

CHAPTER 12

THE JUDGMENT AND ETERNAL STATE

Judgment as universal

The Scriptures consistently associate death and resurrection with divine judgment of the individual.

Confessional statement, WCF 33:1

“God hath appointed a day, [BP Adds: (which word in Scripture in reference to the last things may represent a period of time including the thousand years following the visible, personal and pre-millennial return of Christ)], wherein He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom all power and judgement is given of the Father. In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil.”

- Specified in BP confession that “day” can be a longer period, including the millennium
- Judgment includes wicked angels
- Judgment includes all humans
- Judgment covers all of one’s life and deeds
- Reward or punishment is based on this judgment

Scriptural evidence for judgment of all people

Ps 62:12, "Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."

Prov 24:12, "If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?" (quoted in Rom 2:6)

Eccl 3:17, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked"

Eccl 11:9, "Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment."

Eccl 12:14, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

Jer 17:10, "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (cf. Jer 32:19; Ezek 18:30)

Matt 10:26, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."

Matt 12:36-37, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Matt 16:27, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."

John 5:22, 26-27, 30, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son. . . . For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. . . . By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." (for Jesus as the final judge, cf. Matt 7:20-23)

Acts 17:31, "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Acts 24:25, "As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid"

Rom 2:5-6, 16, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous

judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’ . . . This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” (referring to Ps 62:12; Prov 24:12)

Rom 14:10-12, “You then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” (referring to Isa 49:18; 45:23)

1 Cor 3:13-15, “His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” (Paul does not judge his own ministry, 1 Cor 4:3)

2 Cor 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat (*βῆμα bema*) of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

Heb 10:26-27, “If we deliberately keep on sinning, . . . no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

2 Pet 2:4, “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment . . . “

2 Pet. 3:7, “By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

Jude 6, “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.”

Rev 20:11-15, (long section vividly portraying the judgment of the great white throne)

Judgment of the saved

Many of the verses cited above mention the judgment of believers; they are not exempt.

Time of judgment

The judgment of the saved apparently occurs before the millennium begins, perhaps immediately at death. It appears that it will be completed by the time the messianic kingdom is inaugurated, since by then the saints are established in positions of authority.

Authority in the kingdom is based on this judgment. Cf. the parable of the talents in Luke 19:11-27, which was geared to teach those who thought the kingdom would appear immediately. The reward of successful judgment was the rule over cities; the parallel account is more general, Matt 25:14-30.

According to Rev 19:7-8, it appears that the church is judged before the second coming of Christ to the earth at the beginning of his visible reign.

Rev 19:7-8

Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Nature of judgment

This judgment obviously does not include the guilt of sins, which has already been judged in Christ. Rather, it seems to be a judgment for our Christian life and service, which will take into account our sins and good works (1 Cor 3:13-15). The order of preeminence and responsibility in the kingdom will hinge on this judgment.

It is important to emphasize that, while the NT uses the terminology of “rewards,” the sole glory for any good works we do must be God’s, who works good in and through us (Gal 2:20; Phil 2:12-13). Thus the promised “rewards” are actually only additional bounties of his grace.

Judgment of the lost

Time of judgment

WLC 88, What shall immediately follow after the resurrection? A. Immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgment of angels and men; the day

and hour whereof no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord. [Original version]

A. Immediately after the second resurrection shall follow the final judgment of angels and men; the destruction of the earth by fire, and the ushering in of the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. [BP Version]

Since the lost suffer punishment even in the intermediate state, there must be an initial judgment at the point of death. Their final judgment follows their resurrection at the close of the millennium, specified in Rev 20:11-15.

Nature of judgment

The lost are to be judged according to their works (good and bad), against the perfect standard of the law. All will be found guilty of rebellion (Rom 3:19). Yet there are different degrees of sinfulness (cf. WLC 150-51).

Punishments in hell will be based on this judgment, with some being punished more severely than others:

Matt 11:22, Tyre and Sidon

Matt 11:22, “But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.”

Luke 12:47-48, unknowing servant

Luke 12:47-48, “That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Rom 2:5-6, Jew vs. heathen

Rom 2:5-6, “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’”

Wicked angels will be judged at this time (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 20:10). Christians will participate in that judicial verdict (1 Cor 6:2-3).

Eternal state of the lost

Confessional statement

WCF 33:2, WLC 89

- Eternal torments
- Everlasting destruction
- Cast out from favorable presence of God
- Cast out from fellowship with Christ, saints, holy angels
- Cast into hell
- Unspeakable torments both of body and soul
- With the devil and his angels forever

Scriptural descriptions

Hell is described by various terms in the Bible, all of which contribute a different element to the eternal suffering of the lost.

- Destroys body and soul, Matt 10:28; 2 Thess 1:8-9
- Company of Satan and demons, Matt 25:41; Rev 19:20; 20:10, 15
- Fire, Matt 25:41; Rev 20:15
- Darkness, Matt 25:30
- Worms, Mark 9:43-44
- Results in thirst, weeping, gnashing of teeth, Luke 16:24; Matt 22:13; 25:30
- Perpetual and continuous torment, Rev 14:9-11

We note that many of these terrible descriptions come from Jesus Christ himself, who often warned people to flee from hell.

Duration of punishment in hell

Some Christian or quasi-Christian sects, as the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses, teach that the wicked will simply be annihilated, and will not suffer eternally in hell. This idea contradicts plain biblical statements:

Dan 12:2, “. . . others to shame and everlasting contempt”

Matt 25:46, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment.”

The J. W. *New World Translation* reads, “these will depart into everlasting cutting-off.” This translation is not at all justified; κόλασις *kolasis* means “punishment,” not “cutting-off.” They also translate the term wrongly in 1 John 4:18, “fear has to do with punishment” (*NWT*, “fear exercises a restraint”—but even here “restraint” is far different from “cutting-off”)

Luke 16:19-31, continuous torment of the rich man in hades

Rev 14:9-11, “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.” Even the *NWT* must render this passage to teach eternal torment of the lost.

Another consideration is the immortality of human beings. Unlike the animals that perish, humans live forever—whether in heaven or in hell.

The everlasting punishment of the lost should be a powerful inducement to us to have compassion for them, and to seek to do all we can to win them to Christ. Examples of this compassion are Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus himself.

Eternal state of the saved

Confessional statement

WCF 33:2, WLC 90, WSC 38

- Everlasting life
- Fullness of joy and refreshing
- Openly acknowledged and acquitted
- Join in millennial reign (BP Conf.)
- Received into heaven (earth not mentioned)
- Freed from all sin and misery
- Inconceivable joys
- Perfectly holy and happy in soul and body
- Company of the saints and the angels
- Vision and fruition of the Triune God

Scriptural descriptions of the eternal state

- Eternal life, Matt 25:46; John 3:16
- No tears, Rev 7:17; 21:4
- No hunger or thirst, Rev 7:16-17
- No unpleasant heat, Rev 7:16
- Glory, 2 Cor 4:17
- Rest, Heb 4:9
- No pain, Rev 21:4
- No night, Rev 22:5
- No curse, Rev 22:3

- Unsurpassed beauty, Rev 21:1-2
- Fellowship with others in heaven (assuming this continues in eternal state), Heb 12:22-23
- Communion with God, Rev 21:3; 22:4
- Authority with God, Rev 22:5
- Worship of God (continues in eternal state), Rev 7:9-12; 19:1
- Service to God, Rev 22:3

Degrees of reward

This principle is clear from a number of passages:

- Matt 6:20, treasures in heaven
- Matt 19:28, 12 thrones for apostles
- Matt 20:23, sit at right and left hand
- Matt 25:14-30 = Luke 19:11-27, parable of talents
- 1 Cor 3:14-15, rewards for Christian service

[Note comments made above, under “Judgment of the Saved”]