

THE BIBLE AND THE FUTURE: FINAL JUDGMENT

Matthew 25:31-40 (ESV) ³¹ When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Introduction: The notion of *judgment* in Christianity today is unpopular. “Judge not” is wielded with ferocity whenever Christians make moral judgments about society’s behavior. Judgment is unwelcome, however, until we need our day in court. Our built-in desire for vindication—whether it’s our quest for vengeance when we’ve *been wronged* or pleas for mercy when we’ve *done wrong*—testifies to an inherent, irrepressible desire for justice to be accomplished.¹

When it comes to the Final Judgment, we want to answer some of the following questions: Who’s going to be judged? Will believers be judged? Will they be judged differently than non-believers? Do believers need to fear the Final Judgment?

I. The Necessity of Final Judgment

Judgment is inescapable. No one will be exempt.

- Hebrews 9:27 — “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes **judgment**...”
- Romans 2:16 — “on that day when, according to my gospel, God **judges** the secrets of men by Christ Jesus...”
- Romans 14:10 — “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the **judgment** seat of God...”
- 2 Cor 5:10 — “For we must *all* appear before the **judgment** seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”
- Rev 20:12 — “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were **judged** by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.”

¹ The following sources were used in the development of this lesson: Randy Alcorn, *In Light of Eternity: Perspectives on Heaven* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 1999), chap. 18, Kindle; William Boekestein, *The Future of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2019); Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979); Michael Allen Rogers, *What Happens After I Die?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

On Judgment Day, as Thomas Watson writes, “sinners will be so clearly convicted that they shall hold up their hand at the bar and cry ‘guilty’ ... the sinner himself shall clear God of injustice.” Who’s going to be judged? Everyone. Who’s going to do the judging? Jesus. Will believers be judged? Yes.

II. The Nature of Final Judgment

Will believers be judged according to their works? The answer is yes. Christians will be judged according to their works.

- Rev 22:12 — “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.”
- 2 Cor 5:10 — “For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due ***for what he has done*** in the body, whether good or evil.” It’s critical to understand that the judgment of believers by Christ is a judgment of our ***works***, not our sins (1 Cor 3:13-15; cf. Rom 8:1).
- Matthew 25:31-40 — Gospel salvation is only by God's grace through faith in Christ. It is never merited by our works. Yet Christ the Judge identifies his people by *the outworking of his salvation within them* through distinguishing deeds of mercy and obedience.

Do believers have anything to fear at the Final Judgment?

John Calvin asks the following pastoral questions: “How could a most merciful prince destroy his own people? How could the head disperse its own members? How could the advocate condemn his clients?” The judge of believers is the “very One who has already stood trial in [their] place before God and so has removed the whole curse from [them].” There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). Believers may have boldness in the day of judgment (1 John 4:17-18). The judgment seat will be our place of vindication.

Listen to Anthony Hoekema’s summation (from *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 258-259):

“It is sometimes said that the sins of believers, which God has pardoned, blotted out, and cast into the sea of forgetfulness, will not be mentioned on the Day of Judgment. If it be true, however, there is nothing hidden which will not then be revealed, and that the judgment will concern itself with all our deeds, words, and thoughts, surely the sins of believers will also be revealed on that day. In fact, if it is true that even the best works of believers are polluted with sin (see Isa 64:6; Rom 3:23; Jam 3:2), how can any deeds of believers be brought into the open without some recognition of sin and imperfection? Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 that some believers build on the foundation of faith in Christ with inferior materials like wood, hay, and stubble—these will be saved but yet will suffer loss. The failures and shortcomings of such believers, therefore, will enter into the picture on the Day of Judgment. But—and this is the important point—the sins and shortcomings of believers will be revealed in the judgment as *forgiven sins*, whose guilt has been totally covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as was said, believers have nothing to fear from the judgment—though the realization that they will have to give an account of everything they have done, said, and thought should be for them a constant incentive to diligent fighting against sin, conscientious Christian service, and consecrated living.”

John Piper says that we should picture final judgment like this (see <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-will-it-be-like-at-the-judgment>):

God has a file on every person (the books of Revelation 20:12). All you've ever done or said (Matthew 12:36) is recorded there with a grade (from "A" to "F"). When you stand before the "judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10) to be judged "according to what you have done, whether good or bad," God will open the file and lay out the tests with their grades. He will pull out all the "F's" and put them in a pile. Then he will take all the "D's" and "C's" and pull the good parts of the test out and place them with the "A's", then put the bad with the "F's". Then he will take all the "B's" and "A's" and pull the bad parts out of them and put them in the "F" pile, and put all the good parts in the "A" pile.

Then he will open another file ("the book of life") and find your name. Behind your name will be a wood-stick match made from the cross of Jesus. He will take the match, light it and set the "F" pile, with all your failures and deficiencies, on fire and burn them up. They will not condemn you, and they will not reward you.

Then he will take from your "book of life" file a sealed envelope marked "free and gracious bonus" and put it on the "A" pile (see Mark 4:24 and Luke 6:38). Then he will hold up the entire pile and declare: "By this your life bears witness to the grace of my Father, the worth of my blood and the fruit of my Spirit. Enter into the joy of your Master."