

The Final Judgment

[Brian Schwertley](#)

The final judgment is the last major event connected to the second coming of Christ. When Jesus returns, the resurrection of the body will occur and the whole human race will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This doctrine has always been maintained by the church of Christ. It was affirmed in the post apostolic church (e.g., the Apostles Creed [c.A.D.170], and the Nicene Creed [A.D. 325]) as well by all the symbols of the major Protestant denominations.¹ Although this doctrine is often met with fear and loathing among unbelievers, it is a great comfort and blessing to believers. A day of perfect justice is coming in which our Lord will be vindicated publicly and the saints will hear "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34) from the lips of Jesus. There are many things to consider as we study this important doctrine.

1. The Future Reality of the Last Judgment

It is important to establish the future reality of the final judgment because it is often denied. It is denied by modernist theologians who regard the last judgment passages as merely figurative of various judgments that occur throughout history. It also is denied by "hyper-preterists" who believe the second coming, general resurrection, and final judgment have already taken place in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed.

(A) Why do people believe that the final judgment is a process or has already taken place? A major reason is that people confuse personal, historical and partial judgments in history with the final judgment at the end of history. In the Bible there are many examples of personal (e.g., Korah [Num. 16:31-32], Ahab [1 Kgs.22: 23,34ff.] and Herod [Ac. 12: 22-23]) and national judgments (e.g., Egypt [Ex.14: 30-31; Isa. 19], Babylon [Isa.14; 21: 1-10], Judah [Isa. 1:21-31], Judah [Isa. 1:21-31], Edom [Isa. 21:11-17], etc.). The language used of these judgments is often very similar to the terminology used to describe the second bodily coming of the Lord and the final judgment (e.g., "the day of the LORD" [Isa. 2:12; 13:6; Jer. 13:5; Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2: 1,11,31; 3:14; Am. 5: 18,20; Zeph. 1: 15,18]; "the day of vengeance" [Pr.6: 34; Isa. 34:8; 61:2]; "the days of vengeance" [Lk. 21: 22]; "the day of visitation"[Isa. 10: 3]; "the day of evil" [Jer. 17:17]; "the day of slaughter" [Jer. 12: 3]; "the day of indignation" [Ezek. 22:24]; "the day of His coming" (Mal. 3:2); "Behold, He is coming" [Mal. 3:1]; "the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" [Mal. 4:5]; the coming on the clouds phraseology [cf., Isa. 19:1; Nah. 1:3; Mk. 14:62; Mt. 26:64]). The similarity of language does not mean that Christ's second bodily coming and final judgment occurred in A.D. 70 any more than in the days of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Joel. It does, however, teach us that all the visitations of judgment throughout human history point to the final day of wrath, when evil will be totally eradicated from the earth forever.

¹ E.g., The Confession of Augsburg (Article 17); The Confession of Basle (Article 9); The Confession of England (Article 23); The Belgic Confession (Article 37), the Articles of the Church of Ireland (Article 19); Westminster Confession of Faith (33: 1-3), Larger Catechism (88-90), Shorter Catechism (38); Second London Confession (Ch. 31: 1-3; 32: 1-3); the 'Orthodox Creed' (Article 50); etc.

Another reason for rejecting the final judgment as historically understood is the misinterpretation and misapplication of Hebrews 9:27, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." Full-preterists use this passage as a proof text for their assertion that the final judgment has already taken place (in A.D. 70) and that each person enters into the judgment immediately at death. In other words, the New Testament teaches not a future universal judgment but merely individual personal judgments at death. This view is erroneous for the following reasons. First, there is absolutely nothing in this passage that contradicts the biblical and confession teaching regarding a future universal judgment. Orthodox commentators interpret this passage in two different manners, both of which do not contradict the historic position of the church. The majority view regards the statement "after this the judgment" as referring to the final judgment after the second *bodily* coming of Christ. The phrase "after this" (*meta touto*) is indefinite. That is, the word after does not need to be interpreted in the sense of *immediately after* but simply sometime after. Owen writes,

Now this "after" doth not denote the immediate succession of one thing unto another; --if one go before, and the other certainly follow after, whatever length of time be interposed between them, the assertion is true and proper. Many have been long dead, probably the most that shall die, and yet judgment is not come after. But it shall come in its appointed season; and so as that nothing shall interpose between death and judgment to make any alteration in the state or condition of the persons concerned in them. The souls of them that are dead are yet alive, but are utterly incapable of any change in their condition between death and judgment. "As death leaves men, so shall judgment find them."²

The author of Hebrews is pointing out the fact that judgment invariably follows the death of the body; "for while death itself is a judgment that sinful man has brought upon himself, it is not the final judgment."³ The when of the final judgment must be determined by other portions of Scripture. "This 'judgment' is here opposed to the 'salvation of believers at the second appearing of Christ. It is the judgment of the wicked at the last great day: Rom. 2:5."⁴

Another interpretation is that the author of Hebrews is not even addressing the issue of the final judgment, but is simply pointing out that after death everyone at once has their soul placed in heaven or in hell. In contrast to the judgment of the last day, which is universal and public, this judgment is hidden and private. In favor of this view is the fact that the word for judgment (*krisis*) in this passage is *anarthrous*. "The writer does not say that *the* judgment immediately succeeds the death of the body, but that a judgment does."⁵ Young's Literal Translation of the Bible reads: "it is laid up to men once to die, and after this--judgment."⁶ One's immediate state after death is a declaration concerning the eternal condition of the deceased. Those who are not in Christ immediately receive a condemnatory sentence.

Second, one must reject the hyper-preterist interpretation of Hebrews because it is contradicted by many clear portions of Scripture. A principal rule of biblical interpretation is that the clearer portions of the Scripture must be used to interpret the less clear. Not only does God's word unequivocally teach that the final judgment occurs after the second *bodily* coming of

² John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1855]), 6:410.

³ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 387.

⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), p. 525.

⁵ William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889) 2:660, footnote number 1.

⁶ Robert Young, *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977 [1889]), p. 153.

Christ⁷ and the general resurrection, it also teaches that it is a universal event (i.e., all men and women who have ever lived will be raised and judged together). Before considering the biblical chronology of the final judgment let us first turn our attention to a few passages that explicitly disprove hyper-preterism.

One such passage is John 5: 28-29. It reads: "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in their graves 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 condemnation." There are a number of reasons why this passage cannot refer to regeneration, progressive condemnations or the events of judgment in A.D. 70. (1) Unlike verse 25 which refers to regeneration (which Jesus says is already taking place - "and now is") the events of verse 28 and 29 are entirely future: "the hour is coming". (2) The phrase "those who have done good" points not to regeneration but to the fruits of saving faith lived over the course of one's Christian life. (3) Jesus doesn't say "the dead" (as in verse 25) which often refers to spiritual death (e.g., Eph. 2:1; Lk. 9:60); but uses the expression "all who are in the graves." This expression is

⁷ The book of Acts describes Jesus second bodily coming as something very different than His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into Heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up for you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'" (Ac. 1: 9-11). The phrase "in like manner" (NKJV) means literally "in what manner" or "in that manner in which" (see C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960], p. 132.) In other words "in like manner" means "in the same manner". "The Greek phrase (*hon tropon*) never indicates mere certainty or vague resemblance; but wherever it occurs in the New Testament, denotes identity of mode or manner" (J.A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles* [Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1963 (1857)], p. 16). Note that "in like manner" and "as you saw Him" are essentially expressions of the same idea twice. "The fact of his [bodily] second coming and the manner of it are also described by this emphatic repetition" (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d. (1930)], 3:12). God wants to make sure that the church gets the doctrine of the second coming right.

Now, let us compare the description of the second coming in Acts 1: 9-11 to the coming in judgment that occurred in A.D. 70. (1) Acts teaches that Christ's return will be *bodily*. He left in the same body in which He lived, was crucified, buried and resurrected. He ascended in His glorified human body and He will descend in the same body. Did Jesus return in His glorified physical body in A.D. 70? No, he most certainly did not. In Matthew 24 we are specifically told that the judgment upon Jerusalem is "the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven" (Mt. 24:30 (Young's Literal Translation of the Bible). In other words, Christ judges Jerusalem from His throne in heaven. There is no bodily descent. (2) The account in Acts describes a *non-literal, non-bodily coming*. The coming on the clouds terminology of Matthew 24:30 is taken from Daniel 7:13 which describes our Lord's ascension up into heaven to the right hand of power and the poetic metaphor language of the Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isa. 19:1; Nah. 1:3). In the Old Testament Jehovah did not literally come upon heathen nations riding on the clouds. Acts 1: 9-11 however, teaches that just like the apostles people will be able see Jesus' body. (3) The account in Acts emphasizes the fact that our Lord's ascension was *visible*. Thus "in the same manner" His second coming will be visible. That is, His resurrected body will be on display. In the judgment on Jerusalem Christ was *invisible*. He was not on display, because He was at the right hand of God in heaven. When Matthew 24:30 says that all the tribes of the land "will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" it is speaking of the fact that that generation will witness the judgment of Christ personally, not that they will literally see Jesus' descending body. (4) The account in Acts teaches that Jesus' second bodily coming will involve a literal descent from heaven. He will come in a *vertical* descent from heaven to earth. The account of our Lord's coming in judgment does not describe *vertical* motion but *horizontal*; "as lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west" (Mt. 24:27). The difference between Acts 1:9-11 and Matthew 24:27 is very easy to account for because they are describing two completely separate and different events. In one, Jesus literally descends in His glorified and spiritual body to earth. In the other Christ never leaves heaven but judges apostate Israel. His coming is figurative. The coming from east to west describes the massive Roman armies moving across the land from the east to the west. Anyone willing to study the Scriptures who is not spiritually blind can see the hyper-preterism is heretical nonsense.

obviously meant to be taken literally. The hyper-preterist appeal to the dry bones and graves imagery of Ezekiel 37 cannot be applied to John 5:28-29. God interprets the poetic imagery of Ezekiel and says explicitly that it refers to the revival and restoration of Israel to their land after the captivity. In John's gospel Jesus' statement is not poetic metaphor and is left uninterpreted because it is meant to be taken at face value. (4) The phrase "all who are in their graves" cannot refer *only* to people who are unregenerate or spiritually dead because it is applied by Christ to both the saved (the regenerate) and the lost. Unlike verse 25 where Jesus says "those who hear will live" which implies two classes of people (hearers--regenerate and non-hearers--unregenerate), verse 28 refers to the whole number of the dead. (5) Our Lord speaks of a resurrection with two opposite results. One results in life (i.e., eternal life) the other in condemnation. That condemnation refers to both body and soul being cast into the lake of fire is proved in two ways. First, the unregenerate/unbelieving person is said in Scripture to be condemned already (Jn. 3: 18). Therefore, what Christ points to in the future is something more than just being unregenerate or unsaved. Second, the resurrection to condemnation cannot refer simply to going to hell when one dies because: a.) Jesus said it is future (i.e., it hasn't happened yet). Yet, when our Lord spoke those words, millions of people were already in hell and, b.) Christ spoke of a single event ("all...will come forth"), not a progressive process. (6) The Old Testament verse that closely resembles Jesus' statement speaks of a literal resurrection. "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12: 2-3). "The major difference between this passage and John 5: 28-29 is that Daniel is only speaking about the Jews who died during the period of great distress."⁸ Our Lord uses the word "all" and emphasizes that all (both saved and lost) will arise at His command. Daniel's expression, literally "those who sleep in the ground of dust shall awake", cannot be circumvented by hyper-preterists. The word "sleep" in Scripture is used of people who are physically dead (cf. Lk. 8: 52-56; Jn. 11:11, 13; Ac. 7: 60; 1 Cor. 11: 30; 15:51; 1 Th. 4:14:5:10). The phrase "dust of the earth" (lit. "dusty earth") is based on Genesis 3:19. It refers to the grave (cf. Job. 20:11), the resting place of the dead body. A literal *bodily/physical* resurrection of both the saved and unsaved will occur in the future. Since graveyards are presently full of dead human bodies (both saved and lost) we know positively that hyper-preterism is a lie of the devil.

Another passage that completely disproves the hyper-preterist heresy is Matthew 10:28, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy *both* soul and body in hell." Our Lord tells the disciples not to fear their persecutors who only have power to cause physical death. Such wicked men can only do harm to our physical bodies. They cannot harm or destroy the soul (*psyche*). However, Christians are to fear God who has the power "to destroy both soul and body in hell." The Bible teaches that there is an immaterial, invisible element to man called the soul or spirit (*psyche, pneuma*). There also is a physical, material, visible aspect of man, the body (*soma*). God has the authority to cast both body and soul into hell (Greek, *gehenna*). This word is "generally used to describe the abode of the wicked, body and soul, after the judgment day".⁹ "'Soul and body in Gehenna' implies the bodily resurrection of the damned."¹⁰ Hendriksen writes,

⁸ Edward J. Young, *Daniel* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1949]), p. 256.

⁹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 472.

¹⁰ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1961 [1943]), p. 411.

Jesus, then, is saying that there is an everlasting future for both the soul and the body. Neither will ever be annihilated. But everlasting "destruction" is in store for those who reject him. The attempt to save the body so that it may continue to exist here and now for a very brief span of time, while the everlasting interests of the entire person, soul and body, are being neglected, is foolish indeed, like exchanging a minor for a major peril.¹¹

Has there been a point in history in which all the wicked were raised from the dead and then cast "both soul and body" into hell? No, there most definitely has not. Therefore, hyper-preterism is false. Such heretics must deny many explicit passages of Scripture in order to cling to their doctrinally perverse paradigm. Many more examples could be cited but we must move on.¹²

(B) The Bible teaches that the final judgment will occur immediately after the second coming and the general resurrection. Matthew 25:31-34, 41 reads,

When the Son of man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"...then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

In Revelation 20: 11-15 we read,

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (cf. Mt. 13:30; 47-50)¹³

¹¹ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 472.

¹² Hyper-preterism is a dangerous heresy because it not only is an *implicit* denial of Christ's *bodily* resurrection; it also leads to the redefinition and perversion of several important doctrines. (1) The bodily resurrection is rejected by a forced redefinition of 1 Cor. 15 and other passages. Thus, it is taught that Jesus doesn't save the whole man but only an aspect of man. (2) The *literal, bodily* second coming of Christ is rejected in favor of a coming in judgment upon Jerusalem. (3) The final, universal, public judgment is rejected (the capstone of our Lords' exaltation) in favor of a partial judgment in A.D. 70 or progressive judgments at death. (4) The glorification of the saints on the final day is rejected. (5) The rapture of the saints on the last day is rejected. (6) The complete restoration of the earth and turning back of the fall at Jesus' second coming is rejected. Hyper-preterists severely limit the impact of our Lord's resurrection and glorification. (7) The wicked are not *publicly* condemned and cast into the lake of fire. (8) There is no *public* vindication of Christ and the persecuted saints. (9) There is never a time in history when the salvation achieved by Jesus (which is definitive, progressive and final) is brought to completion. What is particularly dangerous regarding this heresy is that hyper-preterists will claim to believe in most or all of these doctrines, but, like modernists, they completely redefine them giving them a meaning that not only violates standard procedures of interpretation, but contradicts all the creeds and confessions of every branch of the Christian church throughout history. Beware of false prophets; their doctrine can devour you.

¹³ Hyper-preterists often will argue that the great white throne judgment of Revelation is a figurative way of describing progressive judgments throughout history. The passage, however, emphasizes that *all* the dead from *every* place are summoned before Him: "all the dead in Hades", "all the dead in the sea", "anyone not found in the Book of Life". Ignoring the plain meaning of the text hyper-preterists will repeat the mantra, "the time indicators."

These passages are so clear that no one should be taken in by the skeptical perversions of the modernists or hyper-preterists. All nations are judged together in a public manner. All the dead are raised and set before the judgment seat of Christ. "The manner and place of their dying make no difference; it matters not whether they were drowned at sea or consumed by fire or devoured by wild beasts, or whether they succumbed through illness or old age; all are given up to judgment."¹⁴

(C) Scripture says that the final judgment will be accompanied by a destruction of the earth by fire and will be immediately followed by the handing of the kingdom over to the Father. 2 Peter 3:7, 10-13 reads,

But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men...But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Note that Peter compares and contrasts the destruction of the world by water (3:6), which was a global event with the coming destruction of the earth by fire. When Jesus returns not only will all evil and sin be destroyed, but the earth as we know it now will likewise be destroyed. There will be no more disease; there will be no more death, crying and sorrow. All suffering will be removed. "There will be a glorified earth and a glorified heaven, and glorified men and women will live on such an earth and under such a heaven."¹⁵ The final consummation is a world-wide (i.e., it covers the entire globe) event; it cannot be limited to Palestine or the Roman Empire in A.D. 70.¹⁶ This fundamental truth is why Paul says the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of

The time indicators of Revelation are not as specific as those which frame Matthew 23:36 to 24:34. In Matthew Jesus repeatedly says "all these things". The "all these things" refers to what precedes verse 34. In Revelation it simply says "the things which must shortly take place." The fact that Christ points the church to the final victory at the end of history does not violate the time indicators. The bulk of the prophecy deals with events that must shortly take place.

¹⁴ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 219.

¹⁵ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter* (Carlisle, Pa: Banner of Truth, 1983), pp. 193-194.

¹⁶ This author is aware that some orthodox (i.e., partial) preterists apply 2 Peter 10ff to the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70. Although this interpretation is possible, there are a number of reasons why it is unlikely. First, it is probable that 2 Peter is written to Christians throughout Asia Minor (cf. 2 Pet. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:1). Why, we ask, should believers in Asia Minor (whether Jewish believers or a Gentile-Jewish mix) live in sober fear because the Romans are going to march into Judea and kill their persecutors. Second, (as noted) Peter contrasts the destruction of the world (*kosmos*) by water with its coming destruction by fire. If the apostle were discussing a localized event (i.e., Judea only) this comparison would be unlikely. Third, Peter mentions scoffers that will arise that will challenge the coming of Christ because of its lengthy delay (3:3). Given the fact that 2 Peter was written around A.D. 67-68 this warning would be unlikely for an event only a few years away. Fourth, when discussing Christ's delayed coming, Peter gives the following reason: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (3:9). Why would the Lord delay His destruction of Jerusalem in order for the elect in Asia Minor to come to Jesus? If Peter is talking about our Lord's bodily coming at the end of history such a delay makes perfect sense. Fifth, Peter's statement that "the heavens and the earth...are reserved for fire until the day of judgment" uses a phrase almost identical to Jude 6

the Son of God so that it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:19-25). No domain will be left in the universe in which the absolute supremacy of Christ and of His work is not fully realized and made effective. The final judgment is coterminous or immediately prior to that great event.

(D) In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that after the general resurrection Christ's kingdom will be handed over to the Father.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till he has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (15:20-26).

Since the Bible places the final judgment immediately after the second coming of Christ and general resurrection, Paul's statement renders any concept of a progressive judgment or a final judgment in A.D. 70 impossible. The word translated "end" (Gk. *sunteleia*) means full end. There is to be an ultimate and final consummation when death is forever eliminated and the eternal state of perfect and final victory is realized. "The end is, when Christ shall deliver up his kingdom, after having subdued all his enemies; i.e., after having accomplished the work of redemption"¹⁷ (i.e., bringing it to a full completion in history whereby all the elect are saved, have glorified bodies, and inherit a glorified earth). When Christ's definitive victory of the cross and resurrection is fully and completely brought to pass in history, then He will "deliver up" this authority or rule to His Father. Hyper-preterists (if consistent) would teach that this has already occurred. (The proof of a future final judgment is also demonstrated in the universality of the parties involved discussed below).

("And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains for the judgment of the great day"). All orthodox theologians and commentators apply Jude 6 to the final judgment. Sixth, after describing catastrophic events that are a prelude to the creation of a perfectly redeemed world (cf. Rom. 8:19-22) Peter states in unequivocal terms that righteousness dwells in the new heavens and the new earth (3:13). The eschatological expectation of this state of righteousness indicates that Peter is describing not simply the existence of believers and the church as it now exists in a corrupt world but something beyond that. The present world order which has sin, corruption, evil, suffering and fleshly desires will be eliminated and replaced by a glorified earth "in which righteousness dwells." Peter describes the final great redemptive benefit of our Lord's resurrection power. The destruction of Jerusalem was the completion of the covenant transfer to the Church and was important in the history of redemption. It, however, cannot account for the eschatological expectation of 2 Peter 3:13.

But, some will ask, "What about Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22? Don't these passages speak of what occurred at our Lord's first advent when He definitively made a new heavens and a new earth by His redemption?" Indeed they do. Isaiah 66:22 even applies to the passing away of the old Israel and the formation of the church, the true Israel of God (cf. Eph. 2:13-22; 3:6, 10). One must keep in mind, however, that our Lord's recreation of all things is definitive, progressive and final. Peter, in 2 Peter 3, speaks to the completion of this process. He is discussing the "not yet." His use of the phraseology of Isaiah is not inconsistent with the prophets' teaching when understood in its theological context.

¹⁷ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857]), p.327.

2. The Subjects of Judgment

The Bible teaches that at the final judgment Jesus will judge the whole human race ("the quick and the dead") as well as the fallen angels. In Matthew 13 our Lord said that the wheat and the tares would be gathered and separated at the end of the age (vs. 30, 36-43). In the parable of the dragnet the wicked and the just are gathered, separated and judged by Christ (Mt. 13:47-50). In Matthew 25 all nations stand before Jesus and the sheep and goats will be separated one from another (vs. 31-34, 41). Paul in his preaching at the Areopagus was very clear on the universality of the last judgment. He said, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Ac. 17:30-31). Note that the word "world" must be interpreted in the context of the phrase "all men everywhere" (v. 30). All men everywhere (a double expression emphasizing universality--"every person in every place") must repent because the world ("all men everywhere") will be judged. One cannot legitimately restrict the term "world" in this passage to the Roman Empire.

The account in Revelation 20 is especially clear on the issue: "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (vs. 12-13). All the dead, whether small or great, whether in the grave or at the bottom of the sea, are summoned. Billions of people and myriads of angels will be gathered before the throne of the Son of God. These passages are in fundamental agreement with John 5:28-29 which speaks of all who are in their graves being resurrected and judged at the same time ("an *hour* is coming" when "*all* who are in their graves will arise"). This scenario is also supported by 1 Thessalonians 5 where Paul says that when Christ returns the wicked will receive sudden destruction (v. 3) while the righteous will be saved (v. 9).

In addition, the Bible says that evil angels will be judged on that day. Peter writes "God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Jude 6 says that the fallen angels are "reserved in everlasting chains in darkness for the judgment of the great day". In Revelation 20 we are told that the devil will be "cast into the lake of fire" where "he will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (v. 10). This fate awaits all demons. That is why the demons ask Jesus in Matthew 8:29, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" Even the demons know that a day of judgment, over which Christ sits supreme, awaits them.

A question that is often asked regarding the last judgment is: "Will the sins of believers be made public on that day"? There are theologians and commentators who argue that since the sins of Christians are covered by the blood of Christ, they cannot be a subject of discussion at the judgment. Although the Bible teaches that believers have the guilt and penalty of their sins removed and are clothed with Jesus' perfect righteousness and thus are not in danger of being cast into hell, Scripture does teach very clearly that all Christians will have to give an account on that day. The reasons for this assertion are manifold. First, one cannot avoid the biblical passages that speak of the judgment as an event that includes both the saved and the unsaved (e.g., Eccl. 12:14; Mt. 13:30, 36-43, 47-50; 25:31-34, 41; Ac. 17:30-31; Rev. 20:12-13). Second, the evaluation of a believer's works on the day of judgment is explicitly taught in the epistles and is

used by Paul to spur believers toward greater diligence in sanctification. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10) "He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Cor. 4:4-5). "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work that he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:12-15). "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ....So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10,12). Even the elders of the church must give an account before God (Heb. 13:17). "An account cannot be given, however, except by a careful disclosure of one's entire conduct, and thus the imperfections and failures of the faithful will of necessity also be made public."¹⁸ Third, passages which warn believers that "God will judge the secrets of men" (Rom. 2:16); that men will give an account on the day of judgment "for every idle word" they speak (Mt. 12:36) cannot (given the context and audience) be restricted to unsaved sinners. Statements made by Jesus and the apostles, which are intended to spur Christians to a greater obedience, lose all their force if they do not apply to believers!

This view of the judgment raises a number of objections. First, if Jesus paid for all our sins why would He bring them up again on that day? Would this not bring shame upon the saints?¹⁹ Is not such shame incompatible with the joy of that day? One must keep in mind that the sins evaluated are *forgiven* sins. They are brought up not to shame the believer but to magnify God's grace and determine a suitable reward. Further, all saints who appear before the Son of God in their glorified bodies will be happy to confess all their sins to Christ. Being perfected in their sanctification, Christians on that day will not feel shame but rather will experience the sweetest type of spiritual joy. They will evaluate their own works not from a standpoint of selfishness, ego or self-glorification, but from the standpoint of having the mind of Christ. Thus, even the most faithful of saints will throw their crowns at the pierced feet of the Savior (Rev. 4:10).

Second, doesn't the Bible say that the sins of believers are covered (Ps. 32:1), washed away (Ps. 51:2), cast into the depth of the sea (Mic. 7:19), never to be remembered by God (Isa. 43:25)? Indeed, it does say these things. However, these statements must be understood within the full context of Scripture. A reading of the Bible reveals that not only are the sins of great saints such as Moses, Abraham, David and Peter remembered by God, but are recorded in Scripture and thus published before all for eternity (Isa. 40:8). When the Bible speaks about God removing and forgetting sin it means that the guilt and penalty are removed. God no longer holds the sin against the sinner for Christ has paid the price. The passages regarding God forgetting sin

¹⁸ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 4:345.

¹⁹ A passage of Scripture that teaches that genuine believers will not experience shame at Christ's coming is 1 John 2:28. "And now little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." "Believers do not turn in shame from Christ for they know that their sins have been forgiven. They are free from shame. But those who have pretended to be Christians cannot stand in the revealing light of his coming. They cannot hide their shame" (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986], p. 288).

must be applied to guilt and punishment for it is impossible for God to forget anything in a literal manner.

Third, doesn't Jesus' evaluation of the saints in the account of the last judgment in Matthew 25 refer to the good deeds of the saints (e.g. verses 35-36, "for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in", etc.)? Indeed, it does. This section of Scripture, however, does not give an exhaustive description of the final judgment but only an abbreviated one. Christ is emphasizing the necessity of good works as a fruit of true faith and simply does not discuss the saint's full evaluation that is clearly taught in other portions of Scripture. Paul, for example, discusses works that are essentially useless that will be consumed by fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

3. Jesus Christ the Judge

The Bible teaches that the judge of all mankind will be the divine-human mediator Jesus Christ. Our Lord said that "the Son of Man", "The King" would sit on the throne of His glory and judge all nations (Mt. 25:31ff.). John's gospel says the Father "has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man" (Jn. 5:27). When Peter preached to the Gentiles in Cornelius' house, he taught the people the importance of this doctrine saying, "And He commanded us to teach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead" (Ac. 10:42). Likewise Paul said to the Athenians, "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (Ac. 17:31). For Paul the knowledge of this coming day is a reason for believers to live in a manner that pleases Jesus, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1).

Why does the Father give Jesus this great role as the judge of the world on the final day? There are three reasons for our Lord to be given such a role. The first and main reason is to glorify the Mediator. Christ's role as judge is an aspect of His exaltation. It is part of His reward for his redemptive obedience. After describing our Lord's state of humiliation even to the death of the cross, Paul says, "Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth" (Phil. 2:9-10).

What an incredible display of Christ's glory, honor, and power will that day bring. The days of humiliation are all in the past. The time of supreme exaltation has arrived. The Man born in a filthy manger, hunted by Herod, despised and rejected by the people, who suffered at the hands of wicked, unjust men, who was spit upon, beaten, whipped and crucified, is now seated on the great white throne, surrounded by a mighty army of angels, encircled with a great rainbow, with a countenance brighter than the sun. In his exalted presence every knee must bow. Jesus will have gone from the bitter dregs of debasement and humiliation to the throne of universal judgment--what an incredible ascent! He who was judged at Pilate's seat will summon all to His throne. Before Him caesars, statesmen, generals, pontiffs, emperors, kings and all men of renown will bow as beggars in the dust. What a change from the insults and the spitting, the nails and the wounds, the mockery and the thirst, the abandonment and the dying anguish to the

glory which will be revealed in that day.²⁰ Are you ready to stand before Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire?

Jesus' judging of the whole world is the crowning honor of His kingship. As king of the nations, it is proper that He should conclude His mediatorial sovereignty by sitting in judgment over all kingdoms. This is an important aspect of gospel preaching. Our Lord has been and continues to be the prince over all men and all nations. No one is excepted. As the mediatorial king Christ demands repentance and submission to His law-word. Men and nations must either submit themselves to Jesus as Lord by believing the gospel and repenting of their sins or be broken as a potter's vessel and be cast into hell. All men need to be told that a time is coming in which the messiah-king will judge and mete out vengeance upon His enemies. Sinners must bow before those pierced feet in the present or be crushed like grapes in the winepress of God's wrath in the future.

Second, Jesus alone is uniquely suited to judge mankind because He is both God and man in one person. The fact that Christ will judge the secrets or hidden things of the heart is a great proof of His divinity. Only God who is omniscient knows and remembers our secret sins, our innermost thoughts and motives. Only God can dispense perfect justice on such a grand scale to literally billions and billions of people. Only God has the authority to determine what is good and what is evil; and, only God has the judicial authority to sentence men to the second death. Our Lord is uniquely qualified to judge humanity because he was tempted in all points like us, yet without sin. Men will never be able to say that they were judged by a detached remote being that did not know their weaknesses and temptations. Christ is a partaker of our humanity. He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Therefore, He understands what it is to be a man. No person will ever be able to look back on that day and say that He who sat on the great white throne was too stern because He knew nothing of human weakness.²¹

Third, Jesus is uniquely suited to judge all mankind because He is the mediator of the covenant of grace. Throughout all of human history, after the fall, grace and mercy came through Christ. It is appropriate that the one who endured the shame and shed His own blood so that men might be reconciled to God should judge all people who reject His gospel. Everyone who rejects the vicarious suffering (the tears, the bloodlike sweat, the thorn-pierced head, the blood-stripped back, the gaping wounds and agony of soul) that our Savior endured deserves to be judged by the one they so coldly rejected. Every person who rejected the Savior's message of peace, mercy and love must endure the judge's words of wrath and fiery indignation. Those who treated the gospel offer with apathy or contempt will on that day be seized with horror and dread.

4. The Nature of the Judgment

There are a number of things that ought to be noted regarding the nature of the judgment.

(A) The judgment is a public event.²² Jesus will return in glory surrounded by the host of heaven. As the judge he will summon all mankind (Mt. 25:32). The dead will arise at His call (Jn

²⁰ See C. H. Spurgeon, "Coming Judgment of the Secrets of Men" in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised in 1885* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1971 [1886]), 31:380.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31:381.

²² The universality and public nature of the judgment is implied in the passages where Jesus teaches that generations of people who have been dead for centuries will be present at the last judgment to receive a lighter sentence and even stand as examples against the generation living in Jesus' day. "But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you....it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of

5:28-29). The dead will come forth from their graves and even the oceans will give up the dead within them (Rev. 20:13). God has ordained the final day to be public for a number of reasons. First, (as noted) its public nature will glorify Christ. Our Lord who was *publicly* humiliated, condemned as a criminal and crucified will be *publicly* exalted and vindicated before the whole human race. Every mouth will be stopped and every knee will bow before Him. Second, God has decreed that the secrets of men whether good or evil be exposed in a very public manner. "In the day when God will judge the secrets of man by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Rom. 2:16). Every sinner will hear the story of his wicked life published to his everlasting shame. The public nature of the event is obviously intended to magnify the guilt, shame and dread of the occasion. Third, the public nature of the event is also a vindication of the saints. Not only will the covenant people witness the exposure and condemnation of their enemies and persecutors; the persecutors of faithful Christians, the skeptics and mockers of the truth, will witness the exaltation of believers for the fruits of faith, the good works done in the body. It is a day when the tables are turned, when the humble shall be exalted, the meek shall inherit the earth and the wicked, the proud, and the boastful shall be abased. All who laughed at the true religion will be publicly cast into hell.

(B) The judgment is a judicial event. The whole scene of this event is one of a grand courtroom. There is a summons to which all must appear. There are spectators---the human race and the angelic hosts. There is the judge--Jesus Christ. There is the examination of evidence whereby everyone outside of Christ is proclaimed guilty and those who believed are declared righteous based on the merits of Christ. There is also the execution of the sentence. The wicked are cast into the lake of fire while the righteous are ushered into paradise. With His pierced hand Jesus will wave the impenitent away. The same lips that asked the multitudes to come to the wedding feast will say to the wicked, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"(Mt. 25:41).

(C) The judgment brings an end to all rebellion against God forever. Human history has a terminus point, a time of reckoning. God permitted a long age of rebellion. For thousands of years God has showed patience and longsuffering to a wicked world. He has blessed the wicked with sunshine, rain, food and delights of every kind (beautiful beaches, lovely sunsets, family, friends, enjoyments, great food, fun vacations, laughter and merriment). But a day is coming when all rebellion will be crushed. For the unrepentant the "good times" are coming to an end. The doctrine of the final judgment is a total repudiation of evolutionary, cyclical or Manichean concepts of history. There has been a long day for sinning; therefore, God has ordained a special day for punishing. The definitive victory over evil that Christ achieved at the cross becomes a perfected reality on that day when the sheep are forever separated from the goats.

5. The Necessity of the Judgment

Why is this final universal judgment necessary? Why doesn't God just progressively deal with sinners on an individual basis? Why doesn't God just overlook the sins in a person's life or just extinguish evil people by placing them in a state of non-existence? Why does God go to all

judgment than for you" (Mt. 11:23-24). "The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here" (Mt. 12:41). These passages render the idea that the final judgment passages only refer to a person's judgment at death impossible, for whole generations from different eras and locations *rise up together* and are *judged together* on the *same day*--the day of judgment.

the trouble of having this grand public event? There are a number of reasons why the final judgment is necessary. (A) God's nature and character requires that a perfect and public reckoning take place. Every rebellious act against Jehovah's holiness must receive its proper reward. God's righteousness requires that sin be punished by death. The whole universe must witness the reality that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. The last judgment is a public display of God's righteous and holy character. Jehovah wants every rational creature who ever lived to understand why Jesus had to suffer and die. In that great day there will be display of the unity of all of God's perfections (wrath and love, righteousness and mercy) as every sin is met with justice. It will be clear that the elect are cleansed with the blood of Christ and clothed with His perfect righteousness. It will also be evident that those who hear "depart you cursed" are receiving exactly what justice requires. All men will observe how love and righteousness meet in equal splendor in the mediatorial king.

(B) The final judgment resolves the many injustices that occur in this world that have not been rectified on earth. There are wicked people who live and die in the lap of luxury. There are murderers, rapists and thieves who are never caught, exposed and punished for their crimes. There are dictators who oppress the poor, torture and murder innocent people, yet who live in palaces and die at a very old age. There are many people who have been severely wronged and have not experienced closure or justice in this life. There are thousands of Christians who have been slandered, beaten, imprisoned and even murdered for their faith. Will a righteous and holy God allow such inequities to go unpunished? Will the God of perfect justice allow injustice to continue in His universe? Will Jehovah allow evil people to get away with their sins and crimes? God's nature requires that all injustices be resolved. God displays His perfect justice by publicly exposing all sins and crimes, by publicly declaring the guilt of the offending parties and by publicly meting out the sentence of condemnation. There is a day of perfect justice and closure because God's nature demands it. There are no ethical loose ends in Jehovah's kingdom. God will also make sure that all those who believed in Christ and faithfully served Him will be rewarded openly. There must be and there will be a day when God will judge the world.

6. The Standard of the Judgment

The standard by which all men will be judged is God's revealed will in Scripture and nature. Jesus says: "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (Jn. 12:48). Paul says that even people who do not have written revelation will be judged. "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). The apostle goes on to discuss the fact that Gentiles (i.e., those who do not possess special revelation--the written Scriptures) have "the work of the law written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). Because everyone is created in God's image, people have "moral motions." They have consciences that accuse or excuse when they commit certain acts (cf. Rom. 2:16). Therefore, people cannot use the fact that they never had a Bible as an excuse to avoid God's judgment and condemnation. Everyone knows what is right and wrong. Therefore, Jesus can say that at the resurrection all will "come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn. 5:29-30). Deeds are defined as either good or evil. These categories are obviously defined by God. (Although this passage appears to teach that good deeds are what make the difference between heaven and hell on the final day, we know from other portions of Scripture that the good deeds of believers are

the evidence or fruit of saving faith and thus are non-meritorious [cf. Rom. 3:21-28; 4: 5-8; Gal. 3:10-13; Jas. 2:14-26; etc.]).

Although the Bible teaches that people who have never received divine revelation or heard the gospel will be judged and condemned, it also teaches that the severity of the punishment is related to the amount of light spurned by the parties involved. Jesus taught that those who rejected the gospel message accompanied by great signs will receive a greater damnation. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for you" (Mt. 11:21-22). He also said that people who knew God's requirements yet who refused to obey them will receive greater punishment. "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of strips, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Lk. 12: 47-48). This principle is also taught in the parable of the talents where God expects a return on His investment (Mt. 25:20-30).

Even believers will receive rewards based on the quality of the works while done on earth. "Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work, which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Note that there is no danger of being cast into hell if one has inferior stubble as works. This passage teaches that even though God enables us to do good works by His grace, in His sovereign good pleasure He gives us rewards for these works of grace. Although the question of whether or not a person goes to heaven or hell depends solely on whether or not he believes in Jesus Christ, there are different degrees of punishment in hell as well as different rewards in heaven. Everything will be determined on that great day according to what was done on earth.

7. The Extent of Disclosure on the Day of Judgment

The disclosure of conduct on that day will be exhaustive. Not only will all men without exception appear before the judgment seat of Christ, but also every sin will be made manifest. "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14). "In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel"(Rom 2:16). God will judge men's *thoughts*--"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5); *words*--"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Mt. 12:36-37; cf. Jude 15 below); and *deeds*--"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Mt. 7:23). "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; for I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink" (Mt. 25:41-42). "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds

which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14-15).

Why does the Bible emphasize the exhaustive nature of the final judgment? Why is the public examination so meticulous? A major reason is that the judgment reflects God's nature and character. Jehovah not only wants us to know that He is omniscient but that every deed is noted for the coming day. The author of Hebrews reminds us of this fact. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account" (Heb. 4:13). God tells us that every single sin committed will be exposed. Because God is both omniscient and perfectly just the judgment must be exhaustive. Jehovah cannot overlook violations of His law. He must right every wrong and render a perfect verdict in every case. If men are to be rewarded according to their deeds, then the deeds must be brought to light. Even sins committed in the heart (lust, unlawful hatred, impure thoughts, etc.) will be examined. What David says regarding himself in Psalm 139:1-4 applies to everyone. "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off, You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether" (Ps. 139:1-4).

God has also made the judgment exhaustive in order to strike fear into the hearts of men. Unbelievers are to be warned that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Jehovah; that God sees and knows all things at one time exhaustively. God is watching. We are always under the eyes of holiness. There is no escape from perfect justice. No one will get away with sinful thoughts, words or acts. Every impure thought, every lie, every hurtful word, every act of fornication, every Sabbath desecration, every filthy joke will be recorded and made known. For the ungodly the judgment is a day of supreme terror. Therefore, knowledge of this great day should make sinners flee to Christ. The only refuge from an infinitely holy and omniscient God who knows all of our evil thoughts, words and acts is the atoning death and perfect righteousness of Christ. This reality is the reason that Paul says that the final judgment is an essential part of the gospel. "God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, *according to my gospel*" (Rom. 2:16). The background of the cross is the judgment seat of Christ. If God's nature did not require a day when perfect justice is meted out, then God would not have required the death of Christ for sin. The exhaustive, meticulous nature of the final judgment reveals the exceeding sinfulness of sin. No stone will be left unturned because God hates sin with a perfect and infinite hatred. Such a day points to need and greatness of our Lord's atoning death. Only the incredible sufferings of the God-man; the mediator who offered so vast a sacrifice; who endured the judgment and the terrors of hell can propitiate an omniscient and infinitely holy God.

This doctrine is also set before the Christian as an incentive toward holiness and good works. Professing Christians often make a distinction between secret and public sins. God, however, does not. All sins will be laid bare. Secret offenses will be brought into judgment. The deeds of the night. The sins hidden behind closed doors. Even sins hidden from husband or wife. If a professing Christian is living in dishonesty, untruthfulness, fornication, adultery, uncleanness or idolatry it will all be made known on that day. "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later" (1 Tim. 5:24). All hypocrisy will come to an end on that day. Hypocrites will have an eternity to ponder their foolishness and shame.

Further, all the sacrifices, good deeds and even secret works done on behalf of Christ will receive a reward. This fact should be a great incentive for kingdom work. We strive for righteousness and buffet our bodies not to receive the praise of men but to hear the words of our

precious Savior, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 25:34). The wise and diligent Christian lays up "treasures in heaven where neither moth, nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Mt. 6:20). The fervent believer runs the race so that he may obtain a prize (1 Cor. 9:24). The faithful servant will receive an imperishable crown (1 Cor. 9:25). What is done for Christ will last forever. "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward" (2 Jn. 8; cf. Col. 3:24; Heb. 11:26). Those who because of their faithfulness to Jesus had to wander in the woods clothed with rags will dwell in mansions clothed in glittering apparel. Be diligent. Run the race. Fight the good fight for your labors in Christ are not in vain. You will receive a reward that can never perish or be taken away when our king returns.

8. The Finality of the Judgment

The sentence uttered by Jesus on that day will be irrevocable. The wicked will be cast into the lake of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth and the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever (cf. Mt. 13:40-42; Rev. 14:11; 20:10). The righteous will enter the joy of their Lord and behold the face of God. They will live in blissful communion with Jesus and lean upon His breast forever. Oh, how this truth sweetens heaven. Once the verdict is spoken there are no second chances, no reprieves or pardons. The time to look to Christ with the eyes of faith is now. The time to serve Jesus and work for His Kingdom is in the present. May God enable you by His grace to lay down the weapons of your warfare and trust in God's beloved Son. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

Copyright 1998 © Brian Schwertley, Haslett, MI

[HOME PAGE](#)