

The Final Judgment

The Confusion of the Final Judgment

As we consider what Jesus and the Scriptures say about the final judgment, unfortunately man has complicated what is a simple biblical truth. The plain teaching of Scripture have been obfuscated by charts and speculation. The final judgment of God has not escaped unscathed. Some today maintain that there are multiple judgments in heaven and on earth. A separate judgment for believers when they are taken from this earth to escape the tribulation—the judgment seat of Christ. Another judgment for those before a thousand year golden age at the coming of Jesus to earth—the judgment of the sheep and goats. Then another judgment after that golden age before we have the new heavens and earth—the great white throne judgment. As the nature of each judgment and those involved and the timing of each are explained, your head begins to spin and it's difficult to read the Bible yourself to come to those same conclusions!

The Simplicity of the Final Judgment

Let us make simple what is often argued to be complex. The Scriptures speak about this age and the age to come. The division between these ages is marked by the return of Jesus and the final judgment. Jesus Christ is coming again. Not two more times, not three more times. He's coming once more. He's coming to rescue his people and he's coming to judge. He's coming to grant eternal life and he's coming to mete out eternal punishment. In other words, there is one final judgment. One judgment day. The day of the Lord. The great judgment in which Christ will judge over every person from every nation from every time. It will be a great day. It will be a terrible day. It will be the day of justice.

The Biblical Witness

How can such statements be supported from Scripture? This is the question we must ask of any interpretation or summary of the biblical teaching. Thankfully, God wanted this to be clear to us. There are more than 50 references in the New Testament to the "day" as a reference to the day of judgment. I cannot survey them all, but I've included here those that are more than a passing reference so that we might understand the nature of this great day.

Acts 17:30–31, *"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."*

❖ Jesus will judge the world (all people everywhere) on a day fixed by God.

Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

- ❖ This is judgment for entrance into the kingdom of heaven (or the kingdom of God). Jesus must know you!

Matthew 11:21–24, “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

- ❖ It will involve people throughout history on the same day. Some will be exalted to heaven and others brought down to Hades.

John 5:28–29, “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”

- ❖ All the dead will be raised on day, some to life and the others to judgment. No indication (here nor anywhere) of this being separated by seven or a thousand years.

Romans 2:5–8, “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

- ❖ This day of judgment will involve both the righteous and the wicked, the believing and the unbelieving. Some will receive eternal life and others wrath and fury.

2 Peter 3:7–13, “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the

earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

- ❖ The day of the Lord is the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly followed by the new heavens and earth.

Revelation 20:11–21:8, *"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 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. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, 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.*

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.'"

- ❖ In keeping with the previous text in 2 Peter, the wicked are cast into the lake of fire and the righteous receive the reward of being in the presence of God forever in the new heavens and earth.

Matthew 25:31–46, *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 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. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 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. 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, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 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.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- ❖ The judgment of all the nations (every person) occurs at the coming of Jesus. The reward for the righteous is eternal life and the sentence for the wicked is eternal punishment.

Conclusion

These passages, and many others, all describe judgment day. They describe all people coming before the judgment seat of Christ. They describe him on his throne calling his own into eternal blessing and casting the rest into eternal darkness. The only way that these could be seen as separate judgments at separate times involving separate people is trying to make them fit into a theological system incompatible with these clear texts. If you get the end times wrong, you'll get the end judgment wrong. What is plain, not obscure, is that there is a judgment day and all peoples of the earth will stand before Christ to give an account.

Things have not always been this way. What has become a common view among churches is actually a recent understanding of the end times and the final judgment. The dominant position of the church have been the views set forward in this short article. You don't need to be a historian to discover this. Just consider the hymns that we sing and how they speak about the coming judgment at the end of time. You'll discover that at the coming of the Lord there is a great judgment of the righteous and unrighteous that divides this present age and the new heavens and new earth that will come at the return of Christ.