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Commentary — From the Margins
When Is “Close” Close Enough?

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, retired faculty member from Andrews University, wrote, The emphasis of the Scriptures is not on the time or dynamics of the final judgment, but rather on its inevitability and finality. To Bible writers the reality of the final judgment was more important than its time or modality. This observation applies to other Biblical truths such as the Second Advent and the resurrection. For example, no attempt is made by Christ or by most of the New Testament writers to differentiate between the resurrection of believers at the time of Christ's Coming and the resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the millennium. (from "The Pre-Advent Judgment")

When no attempt is made by Christ or by New Testament writers to distinguish between a resurrection of believers at Christ's coming and a resurrection of unbelievers at the end of the millennium, then logic should cause Dr. Bacchiocchi to question whether these two resurrections are of believers and unbelievers, or whether the first resurrection is of firstfruits [the early barley harvest of Judea] of God and the latter resurrection of the main crop harvest of God [as in Judea's wheat harvest]. For until the person has been born from above, or born of Spirit, the person has only one breath [*psuche*] and will experience only one death. And this cannot be stressed too much: until a person is born a second time, the person cannot die a second death! Thus, since only the firstfruits are in this age born of Spirit [*Pneuma 'Agion* — literally, holy Breath], only the firstfruits will be resurrected to have their judgments revealed (1Co 4:5) when Christ returns. Everyone else will await a second birth which will occur when this multitude of humanity is resurrected to life in the great White Throne Judgment. This resurrection to life will be their second birth. Then and not until then, the person will be subject to the second death. The person will be as one of the two thieves crucified with Christ Jesus at Calvary, in that the person will be raised up after death and will with the person's mouth either profess that Jesus is Lord or deny Jesus, who stands between those resurrected in this White Throne Judgment that receive life or are sent into the second death. What they did when alive in the flesh will be known when the books are opened, and what they did will be rewarded or punished, for this will be a resurrection to judgment, not automatic condemnation.

Two resurrections—one when Christ returns, one after the thousand years and after Satan has been loosed for a short while. The first resurrection is of firstfruits only, with judgment presently (i.e., in this age while the disciples live physically) being on every disciple who has been baptized into the household of God (1Pet 4:17). The second resurrection is of the main harvest of God, when the majority of those who will be saved first receive spiritual birth, or a second birth as a spiritual child of God. Judgment only occurs after death, with baptism representing real death (Heb 9:27). And all other teachings about being resurrected to judgment are not of God and are to be rejected.

Sorry, Sam, you don't understand the judgment of God. You are close, in that you have two resurrections—and this is much closer than either Greek or Roman catholic faiths or the Evangelical faiths. But is this close enough? It isn't, is it? For from your flawed

understanding of the resurrections comes the entirety of your pre-Advent judgment theology, which has the hapless Eskimo who never heard the name Jesus of Nazareth but was, by God, consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32) now condemned to the lake of fire. Saints will, most likely, be surprised by who enters the kingdom of heaven and who does not, for saints still see with fleshly eyes and perceive those things done by the flesh. The Apostle Paul was certainly surprised when the fellowships in Asia deserted him (2 Tim 1:15). And of all saints, Sabbatarians who should have the most love for fellow disciples have the least ... Sam, where is your love for the mass of humankind that toils in quiet desperation without having heard the name *Jesus the Christ*? Today, I have a kitten, a runt from birth, that is quietly dying as its ill-formed digestive track refuses food. The degree of compassion I have for this kitten is not expressible in words; yet, the majority of humanity quietly dies because its spiritual digestive system has not been made alive. Do you suppose that the Father's compassion for the person He has not yet drawn from this world (John 6:44, 65) is any less than my compassion for a kitten that I will have to watch die on the slim chance that once again this kitten will defy the odds against its survival? Come on, Sam, you are a better person than one who condemns to a second death every man, woman, and child who has never known Christ. At least I hope you are.

Without love, no one can please God. Without deep, heartfelt concern for disciples that far too many sermonizers in the former Worldwide Church of God labeled as *nominal Christians*, no Sabbatarian disciple [myself included] can please God. Yet, with the assurance of Scripture, many of these disciples labeled as *nominal Christians* have been called to be sons of destruction: they will betray brethren, slay brethren, despitefully use brethren—how long should this listing be? For Jesus washed the feet of Judas Iscariot only minutes before Judas left to betray Him. And if we say that we abide in Christ, then we ought to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), washing the feet of those who will betray us. The blessing God has given us is that we don't today know who they are.

The security of the kingdom of heaven does not rely on unquestioning trust, love, and obedience that God has somehow earned from humankind. This would make entrance into the kingdom of heaven a work of men. Rather, God sculpts each disciple into a vessel for honored or dishonorable use as it seems good to Him. When we are first placed on the Master Potter's wheel, we tell God how "workable" we are by either choosing life, or by choosing death. Our choice. This is where the disciple has input into what Christ Jesus will do with the disciple. On a day of salvation [which is not confined to being a physical day] that is analogous to when Moses delivered the second covenant to Israel on the plains of Moab, a covenant made in addition to the covenant made at Horeb or Sinai (Deu 29:1), we have set before each of us the choice of good and life, or evil and death with evil being nothing more than determining for oneself what constitutes good or evil. We are to choose. We cannot help choosing, for in making no choice we choose death. And once we choose, God makes from us a vessel suitable for the use He intends for us.

This analogy of disciples being clay on the potter's wheel is not well understood and is often overlooked by Sabbatarian fellowships. The shaping of you and of me as, prayfully, vessels intended for honored use takes from when we are born of Spirit until we die physically. Death, then, begins the drying process of the *greenware*. The resurrection of the firstfruits results in the firing of the vessel that transforms fragile *greenware* into sturdy *biscuit ware*, ceramic now in composition but without adornment. Glazes are added to the

biscuit ware, and the vessel is refired, with the glazes becoming an actual part of the ceramic structure of the vessel. The adding of these glazes comes during Christ Jesus' millennial reign, with the second firing to occur with the coming of the new heavens and new earth ... the glazes are, for disciples, their spiritual rewards.

Fire of a different sort than the combustion of matter through oxidation separates the supra-dimensional heavenly realm from our four unfurled dimensions. Thus, a resurrection is a type of baptism by fire, a passing through fire (Isa 43:2) just as the Flood of Noah was a baptism by water unto death. So it is this baptism by fire unto life that a resurrection represents, with the resurrection of firstfruits being the copy and shadow of the coming of the new heavens and new earth following the great White Throne Judgment. For the disciple whose mortality has not put on immortality will not enter the heavenly realm, and will be as a clay vessel that breaks in the kiln.

If there is the smallest doubt in Jesus' mind about a disciple, the disciple cannot be admitted into the kingdom of Heaven, for neither the Father nor the Son are in the business of creating additional Adversaries. Therefore, in the shaping of the disciple into the vessel that Christ Jesus intends for the disciple to be—again, one either for honored use, or one for dishonored use such as for fulfilling Scriptures about spiritual betrayal—all doubts about the disciple's behavior are erased through Jesus placing into the disciple His mind and His nature as the jar of manna was in the physical ark of the covenant. The purpose for Jesus being the Master Potter is for Him to receive all glory through reproducing in the disciple someone with His mind and nature. He makes every disciple into the vessel that seems good to Him; therefore, all credit goes to Him, not to us.

There is no wrestling match going on between Christ and Satan for the souls of men. Such thinking is being physically minded, and is perhaps worthy of the writer of the 2nd-Century BCE Qumran War Scroll but certainly not worthy of a disciple. Satan can do no more than he is allowed. Even as the spiritual king of Babylon, he holds his position at the providence of God, who will draw into heaven a third of all humankind just as Satan dragged into darkness a third of the angels. How many human beings is that? Perhaps 60 billion people have drawn breath since Adam knew Eve. Perhaps, then, 20 billion will eventually receive life in a glorified body in the heavenly realm. How many will be firstfruits? The only basis for comparison is the size of the Judean barley harvest in relationship to the Judean wheat harvest. What was the comparison in bushels or in tons? That is, perhaps, the relationship between the number of saints resurrected to glory upon Christ's return, and the number of saints that will come from the great White Throne Judgment.

Sam, look at how simple the judgments of God actually are.

The old adage that close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades has some merit, for see how close you are to understanding the divine schema:

Jesus speaks of "the hour" that is coming "when all who are in the tombs 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 judgment" (John 5:28-29). In this statement Christ presents the resurrection of the "good" doers and that of the evildoers as taking place contemporaneously (cf. Matt 25:32; Luke 11:32). Yet John the Revelator distinguishes between the two resurrections by placing the former at the beginning of the millennium and

the latter after "the thousand years were ended" (Rev 20:4-5). (from "The Pre-Advent Judgment")

Why would Jesus not present the resurrection of those disciples who have done good and those disciples who choose evil to occur at the same time? Of course, He presents the resurrection of the household of God to occur upon His return, for judgment is now on the household of God while saints still live physically. This judgment will be revealed, not made, upon Christ Jesus' return (again, 1Co 4:4-5). However, for that portion of humanity presently under natural grace (Rom 5:13 — when no sin is reckoned to a person, the person is under grace), judgment follows death. Thus, judgment for that portion of humanity that was not born a second time while physically alive occurs when this portion receives its second birth in the resurrection that follows the Millennium.

It is a bad assumption to assume that everyone resurrected when Christ returns will be resurrected to everlasting life. Jesus doesn't say that. Rather, He said that "as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son" (John 5:21-22). When does the Father raise the dead and give to them life? Does He not raise the dead and give them life prior to judgment? Yes, He does. Judgment is now on the household of God, so has not the Father given life to those disciples He has drawn from the world when He draws them from the world? Judgment would not be upon them if He had not. Therefore, again, baptism represents actual death, and the person raised from the baptismal pool is raised from death and raised unto judgment. For the Christian, baptism is unto judgment. But that portion of the world not baptized is not now under judgment, but awaits judgment either in the grave or while walking the streets of Baltimore.

Receiving the divine Breath of the Father is what it means to be born of Spirit. Prior to being born of Spirit, a person is spiritually dead. The person is spiritually as Adam was physically the moment before *Elohim* [singular in usage] breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life. So through receipt of the divine Breath of the Father [*Pneuma 'Agion*], the Father has given life to the dead throughout this present age, and He will give life to the remainder of the dead in the last resurrection. But He judges no one. He allows the Son to give life to whom He will. Thus, the way to glorification—to mortality putting on immortality—begins with the Father giving life to the dead, and concludes with the Son as judge giving life to whom He will. The spiritual birth process doesn't conclude when the Father raises the dead and gives life to them. Rather, the process concludes when the Son gives life to those whom the Father has made alive. Both the Father and the Son must give life to the disciple who puts on immortality.

Therefore, the person made alive by the Father who hears Jesus' words and believes the Father [whose words Jesus speaks] has everlasting life and does not come under judgment, but passes from death to life (John 5:24). This person would not hear or believe if not first born of Spirit, for the person not born of Spirit is hostile to God (Rom 8:7). So for the person to pass from death to life, the person of necessity must be made alive by the Father, then given life by the Son through the faith involved in hearing and believing. This person's faith is now counted as righteousness, and this disciple rightly judges him or herself and has no need for any further judging. Hence, the context of Jesus saying not to marvel when all who are in the tombs are resurrected has the "all" being those who have been made alive by the Father. Jesus has been, as the reality of the Azazel goat, bearing the sins of those who

have been made alive by the Father. These disciples have been cloaked by His righteousness, that righteousness put on as a garment. No one in the heavenly realm sees the sins of these disciples except Jesus, whose garment they wear. Thus, it is to Jesus that judgment has been given. He made the disciple into whatever kind of vessel the disciple became: a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction, or a vessel of mercy prepared for glory. So He gives the disciple (through making the disciple into a vessel for dishonored use or for honored use) over to the second death, or over to glory and everlasting life.

Sam, there is a disconnect between God seeking “to gain and maintain the unconditional love and trust of His creatures” (your words), and “Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Rom 9:20). The Apostle asks, “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use” (v. 21). You know the answer. Of course He does. So why do you write about God “making adequate provision for [humankind] to understand and accept the justice of His judgments”? You seem to have missed the entire point about from one lump of clay two sorts of vessels can be made by the Son. The difference between being made honored or made dishonorable stems from how workable is the lump to which the Father gave spiritual birth, with this workability determined when the disciple chose either life or death.

For each disciple, there are not many days of salvation as there were not many days on the plains of Moab on which the mostly uncircumcised nation of Israel could choose life (Deu 30:15-19). A decision must be made, for Israel would cross the Jordan and enter into the geographical representation of God’s rest, with the weekly Sabbath being the spiritual transitional rest between the earth’s geography and heaven. And your decision, Sam, was the right one: you entered into the Sabbath as Abraham entered into the Promised Land. But it was believing God that was the faith counted to Abraham as righteousness (Gen 15:6), not Abraham journeying into God’s rest, his first expression of belief. Likewise, living in the Sabbath was a first expression of belief. Now, you need to truly believe God about the Son of Man.

If judgment is today on the household of God—and it is—then the evaluative process is at work in the form of Christ Jesus sculpting and disciplining the vessel whether for honored or dishonorable usage. He endures with great patience vessels He intends to break in order to make known the riches of His glory ... today, there are two sons in the womb of the last Eve. Both are sons of promise as Esau and Jacob were twice sons of promise, but one son is hated and one is loved even though no sin is presently imputed to either. So yes, there are differences between disciples. The elder covers himself with his own righteousness, and will shortly cover himself with the blood of his righteous brother; so the elder is hair-covered and red, while the younger should be as righteous Abel was, but unfortunately, will prove to be a deceiver who must wrestle with God. The younger will produce many false prophets, and will deceive many. Although the older son attempts to enter God’s rest on the following day [i.e., the 8th-day] and is rejected, it is his younger brother who leaves the Promised Land to enter into the geographical representation of death [Haran, as part of Assyria] that deceives, and continues to deceive until he returns to God’s rest and wrestles with God. Jacob’s bodily return to Canaan serves as a geographical shadow and type of the resurrection in the same way that Terah’s death in Haran and Abram’s journey on to Canaan serves as a geographical shadow and type of the

death of the old man, and birth of the new creature in the same tent of flesh, with this new creature entering God's rest. Therefore, Jacob's wrestling with God becomes a period when the disciple is evaluated, with those who overcome with God entering into His rest.

Two parables Jesus tells about the coming resurrection of firstfruits must be put into context: when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Most High and of His Christ (Rev 11:15), the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28). Satan will no longer reign as the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:3), for he will be cast into time (Rev 12:9-10). Christ Jesus will begin to reign over the mental topography of humanity, and He will reign through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for His kingdom is not of this world. He doesn't reign over wheat fields and rocky pastures, oil derricks and supermarkets. Rather, He will reign over the thoughts of the mind and the desires of the heart—and through the thoughts and desires of humankind Jesus will compel or persuade human kings and princes to rule geographical territories with equity and love.

When endtime Israel, a spiritually circumcised nation, is recovered from death and led into God's rest as the Lord led the physically circumcised nation out of Egypt and into Canaan (Jer 16:14-15; 23:7-8; Isa 11:11-16; Ezek 36:24-32; 20:34-37), the nation of Israel will be empowered [or filled] by the Holy Spirit. No longer will sin and death dwell in the flesh of God's holy nation—and when the Holy Spirit is poured out on all peoples and beasts, changing even the predatory natures of lions, wolves, and bears (Isa 11:6-9), human nature will also be changed. All of the humankind will be born of Spirit. Thus, halfway through seven endtime years of tribulation, a third son, a spiritual Seth, will be born to the last Eve. The first son, a spiritual Cain born at the beginning of the seven endtime years, will be marked for death. The second son, a spiritual Abel born when Cain is, will be that same spiritual Jacob who wrestles with God for three and a half years. Except for a remnant (Rev 12:17), this righteous son will be slain by his elder brother. But the third part of humankind (Zech 13:7-9) that previously had no spiritual life will be born of Spirit, and will be born empowered and without sin in that heavenly realm where it didn't previously have life. This third part will be spiritual virgins, which no Christian alive today can claim to be, for all have sinned and have come short of the glory of Christ.

Therefore, the false grain [tares] that has been planted in the fields of God by the Adversary will have spiritual life when Christ Jesus returns; so it is appropriate for the angels to gather these weeds and burn them, thereby removing from Christ's kingdom "all causes of sin and all law-breakers" (Matt 13:41). It will be right for the angels to separate the evil from the righteous, and cast the bad fish into the fire (vv. 47-50). There will be half of the virgins born from above when the Holy Spirit poured out who do not value what they have received ... the number of virgins will be the third part of humanity, plus the 144,000 that have come from natural Israel during the first half of the seven endtime years. And unfortunately, not all of those who will be born empowered by the Holy Spirit will value the gift that they have received.

God is not a respecter of persons. The person born empowered by the Holy Spirit halfway through the seven endtime years must by faith [endure to the end](#), and if this person does so, this person will be saved as part of the great harvest of firstfruits. And this is the good news that must be proclaimed to all the world as a witness to all nations before the end comes (Matt 24:13-14).

But enduring to the end will require faith, for Satan will be cast to the earth and will

come seeking to devour whomever he can. The person who endures cannot take the mark of the beast [*chi xi stigma* — that is, the *tattoo of Christ's cross*], so this person cannot buy and sell but must have faith that God will supply the person's needs on a day by day basis. And this daily exercise of faith will be counted to the person as righteousness in the same way that Abraham believing God was counted to him as righteousness. So the five virgins that Jesus never knew are the ones who, for whatever reason, do not have faith that will be counted as righteousness. The oil, now, becomes faith, for all ten virgins are unspotted by sin because of what Christ has done when He baptized the world in Spirit.

Sam, you and I will never be spiritual virgins because, as with the Apostle Paul, the law of sin and death dwells in our flesh. Our minds are clean (hopefully so), but we lose battles to our flesh. The sun has set on my anger. My brother has been offended. And so it is, I'm sure, with you. Not big things, but little stuff that causes us to remember that we are sinners.

Now imagine what it will be like to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, this invisible event foreshadowed by what visibly happened on that day of Pentecost following Calvary. We will be liberated from the sin and death that has been dwelling in our flesh as natural Israel was liberated from physical bondage to Pharaoh—and the lives of men will again be given for our ransom from sin (Isa 43:3-4, especially v. 4). We will be what we are in our minds and hearts. If our desire has been to walk uprightly before God, we will walk uprightly before God. If we have been faking it (and apparently some members of the former Worldwide Church of God were doing just this, for they stampeded from services to get to *Red Lobster* when Joe Sr. determined that it was okay to eat vermin), then when empowered, our ugly insides will be visible for both men and angels to see for the mantle of Christ's righteousness will be removed. The Son of Man will be revealed (Luke 17:30), both the presently uncovered Head as well as the presently clothed Body. And since death will then be outside the disciple and will have to come from without, martyrdom will return as we have poorly imagined it.

The liberation of spiritually circumcised Israel from sin and death is the event that begins the seven endtime years of tribulation ... it doesn't matter what you have been taught, or what you taught or now teach. There will be a [Second Passover](#) liberation, a spiritual Passover liberation, for the paschal Lamb of God was slain on the Preparation Day, the 14th of Abib. And one long spiritual night began, a night of watching and waiting, of roasting the Lamb with our sins and of eating the Lamb when we take the sacraments—a night of eating with our feet shod and our loins girded and staffs in hand as we anticipate Christ Jesus' return. But before He returns, before liberation from sin, the death angels will again pass over the land.

You do cover your sins by renewing the covenant by which Jesus bears your sins on the night that Jesus was betrayed, don't you? If you don't, you would be wise to begin. Very wise. For if you are a firstborn and are not drinking of the cup on the night Jesus was betrayed, you will be as an Egyptian was on that first Passover night.

In your "The Pre-Advent Judgment" article, you spend a long time proving that Christ Jesus, as Master Potter, has made of every disciple a vessel for either honored or dishonorable use, for in the making of both sorts of vessels can be seen a pre-Advent evaluative judging of the type that you very legalistically find. But there is no need for Christ to construct a case for or against a disciple prior to when the disciple's judgment is revealed,

for He, Himself, made the person into the vessel that the person is. This is not to say that He creates evil. Rather, it is to say that from the person who chose evil, He created a vessel of wrath which He endures for a season.

Why, you ask, would anyone choose death over life?

Do you really have to ask? All Scripture must be fulfilled. Jesus went out of His way to fulfill prophecies about Him. *Two swords are enough*. And within all Scripture are the previously mentioned passages about betrayal. So there must be vessels of wrath prepared for destruction—and as the Father gave Judas Iscariot to Jesus for, from the beginning, the expressed purpose of betraying Jesus, the Father has given to Jesus endtime disciples for the express purpose of betraying you and me and every other Sabbatarian. Some of these disciples are in services with us so that, as Jesus did Judas', we can wash their feet. But most of these disciples are in 8th-day fellowships, and nothing either of us can say will cause them to begin keeping the Sabbath or living by the other laws of God written on hearts and placed in minds. As the Lord gave to natural Israel statutes by which the nation could not live (Ezek 20:25-26), the Father has given to lawless spiritually circumcised Israel statutes by which this holy nation cannot live—and the foremost of these statutes is worship on the 8th-day, which will send Israel's infants into the lake of fire for no one can enter into God's rest on the following day (Num chap 14, with Ps 95:10-11 & Heb 3:16-4:11).

You err is searching in darkness for what is clearly visible on this long night of watching under a full moon. Go visit the potter's house. Understand how Paul uses the analogy differently than does Jeremiah. Understand also how Zechariah, under inspiration, uses the analogy, for the temple potter's field is a rubble yard of broken vessels of dishonor, wrath and destruction, as Judas Iscariot was a son of destruction (John 17:12).

You have been created as a vessel for honored use—go now and do the honorable thing. Show love for that portion of humankind which has never known Christ Jesus. Lose the hubris that goes hand in hand with your conception that the first resurrection is for the good, and the great White Throne Judgment is for the damned ... while I was writing this, that kitten died. It wanted me to hold it just before it died, but you seemed more important. I pray that you are.

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