

## *The Flaming Sword*

**Genesis 3:24**

**April 4, 2009**

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Many of you knew my father. Apart from Susan, he was my best friend, and I loved him more than I can say. It was about 25 years ago that my father had come downtown to take care of some business, and something went terribly wrong. It was then that a group of men assaulted him with knives. They stabbed him in the chest, broke his sternum and several ribs. They knocked him unconscious and took a huge sum of money. I was in California at the time. As my dad lay unconscious at Swedish Medical Center, my sister Lydia and I hopped on a plane and flew back to Colorado. Dad had lost a lot of blood, and he was on life support. For a time, we didn't know whether he'd live or die.

But now I can tell you this: As my father opened his eyes and came back to life, I have never been so grateful for those violent men and their knives. You see, my dad had gone downtown to see the doctor. Something did go wrong: He had a heart attack in the doctor's office. They did knock him unconscious. They did break his sternum and several ribs. They did assault him violently with knives called scalpels. They did take a huge sum of his money and he gladly gave it... for they saved his life. They had performed emergency open heart surgery, removing four clogged vessels (a heart of stone), and replacing it with a heart of flesh.

Well, my point is:

When you get burned and when you get cut, it makes a huge difference:

1. Who it is that is holding the knife, and
2. Why it is that they are cutting you.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve steal from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Eve takes it for the serpent tempted her to create herself in God's image, with her own judgments... tempted her to create herself and save herself, with law in the power of the flesh, to be her own creator rather than God's creation. When Adam and Eve take the fruit, they hide in shame, for suddenly they know good and evil, and they realize something is evil in them.

God curses the earth, and then in verse 22, we read:

*Genesis 3:22 "Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever" therefore the Lord God sent Adam out from the garden of Eden to work the ground (the Adamah) from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword (fiery knife) that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."*

In verse 23, God sends Adam to work the *Adamah* until he returns to it... until he realizes that he is made of it: "*dust to dust and ashes to ashes.*"

It reminds me of what Paul says in Romans 1, where he writes that the wrath of God is revealed in this: that God gave men up, “*delivered them up*” (*paradidomi*) to the *epithumia*, the dreams and desires of their hearts. That is: He gave them up to their own flesh... their dust.

It also reminds me of what Paul writes in I Corinthians about the guy in the church who was having sex with his mother-in-law and boasting about it. Paul instructs the church to gather and literally “*deliver this man up*” (*paradidomi*). It’s a technical term related to judgment: “*Deliver this man up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.*” Let him sin and see his sin. Let him rub his face in it – his dust.

*I Corinthians 5:5 “Deliver him up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that (so that, so that) his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.”*

Do it precisely so he can be saved. “*Deliver him up to Satan.*”

Scripture tells us that the “*whole world*” lies in the power of Satan. It makes you wonder if all of Adam (all of humanity) has been “*delivered up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.*” So that humanity “*might be saved in the day of the Lord.*”

Which should make us stop and ask: “What is the Day of the Lord?”

Well, you know my Dad was sick with a diseased heart long before the surgeons cut into him with knives. It was some chest pains while working the ground that made him go to the doctor in the first place.

According to Scripture, apart from Christ, we all have diseased hearts. Actually, we are all “*dead in our trespasses and sins and the uncircumcision of our flesh.*” (“Uncircumcised” means our flesh has not been cut away.) When Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, they were the walking dead, and just didn’t know it. Perhaps God cursed the world so they’d see their sin and submit to surgery.

You realize that whenever you sin, you simply manifest a deeper problem: You have a heart of stone. You may have lied or cheated, or had an affair, but the real problem is that you don’t love love; your sin just revealed the disease.

It’s Palm Sunday. The crowd shouted “Hosanna!” On Friday, they’ll chant “Crucify!” Friday just reveals the disease, for they were just as sick and evil the Sunday before. They needed heart surgery.

In Matthew 5, Jesus says, “*If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off, for it’s better to lose one of your members than that your whole body get thrown into Gehenna.*” Gehenna was the valley outside Jerusalem where the trash was burned. “*Better to cut off your arm (or finger) if it causes you to sin, than to be thrown into the fire with it.*” The only problem is that it’s not your arm that causes you to sin.

A few chapters later Jesus says it: “*Out of the heart come evil thoughts and this is what defiles a man.*”

You see, you need to cut out your heart.

You need to cut out your flesh.

You need to cut out your old man.

And I doubt that any of us can successfully perform that surgery.

When Adam and Eve took the fruit, they took a power that did not belong to them. They took the power of judgment, and with it, they tried to make themselves in God's image, but instead of saving themselves, they turn themselves into monsters, hiding in the dark.

This is the me that I create with my judgments, the Old Adam. [Peter points to poster of the Old Man.] It is disobedience, darkness and death (the edge of Hell), emptiness and lies - chief of which is, "I save myself." INSERT PICTURE

But through God's grace in Christ Jesus, my Lord and Master, a new me is being formed in the place of that old me. It is God's judgment: Mercy, light, life (the edge of Heaven). Substance and truth; Jesus – the New Man – the New Adam. [Peter points to poster of the New Man.]

But in this world, I am divided.

*The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers Movie Clip #1:*

*(Nighttime, Frodo and Sam are asleep. Gollum is crouching in a corner by himself.)*

*Gollum:* Must have the precioussss. They stole it from us. Sneaky little hobbitsesss. Wicked, trickssssy, falssse!

*Sméagol:* No! Not Master.

*Gollum:* Yes, precious. False. They will cheat you, hurt you, lie.

*Sméagol:* Master's my friend.

*Gollum:* *(Tauntingly)* You don't have any friends. Nobody likes YOU...

*Sméagol:* *(Covers his ears)* Not listening. I'm not listening.

*Gollum:* You're a liar and a thief.

*Sméagol:* *(Shaking his head)* Nope.

*Gollum:* Murderer...!

*Sméagol:* *(Starts to weep and whimper)* Go away.

*Gollum:* Go away! *(Cackles)* HAHAAHAHA!!

*Sméagol:* *(Weeping and in a small voice)* I hate you. I hate you!

*Gollum: (Fiercely)* Where would you be without me? Gollum, Gollum. I saved us. It was me. We survived because of me!

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That's Gollum and Sméagol in one body. Do you ever feel divided? ...Like you have two wills, so you don't have free will, purity of heart. When Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, he named Gollum after the Hebrew legend of the *Golem*. "Golem" is Hebrew for unfinished substance. According to legend, He is the dust without the breath of God.

In I Corinthians Paul writes: "*Just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*"

In Ephesians and Colossians, Paul tells us: "*We must put off that old man, and put on the new.*"

So I see that I need surgery. But how could I ever even begin to perform such a surgery?

Genesis 3:24 "*He drove out the Adam, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim (they surround God's throne of judgment, and are a sign of His presence), and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (a knife of fire that cuts in every direction).*"

In Scripture, the sword and the fire are instruments of judgment. The entire world will be judged by fire. And there is a sword "*that pierces to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, discerning (judging) the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*"

The flaming sword is judgment: God's judgment – His word.

Where is judgment?

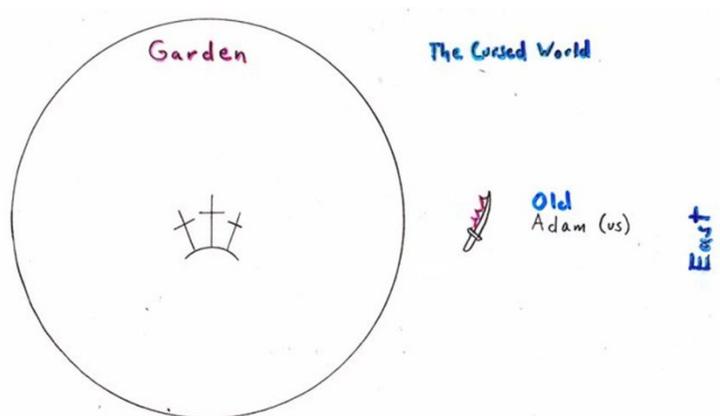
When is judgment?

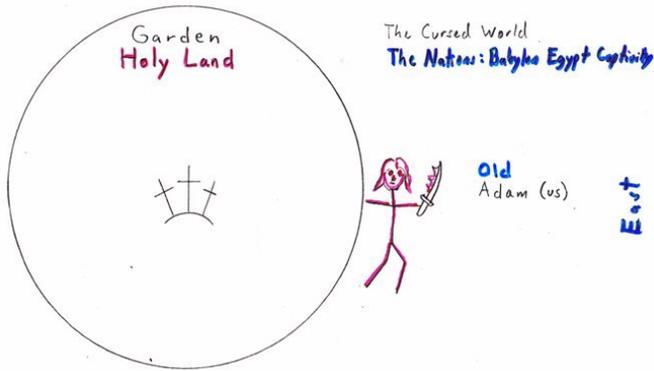
What is judgment?

And who gets judged?

I wish I had several days, but I've got about 15 minutes, so this will have to do:

Here's the garden: in the middle are two trees (law and life) that in some amazing way become one tree. And here's Adam. He's been kicked out into the cursed world. (Old Adam is dust, yet it appears he still has breath, or spirit, from God.) Well, between Adam and God, between Adam and Life, is judgment – flaming sword. Hey, that reminds me of this:

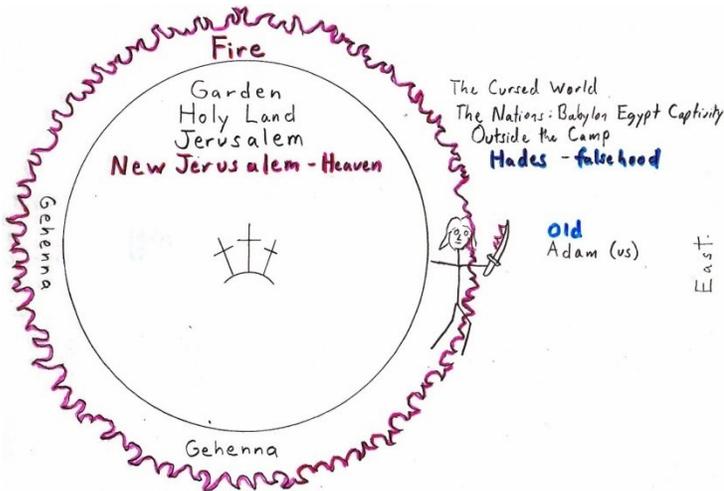
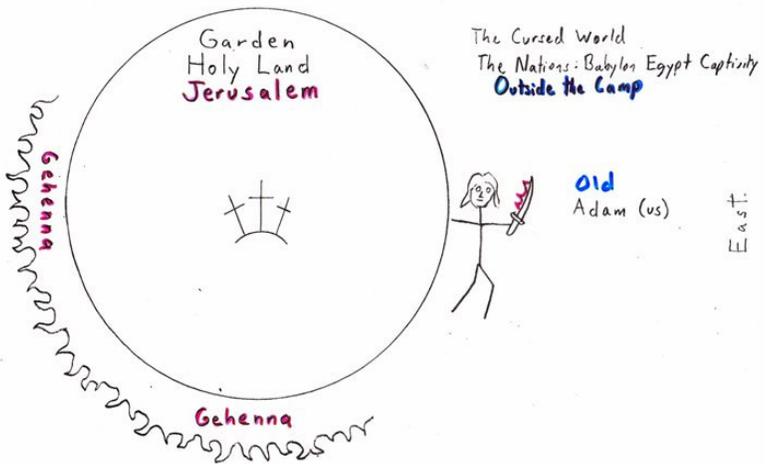




Remember when the Israelites crossed the Jordan and entered the Holy Land from the East? They encountered this weird God-Man with a drawn sword. Between them and the promised blessing was judgment. And hey, that reminds me of this:

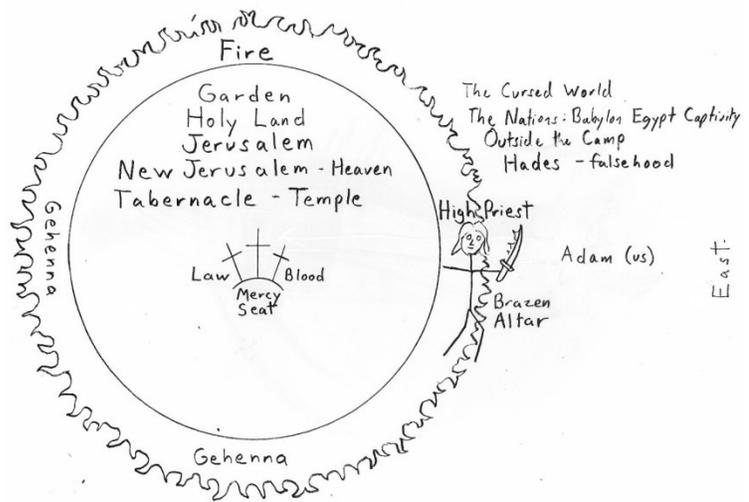
Jerusalem is surrounded on two sides by the valley of Gehenna (Scripture says that the fires of Gehenna are ignited by brimstone from the mouth of God (Isaiah 30:33)).

And hey, that reminds me of this:



The New Jerusalem – Heaven. (Zechariah 2:5 prophesies that God will be a wall of fire all around her.) Outside is the outer darkness – Hades; those who live and practice falsehood – Old Adam. And to get into the city, you have to pass through the fire. Between Old Adam and Heaven is judgment – Eternal Fire. And hey that reminds me of this:

The Tabernacle – the temple in Jerusalem. Inside was the Holy of Holies that contained the Law, the knowledge of good and evil, that was covered with blood – that is life. And that formed the Mercy Seat, the throne of God on earth. You entered the temple from the East and guarding the way was the burning altar, and the high priest holding a “machaira” (large knife or sword).



Worshippers entered the temple with sacrifices, and according to elaborate ordinances, the priest would carve up the sacrifices. He would literally perform surgery, for parts of the sacrifice would be burned outside the camp, and part would be given to God.

In Romans 12:1, Scripture tells us to “*present our bodies as living sacrifices.*” And Scripture also tells us that Jesus is our High Priest.

When Jesus was crucified, the veil in the temple ripped from top to bottom, and when Jesus was crucified, He was crucified “*outside the camp.*” [Peter draws an arrow to a cross, which he draws “outside the camp.”]

Jesus is the heart of God come to us – the tree of life come to us – and the sacrifice offered in our place. He bears my body of death to destruction, and gives me His body of life. He is the New Adam, born in the Old Adam.

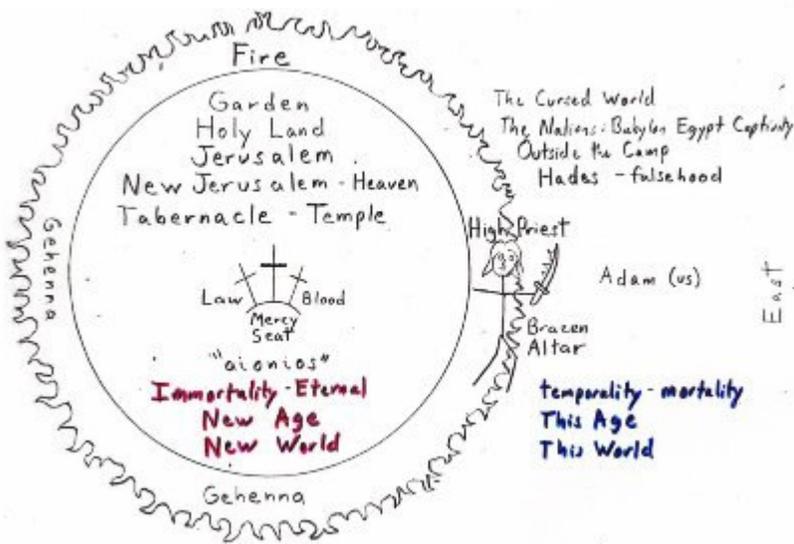
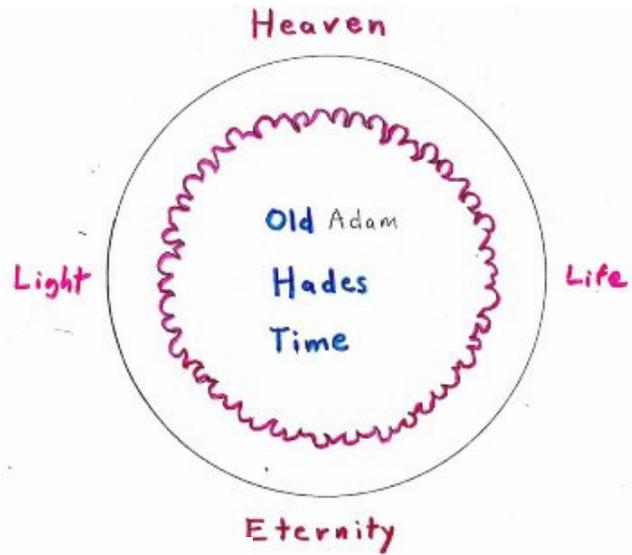
But make no mistake: to come home – this Old Adam must be cut out and destroyed, for “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.*” [Peter draws an arrow from the cross back into the Holy of Holies.]

Disobedience, darkness and death are destroyed by mercy light and life. My kingdom of lies is destroyed by God’s kingdom of truth... My emptiness destroyed by His substance. Adam (mankind) must pass through judgment to come home.

But now here’s something that really confuses people: Space and time don’t work the same way on either side of judgment. In reality, the inside is much larger than the outside, so...

So Heaven is the large thing, and Hell is the small thing, about to be consumed by fire, light and life, and eternity.

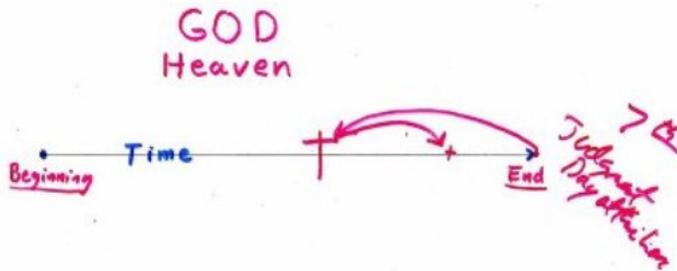
And check this out:



And when you cross over judgment, you cross from temporality to eternity; from mortality to immortality; from this age, to the new age; from this world, to the New World – New Creation; from time to timelessness.

No wonder we get confused. So when does judgment happen?

If you've been around, you may remember this diagram:



This is a time line. We live in chronological time. God is not stuck in time; I don't think Heaven is either. Well, chronological time has a beginning and an end. Jesus is the beginning and the end. God's judgment comes at the end of time. It's the Day of the Lord – Judgment Day – the edge of the 7<sup>th</sup> Day.

Yet, in 30 AD, Jesus said, *“Now is the judgment of this world.” “Now is the ruler of this world cast out, and I, when I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”*

He was speaking of being crucified on the tree.

So judgment happens at the end of time.

But judgment came to us in 30 AD.

And judgment comes to you now, when you surrender to Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Jesus said to the thief on the cross, *“Today you’ll be in paradise.”* This day we’ll cross over into Eden, the New Jerusalem -- Heaven.

You see, judgment is the boundary between The Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of this world.

That’s **where** it is.

And judgment is the boundary between time and eternity.

That’s **when** it is.

Judgment is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

That’s **what** it is... **who** it is.

When you read Old Testament descriptions of judgment day – the Day of the Lord – you realize they sound like Good Friday.

-When all will look on Him they’re pierced.

-When the sky grows black at noon, and the earth shakes.

-When vengeance is also mercy, and blood is New Wine.

Scripture says that *“in Christ we’ve come to the end of the ages.”*

Paul tells the Athenians that *“God has fixed a day on which He’ll judge the world in righteousness by a man.”* That man is Jesus. Jesus is the judgment. Jesus said He didn’t judge, and yet all judgment has been given to Him.

Jesus is the Judgment. Jesus is the Flaming Sword.

In John 5:24, he says, *“Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* When you believe the Word, you don’t come into judgment because you’ve already passed through judgment – Jesus is the Word.

Scripture says, *“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (machaira –the high-priest’s knife), piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

We're talking open heart surgery. And nothing cuts as deeply or as accurately as "*Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*" To look to the cross in faith is to surrender to God's judgment. For when we look to the cross, what do we see? The Judge "*delivered up*" (*paradidomi*) in our place.

We see PERFECT LOVE

ENDLESS MERCY

and ABSOLUTE GRACE.

That is the judgment.

That is the judgment; that is the standard; that is the knife, and nothing cuts as deeply. It is the scandal of the world, for:

If PERFECT LOVE is the standard, no lack of love will be tolerated in the kingdom.

If ENDLESS MERCY is the measure, no lack of mercy will be allowed.

If ASOLUTE GRACE is the commandment, no lack of grace will be permitted.

Jesus said it: If you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven.

So listen: If you refuse to forgive someone in Hell, then you're stuck in Hell until that darkness is cut out of you, judged out of you by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. And to refuse God's grace in Christ Jesus, revealed by His Spirit, is to commit (what I believe Jesus called) the unforgiveable sin. The unforgiveable sin is to hate forgiveness. To rest in the Kingdom of grace, you must have the hatred of grace cut out of you – you must be judged.

You know, some people seem awfully worried that I may be saying there's no Hell. The irony is that I'm warning them that that may be exactly where they're going. Jesus said it: "*Sons of the kingdom*" get "*cast into outer darkness.*" For as He said, "*The measure you give is the measure you get,*" and "*The judgment you pronounce is the judgment you receive.*" So to refuse to pronounce mercy is to banish yourself from the Kingdom of mercy, and hide in Hell. Yet even death and Hell come to an end in the Eternal Fire – the fire of God's mercy. In the end, **all** must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. All must submit to the surgery and surrender to fire. Our God is a consuming fire.

In Isaiah 66 – the great End Times scene that Jesus quotes in the Gospels – God says:

*"All flesh shall come worship before me... And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me, for their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."*

Did you get that? If "*all flesh*" is in the city, whose bodies are they looking at in the Valley of Gehenna? "*The men who have rebelled against me.*" Well, who are they? Read Isaiah, he makes it clear – every man since Adam.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Including the Messiah, who was numbered with the rebels or transgressors, and gave us His life.

You see, all people will look on all their old bodies of death, and worship God from new bodies, which contain God's heart. This New Adam will look out on the Old Adam. The Vessel of Mercy will look upon that old Vessel of Wrath. One day I will look out of the New Jerusalem and see this old body of mine being consumed in eternal flames, and I'll cry out "Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus, who has delivered me from this body of death and darkness and sin and arrogance and pride and insecurity and pain and hell! Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus – the Flaming Sword, and the Great Surgeon.

In I Corinthians 15:22, Paul writes, "*As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive.*" Then he writes, "*But each in its own order*"...

I think that means: In this life we can surrender to the surgery or run from it. If we surrender, Jesus bears our old man to destruction - Jesus is the scapegoat. And Jesus gives us the new man – His life. Jesus is the spotless lamb (Matt. 25). When we believe His judgment, we surrender to surgery and we receive eternal life now. Then when this old body dies, our soul is already dead (that's the 2<sup>nd</sup> death, and we no longer need fear it). We've already surrendered the old man, and we've already passed through judgment and we step into eternal ecstasy, our home.

But if we refuse such a great salvation, and run from God's judgment, I suspect we are delivered up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, and upon death, we descend into Hell - Hades. Whether it be for a few minutes or billions of years – I don't know. Maybe we come to Christ in Hell, for Jesus descended into a Hell. Maybe we're destroyed by the fire as Hell is destroyed by the Fire – I don't know. Yet even things destroyed by the eternal fire – like Sodom – are made new (Jude 7 & Ez. 16).

Perhaps some never really "*died in Adam,*" so they won't be "*made alive in Christ.*" Perhaps some are only vessels of wrath and never had a soul; never had the breath of God. I doubt it, but I don't know. I don't know. I don't know!

In Romans 11, Paul concludes his theological discussion when he talks about vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy – the old Adam and the new Adam – Israel and predestination and judgment. He concludes with this statement:

*Romans 11:32 "For God has consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and inscrutable His ways ... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things."*

In other words:

I can't understand how the knife cuts everyone, but I know how it cuts me.

I can't comprehend all of God's judgment, but I can trust God's judgment.

I can't explain everything the knife does, but I know who the knife is.

The knife is Jesus.  
 My father is the surgeon.  
 And the Spirit is Love.

And so I look to the cross and see that I can trust God’s judgment. And so I surrender to the surgery, saying, “Judge the Hell out of me, Jesus. Cut the old man out of me – I don’t want it anymore. I want to be one as you are one in *“the image and likeness of God.”* One will – free will. A pure heart – undivided.

Do you see? God is One: One love – One fire – One Holiness – God is One.

When I see that, it judges me. I realize that I am two: Love and Not Love.

But when I make myself the judge, I assume I am one, so I judge God and make Him two:  
 Love and Not Love. (And I call that “Not Love” holiness or wrath.)

*“Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength.”*

God is one, and I shall be one. So I say, “God, judge the Hell out of me. Judge the sin out of me. Judge it out of everyone – forgive everyone.”

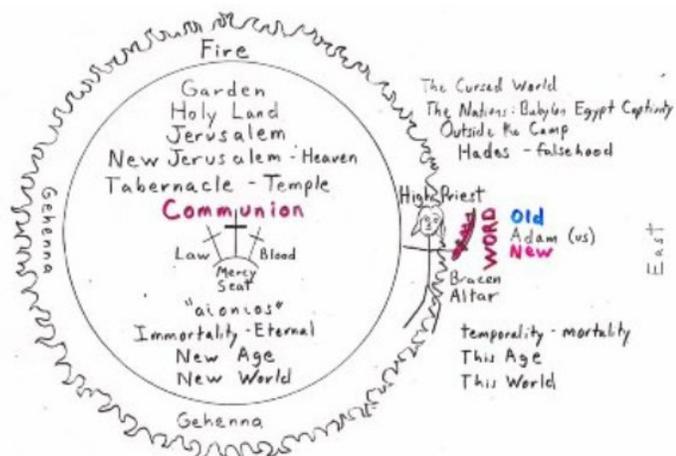
Now some people will say just what they said to Paul: “Well, if God has grace on everyone... why not sin that grace may abound?”

If that’s what you ask, understand what you’re asking:

- “Why should I love love?” Which is to say:
- “I don’t love love.” Which is to say:
- “I want hell.” Which is to deliver yourself up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, and sure, you may be saved on the *“day of the Lord,”* but you don’t have to go to hell. The *“Day of the Lord”* is now. The *“Day of salvation”* is now. You can know Him now.

This picture reminds me of one other thing:

It reminds me of communion in the sanctuary, and the knife is the word that I just preached. It cut you. Or I should say: He cut you.



One Sunday, six years ago, when my daughter was a child, and going through some very difficult things, she came to me after the service. I could tell something had really affected her. It wasn't the sermon, but a vision. She said, "Daddy, I watched as people came forward for communion and this is what I saw: These cutters, like knives, came flying through the air and cut people... cut off arms and legs and heads." And she said, "But Daddy, I wasn't scared, because as they hobbled to the communion table and took communion, Jesus' body and Jesus' blood, they would bump into each other where they had been cut, and then all these bodies formed one big body that nothing could hurt."

You see, she saw us surrendering the Old Man and receiving the New. She was watching judgment.

Paul writes, "On the night that Jesus was "delivered up" (*paradidomi* – the same word he used when talking about being delivered up to Satan)... That night, He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, saying, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same way, He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, do it in remembrance of me."

This is judgment.

This is you. There is an Old You and a New You. [Peter holds both poster boards before the table.]

When you come to the table:

You see that the judge was delivered up to Satan for you, and in your place.

You see mercy and that is your judgment. I mean it cuts you, dividing Old Adam from the New Adam. Jesus bears that Old Adam to destruction, crucified with Christ, and gives you the New Adam, himself. [Peter nails Old Adam to the cross and places New Adam in front of the table.]

That's judgment. God performs surgery and makes you in His image.

Imagine if my Dad didn't know the surgeons were good.

Imagine if he ran and hid his diseased heart.

Imagine if they chased him and strapped him to the operating table, but he didn't know why they broke his ribs and plunged knives in his chest.

Imagine if he had no faith in the one holding the burning knife. Well, it would be absolute hell.

Instead, it was life. Yes, it hurt. But it was good. The judgment was good.

Come to the table of the Lord. Eve, he is showing you what the serpent made you doubt:

- The judgment of God is good.

- The judgment of God is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Communion.

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While I was preaching, while we were singing, there may have been someone in your mind, on your heart... someone that you hate. Don't hide in the darkness any longer. Don't run from the judgment. Don't trap yourself in the kingdom of unforgiveness – Hell. Think of that person in your mind right now, maybe a few of them. Do you understand what God has done for you? Then say these words after me, in the silence of your heart: “In the name of Jesus, under the authority of His blood, I forgive. And so come, Lord, Jesus, we're ready for judgment day. You are judgment day, and we love you.”

The Lord of the Rings movie clip:

*Frodo and Gollum wrestle for the ring inside Mt. Doom, above a lake of fire. Gollum bites the ring finger and the ring off of Frodo's hand. As he does, he slips and falls into the lake of fire. Frodo clings to the cliff and is saved. If your finger or Golem causes you to sin, better to cut it off and cast it into Gehenna than to be thrown into the fire with it!*

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If you're a Tolkien geek like me, you know that's the end of the Old Age, and the beginning of the New Age. That's what happens at judgment. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and Gollum become very connected. Gollum is like Frodo's Old Man. He is destroyed in the fires of doom, where the ring that was stolen was forged, and Frodo is free. That's what happens at judgment. And here's what's even more incredible: somehow in Christ, He does it for us. He bears that sin to destruction, and he gives us himself, his body broken and his blood shed.

And if you're thinking to yourself, “Oh man, I feel sorry for old Gollum”, well, then forget that clip. Because in the end, when you look out of the New Jerusalem and see the Gollum, you will see that it's nothing. Your judgments wrote you out of His story. They're nothing. Your disobedience is nothing. Your darkness is the absence of light, not the presence of something. Your death is the absence of life. Your lies are the absence of truth. Your emptiness is the absence of substance.

And now you're full. In Jesus' name, believe that the judgment of God is good. It's the Gospel.