

Essay #4:
**Eagerly Await the Savior
even though You Must Face Divine Judgment**

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Dear brethren from all over the world, greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ. Glory to our merciful Lord who unites us through His Holy Word.

We rejoice that this CELC convention is able to be held in Japan. We thank our gracious Lord who will bless us through our studies and gives us opportunities to gather even in this world to worship Him and to encourage one another.

O Lord, we ask you to strengthen us with the armor of your Word so that we together may continue to stand fast against all temptations. We live in a world with many misleading teachings, especially about Judgment Day. Please bless our Bible study today, remind us of your clear Word, and increase our wisdom and faith. Help us be servants who await your second coming with joy and thanks, and not with fear or despair. Amen.

1. Who will be judged on Judgment Day?

The connection between the judgment and resurrection.

At first, let us consider who will be judged on Judgment Day? This question is closely related with the question who will be

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raised from the dead? The Lord encourages us concerning the believer's resurrection with many passages throughout the Bible. (Isaiah 26:19, Luke 20:35, John 11:25,26, Philippians 3:11)

The resurrection of the unbeliever is also mentioned in many verses. The Gospel of John said "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice, and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:28,29) Paul also declared before Felix, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." (Acts 24:14,15 cf. Daniel 12:2)

Thus, believers and unbelievers both will certainly be present on Judgment Day. The Bible says, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." (Matthew 12:30) The atheists who hope there is no God and the agnostic who has doubt about the existence of God will also without exception be the subjects of judgment. So the question is, "Who will be judged on Judgment Day?" The very fact that all nations will be raised is not an unrelated subject. All human beings will be raised and all will be judged.

Believers in Christ will, of course, enter heaven with glorious bodies and receive eternal life. Unbelievers will enter hell to be punished forever and will suffer punishment in their bodies, but their bodies will never be destroyed or disappear. Thus, we reject all false teachings, which says that unbelievers will never be raised. If that were so, unbelievers in their bodies would not be subject to the Judgment. Unbelievers will be judged and punished in both body and soul.

All people and the angels who sinned are subject to the judgment.

Will there be a choice whether one appears before the Judgment Seat of God or not? There will be no choice! Everyone must stand before the Christ for judgment. Scripture makes this clear. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body,

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according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10) “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’” (Romans 14:10,11) “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,” (Hebrew 9:27; Matthew 25:32; Acts 17:31).

Not only those who still live on the Last Day, but also the dead will be judged as 1 Timothy 4:1 says, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” All people who ever lived and still live will be judged. No one will be overlooked! No one can escape from the judgment! “‘Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?’ says the Lord; ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 23:24) No sin will be hidden from the Lord. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrew 4:13, Luke 12:2) The angels who sinned will also experience the carrying out of the final judgment. “For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.” (2 Peter 2:4; Matthew 8:29) Besides the evil angels, those who are to be judged are all human beings, without exception. Christians, non-Christians, (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10) those who are living and those who are dead and evil angels too. (Acts 10:42, 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6)

Christians are also subject to the judgment.

The teaching that “Christians will never be judged” is a distortion of God’s Word. In Japan, the word “judgment” makes a fearful impression. People think that the word “judgment” should only be used for criminals. This distortion of the Bible may be caused by such a misinterpretation, but the original Greek meaning for “judgment” includes “to separate” and “to give a decision.” As Matthew 13:24-30 indicates, Christians will be finally separated from the “tares (weeds),” and also all the effects of sin such as death, sorrows, troubles, burdens, illness, false teachings, etc. The meaning of separation or handing

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down a decision doesn't leave a bad impression regarding the word "judgment." Rather for the believer being separated from all evil is something to look forward to. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2) If Christians would not be judged by Christ in the sense of receiving a verdict of not guilty, that would be one of the greatest tragedies. Therefore Christians may call judgment day "the day of redemption, the day of delight" as well as "the last day" (Ephesians 4:30, Isaiah 63:4).

But we sometimes come across Bible passages like "whoever believes in Him is not condemned" (John 3:18, 5:24, Romans 14:22) You may be confused by this contradiction, but this outward contradiction is from the application of "Law and Gospel". According to the Law, everyone has to stand before Christ's judgment seat, but according to the Gospel, believers will not be condemned. Believers who stand before the judgment seat of Christ will not have any guilt to be condemned for, because all their sins have been forgiven through faith in Jesus' redeeming work. The Bible doesn't have any contradictions (John 17:17), even about the Judgment. Here, too, Christ applies the teaching of the Law and the Gospel. Since all Christians still have an "old Adam", the Law is a warning. (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10)

Article 17 of the Augsburg Confession also shows this very clearly. A Jewish teaching tells us that before the resurrection the saints will establish an earthly kingdom and annihilate godless people. Such a teaching is the same or very similar to present day Chiliastic teachings (millennialism). On the basis of Scripture we cannot accept such teachings.

2. Who will be the Judge?

The Judge, Jesus Christ.

We confess in the 2nd article of the Apostle's Creed that "He (Jesus) shall come to judge the living and the dead." The Bible clearly teaches us who will be the Judge. "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead." (Acts 10:42) Jesus told the Jews that the Father gave

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Him the authority to be the Judge of all. “. . . and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” (John 5:27) From other passages, it is an obvious fact that the Father chose the Son of Man as the representative of this great authority. Paul writes, “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.” (1 Timothy 4:1) “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” (Matthew 25:31-33; Acts 10:42; John 5:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

Jesus stood in front of Caiaphas and Pilate and was judged by them. They condemned Him as guilty, although He never committed any sins, and people heaped abuse on Him crying, “Crucify him!” But finally, He Himself will judge all the living and all the dead, the evil angels, even Caiaphas, Pilate and the multitudes, including the Roman soldiers who whipped Him, on the last day.

But we cannot strictly say that this role of judgment is separated from God the father, since we cannot divide each person of the Triune God strictly. And the judgment of Jesus is never different from the Father and the Holy Spirit. (John 5:30, 10:30) Therefore, in a wide sense we can say that the Triune God is the judge on the last day.

The Righteous ones will be given this authority too.

The righteous ones, in other words, Christians will also judge the world with Christ. That is a plain doctrine of the Bible. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (1 Corinthians 6:2,3) “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them.” (Revelation 20:4) “So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have fol-

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lowed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29,30)

But we also have to remember the following Bible passage. “There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (James 4:12) So the righteous do not use this authority of judgment according to each one’s own will. We who are recognized as righteous by God’s grace, will be raised, and judged, and be made righteous having the perfect “image of God,” “who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” (Philippians 3:21) That is why we who will have received God’s perfect image and are in perfect harmony with God’s will, will never judge differently from the judgment of Jesus Christ, the Judge. Our thoughts and decisions will harmonize perfectly with Christ’s will and judgment.

Since we will approve and cooperate with Christ’s decisions and judgment, Christians will also judge the world and evil angels. We are not told the details about this authority, but let us be sure of this fact and rejoice in this great honor. This great honor, which Christ gives us by grace, moves us to judge our brothers and sisters rightly also in this earthly life. We who have been saved by grace through Jesus Christ, must judge every thing in this world according to God’s Word.

3. The basis of judgment and the use of evidence in the judging.

The basis of judgment is not according to the Law.

Judgment in this world is according to the law of a government. If Jesus also judges people according to the Law, every single man is guilty without exception. And all of us will be punished with eternal death in hell. “Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for in your sight no one living is righteous.” (Psalm 143:2) “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.” (Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10) These passages show and also emphasize for us that no one would be guiltless before God, if we would be judged by the Law. “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in

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His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Romans 3:20) “But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith.” (Galatians 3:11)

But let us no longer fear the Day of Judgment! Christ said that he would not judge us by the Law. If He would, His work of redemption for the whole world and His resurrection would lose all their meaning. (1 Corinthians 15:17-18)

The basis of judgment is according to the Gospel.

Jesus tells us in John 12:48 “The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” What is the “Word?” It is the Gospel (Romans 2:16). Did a person accept the Gospel in faith? (Subjective Righteousness) Or did he reject the Gospel? In other words God will judge a person individually according to his or her attitude toward the Gospel. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16) “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment.” (John 5:24) He will “give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) In short, the destiny of every person depends on this point, that is, whether a person in this life believes the Gospel of Christ or not. That is the all important thing! Those who believe in Christ will never be condemned in sin. That’s it! (John 5:24) That’s the Gospel, and it is the power of God unto salvation! (Romans 1:16,17)

But many people have questions about this very point. The Bible tells us that we are saved through faith in Christ by grace, not by our work or virtue. (Ephesians 2:8,9) We find some passages in the Bible, such as Matthew 25, which seem to tell us that our salvation depends on our deeds. Does it indicate a contradiction about the basis of judgment and salvation?

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Why does the Bible speak as if good deeds are the basis of judgment? Because human deeds are the official fruits of our faith and will show faith or unfaithfulness in Christ.

When the Bible sometimes seems to show that good deeds are the basis of judgment, we may be confused about the basis for judgment, if we don't remember all of God's Word. (Matthew 25:35-44; Revelation 20:12; John 5:28,29; James 2:24) Our Lord looks into the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7) Human thoughts and motives themselves can not be seen by humans, but are seen by the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrew 4:12,13). They will show their thoughts and motives by the deeds they produce. Such deeds are the public evidence of our faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Hebrew 11:6) True good deeds are then public fruits coming from faith in Christ. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22) "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17,26)

We may be confused by the letter of James, if we ignore the context and the circumstances when this letter was written. James admonishes people who knew the facts about being saved by faith, but they were in danger of abusing God's grace. Some of the people were tempted to believe that they did not need to do any good works. James says that such a faith without works is dead, and is not true faith. In that case there is no faith that remains in the heart. A faith without action is dead.

When we hear the "fruits of faith," most Christians are apt to imagine outreach in the form of mission work or some deeds of services to other people or devout prayers. But even when the deeds seem to be a small thing to us, if the deed comes from the faith in Christ, then it becomes a wonderful service and worship of God. A confession of faith in word or deed is also a good work, as 2 Corinthians 4:13 says; "I believed, therefore I have spoken." Even if it is not an eloquent confession with beautiful words and delivery in human eyes, but simply a con-

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fession made from a believing heart, it would be a fruit of faith, which pleases God. (Luke 21:1-4, Hebrew 11:4) Jesus pointed to the simple faith of little children (literally in Greek, “infant, baby at the breast”) as an appropriate example of the saving faith of those who enter the kingdom of God. (Luke 18:15-17, Psalm 8:2) We tend to judge public deeds by their type, greatness, and quantity, but the Lord’s basis for Judgment on the Last Day is not like that of human beings.

Bible scholars who are familiar with the Bible, people who come to Sunday service, every week, those who were baptized . . . even they will stand at left of Christ’s judgment seat unless they believe in Jesus Christ as their own Savior. The place at the left of Christ’s judgment throne pictures being declared guilty. On the other hand, those like the tax collector, the adulterous woman, the crucified criminal and also others who were criminals, even right before their deaths, will stand at the right hand of Christ if they believe in Jesus. All who believe in Jesus as their own Savior from eternal death will stand at the right of Christ. Being placed at the right of Christ pictures being declared not guilty.

Against those who don’t believe in Jesus.

Those who are condemned will not be judged according to each sin they have committed (James 2:10). The Judge will also look into their hearts in this case. If he has no faith in Christ, he never bears fruit which is God pleasing. Not what are “good works” in our sight, but rather what Jesus, the Judge, will see as “good works” which flow from “faith in Him” will be the basis of judgment. If a person doesn’t do good works in Christ, it means that he has no faith in Jesus the Savior. “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20) Jesus says, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” (John 15:4) “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Unbelief is a sin. But it is not true that people are not saved because of their sins. All sins are forgiven through Jesus’

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redemption. The reason why people are not saved is because they reject their Savior, and they do not accept “the garments of salvation” that is “the robe of righteousness” which the Savior offers them. (Isaiah 61:10, Matthew 10:33) Because unbelievers reject the grace of salvation from Christ, they stay under the wrath of God, which is caused by their sins. “For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” (Ephesians 5:5,6) “Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” (John 8:24)

Isaiah 13:9-13 is a powerful warning from God for the people who do not accept God’s mercy. “I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins.” Therefore, they have to accept this fact: that by God’s abundant mercy, Jesus alone fully became the Lamb of God for all people who deserve to be punished for their sins. Of Jesus the Bible clearly says, “He who gave himself as a ransom for all men.” (1 Timothy 2:6; John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; Titus 2:11; Hebrew 2:9)

Their sins also have been forgiven. In Japan, when someone causes a car accident, he will be exempt from further punishment as long as he pays the fine before the dead line. Of course his sin is not forgiven in this case, but if he rejects paying the fine, which is the only way to be released, he has to receive from further punishment as a natural result. Likewise those who will be condemned have rejected the only way to be saved. By rejecting the only Defense Counsel of the Savior and His payment for their sins which can save them, they will bring eternal death on themselves. (Zechariah 3:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21)

But we have to remember that we are not saved because of our faith, as a good work or because of its intrinsic value. Faith in Christ is also a gift from God and it is God’s work. The Bible says, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (John 6:29,44,65; Ephesians 2:8,9) The object of our faith is the True Savior. The one whom we believe in is the

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Almighty One from whom we have a promise. He and His Words are the object of our faith and He, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the sole cause and reason why we are saved!

False teaching about this doctrine

Thus far, we have accepted the fact that all human beings deserve to be judged by Jesus. No one can take another's punishment for sins; no one can gain salvation for himself or another by his own virtue and good works.

In Japan we have a proverb saying "In ga warui." It means that someone has to shoulder a burden for the penalty of the sin which one's parents or relatives or ancestors caused. The Jews too had this mistaken idea. The Bible points that out in John 9:1-7, Ezekiel 18:1-4,20. It is a wrong way of thinking. Nobody can undertake the responsibility for your sins or mine. Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, undertook our sins and perfectly removed the penalty for everyone's sins. (Psalm 49:7-9,15; Matthew 11:28) The Roman Catholic Church teaches as a basis of judgment that "God will judge by His love." If they say "God's love" is "the Gospel of Christ", then there would be no problem, but their definition of God's love is different from the Bible.

I want to again summarize that we have learned so far that each one of us without exception will be judged by Jesus Christ on the Last Day, and the basis of Judgment depends on believing the Gospel of Jesus or not believing. (Mark 16:16; John 12:48-50) According to the pronouncement of judgment, everyone will live either in heaven or in hell eternally.

The Judgment is not an examination.

The Judgment is not an examination of whether a person committed sin or not. Jesus knows! Jesus knows all those who don't believe in Him. "But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him." (John 6:64) Jesus also knows all those who do believe. "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'" (2 Timothy 2:19) Jesus is God, who is eternal and omniscient. By faith in Jesus, we know and have

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confidence that we are saved. And so we have the peace of God. (Romans 5:1)

It will not be on the Last Day that the Judgment for all people will be determined. The outcome of our judgment hinges on believing the Savior at the moment of our death, which brings the time of grace to an end. "And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'" (Luke 23:43) "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." (Revelation 14:13; John 3:16) Even if you were converted right before your death, if you die having faith in the Savior, you will be placed and stand on the right side of the Judge in front of Judge. But if you die having no faith in the Savior, even if you have believed until right before your death, you will be placed and stand on the left side of the Judge to be punished. Put another way, "death" (namely the end of the time of grace) is the end of the time set for each one of us to receive a place in heaven for eternity. (Luke 16:19-31)

This judgment on the Last Day is the public proclamation of the Judgment. (Matthew 25:34,41) The Judgment is determined when a person dies. "When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of the unjust perishes." (Proverbs 11:7) "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10) If we focus on only our soul, the judgment will be carried out when we die. (Luke 23:43) On Judgment Day, each person will be proclaimed innocent or guilty publicly and formally, and all human beings will be given the decisions of their own judgment, only then, it will involve not only the soul but also the body.

The Judge brings punishments and retributions.

The Judge brings punishments and retributions according to the sins which have been committed. (2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 2:6-11) When an unbeliever is sentenced to eternal punishment, he will be punished according to the sins that he has committed in his life. (Ephesians 5:5,6) When a believer is proclaimed

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innocent, by grace he will be rewarded according to “the good works” that he has done in his life. (Matthew 5:10-12) “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” (Matthew 25:34)

As Christians who can enter heaven because of Jesus and by His grace, we should not now compromise with any teaching of false doctrine nor should we have as the motivations to do good works the desire to receive greater glory in heaven. We know and rejoice that all is by grace through our Lord Jesus Christ! Let us remember God’s Word and preserve His Word because we love and thank our Lord Jesus Christ. “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.” (John 14:23,24)

The Judge’s judgment is certainly the right judgment.

No one can complain by saying, “I didn’t have a fair trial.” Jesus says, “My judgment is just” (John 5:30). The basis of the judgment is established by God’s Word, not by human ideas. In Japan, the Supreme Court has the highest authority for all judgments. Just as the judgment from the Supreme Court is the final decision in the land, so the judgment handed down from our Lord, the Ruler of All, and the King who has all authority, is final and will never be overturned. He will never change the basis of the judgment. It’s not unfair at all. The happiest news for all human beings, not only Christians, is that God is determined to use the Gospel in dealing with us. Because everyone has the privilege to receive “forgiveness of all sins” without discrimination, we don’t need to have any insecurity about the future, but we can continually have peace with God in our lives. It is so sad when a person rejects the Gospel and places himself or herself back under the curse of the Law!

4. The reality and eternity of condemnation in hell. Popular errors: The denial of hell or limiting the duration of hell

Fact—Hell is not a made up story or a story from someone’s imagination but is a dreadful reality.

Our Lord himself tells us about hell and eternal suffering in hell. “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast

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it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." (Matthew 18:8,9) "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28) Paul also writes, "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." (2 Thessalonians 1:9, Matthew 25,41,46)

A condition of suffering in hell (not complete destruction).

We should listen to what the Bible says about hell rather than imagine about hell. The most fearful punishment of suffering in hell is not complete "destruction, extinction". The word "destroy" in Matthew 10:28 doesn't mean complete destruction. 2 Peter 3:6 also uses the very same word to describe the destruction caused by the flood. As you know, this earth was not completely destroyed by the flood. In the same way, the human body and soul will not be completely destroyed in hell. The teaching that supports the idea of punishment resulting in extinction in hell is not a doctrine based on the teachings of the Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the immortality of the soul after death, and so they insist that the punishment established for unbelievers is the eternal extinction of the soul.

Hell was originally a place prepared for Satan and his followers. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (Matthew 25:41,46) Matthew 8:12 says, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Those passages teach a suffering, a despair, and a wrath from which no one can escape. Those who enter hell are utterly forsaken by God and will never be able to flee from there. The punishment of hell will never be commuted or come to an end, and those in hell will never have even a temporary rest. Their souls and bodies suffer eternally.

Eternal suffering.

Matthew 25:46 says, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment." Also Article XVII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession states, "the ungodly (are) to be punished with the devil without end." As a Christian's life is filled with God's blessings in heaven which will last forever, so the unbeliever's life will continue to be punished eternally in hell. In the final Judgment, perfect and eternal separation will happen between believer and unbeliever. (Matthew 25:46) Paul tells us that human beings can know from their natural knowledge to a certain degree that there indeed might be eternal punishment. (Roman 1:18-21) The knowledge of God's judgment is a part of God's law which was written in our heart by God. (Roman 1:32) For this reason, we can certainly find the doctrine of eternal punishment even among heathen people, although the doctrine is twisted by human reason or Satan.

The Bible teaches very clearly about the doctrine of eternal punishment. Therefore, if someone denies the doctrine of eternal punishment, it means he is denying God's sacred Word and authority. If a person rejects eternal punishment, he or she must also logically reject eternal life. Both of these are facts, and they stand symmetrically together. (Matthew 25:46, John 3:36)

While the word "everlasting" is sometimes indeed used in a limited sense in the Bible, [i.e., enduring, lasting, for life (Exodus 12:14,21:6)], and in many places where the same word is used it has a very strong meaning, "everlasting, and eternal" (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 18:8; Mark 3:29). In addition, the Bible refers to the term of everlasting suffering by using words which can't be misunderstood. (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:48; Revelation 14:11; 20:10) Though both the Hebrew "Sheol" and Greek "Hades" may indicate the condition of death or the grave (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27,31), the exact meaning in the following passages is that it is a place in which unbelievers suffer eternally in miserable circumstances and violent distress that one can hardly express with words. (Deuteronomy 32:22; Psalm 49:14; Proverbs 15:24; Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15; 16:23)

Although Russellism insists that both Sheol and Hades can not mean hell, we do not try to prove the existence of hell by the

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meaning of these words. The Bible teaches a doctrine of eternal punishment by using another word. The Greek word Gehenna was a name of a valley very near the wall of Jerusalem. It became a garbage dump in which fires continually burned. And so it came to picture hell. (Matthew 5:22; Mark 9:43,44, Luke 12:5) The Bible also uses other expressions in teaching about eternal punishment in hell, as the words of Isaiah 66:24 clearly show. Jesus Himself, who is true God, taught and emphasized the fact of eternal punishment. (Luke 16:23; Mark 3:29) The fact of eternal punishment is also proved by Jesus' descent into hell to proclaim His victory to souls there, many of whom had lived in the Old Testament era but had not believed in Him. (1 Peter 3:18-20)

Therefore The Augsburg Confession with the following words declares condemnation on all people who refuse to believe the doctrine of eternal punishment: "But ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end. They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed." (Augsburg Confession Article XVII)

If someone raises the objection that eternal punishment is overly dreadful and so it cannot be true, they have to remember the following. It is the God of limitless justice, holiness, and might who punishes justly and eternally all people who reject His grace and are opposed to Him. He is not like a limited human being. Someone may try to comfort himself or herself by saying "God is love, so He will never declare a person guilty of deserving eternal punishment." That is also a grave sin against God. Of course God is love (1 John 4:8), and He wants no one to die and suffer the punishment of hell. That is why God has many times and in many ways been warning human beings regarding hell and its punishment. If God was really cold-hearted, He would not have sent the Savior to suffer hell for us. He would rather have immediately and suddenly sent every human being to hell. The doctrine of eternal punishment must always be based on God's love,

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God's justice, and on God's clear Word which sinful human reason never wants to fully accept.

Essence of eternal punishment.

The Bible clearly teaches us that the form and the essence of the eternal punishment are the eternal expulsion from God's sacred grace and fellowship, that is the eternal separation from God's love and mercy. (Matthew 25:41, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) We know that Jesus has been sacrificed for all our sins. He certainly received the same punishment that we all ought to receive. In His anguish in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus cried out, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." (Matthew 26:38) He also called out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46) It is clear that Jesus Himself received punishment in place of our sins. (Isaiah 53:4-6) His Word and suffering tell us that there is certainly suffering in hell, and how fearful and hateful it is to be forsaken by God. Originally human beings were created to have fellowship with God. We can only find real joy, peace, and receive the good and spiritual gifts through this fellowship. (Romans 4:25-5:1, Psalm 17:15, Matthew 11:28, James 1:17) To be forsaken by God means the kind of terrible suffering of body and soul that cannot be expressed by our words.

Hell is worse than a trash can.

Those who go to hell to suffer can't avoid this most fearful punishment. Hell is a place for the people who are abandoned completely by the merciful, loving God. So to speak, it is the same as if they are thrown by God into a fiery trash can. No, it is far worse than being in a burning garbage dump. In the case of a garbage dump, even a burning one, someone might try to pick up some of the rubbish and use it again as is the case with recycling. But in hell, there is absolutely no ray of hope, forever. (Luke 16:19-31)

The fire of hell.

We can not understand fully the nature of the fire and the suffering in hell reported in the Bible. However, we should take note that the Lord expects us to fear and pay attention to these words. It is really unimportant whether the fire of hell is material or non-material. Because even if it has a figurative meaning,

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the word “fire” means something that has indescribable suffering and agony. (Isaiah 66:24) And we cannot compare darkness in hell to darkness on earth. (2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13) Even if it is a figurative meaning, the word “darkness” indicates to an indescribable suffering, fear, and complete despair. It is more useful for people to spend time pondering how to find the way of escape from the suffering of hell and for us to ponder how to better tell others the Gospel truths of God’s Word instead of spending time discussing what the fire in hell really looks like.

In hell, everyone can recognize the Lord.

The endless but just punishment and suffering will force those in hell to recognize the existence of the righteous and omnipotent Judge, the Lord Jesus, as it is written in Luke 16:27,28. Those who have gone into hell seem to know the people in heaven and the eternal blessings which they receive in heaven. (Luke 13:28; 16:23) This would increase their shame and regret.

There is no mitigation for suffering in hell.

“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’” (Luke 16:24,26) The rich man who was suffering in hell couldn’t receive even a drop of water. The suffering in hell has no end and no mitigation. No one can escape. (Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:48; 2 Thessalonians 1:9) There is no hope in hell at all. (2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13)

Again the Bible tells us about the sufferings in hell using various descriptions. “Trouble and distress.” (Romans 2:9) “Being in torments in Hades.” (Luke 16:23) “I am tormented in this flame.” (Luke 16:24) “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:43,44) “And cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:50; 8:12) “Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind” (Isaiah

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66:24). “Who can stand?” (Revelation 6:17), etc. The expressions in the Bible are short, but they use the harshest words possible so that we can begin to imagine the eternal suffering of the bodies and the souls in hell. In fact, it is beyond our reason and understanding, because it has not happened to people who still live in the earth, and it is an eternal matter which we cannot fathom.

The eternal sufferings in hell attack not only body, but also soul. The soul also suffers permanent agony. (Galatians 3:10) They suffer the deepest fear eternally. (Luke 16:27,28) Severest agony also falls upon the cursed soul, right after the soul is separated from its body by death. (Luke 16:23)

In order to describe further the eternal sufferings in hell of the accursed ones, one can separate the sufferings into negative sufferings and positive sufferings. The negative sufferings mean the loss of all the blessings from God (Matthew 25:41), separation from Him and every blessed fellowship (Luke 16:26; Matthew 8:12; Revelation 22:15), separation from the mercy of God (Luke 16:25,26), and the loss of every comfort. (Revelation 6:17)

The positive sufferings are the most severe sufferings of soul (Mark 9:48), i.e., fellowship with the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), confinement in hell forever (Matthew 25:30, 1 Peter 3:18-20; Jude 6), and the suffering of fire which always continues and never burns out. (Luke 16:23,24; Revelation 14:10,11; 20:10,15)

A gradation of sufferings in hell.

The sufferings in hell are beyond imagination, but there are apparently some degrees in the sufferings. “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.” (Luke 12:47,48) That is to say, those who do not accept God’s Word after listening to it, will receive a worse condition when they get to hell. (Matthew 11:16-24) The Bible teaches us clearly about the differences of degree, quality, and standard of punishment. (Matthew 11:24; 23:15, Luke 12:47; 2 Peter 2:17) The sin which receives the worst punishment is a malicious resistance to God’s Gospel. (Matthew 11:16-24)

The place of hell.

Nobody can point out where the place of hell is geographically. We talk about hell as a place according to clear Bible passages. (Luke 16:28, 1 Peter 3:19) But we must not think of the place as material or spatial. We also must not try to decide where the place of hell exists. (The Roman Catholic Church teaches that hell is in the middle of earth.) The Bible doesn't give us full information about this matter. Because the sinful heart is not satisfied with the information God gives us, there are many false teachings regarding hell, some of which even deny the existence of hell. Hell is a place where God, by expelling them from His gracious presence, carries out His eternal and righteous judgment on the people who are deserving of eternal punishment. Let us pray to God, that by leading of the Holy Spirit through the Word, they are lead to the Way to be saved from hell, rather than spending their time working hard on searching for hell's location or denying its reality.

Wrong teachings about hell.

All the religious philosophy except what the Bible teaches us, teach a salvation by works. Therefore, those who believe in "work-righteousness" can never have confidence about their entry into heaven. The false teaching of salvation by works increases the fear of the punishment of sins. (Romans 3:20) People who believe false religious teachings about salvation and also about hell, often have doubts regarding salvation and whether they might go to hell or not. They naturally want to reduce or eliminate the sufferings of hell. Various false teachings regarding salvation and hell are still appearing.

Purgatory.

Purgatory is one of these false teachings. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there is a "halfway point" between heaven and hell called purgatory and that almost all believers have to go there except for a few very devout Catholic believers. They teach that Jesus' death on the cross is not able to provide 100% cleansing from sin and its consequences. In other words, it is not a sufficient redemption. Therefore, people need to make up the deficit by doing good works and also by suffering in purga-

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tory. Hell is not like purgatory. The fire in hell can not purify sins. Hell is a place for the punishment of sins. One is never improved, that is, made better through receiving eternal punishment in hell. Make no mistake about it. Purgatory is a figment of the imagination of the sinful human heart.

Churches which deny hell.

We deeply regret that there are not only churches that think of eternal punishment in hell incorrectly, but also there are some churches which do not believe in eternal punishment in hell. "Restorationism" insists everything will be restored again as it was like in Eden. Especially, they say that all human beings will be restored. In other words, they teach that all will be saved finally. This idea is also found in "Universalism" and "Unitarian teachings". They insist, "Even if there is a punishment for the unrighteous people in future world, it is rather for rectification, not punishment. Those who are unrighteous are purified, led to goodness and all their sins at last are washed away. Finally, they too all enter heaven. Instead, its the evil angels who are punished." Belief or unbelief in Jesus Christ is not a very important matter for them. Finally, the punishment of sins becomes a means of salvation.

The Sabbath Second Coming Church completely denies both the existence of hell and punishment after death and teaches unrighteous will be totally exterminated or destroyed. "Annihilationism" stresses that the souls of those who live badly will be completely annihilated also when they are judged.

Some insist that for a God who has limitless love, eternal punishment is a contradiction. The punishment of judgment is discipline rather than a penalty, all will be led into good, and thus, finally everyone will be saved. There are some people who think that we experience hell not after death but during our earthly time. All these doctrines contradict the clear Bible doctrine regarding hell and The Judgment.

Calvinism teaches that some people were chosen to be cast into hell eternally. That is not what the Bible teaches. God never chooses anyone to be sent to hell. But He wants all the people to be saved. (Ezekiel 33:11, 1 Timothy 2:4)

How Japanese people think of hell.

Many people have an impression that hell is not so severe. In Japan there are various superstitions. There is a hot spring called "Jigoku; hell" in Beppu of Kyushu island in Japan. Usually people go to hot springs not to suffer but to refresh their minds and bodies, but it is strange to name a tourist resort "hell", isn't it? And there is a proverb that says "Jigoku ni mo Hotoke; Buddha is also in hell". It means that God's mercy is even present in hell. And there is a story about a man in hell, who could go up into heaven by climbing a spider's thread. These stories weaken the sufferings in hell.

I sometimes meet people saying "I don't mind if I go to hell." "Whatever you say, I will go to hell anyway." And also sometimes Christians tell me that "Although I tell unbelievers about hell and eternal death, they have no interest in it." Many Japanese think of hell lightly. They make light of eternal death and punishment. In some respects, I think they are a kind of victims. The assailants are religious groups and Christian denominations who teach false doctrines about hell. If they would have taught about the terror of hell as the Bible teaches us, unbelievers would never think of hell lightly. Instead they would want to ask "What should I do to be saved?"

The purpose to teach this doctrine.

The purpose why the Bible shows us the eternal punishment is of course for admonishment (Matthew 3:7-12) and also helps to realize the necessity of salvation, to seek the grace of Christ, and then to praise and give thanks to the Lord who has saved us from there by knowing the fear of God's anger. This doctrine also teaches how miserable the consequences of sin are and warns us of the danger of unfaithfulness and a false earthly sense of security. (Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 10:12) However, this admonition is not only for unbelievers but is also for believers as long as they are sinful. (Matthew 26:24, 24:42-51, Hebrew 6:4-6) When you rescue a person who doesn't recognize that his house is on fire, even if you tell him the way to be saved, it would be useless for him unless you tell the critical situation he is in. Likewise, if a man has a false sense of security about his death and eternal life, we have to teach the Law to make him realize his sin,

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in order to tell him the only way he can be helped, which is the message of God's salvation. (Romans 3:20; 4:25; 5:13) We have to proclaim God's loving admonition so that he will despair of his state and turn to the Savior.

God's admonition about eternal sufferings again and again in the Bible comes from God's love toward all human beings. If someone by human reason judges God's admonishment as "cruel, unacceptable, or unrepeatable," that is truly misunderstanding God's love. The doctrine of eternal punishment is connected with God's divine judgment and emphasized for all sinners. (Romans 2:5,6; 3:4)

The doctrine of hell and eternal punishment never converts our souls, because "The Law brings wrath." (Romans 4:15) Nevertheless, the Law serves us as it is written, "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24) Therefore, all the preachers who deny eternal punishment in hell are not loving preachers. Instead, they are the most cruel preachers among all false ones. We have to remember the words of the prophet, "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul." (Ezekiel 3:18-19) And please remember 1 Timothy 6:3-5, as well.

This type of teaching is truly "a teaching without love" "coming from cruel church." Jesus and His apostles clearly taught the Doctrine of eternal punishment. All Christians have to follow the Lord as faithful servants of Christ and as faithful administrators of God's mysteries. "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:1,2)

How can we speculate about God's immeasurable righteousness and judgment with our shallow human thinking and a weak human sentiment? We should just follow the Bible which teaches us very clearly.

5. The Christian's attitude in anticipating standing before the judgment seat of Christ.

Many Bible passages about the Last Day sometimes make us feel insecure. "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:18) "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrew 10:25,37) "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." (James 5:8) "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." (1 Peter 4:7)

And it is written that sufferings and trouble will increase all the more before the final day of judgment. (Matthew 24; 2 Peter 3; 2 Timothy 3:1) "Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'" (Acts 14:22) So should we wait for the Lord's coming with anxiety and fearfulness?

We can stand before the Judgment without fear.

But thus far we have seen, we need never be afraid or despair on account of God's wrath which God's Law teaches us. We will be able to stand before the judgment because of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. Jesus' sacred sacrifice was enough to atone for our sins perfectly. "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10) "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14; Psalm 49:7-9,15) Not by our work or virtue but God Himself is our salvation! "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2)

God Himself declared us righteous through faith in Jesus. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:22-24; 1:16,17; Genesis 15:6) Even if someone accuses us, the fact that God declared us righteous can never be overturned. Even Satan can't do it. "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." (Romans 8:33-34,38,39) "'Come now, and let us reason

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together,' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" (Isaiah 1:18) "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14) God calls us "Holy ones"—ones who have no sin—over and over again. "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13) God calls us "sons of God" many times. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26)

Even if someone says, "I am happy. My life is right, but you are not!" we do not have to be confused by these words. God tells us His children that we are His "Blessed ones!" many times in the Bible. "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." (Romans 4:7,8; Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 1; Luke 11:28)

God declares repeatedly, "Your sins have been wiped away". "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12) "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18,19) It is fact that God promised forgiveness of all our sins. "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins." (Isaiah 43:25; Hebrew 8:12) "And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book." (Daniel 12:1) And God revealed Himself as "The Lord". This name means "God of the Covenant", that is, our Lord is the only one who never changes, breaks, or forgets His promises to us. (1 Peter 1:25) All our sins have been completely forgiven through Jesus.

If you still have anxiety.

If you still have anxiety about standing before Christ on the Last Day, let us remember these verses, too. "For sin shall not

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have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:14-18) Sin never rules over us, because we are not under law but under grace! Our new spiritual lives as Christians do not come from the fear of punishment for breaking law, but from the motivation of thanksgiving for the grace which the Lord has given us.

The highest authority declares us righteous.

For Christians, the condemnation for our sins which we should have received has been changed into forgiveness of sins and righteousness through Jesus' work. By God's grace, Christians have received and now own the forgiveness of sins and righteousness which Jesus won for us. (Galatians 4:4,5; Romans 6:14,15) God's declaration of guiltlessness will never be overturned. (Romans 8:33-34) God will never investigate the sins of those who have been declared righteous, and He will never overturn His declaration on the spur of the moment. God is holy and true. (1 Timothy 2:13; Leviticus 19:2; Deuteronomy 32:4)

Even if a district court declares you as guiltless, but the Supreme Court declares you as guilty, which judgment will apply to you? Of course, the declaration of the Supreme Court has authority. In the same way, even if the people of the world or the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court judges you as a criminal, or even if you commit a sin which deserves the death penalty (Luke 22:33-43), if the real highest Justice, the Righteous God above all, declares you as guiltless, this judgment will be applied to you on the Last Day. (Romans 8:31-39) Just as neither Satan nor height nor depth nor any powers, nor money, nor anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God, these things also will never be able to overturn Christ's judgment.

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The Judge never sees our filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), but He will see only our “garments of salvation, our robes of righteousness” which the Judge Himself won for us and offers to us and which we receive and wear through faith. (Revelation 7:9-17; Isaiah 61:10) The Judge Himself says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.” (John 5:24)

The Apostle John heard Jesus saying to him in Revelation, “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walks naked and they see his shame.” (Revelation 16:15) What Jesus means is, “You need to make sure that you are always wearing perfect robes of righteousness.” We who wear the robes by faith in Jesus, do not need to be afraid of our rags covered with the stains of our sins when we stand before God on Judgment Day. We who have been given the spotless garments can call out with joy just as Isaiah wrote, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10)

It is impossible to take us away from God’s grace. “And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” (John 10:28; 1 John 5:16) And the Lord will never forsake us. “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” (John 6:37; Isaiah 49:15; Hebrew 13:5) And also we do not have to doubt the certainty of our salvation at all!

*But there is a possibility of losing this great blessing from God.
The only way to lose this blessing is if we leave our Lord.
(Hebrew 4:11; 10:4-6; Matthew 12:31,32; 1 Timothy 6:20)*

In fact, things which tempt us into unfaithfulness surround us and are dwelling among us. For this reason let us ponder the Bible message to learn how we can defeat our sinful nature, greed, temptation, and persecution from this world and Satan.

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How we can prepare for the Last day?

Christians nourish their faith by reading the Bible everyday and pondering it until the last day comes. We regularly gather for worship to encourage, to admonish, to strengthen each other and to make use of the means of grace. (Hebrew 10:25) Through these means of grace, the Holy Spirit continually supplies oil for our lamps of faith in Christ. The parable about the foolish virgins who didn't prepare for the coming groom is a good warning. They failed to use the means of grace. "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'" (Matthew 25:11,12)

Let us pray to God.

Praying to God is very important in preparing for the last day. Our old Adam continues to whisper to us to ignore prayer and helps make excuses like "I am so busy. I do not have enough time. I have something more important to do than praying to God. . . ." That is no excuse! We have to remember what Jesus says. "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:36) Paul also says "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2) Also Peter says, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." (1 Peter 4:7) Let us pray and encourage one another so that we will not lose our faith in Jesus but stand firm until the last day. (1 Thessalonians 3:9-13)

Fighting against our sinful nature.

If we do not believe in God's promise or if we keep sinning in a false sense of security as the Christians in Rome and Thessalonica, we make ourselves "slaves of sin" again. They just were waiting for the last day without working, giving up on their responsibilities and doing nothing. Paul plainly rebuked them. (2 Thessalonians 3:10,12)

All human beings are either "slaves of sin" or "slaves of righteousness". (Matthew 12:20; 6:24) Don't forget that God redeemed us to be "Children of God", by Jesus' death and tri-

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umphant resurrection. We who belong to God receive God's inheritance. We can only receive it through Christ and by grace, and it is an absolutely certain blessing. Don't you think it is foolish to choose returning to sin, walking as a slave of sin, and going into eternal punishment, although you are under the glorious grace of God?

Peter's words lead us into a right preparation for Judgment Day. They warn us "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8) Against God's will, Satan hopes that Christians will leave God and fall into eternal death. Satan, who is already judged, tries every possible means to take people to hell as much as he can until the Last Day. Satan will use distress, trial, wealth, power, and idolatry, like he used them when he tempted Jesus. (Matthew 4:1-11)

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth." (Luke 21:34,35)

Temptations of the world.

We Christians living in this world are always in danger that we might lose the great inheritance of heaven. Sin can easily infect us easier than influenza or a computer virus. It infects every part of the world, not only outside but also inside our homes and churches. It is carried through TV programs, TV commercials, magazines, customs, gossip, advertisements, music, classes in school, friends, and even loving family members. It is very dangerous to come into contact with sin everyday—sins such as robbery, swindling, suicide, murder, adultery, vulgarity, and other sins which fascinate us. Because we do not feel shock from these sins anymore, our conscience is easily paralyzed by them.

False teachings.

Satan knows the Bible very well and skillfully tempts us by false teachings. When the Bible tells about the Last Day, it warns us many times to "keep watch!" (Matthew 24:42; 25:13, Mark 13:35, 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Revelation 16:15) The Lord also warns us "Watch out that no one deceives you." As signs of the coming

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of the last day, the Bible says that various false teachings and false Christs will appear and deceive Christians. “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.” (1 Timothy 6:20)

Chiliasm (millennialism) insists, “Before or after the judgment, Jesus will come again in visible form and will raise Christians from the dead. He will reign on this earth for 1000 years, and He will destroy the temptation and suffering which come from Satan, who battles against God’s church.” But let us not put our hope in this earth. Jesus Himself says in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world.” And also at the transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36) Peter offered to put up shelters on the mountain for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Peter wanted to keep the glory of the Lord on this earth, but Jesus didn’t answer him. (I think Moses and Elijah would never want to live on this earth anymore because they are receiving the blessings of heaven.) Let us not seek after earthly joy and happiness which is going to be destroyed and gives us only temporary peace. Rather let us keep our eyes of faith fixed on Jesus and seek after His kingdom, so that we will not fail to be declared guiltless on the Last Day. (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1,2)

These are also works of Satan. Although Satan performs impressive signs and all kinds of counterfeit miracles, we can defeat them by God’s Word as Jesus did in the desert.

The most important thing is to remind and engrave in each one of our hearts the love of God’s Savior who accomplished our salvation by sacrificing His own life. “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

How we can stand against these temptations of this world.

Christians can’t live apart from this world, but we can equip ourselves against Satan and the world. Christian education is indispensable for this. God offers us “the sword of the Spirit” and “the shield of faith” through Christian education. (Ephesians 6:16,17)

Let us ponder the verses Paul used to encourage the Christians in Thessalonica. “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you

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yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)

Peter also emphasizes the same thought. "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; you therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Peter 3:14,17,18)

Choose to use and listen to Law and Gospel.

The Law reminds us that we all have to stand before God's judgment. It tells us that we all have to attempt to explain all of our works and all of our sins. Whenever we hear the law, we recognize our sins and feel doubt, fear, and despair. The function of the law is to control our sinful flesh. When the law threatens us, saying that we have to explain our sins, we can control ourselves to some extent through this function of the law.

The Gospel never has threat and demands. God's Gospel relieves those who are afraid of the law like this. "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins." (Isaiah 43:25) The Gospel freely offers us Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and salvation and comforts us, relieves us, and leads us through faith in Christ.

Since we Christians still have a sinful old Adam, we have to listen to both the Law and the Gospel of God. Our sinful nature must be shattered through the awareness of our sins and fear when we hear the frightening event of Judgment Day. Then we

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have to rely on the refuge of the Gospel, which tells us that all our sins have been forgiven through Jesus. We can properly prepare for Judgment Day through this correct division and use of Law and Gospel.

Walk as a slave of righteousness.

The passing of time shows that we are getting closer to the Last Day or the end of the time of grace. Even though it is certain that we will be declared “guiltless” on the last day and we will go to heaven, we can’t have misplaced confidence. Shall we continue sinning because we will certainly be saved? That is not the attitude of a Christian who has been completely freed from service to sin. It is rather the attitude of an unbeliever who doesn’t have gratitude and love toward to the Savior in his heart. “You also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. For you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” (Romans 6:11-12,14,15) Instead “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” (Romans 6:17-19) Although we are still “slaves”, we have become slaves of righteousness, and want to serve the Lord with joy and love by using our talents and time.

To sum up, good preparation for the Last Day means also fulfilling our responsibilities faithfully during our time of grace because we are called by the Lord. Namely, it means that we should glorify God with all our deeds and serve God and our neighbor with gratitude, love, and joy by correctly hearing and teaching the good news of Jesus. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Peter 2:9, and Matthew 25 about the Parable of the Talents).

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Sowing the seed of the Gospel is right preparation.

We all are disciples of Jesus Christ and we all have our own special missions in our Christian lives. (1 Peter 2:9) We all are witnesses for the Lord. It doesn't matter whether you are a pastor, a teacher, an elder, or a lay member. It is a natural action to share our joy of the Gospel which fills our hearts, just like a living tree bears fruit. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34) "I believed; therefore I have spoken." (2 Corinthians 4:13)

Persecution can not stop our mission work. We can see this through the works of the Prophets in the OT and the Apostles in the NT. "And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'" (Acts 4:18-20) Rather, God allowed persecutions as a tool to assist in mission work. "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." (Acts 8:4)

Don't we want to take advantage of the many opportunities which the Lord has provided, since we have the same joy of the Gospel as the disciples had? It is said that the population of the world is two-thirds Christian, but this number means "visible church members", namely those who are nominally members. True Christians who belong to the "invisible church" are fewer. (In Japan it is said that the visible Christian church is one-hundredth of the population.) It is a fact that we who belong to the CELC are less than one-hundredth of the world's population, but the vast mission field in front of us makes us joyful rather than disappointed to use these opportunities for sowing the Gospel. The Lord told us to "Sow the Gospel." But this is not a burden or a labor or a difficult task for us who love the Lord. (1 John 5:3; John 14:23,24)

After Jesus ascended into heaven, two angels appeared and rebuked the disciples. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?" (Acts 1:11) It is very clear what the angels were saying. "Go to work! You have work to do!" "Prepare correctly for Jesus' second coming." Or "Seek first the kingdom of

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God and His righteousness.” It does not mean “to be a man who always gazes up into heaven” but it means to work hard as a faithful servant. It means not only to protect ourselves from the temptations of Satan and keep ourselves pure, but also to be eager to follow the Lord’s command, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)

We have received great blessings through God’s grace. We have the Gospel which is God’s pure Word, the power of God, the Truth, and explains eternal salvation. We have to preserve this great blessing. There is no other Gospel. There is no other way of salvation. (Galatians 1:7-9; Romans 1:16,17; 1 Timothy 4:2-5) We servants of the Lord have to use this blessing as our Lord wants us to. Paul confessed that he did everything “for the gospel’s sake”. (1 Corinthians 9:23)

Let us Christians shine the light of hope from our Savior into this world of darkness without hiding it. (Matthew 5:14-16) “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) This Gospel is our motivation for evangelism, worship, preaching, and living.

The blessing of the unity of faith and knowledge.

We have received another great blessing through God’s grace. It is “the blessing of the unity of faith and knowledge.” Although we have different nationalities, languages, customs, and places to work, we share the unity of faith in Him and in the knowledge of our Savior and in the same judgment our Lord has given to us. “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3-6,13) God’s same will is proclaimed, and the same judgment and knowledge are preserved in our churches, seminaries, Sunday schools, Bible classes, and mission work. This unity is never made by human work and wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:14), but only by the Holy Spirit. Let us thank God for this unity. Also, let us pray to God that this unity will spread out and be strengthened.

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You and I are the nation of God. We are brothers and sisters in our Lord. We possess the Gospel that is the truth. We possess true, perfect, and eternal freedom from Satan, and from the punishment of sin and death by God's grace through Jesus' perfect life and His substitutionary death. (Hebrews 2:14,15)

The Bible has been keeping Christians prepared since early Christian times by warnings (Law) concerning the Last Day. And the Bible has been continually encouraging Christians to joyfully await the second coming of the Lord and the Resurrection. "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (1 Timothy 4:8)

"So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him, He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Hebrew 9:28; Romans 13:11; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 7:29; Titus 2:12,13) Through these words, God blesses us so that we do not become lazy and become separated from God's grace in this difficult age. We can live our life faithfully to God and look forward to His coming.

Finally, let us ponder the following passages: "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:17,18) God's love has been poured out on us already. We should not live relying on our own love, but let us live by God's love, showing love to God and our neighbor until the Last Day. God is love. Let us remember this very short word of God, especially when we are in temptation, persecution, and distress.

Even if we are in an undesirable situation such as distress or persecution, God works everything for our good with His love! What a comfort for us! The love which God treats us with is much greater than any other love. (John 15:13; Isaiah 49:15) In these passages, God urges us to be dominated by God's love. No one wants a life full of fear. Therefore, keep reading the Bible and to be continually blessed with God's love.

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God declares us to be His children who will receive eternal life in heaven. So we do not need to be afraid at all! God doesn't want us to spend our life in the vain fear of sin, death, judgment, and doubt. "There is no fear in love." God's love has shut fear away from us, because the source of our fear has been wiped out by the love of God.

Let us joyfully and peacefully proclaim the last word of the Bible. "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." (Revelation 22:20,21)



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All Bible quotations in this essay come from "the NKJV"

I want especially to express my heartfelt thanks to the following people who gave their time and lent their talents to help me with the translating and the correcting of me essay. It was only because of their generous and very kind help that I was able to complete my assignment. Pastor K. D. Habben, Pastor J. E. Stahmann, Miss H. Kato, Miss K. Warning.