

God's Courtroom

Dedicated to the late Pastor John Somers for his
encouragement and counsel over the years.

**You will one day stand trial in God's
courtroom. Are you prepared?**

by

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1	8.	The Penalty	22
2.	The Legal System	1	9.	God's Offer of Pardon	26
3.	The Judge	2	a.	Pardon Condition No. 1 - Admit	28
4.	The Charge	5	b.	Pardon Condition No. 2 - Believe	28
5.	Legal Options	8	c.	Pardon Condition No. 3 - Commit.....	28
6.	The Trial	9	10.	Accepting the Pardon.....	29
a.	Time of the trial	9	11.	Exhibit - Plea Agreement Form	31
b.	Public trial	12			
7.	Potential Defenses	16			
a.	Deny or minimize the extent of your sin.....	16			
b.	Compare your life to really bad people	18			
c.	Emphasize your good deeds	19			
d.	Claim you never heard about God's commandments.....	20			

Introduction

As a lawyer, it is unthinkable for me to appear in any court and not be prepared. The consequence of a lawyer not adequately preparing a client for a criminal case is catastrophic. A person who is convicted of a serious crime in the United States criminal justice system could experience the loss of his liberty and freedom. He could be sentenced to prison or even death. According to the Bible, one day you will appear in another courtroom - God's courtroom. The Bible contains a significant amount of information about this event. Thus, you need to be prepared. So a probing but important question that must be asked is this:

If you were to die today, would you be prepared to stand trial in God's courtroom?

Unfortunately, many people will enter God's courtroom completely unprepared and will face significant exposure. This booklet provides key information that prepares you to enter God's judicial system.

The Legal System

If you were charged with a serious crime, you would probably seek a lawyer to represent you. Depending on the crime, if you could not afford a lawyer, the court would appoint one. The lawyer would explain to you how the legal system works. He would prepare you for your court appearance by discussing several issues

including: (1) who is going to be the judge, (2) the crime that has been charged, (3) the penalty of the crime, (4) potential legal defenses, and (5) the possibility of entering into a plea agreement or having a trial. These issues also need to be considered when preparing for your trial in God's courtroom.

The Judge

When I first began practicing law, I worked for a small law firm located in northern Illinois. Part of my responsibilities included representing individuals charged with various crimes. I learned that the personal philosophies and temperaments of the county judges often influenced their rulings. I remember one particular judge in the county that seemed more lenient than other judges. Thus, if I knew the prosecutor had sufficient evidence to convict my client, I would hope this particular judge would be assigned to hear the case, so perhaps, my client might receive a lenient sentence. Another judge in the county was exceptionally smart. In fact, he was brilliant. He followed the law with exacting precision. He was truly a scholar and very patient at hearing complex legal arguments that could result in the case being dismissed. The advantage of having this judge is that he would not have any reservations about dismissing a criminal case if the police made a procedural error and the defendant's constitutional rights were violated. It also appeared this particular judge did not give any more credibility to the police's testimony over the accused, which is good if you are unjustly accused. He did have a down side, at least

from my perspective as a criminal defense lawyer. If the defendant was actually found guilty, the judge would impose a very stiff penalty in the sentencing phase. In summary, judges have different personalities and backgrounds that can affect whether a defendant is found guilty and the length of the sentence imposed.

Since you are going to stand trial in God's courtroom, it is important to understand the judge who will be presiding over your case. A few brief observations on God's character may be helpful. First, a snow job or a lame excuse is not going to work. God knows everything. He is aware of the smallest details. The Bible states, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Mat. 10:30). Second, God does not lie. The Bible states, "[I]n the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie...." (Titus 1:2). God says what he means and means what he says. Third, God cannot be bribed. "For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe" (Deut. 10:17).

A criminal investigation known as Operation Greylord took place in Chicago, Illinois several years ago. There was widespread corruption in the criminal courts. Lawyers were bribing judges to get favorable rulings. This worked for a while. Some of the defendants who were possibly guilty of crimes got their cases dismissed. Ultimately, the corruption was discovered and approximately fifty lawyers and fifteen judges went to prison. I assure you that God cannot be bribed. Fourth, God has no favorites. The Bible states, "For there is no

partiality with God" (Rom. 2:11). God does not show partiality and will judge without regard to race, economics, status in the community, or church membership. It does not matter the type of family you were raised in or whether you made contributions to a church or charity.

Fifth, God is perfectly fair and always right. Human judges can make mistakes. God is perfect in his judgments. "He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity" (Ps. 98:9). Sixth, God strictly follows the law. Human judges sometimes do not follow the law. Some judges are tempted to interpret the law in order to achieve a particular result. However, God cannot bend the law. God's holiness requires him to perfectly follow the law, even if it causes him personal sorrow. Seventh, God is holy and wrathful. The Bible states, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). This character trait of God is often passed over because many people would rather stick their heads in the sand and pretend it does not exist. It makes them feel very uncomfortable. But this characteristic of God must be balanced with the eighth characteristic which is that God is full of love and compassion. The Bible states, "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). One of the most profound and reassuring truths in the Bible is that God truly loves you more than anyone else has ever loved you or could ever love you.

From a human perspective, characteristics seven and eight seem wholly inconsistent. Yet, this is not the case as I will explain later. Finally, most human judges are supposed to be neutral in their desire whether a defendant should be found guilty or not guilty. They are to be impartial arbitrators. God is not neutral on this subject. He has made his intention quite known. God will use every available means prior to your death to assist you so that the penalty of the charge is not imposed. “[N]ot wishing for any to perish...” (2 Pet. 3:9). This is especially important to know because after reading the charge you may come to the immediate realization that you are guilty.

The Charge

If you were charged with a crime (in state or federal court), the charge must be in writing. It may be short and simple or long and complex. For instance, the indictment against a former governor of Illinois was quite long and complex, containing twenty-two counts and more than ninety pages long. On the other hand, the charge that you will face when you stand in God's courtroom is simple and easy to understand. The charge is this:

You have sinned against God.

Regarding the charge, the Bible states, “[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

But one may ask what is sin? Sin is disobedience to God in any way, shape, or form. It may be breaking one of the Ten Commandments. For instance:

Murder

“You shall not murder” (Exod. 20:13).

Adultery

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14).

Stealing

“You shall not steal” (Exod. 20:15).

Coveting

“You shall not covet” (Exod. 20:17). Coveting occurs when a person has a strong desire to obtain something that belongs to someone else.

Using God's name as a swear word

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exod. 20:7).

You can sin by your actions and also by your thoughts. Now you may have never committed the sin of murder, but you may have committed the sin of anger. The Bible states, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the Court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court" (Mat. 5:21-22). Also, you may have never committed the physical act of adultery, but you may have allowed immoral thoughts to linger in your mind. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mat. 5:27-28). Finally, sin can be active rebellion or passive indifference. Active rebellion is where you understand that a certain activity is wrong but engage in it anyway. Passive indifference is where you do not even care about keeping God's commandments. You can even sin against God by failing to do something you know is right. "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jam. 4:17).

The charge that God has brought is so broad that it is undeniable and self-evident that every person has sinned against God at some point in his life. "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19).

Legal Options

In the United States criminal justice system, the role of plea bargaining is very important. Without it, the system would collapse. Plea bargaining is where the prosecutor agrees to a reduced sentence in exchange for the defendant pleading guilty. Thus, you forego a trial. The lawyer and the prosecutor merely present the "plea agreement" to the judge and seek approval. The system would collapse without plea bargaining because there are not enough resources or time to try every single criminal case. A simple example of pleading guilty and entering into a plea agreement relates to a speeding ticket. Say you are charged with driving 75 mph in a 65 mph zone. However, you work out a plea agreement with the prosecutor. In exchange for pleading guilty and waiving your right to a trial, you receive court supervision for ninety days and pay a \$150.00 fine. Why would you want to enter into this type of an agreement? So the traffic ticket will not go on your record. You do not want your auto insurance premiums to increase, or worse yet, lose your license.

Most criminal defendants must make a decision whether to plead guilty and enter into a plea agreement or plead not guilty. If the defendant pleads not guilty, there will be a trial but he will get the opportunity to argue his side of the story to the judge or jury. Regarding your appearance in God's courtroom, you also have the same two options. You can plead guilty and enter into a plea agreement with God. Alternatively, you can plead not guilty and have a trial in God's courtroom.

Very Important - If you fail to plead guilty and enter into a plea agreement before your death, there absolutely will be a trial in God's courtroom. Furthermore, there will no longer be the possibility of entering a plea agreement. God's offer of a plea agreement automatically is withdrawn upon your death.

The Trial

Time of the trial

If you were charged with a crime in state court, the sheriff would arrest you and bring you to the county jail. Very soon after your arrest, a preliminary hearing would take place which is separate and distinct proceeding from the actual trial. At the preliminary hearing, the prosecutor is required to establish that there is probable cause. In other words, the prosecutor does not need to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that you committed the crime but only that there is a sufficient quantum of evidence - probable cause - to subject you to a future trial on the merits. If probable cause is established, you could be sitting in jail for months waiting for your trial (assuming you could not bond out). After the trial, if you are found guilty, you could be sentenced to state prison. Compared to county jail, state prison is more violent, there is more security, and is intended for long-term confinement.

It is important to understand that the spirit of a person can exist outside the body and survives physical death. An initial judgment occurs upon a person's death. The Bible states, "[I]t is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27). If a person has not pled guilty and has failed to enter into a plea agreement prior to death, his or her spirit is taken to a place called Hell (county jail). "[T]he rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades (Hell) he lifted up his eyes, being in torment..." (Luke 16:23). However, the final judgment (i.e., your trial) does not take place immediately upon your death. This may come as a surprise to many.

The final judgment takes place after the resurrection of the body and is known as the Great White Throne Judgment. "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it" (Rev. 20:11). The Bible indicates that one day each person will receive a resurrected body. The scriptural basis for the resurrection is set forth in both the Old and New Testaments. One of the clearest references in scripture to the resurrection of the dead is found in the Book of Daniel. An angel stated to the prophet Daniel, "But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age" (Dan. 12:13). The New Testament also supports the fact that the righteous will be resurrected from the dead. "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14).

As Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, so all who have entered into a plea agreement with God, by placing their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation, will also receive a new body. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thes. 4:16). The resurrection of the righteous is known as the first resurrection and takes place before or simultaneously with the second coming of Jesus Christ. Those who attain to the first resurrection of the dead will reign with Jesus Christ on the earth for a thousand years. This is called the millennial reign of Christ. “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6).

The Bible also indicates that a person who fails to enter into a plea agreement with God will also be given a new body. The Bible speaks of the resurrection of the unrighteous. Jesus Christ stated, “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29) (emphasis added). The Apostle Paul also stated that the wicked would certainly be resurrected. “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets; having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall

certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Act 24:15) (emphasis added). The resurrection of the unrighteous takes place after the millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (Rev. 20:5).

In summary, a person who fails to plead guilty and enter into a plea agreement with God prior to his death will be confined to Hell (county jail) experiencing torment for a minimum of 1,000 years until his physical body is resurrected. You will have plenty of time to reflect on your past life to prepare for your trial. After the 1000-year period, the person’s spirit is united with a resurrected body. “Hades (Hell) gave up the dead which were in them” (Rev. 20:13). Thus, a person who proceeds to trial at the Great White Throne Judgment will stand before God in a resurrected body. “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds” (Rev. 20:12). If a person is convicted at the Great White Throne Judgment, the whole person (spirit and body) is cast into the Lake of Fire (state prison).

Public trial

If a prosecutor charges a juvenile with a crime, the trial is closed to the general public. The juvenile’s privacy is

protected. There ordinarily will be a sign posted outside the courtroom stating “Do not come in” while the juvenile case is proceeding. On the other hand, if you are an adult, the trial is public. Historically, trials were not always public. The founding fathers of our country knew about the abuses associated with the secret trials that were conducted in England & Spain (the English Star Chamber & the Spanish Inquisitions). Thus, under the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, you have a right to a public trial. The reason why trials are public is to show the integrity of the system - what the judge, witnesses, and prosecutor say and how they behave. The United States criminal justice system has flaws, but it strives to give an accused, not a perfect trial, but a fair trial. Having trials open to the public furthers this goal.

The trials in God’s courtroom will not take place behind closed doors. It is not just between you and God. God has a few things he wants to accomplish. He wants to establish to all of humanity that he is righteous and fair, and his judgments are perfect and flawless. He can only accomplish these goals if the trials are public. The most detailed descriptions of the trials that will take place in God’s courtroom are set forth in the books of Daniel and Revelation:

“I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool. His

throne was a blaze with flames ... Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court sat, and the books were opened ... And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds” (Dan. 7:9-11 & Rev. 20:11-12) (emphasis added).

In reference to the future trials, the prophet Daniel stated, “myriads upon myriads were standing before him. The Court sat, and the books were opened” (Dan. 7:10). In Daniel’s day, if a person wanted to describe a vast number of people (millions or billions), the phrase ‘myriads upon myriads’ would be used. It is the type of phrase to describe the sands on a seashore. Attending the trials (at the end of the age) is going to be the largest gathering of people ever put together in human history. The trial will definitely be public. “But when the Son of Man comes in glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him ... Then He will also say to those on His left, Depart from Me, accursed ones, into

the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat. 25:31-32 & 41) (emphasis added).

Like any trial, there will be witnesses who may testify against you. For example, when Jesus Christ was on the earth, he was concerned at the hard hearts of the people who were rejecting the message of salvation. Jesus Christ stated, “The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here” (Mat. 12:41) and “The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.” (Mat. 12:42). The men of Nineveh lived approximately 750 years before Christ. The Queen of the South lived approximately 950 years before Christ. Yet, both provided testimony on whether certain people should be condemned. So there seems to be active participation by some people who are watching the trials, even if they lived in a different age.

In a criminal case, the prosecutor must prove that the defendant is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. In God’s courtroom, there will be absolutely no doubt or question as to whether a person is guilty of the charge. It is important to realize that the amount of evidence and testimony that will be brought against a person standing trial in God’s courtroom will be compelling and overwhelming. Everyone will concur on the conviction. Even when a person is condemned, he will realize the

absolute fairness of God’s judgment in his life. Every person, including those found guilty at the Great White Throne Judgment, will bow their knee to God. The Bible states, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God’” (Rom. 14:10-11).

Potential Defenses

If you fail to plead guilty before your death, there will be a trial but you may be able to raise several defenses.

Defense No. 1 - Deny or minimize the extent of your sin

The first potential defense is to deny or minimize the extent of your sin. This potential defense is quite common and will be used by many people. Every criminal defendant’s worst nightmare (after they have flatly denied committing the crime) is for their lawyer to tell them that a video tape has been discovered showing them doing the crime. For instance, a person is charged with breaking into a store. Later on, it is discovered that the owner had a hidden video camera that was activated when any of the doors were opened. This video shows the defendant in the store. This is very compelling evidence for the prosecutor. Guess what? God has been video taping your entire life. The camera is hidden but it was activated when you were born and only will be turned off upon your death. Furthermore, it is a special

video tape because it not only records actions but also words, thoughts, and attitudes. The Bible states, "And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment" (Mat. 12:36). Notice the phrases "every careless word," "they shall render account," "in the day of judgment." Your secret thoughts, including those violent, greedy, or immoral thoughts also will be put into evidence. The Bible states, "God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16). These thoughts and other actions most likely are contained in the "books." The Bible states, "[T]he dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds" (Rev. 20:12) (emphasis added).

If you plead not guilty, there is a strong possibility that at your trial the entire tape is going to be replayed (or the book read) in its entirety - action by action, word by word, and thought by thought for every minute of your life. Remember, the trial is public. You are not going to be able to hide anything. There is a definite possibility that your spouse, children, co-workers, and friends will hear all of the evidence that is presented. The people whom you thought you had fooled all your life will no longer be fooled. So the strategy to gloss over the bad is not going to work. You might be saying, "That cannot happen because it would take a hundred years just to hear one person's life." However, this will probably not pose a problem. In the eternal future, time may not exist in the manner that we experienced it while living on the earth. "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand

years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). So not having enough time to conduct a thorough trial will not be an issue.

Defense No. 2 - Compare your life to really bad people

The second potential defense is to compare your life to really bad people. When you reflect on your life, perhaps like many others you could say the following:

"I know that I am not perfect and lilly white, but there are a lot of other people who have done worse sins than me. I will just call a couple of really bad sinners as witnesses, a few murderers, child molesters, and rapists, and compare them to me. In the end, I will not look so bad after all."

This potential defense has a tremendous amount of appeal. Almost anyone can find someone who is more sinful than himself. However, the idea of calling "really bad sinners" as witnesses to make you look good is not going to work. Apparently, you have misunderstood the charge. The charge is not based on the amount of sin you have committed but on the fact of sin. In other words, you only need to have sinned one time your entire life to be convicted. The Bible states, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). God's standard for acquittal of the charge is absolute perfection. Yet, if you are like most people, you have probably sinned dozens of times

this week and hundreds or thousands of times over the course of your life. Consequently, merely comparing yourself to other people will not be an effective defense.

Defense No. 3 - Emphasize your good deeds

The third potential defense is to emphasize your good deeds. This potential defense requires you to describe in great detail all of the good things that you have done. Emphasize your charitable activities, the times you went to church, and your good family. Try to gloss over the bad things and put them in “context” by emphasizing your good deeds. The problem with this defense (although good deeds are important) is that it does not remove your past sin. Fortunately, we have a record from one of the future trials where Jesus Christ responded to this defense. Notice how Jesus Christ responds to the “good deeds” defense, “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Mat. 7: 22-23). These were very religious people who performed many good deeds, including prophecy and miracles. Jesus did not deny they did these good deeds. Yet, their defense was rejected because of their sin. In other words, their good deeds did not cancel out their sin.

The performance of good deeds will not be an effective defense against the charge. Some people have the

mistaken belief that God has divine scales of justice and merely places a person’s good deeds on one end of the scale and the bad deeds on the other end. They assume that if a person’s good deeds outweigh the bad deeds, he should be found not guilty and permitted to enter heaven. In reality, the performance of good deeds does not eliminate a person’s past sins. No amount of good deeds will defeat the charge because a person remains fully accountable for his past sins. “[B]ecause by the works of the Law (good deeds) no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Rom. 3:20).

Defense No. 4 – Claim you never heard about God’s commandments

In the United States criminal justice system, ignorance of the law is not an excuse. After committing a crime, you cannot escape the penalty of the law merely by asserting you did not know your actions were wrong. Every day, people are charged and convicted of crimes even though they did not know it was a violation of the law. Nevertheless, many who will be tried in God’s courtroom may present a defense based on their alleged ignorance of God. Some may assert they did not know or really believe that a certain act was sin. Others may assert that they never even heard the name of Jesus Christ or the requirements of salvation. Thus, the goal will be to demonstrate a lack of personal knowledge of God and his standards. They would point to the patent unfairness of God to condemn them for their ignorance. On its face, this is probably the most compelling defense. However,

the Bible states that God has placed the knowledge of his existence in the heart of every person based on what is observed in creation; but when a person rejects the light they have been given, his heart becomes darkened:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened” (Rom. 1:18-21) (emphasis added).

A person who has never even read the Bible knows certain actions are wrong. This is not to say that a person through creation will obtain detailed knowledge of God or a comprehensive understanding of all the commandments. However, certain laws of God are written in a person’s heart and conscience. “[I]n that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them” (Rom. 2:15). Thus, the

defense “I never knew my actions or thoughts were wrong” or “I never believed God existed” will not be accepted. Certainly, the evidence at your trial will include many activities, as well as thoughts you entertained, where your own conscience warned you to refrain, but you rejected your conscience and sinned against God. Upon rejecting the knowledge of God that you were given by your conscience and creation, it will be no defense to assert that you did not receive further light regarding salvation.

The Penalty

In view of the reality that every possible defense will not work, your best option is to plead guilty and enter into a plea agreement before your death. However, in the event you reject my advice, have a trial in God’s courtroom and are convicted, I must advise you regarding the penalty of the charge.

Different crimes carry different penalties. The penalties for certain crimes may include fines, probation, home detention, prison, or death. With some crimes, the judge has the discretion on the sentence. For other crimes, the judge has no discretion on the minimum sentence that must be imposed. For example, if a person is convicted of the crime of home invasion in the State of Illinois, the judge must sentence that person to a minimum of six years in prison. It is a Class X felony. There may be all types of extenuating reasons or excuses why the defendant committed this crime, but it does not matter.

The defendant will be sentenced to six years or more in prison. When it comes to describing the penalties of a crime, sometimes lawyers may be tempted to "sugar coat" the truth. They may be overly optimistic. They do not want to be the bearers of bad news. Yet, a lawyer's job is to tell you the blunt truth.

How would you feel if you were charged with a crime and your lawyer stated you would get off easy; but when you stood before the judge, you were sentenced to four years in prison. This is what allegedly happened to Rembert Hirsch. People v. Hirsch, 312 Ill. App. 3d 174, 726 N.E.2d 672, 244 Ill. Dec. 679 (2000). Hirsch allegedly hit a man with a tire iron on the face and head. The man received about forty to fifty stitches. Hirsch was charged with several crimes including aggravated battery. In preparing for his court appearance, his lawyer allegedly told him, "[d]on't worry about it, probation is a sure thing" and that at most he would get weekends in jail. Id. at 178. But when Hirsch actually stood before the judge, to his shock, he was sentenced to four years in prison.

It is unfortunate that there are many preachers and ministers who are also minimizing and sugar coating the penalty of the charge. Many individuals appearing in God's courtroom will be absolutely blind-sided and stunned when they hear the truth, perhaps for the first time, the exact penalty of the charge. By the way, Hirsch tried to appeal his sentence by blaming his lawyer for the bad advice. He lost the appeal. His four-year prison sentence remained in effect.

The charge is this: You have sinned against God. "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The penalty of the charge is spiritual death. The Bible states, "For the wages of sin is death...." (Rom. 6:23). This not only means that a person's physical body will die because of sin but that he also will be eternally separated from God in a place called the Lake of Fire. "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). It is a place of darkness and suffering. After death, the penalty of sin will bring the full measure of God's wrath. The holiness and righteousness of God must be satisfied. Upon hearing that the penalty of the charge is eternity in the Lake of Fire, you might be thinking something similar to this:

"We live in an age of science and computers. The concept of an eternal lake of fire is old fashioned and should be relegated to the shelf with other fairy tales. Besides, how can a truly loving and merciful God sentence a person to eternal damnation. I might have to suffer a little for some of my really bad sins, but I do not believe that I will be given an eternal death penalty. I should only be given probation or at least paroled in a few years."

This type of reasoning actually sounds very logical. Unfortunately, millions of people will believe "eternal punishment is a fairy tale" only to realize two seconds

after their death that they believed a lie. But they will not be able to sue their preacher or anyone else at that point. Furthermore, there is no appeal of God's judgment. "Even from eternity I am He; and there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13). In reality, there is no probation, no chance of parole, and no day-for-day good time credit on the penalty that God will impose on those convicted of the charge. With this particular charge, God has no discretion to reduce the length of the sentence. Remember, God is holy and must fully punish sin. There is only one length of sentence that can be imposed. It is eternal. The Bible states, "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mat. 25:46).

Even though God has no discretion on the length of the sentence or the place it will be served, this does not mean that everyone will receive the same degree of punishment. There are various factors that God may consider during the sentencing phase of the trial on the level of suffering a person will experience in the Lake of Fire. It appears that the amount of suffering will be proportionate to a person's knowledge of God, the commandments, and the gospel. "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more" (Luke 12:47-48). Second, the Bible is quite clear

that a person who refuses to repent of his sin is storing up wrath upon himself. By implication, different people will store up different amounts of wrath depending on the type and amount of sin. "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deed" (Rom. 2:5-6). Thus, the degree a person suffers in the Lake of Fire most likely will be determined by the type and amount of sin committed in this life and the extent of his knowledge of God, the commandments, and the gospel.

In summary, it is true that God is very merciful, loving, and compassionate, but that is just one side of his character. To ignore the other side of God's character, which is holy and wrathful, is foolish. The penalty of the charge is the bad news - but there is good news! God is offering a plea agreement. In exchange for pleading guilty, God is offering a pardon if several conditions are met.

God's Offer of Pardon

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him" (John 3:16-17).

In human terms, God had a conflict. God must punish sin and extend his wrath and judgment because of his holiness. Every single sin that has ever been committed since the beginning of mankind must be punished fully. On the other hand, God desired to extend his forgiveness, mercy, and compassion because of his loving nature. If a pardon was to be worked out for mankind, both sides of God's character could not be compromised - and this was done. God sent his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to the earth who was born of a virgin. He lived a sinless life on this earth. Jesus Christ allowed himself to be charged with your sin and then be crucified to a cross, a Roman method of torture and execution. All of your sin was placed on Jesus Christ. God then poured out all of His wrath and judgment on his son in your place. "But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). After three days, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead.

God is offering a complete pardon on the basis that the penalty of the charge has been paid fully by Jesus Christ when he shed his blood on the cross. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (Rom. 5:9). Upon accepting the pardon, your name is recorded in heaven. "[R]ejoice that your names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20). However, God's pardon is conditional. There are specific conditions that must be satisfied in order to be eligible to receive the pardon.

Pardon condition No. 1 - Admit

The first condition is that you must plead guilty to the charge. You must admit that you have sinned against God.

Pardon condition No. 2 - Believe

The second condition is that you must believe that the penalty of your sin is eternal punishment from God. You must also believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he died on a cross and shed his blood to pay the penalty for your sin, and arose from the dead.

Pardon condition No. 3 - Commit

The third condition is that you must commit your life to Jesus Christ. "[T]hat if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9). You must be willing to submit to Jesus Christ as the absolute boss and authority of your life. You must also repent of your sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins ..." (1 John 1:9) and "[B]ut unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:5). Repentance is more than just admitting to God that you have sinned. The word "repentance" in the original Greek language of the Bible literally means to "change your mind" about sin. Repentance is telling God that you are sorry for your sin and that you are willing, by his help, to turn from sin.

Accepting the Pardon

You must personally accept the pardon. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name....” (John 1:12). All pardons must be accepted to take effect. The United States Supreme Court case of United States v. George Wilson, 32 U.S. 150 (1833), is a good example of the consequence of failing to accept a pardon. Wilson was convicted of a crime and was sentenced to death. However, the President at the time, Andrew Jackson, offered him a pardon. But for some unknown reason, Wilson refused to accept the pardon. Id. at 158. This apparently put the local authorities in a difficult position. Should Wilson be executed because he did not accept the pardon or should he still receive the benefit of the pardon? The Court observed that “[a] pardon is an act of grace ... which exempts the individual, on whom it is bestowed, from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed.” Id. at 160. The Court held that a pardon is conditional. It must be accepted. The Court further stated if the pardon was rejected, there was “no power in a court to force it on him.” Id. at 161. After the decision, we have every reason to believe that Wilson was executed.

God is offering a pardon to you. If you accept the pardon, you will not be tried! You will not be subject to the penalty of the charge! “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes He who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but passes out of death into life” (John 5:24). If you refuse to accept the

pardon, God will not force it upon you. Furthermore, you will be tried in God’s courtroom, convicted, and sentenced accordingly.

In summary, I recommend that you immediately plead guilty and enter into the plea agreement with God.

Plea Agreement

The below-mentioned person desires to enter into a Plea Agreement with GOD THE FATHER, Creator of Heaven and Earth, in full and final settlement of the charge. The effect of entering this Plea Agreement will grant the person a pardon from the penalty of all their sin. Prior to entering or signing this Plea Agreement, a person is cautioned to carefully examine his heart and motives and consider the costs. This Plea Agreement shall be void and has no legal effect should the person not commit to each and every one of the pardon conditions set forth below.

I. THE CHARGE

You Have Sinned Against God.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

II. THE PENALTY

The penalty of the charge is eternal punishment.

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23).

"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mat. 25:46).

III. THE PARDON

GOD THE FATHER has offered a complete and absolute pardon to the charge upon the below-mentioned person agreeing and committing to the following conditions:

A. Pardon Condition No. 1 - Admit

I plead guilty to the charge and admit that I have sinned against God by my actions, words, and thoughts.

B. Pardon Condition No. 2 - Believe

1. I believe that the penalty of my sin is eternal punishment.
2. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on a cross and shed His blood to pay the penalty for my sin. I believe that He was buried and arose from the dead on the third day.

C. Pardon Condition No. 3 - Commit

1. I confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and submit and surrender to Him as the absolute boss and authority of my life.

2. I repent of all my sins and ask God for His forgiveness. I also ask God for His grace and help that I might turn from all my sin.

I personally accept the pardon by faith upon understanding and fulfilling these conditions.

Signature

Dated: _____

"In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ago" (Titus 1:2).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Kugler attended Valparaiso School of Law in Valparaiso, Indiana where he earned a Juris Doctorate and graduated with Senior Honors. During law school, he received honors in scholarship and was a member of the executive board for law review as an articles editor. Prior to law school, he earned an Associate of Arts from the College of DuPage and graduated with High Honors. He also received a Bachelor of Science in Finance from Northern Illinois University. In 1988, he was admitted to the Illinois Bar. He is also admitted to practice law before the United States District Courts for the Northern and Central Districts of Illinois. He is a member of the American Bankruptcy Institute, Chicago Bar Association, Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, Seventh Circuit Bar Association, and the Illinois State Bar Association. Bruce Kugler has practiced law for more than twenty years. He has broad legal experience representing clients on issues involving personal injury, criminal matters, real estate, family matters, mechanics liens, contracts, environmental enforcement, and bankruptcy. He is currently a trial attorney with the Department of Justice.¹

¹The views stated in this booklet do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Department of Justice ("Department") or the United States. The representations in the in this booklet are made by Bruce A. Kugler in his individual capacity and not as an attorney with the Department and should not be construed as an endorsement. Reference to his title and position with the Department is made in accordance with 5 C.F.R. § 2635.807(b)(1) and (2).

If you have entered into this plea agreement, please let us know. We would like to send you more information to further explain the commitment that you have made and to assist you in living a life pleasing to God. If we can be of assistance in any way, please e-mail or write:

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