

Judged by Our Own Account

“Agree with [be well-intentioned toward] your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him; lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Truly I say to you, there is no way that you shall come out of there until you have paid the *very* last coin” (Matt. 5:25-26). *Adversary* is from the Greek *antidikos*, which is a compound of two words, meaning *against* and *justice*. *Agree* is used only here in the Bible, but the *KJV* is misleading because this verse is dealing with someone who is anti-justice. God’s law requires that we treat even our enemies with respect, because vengeance belongs to God.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the book of Matthew are commonly called the “Sermon on the Mount.” A sermon is nothing more than religious instruction, but what Jesus said astounded the people gathered to hear Him. Unlike the Sadducees and Pharisees who taught their own way of keeping the Law, Jesus spoke about things pertaining to a kingdom, judgment, mercy, faith, eternal life, and reward. In short, Jesus taught them the *purpose* of the Law (Heb. 10:1) and these three chapters capture the fundamentals of God’s law.

Matthew 5:25-26 is a parable of a judge and judgment. Although this is a warning against being delivered to a judge by an adversary, it also describes the *process* of judgment. The process of judgment involves a person being brought before a judge who, upon rendering a sentence, delivers the person to someone charged with carrying out the punishment. What is not described is the process of *judging*.

Most are familiar with modern-day courtroom procedures, but they are not representative of the process of God’s judgment. For the biblical student, the Tabernacle of Witness (Acts 7:44) was the shadow of heavenly things (Heb. 8-9). For example, inside the inner sanctum was the mercy seat, which was above the ark of the testimony. From this we can easily understand that judgment will be merciful, but administered in accordance with the Law.

However, we also see a critical component of God’s judgment reflected in the name of both the tabernacle and the ark—that of *witness*. Witnesses are a foundation of God’s Law. Notice their role in a murder trial: “At the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses shall he that is worthy of death be put to death. At the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death” (Deut. 17:6).

This law applies also to the times of God’s judgment. In fact, there will be a number of legal witnesses in God’s court including the gospel (Matt. 24:14), the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16), and Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:5). However, unlike the courts in this country, every witness in ancient Israel had an important responsibility placed upon them: they were required help carry out the punishment itself. “**The hands of the witnesses shall be *the* first on him to put him to death**, and afterwards the hands of all the people. So you shall put the evil away from among you” (Deut. 17:7). It is for this reason that Jesus is a witness (Rev. 1:5), because He will execute judgment upon all (John 5:27; Rom. 13:4; Jude 1:15) and then carry it out.

When it comes to witnesses, there is one glaring difference between laws in America and those of God. The laws of this country allow anyone to refuse to testify against their own person. In contrast, there is a statute of God that *requires* testimony to be given. For a case in point, note the prophecy about Christ given in Isaiah: “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and **as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth**” (Isa. 53:7).

What this verse says is critically important. The phrase is “sheep before her shearers”—meaning the silence was only before those responsible for the shearing. As prophesied, Jesus was

silent before His *accusers*—but *not* before Pilate, who was the Roman governor, because he was not one of His accusers. When Pilate asked him about the charges (Matt. 27:12-14), He became silent again because that would indirectly responding to His accusers. Since His accusers were all Jews, Jesus was also silent before Herod, who was a Jew. However, during His trial before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, the Gospels clearly bear record of Jesus speaking: “But those who had arrested Jesus led *Him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.... Now the chief priests and the elders and the whole Sanhedrin sought false evidence against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.... And the high priest rose up *and* said to Him, ‘Have You no answer for what these are testifying against You?’ But Jesus was silent. And the high priest answered *and* said to Him, ‘I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said *it*. Moreover, I say to you, in the future you shall see the Son of man sitting at *the* right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven’ ” (Matt. 26:57, 59, 62-64).

Jesus broke His silence before Caiaphas, the Jews’ high priest, and the reason can be found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus: “And if anyone sins and hears the voice of swearing [an oath], and *is* a witness, and he has seen or known, if he does not tell it, then he shall bear his iniquity [punishment]” (Lev. 5:1; also see Lev. 5:5; I Kings 8:31; Prov. 29:24).

This is a statute of God’s Law and makes it a sin to refuse to testify if called upon to do so. What did the high priest say to Jesus? “*I adjure you by the living God....*” The word *adjure* means to *exact an oath*—that is, *to require a response under oath*. In this case, Caiaphas was appealing to God in order to require Jesus to testify. If Jesus had remained silent and refused to speak, He would have been guilty of breaking the Law!

If Jesus was required to testify before the high priest, how much more will we be required to testify before God? Because of this, there will be *one more* witness in God’s court—ourselves! “But I say to you, for every idle word that men may speak, **they shall be held accountable in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned**” (Matt. 12:36-37).

Jesus said we will be judged by *our own* accounting of our works. Notice the conclusion of the parable of the talents and pounds: “Then he said to him, ‘**Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you** wicked servant! You knew that I am a harsh man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow’ ” (Luke 19:22).

Witnesses have always been an important part of God’s Law, and His judgment will be based upon witnesses whose testimony is truthful because every person *will* testify of their decisions, choices, and actions. Interestingly, the word *judgment* is commonly translated from the Greek *krisis*. So, biblical judgment is what we call a *crisis*. Those who reject Christ will discover that He is the true witness who will carry out their sentence of death, bringing a final end to their “crisis.” Those who are called and chosen and faithful will be saved by the blood of Christ in that “crisis” day: “But **they overcame him [Satan]** through the blood of the Lamb, and **through the word [or account] of their testimony [evidence]**; and they loved not their lives unto death” (Rev. 12:11).

The witnesses in the “day of judgment” will also reveal the secrets of men: “For when *the* Gentiles, which do not have *the* law, practice by nature the things contained in the law, these who do not have the law are a law unto themselves; who show the work of the law written in their own hearts, their consciences bearing witness [sumartureoo], and their reasonings [logismos] also, as they accuse [kategoreo] or defend [apologeomai] one another; in a day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:14-16).

The first half of verse 15 is easy enough to understand. Our conscience is one witness, whether for or against us, which is equivalent to the “spirit of man” (I Cor. 2:11). To fully comprehend the last half requires a closer look at some of the Greek words:

sumartureoo—testify jointly, that is, corroborate by (concurrent) evidence.

logismos—conceited reasoning. *Thayer* explains that the intent behind this word is hostile. This agrees with II Corinthians 10:5, the only other place it is used, where it is translated *imagination*s and included with other thoughts that are exalted against God.

katagoreo—to be a plaintiff, to charge with some offence.

apologeomai—1) to give an account of oneself; 2) to legally make a plea; 3) by extension, to justify or exonerate oneself.

From this, Romans 2:14-16 can be understood as: “The Gentiles show the work of the law written in their own hearts because the spirit of man in them testifies, along with their conceited reasoning, against one another—whereby they accuse one another of offences and try to justify themselves.” Importantly, the last part of this passage affirms that Jesus will be a witness against evil men and, in doing so, will reveal all their secrets (also see Mark 4:22).