

Judgement and Joy

John the Baptizer tells his followers "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming,.... he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...his winnowing fork is in his hand". (Luke 3:16-17) Fire? Winnowing Fork separating the wheat from the chaff? Judgement? So where is the Good News? That IS the good news! Judgement IS coming. Most of us fear judgement because of a guilty conscience. It is hard to look forward to judgement when we know that we have sinned and are guilty. But judgement is NOT something to be feared.

I have had only one experience with a real judge. It was Christmas Eve, 1969. My wife, very pregnant with our first child, and I were driving home through Ohio when I was stopped for speeding on the Interstate. Rather than writing me a ticket, the policeman told us to follow him. We got off the Interstate and followed him a long ways into a small town. During that long drive I had plenty of time to think about what I had done wrong. I believe that the trooper wanted my punishment to be having to "waste" so much time following him. When we got to the court house, he and I went in, leaving my wife in the car. We found that court was closed. Here I was, arrested and no way to get out. (They did not take checks and I did not have any cash.) Suddenly we all realized that I was looking at spending Christmas Eve in jail for doing ten miles an hour over the limit. About that time, my wife, tired of sitting in the car and more than a little scared, came into the courthouse, crying. She encountered a man in the halls and asked him to help her find me. He did and asked what was going on. When told, he announced that he was reopening court. She had managed to bump into judge on his way home for Christmas. We went into the court and he asked me how I pleaded. I said "Guilty." He said a string of words so fast that I had to ask the policeman what he said, then stood up and walked out. He had said "Fine fifty dollars and costs. Sentence suspended. Merry Christmas." I was guilty but I was free.

That is the judgement we have to face. God asks us if we guilty and we have to say "Yes." Then God passes judgement -- No punishment. Merry Christmas. Judgement is not something to fear. Judgement is something to approach with confidence, trusting in His love for us.

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