

Chapter 56: The Final Judgment and Eternal Punishment

Who will be judged?
What is hell?

A. The fact of final judgment

1. Scriptural evidence for a final judgment (Rev 20:11-15; Acts 17:30-31; Rom 2:5)

This final judgment is the culmination of many precursors in which God rewarded righteousness or punished unrighteousness throughout history. (2 Pet. 2:9-10)

- blessing and deliverance from danger to those who were faithful to him, including Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David
- judgments: the flood, Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel

2. Will there be more than one judgment?

In a dispensational view, there will be different judgments:

- (a) a “judgment of the nations” (Matt 25:31-46) to determine who enters the millennium
- (b) a “judgment of believers’ works” or bēma judgment (2 Cor 5:10) in which Christians will receive degrees of reward
- (c) a “great white throne judgment” at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:11-15) to declare eternal punishments for unbelievers

- However, these three passages seem to all speak of the same final judgment.

- In particular, Matthew 25 makes no mention of the millennium and frequently references eternal punishment or life.

B. The time of final judgment

--The final judgment will occur after the millennium and the rebellion that occurs at the end of it. (Rev 20:7-11)

C. The nature of the final judgment

1. Jesus Christ will be the judge (2 Tim 4:1; Acts 10:42; John 5:26-27)

2. Unbelievers will be judged (Rom 2:5-7; Lk 12:47-48)

--This judgment of unbelievers will include degrees of punishment

3. Believers will be judged (Rom 14:10, 12; 2 Cor 5:10)

--This judgment of believers will be a judgment to evaluate and bestow various degrees of reward, but believers should never fear eternal condemnation. (John 5:24; Ro 8:1)

--Thus the day of judgment can be portrayed as one in which believers are rewarded and unbelievers are punished. (Rev 11:18)

--Will all the secret words, deeds and sins of believers be revealed on that last day? (Col 3:25; 1 Co 4:5)

- That each will receive commendation (ἰπαινός, “praise”) indicates that this may not be referring to sin.

--Yet many verses suggest God will never call our sins into remembrance (Mic 7:19; Ps 103:12; Heb 8:12)

--Scripture also teaches that there will be degrees of reward for believers (1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 Cor 5:10)

4. Angels will be judged (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; 1 Cor 6:3)

5. We will help in the work of judgment (1 Cor 6:2-3)

--Other parts of Scripture affirm that Christ does not reserve every aspect of the process of judging for himself alone. (Re 20:4; Mt 19:28)

D. Necessity of final judgment

Rather than letting God find out the condition of our hearts, the final judgment “will serve the purpose rather of displaying before all rational creatures the declarative glory of God in a formal, forensic act, which magnifies on the one hand His holiness and righteousness, and on the other hand, His grace and mercy. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the judgment at the last day will differ from that of the death of each individual in more than one respect. It will not be secret, but public; it will not pertain to the soul only, but also to the body; it will not have reference to a single individual, but to all men.” --Louis Berkhof

E. Justice of God in the final judgment (Rom 3:19; Rev 19:1-2)

F. Moral application of the final judgment

1. The doctrine of final judgment satisfies our inward sense of a need for justice in the world (Col 3:22, 25)
2. The doctrine of final judgment enables us to forgive others freely (Rom 12:19; 1 Pet 2:22-23)
3. The doctrine of final judgment provides a motive for righteous living (Matt 6:20)
4. The doctrine of final judgment provides a great motive for evangelism (Ezek 33:11; 2 Pet 3:9)

G. Hell: A place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked (Luke 16:22-24; Rev 14:9-11; 19:1-3; 20:10; Matt. 25:41)
Some deny the existence of hell. One of the most common ways to deny this is through the doctrine of “annihilationism”

Annihilationism: The view that after the wicked have suffered the penalty of God’s wrath for a time, God will annihilate them so that they no longer exist.

Arguments in favor of this view:

1. The biblical references to the destruction of the wicked implies that they will no longer exist after they are destroyed (Greek *apōleia*, Phil 3:19 – but see Matt 26:8; or else *olethros*, 2Thess. 1.9 – but see 1 Cor. 5:5)

Response: The words translated “destruction” do not necessarily imply a ceasing to exist or some kind of annihilation, but can simply be ways of referring to the harmful and destructive effects of final judgment on unbelievers.

2. The inconsistency of eternal conscious punishment with the love of God.

Response: The same difficulty in reconciling God’s love with eternal punishment would seem to be present in reconciling God’s love with the idea of divine punishment at all.

3. The injustice of the disproportion between sins committed in time and punishment that is eternal

Response: This wrongly assumes we know the extent of the evil done when sinners rebel against God.

- Also, unbelievers in hell may go on sinning and receiving punishment for their sin, never repenting.

4. The continuing presence of evil creatures in God’s universe will eternally mar the perfection of a universe that God created to reflect his glory.

Response: When God punishes evil, the glory of his justice, righteousness, and power to triumph over all opposition will be seen. (Ro 9:22-24)

-After all this has been said, we have to admit that the ultimate resolution of the depths of this question lies far beyond our ability to understand, and remains hidden in the counsels of God.

-This is a hard, sorrowful doctrine for us because we have a portion of God’s love for people. Yet we must realize that whatever God in his wisdom has ordained and taught in Scripture is right. (Ro 9:2-3; Ezek 33:11)

-We must believe that eternal punishment is true and just, yet we should also long that even those people who most severely persecute the church should come to faith in Christ and thus escape eternal condemnation.

-From the perspective of the world to come there is a much greater recognition of the necessity and rightness of eternal punishment. (Re 19:1-4)

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