the Lord Christ reveals God's emotional grief at the human situation and his longing to deliver people from the shame and punishment that they deserve, we cannot be content with a detached, clinical but uncaring preaching of God's wrath against sin. Our manner and tone in preaching can help or hinder the listeners in their response.

There is much written as an apologetic for the doctrines of judgment that is beyond the scope of this paper. Interestingly, C.S. Lewis's relevant chapters in *The Problem of Pain* (1940) and *The Great Divorce* (1946) are still persuasive for many. Evangelists fearful of tackling such an unpalatable and counter-cultural doctrine should learn from Peter's handling of criticism of his pioneer approach to reaching Gentiles. The gist of his response was: 'Don't blame me. I didn't like it either. But God insisted: it was his word, not my idea. I just obeyed and the Holy Spirit worked!'²⁹ The issue is not whether we or other people like it. It is what God has said and what Jesus taught.

PREACHING JUDGMENT TO BELIEVERS

Finally, it is important to remember that the Scriptures frequently relate the doctrine of final judgment to ethical demands placed upon disciples of Christ. Throughout the epistles, the return of the Lord in judgment is taught as a motivation to holiness and godly living. Judgment begins with God's household: everyone is included. Old Testament stories of judgments are taught as warnings for believers to live differently. There is no heavenly inheritance for the ungodly or disobedient, no mercy for those who are merciless themselves.³⁰

The accountability of the believer is rarely preached upon. Rightly fearing to undermine the completeness of the atonement, preachers are hesitant to suggest that Christians might lose out on God's blessings because of sin and disobedience. Yet the image of believers being saved, but only like people escaping from a house gutted by fire, is a powerful

²⁸ Gen. 6:6; Ezek. 18:30–32; 2 Peter 3:9; Matt. 23:37; Luke 19:41–44.

²⁹ Acts 11:1–17.

³⁰ 1 Pet. 4:17; 1 Cor. 10:6–10; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5–6; Heb. 2:1–3; 12:25, 29; Jas. 2:12–13; 2 Pet. 3:7, 10–12; Jude 12, 14–15.

reminder that Christians may invest their lives in the sort of rubbish that will be destroyed at judgment. They do not lose their salvation which is secure in Christ, but they do lose rewards that could have been theirs.³¹ In a generation that believes all should get prizes, teaching on rewards for godly service is less attractive than it used to be. However, even the apostle Paul was concerned that he could be sidelined in his ministry, missing out if his life did not match up to his teaching.³²

'Because I enjoy it' has become the primary British justification for behaviour choices. It is inappropriate for the believer, who must be encouraged to seek first to bring God pleasure. The reminder of solemn accountability is too rarely heard in our churches today.

The coming judgment is also taught in the New Testament as an encouragement to Christians facing unnerving persecution. When anti-Christian activity gains the upper hand in society, believers become intimidated, plagued with doubt, and tempted to apostatise. The epistles reassure believers that at the judgment it is not the believers, but their opponents who will be the losers. Final judgment becomes the spur to perseverance, even rejoicing in suffering.³³

While British Christians know nothing of the intensity of persecution found in many parts of the 21st century world, they struggle with the pressures of a profoundly secular society, and are in need of this pastoral application of eschatological truth.

Many have argued that fear of judgment should not be our motivation for mission. Certainly there are higher motives. However, the New Testament does employ the doctrine in this way. Paul confessed that 'since we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others,' and then used the same doctrine to motivate his disciple Timothy. Both our judgment and the more awful judgment of unbelievers should cause us to readjust our diaries so that we have significant time for outreach to unbelievers.

CONCLUSIONS

Judgment is not so much a doctrine to be ticked off on a statement of faith as a lifestyle to be lived. We are to live as those who will give account of our lives: our public ministry and our private, more hidden side. We are to live and minister as those who appreciate and acknowledge our own vulnerability, our sin and our relative ignorance, and our fallibility. Apart from the grace of God, we are as hellbound as anyone else. We are also

³¹ 1 Cor. 3:10–15.

³² 1 Cor. 9:27.

³³ 2 Thess. 1:4–10; 1 Pet. 4:5, 16–18; 2 Pet. 2:9; Revelation *in toto*.

to live as those who believe that the unbelieving world is dreadfully lost, despite all the touches of common grace that make most people tolerable and many delightful. Godliness of life, humble, pastorally relevant preaching, passionate outreach to the unbelieving world are all time-consuming, even exhausting. But they are our calling. It is a calling, however, from the one who is committed to work with us and in us and through us, knowing exactly what a risk that is to his own reputation.

The details and small print of final judgment and the events around it have generated much often shameful division within the church, not least in the evangelical community. We need to work harder at recognising the limits of our understanding, the fallibility of our own expositions (and not just those of the believers we disagree with), and the difference between fundamental and secondary issues of faith. On secondary issues, Paul warned against arguing in aggressive, dismissive or destructive ways, reminding his readers, even in the area of theological debate, to remember the coming judgment. 'Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit.'³⁴ Let us begin with a determination to make sure that we live the truth ourselves, even in our theological discussions and disagreements!

³⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), Rom. 14:10.