

THE JUDGMENT

“the sheep and the goats”

Key question

What will take place at the final judgment?

Key text

Ecclesiastes 12:14

“Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

Introduction

There are few themes in Scripture that can be more confusing to the average Christian than “Biblical Judgments.” we are told to “judge not lest we be judged” (Matt.7:1), but then Paul scolds believers for not exercising judgment (I Cor.5:3,12). Is this not a contradiction? We are told that as believers we will not come under the judgment of God (Jn.5:24) and then again that we will be judged (II Cor.5:10). How can both be true? In some texts we are led to believe that the basis of judgment is our faith (Jn.3:18), while in others it seems to be our works (Rev.22:12).

A. **Seven basic facts about God’s judgment.**

1. Every person is responsible to give an account to God of his or her moral conduct in this life.

Rom.2:3-11 “³ And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same {yourself,} that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who *will render to every man according to his deeds*: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹ {There will be} tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹ For there is no partiality with God.”

II Thess.1:6-9 “⁶ For after all it is {only} just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and {to give} relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸ dealing out

retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,”

- a. This accounting will examine a person’s thoughts, words, and deeds in this life.

Rom.2:14-16 “¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them. ¹⁶ on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

- b. The standard of judgment will be God’s holiness (his image within us) not human relative righteousness.

2. Every person is guilty and cannot give a good accounting to God.

Rom.3:9-18 “⁹ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, "*There is none righteous, not even one;* ¹¹ *There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God;* ¹² *All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.*" ¹³ "*Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,*" "*The poison of asps is under their lips*"; ¹⁴ "*Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness*"; ¹⁵ "*Their feet are swift to shed blood,* ¹⁶ *Destruction and misery are in their paths,* ¹⁷ *And the path of peace have they not known.*" ¹⁸ "*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*"”

- a. Eternal life is available (hypothetically) to anyone who is perfectly righteous in his or her experience.

Rom.2:6-10 “⁶ who will render to every man according to his deeds: ⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. ⁹ {There will be} tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

- b. But in fact, all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.

Rom.3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of he glory of God,”

3. The gospel is the proclamation that Christ has received the wrath of God’s judgment of sin on himself in the place of many.

Rom.5:6-11 “⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath {of God} through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

- a. The cross was an act of divine judgment.

Col.2:13-15 “¹³ And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us {and} which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

- b. Christ’s death was a substitutionary sacrifice.

Gal.3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, ‘*Cursed in everyone who hangs on a tree*’”

I Pet.2:24 “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

I Pet.3:18 “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

II Cor.5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

4. All who are “in Christ” by faith receive the benefits of his sacrifice and thus escape the day of judgment.

Jn.5:24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

Rom.8:1-2 “¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

- a. All who believe in Christ are “in him” and share His justification through grace.

Rom.3:21-26 “²¹ But now apart from the Law {the} righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even {the} righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, {I say,} of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of **the one who has faith in Jesus.**”

- b. True believers will never have to face the judgment of heaven and hell because Christ has faced it for them. Jn.5:24

Rom. 5:9 “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”

5. All who are not “in Christ” will face the day of judgment.

Rev.20:11-15 “¹¹ And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is {the book} of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the

dead, which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one {of them} according to their deeds. ¹⁴ And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

- a. They will be judged on the basis of their own merits.

Matt.16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds."

Rev.22:12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward {is} with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

- b. They will be judged also on their attitude toward Christ.

Jn.3:18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Jn.12:48 "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day."

Heb.10:26-31 "²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and *the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries*. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on {the testimony of} two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.*" And again, "*The Lord will judge His people.*" ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

- c. This judgment will take place after the second coming of Christ. Matt.13:37-43; 24:29-35; 25:31-46; Rev.20:11-15

6. There is a divine judgment of believers that seems to be distinct from the general judgment that determines who will inherit eternal life.

II Cor.5:10 " For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

- a. It is called the judgment-seat of Christ (or God). II Cor.5:10;

Rom.14:10-12 "¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "*As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.*" ¹² So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God."

- b. The issue at stake here is not heaven or hell but rewards or lack of rewards in heaven.

I Cor.3:11-16 "¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one, which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work

will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is {to be} revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If any man's work, which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

1. These rewards are referred to as:
 - a. **inheritance** - **Col.3:23-25** "²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."
 - b. **crowns** - **II Tim.4:8** "in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."
 2. These rewards are based on faithfulness in service. **I Cor.3:10-15**
 - c. This judgment will expose the sins of the believer and magnify God's grace in forgiving them. It will also expose the power of the Spirit in a believer's life magnifying God's grace in gifting the believer.
7. Believers will participate in the judgment of the world.
- Matt.19:28** "Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Also Lk.22:28-30
- Rev.3:21** "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."
- Rev.20:4** "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the world of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."
- I Cor.6:2-3.** "² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent {to constitute} the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?"
- a. Some see this judgment (by believers) as directed at the nations, Israel, and angels during the period of tribulation or the millennial reign of Christ.
 - b. The exact nature and time of this judgment is unclear but it does force us to some conclusions.
 1. To participate in judging the world, one must be separated from it and not subject to the judgment oneself.
 2. This might suggest that the judgment of "all mankind" excludes those "in Christ" because Christ already has been judged for them.
 3. Rev.20:4 suggests that believers will participate in the Great White Throne Judgment of the world (of nonbelievers).
8. The judgment of the nations raises some special questions.

Matt.25:31-46. “³¹ But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave Me {something} to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? ³⁸ And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ³⁹ And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, {even} the least {of them,} you did it to Me.' ⁴¹ Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me {nothing} to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' ⁴⁴ Then they themselves 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 take care of You?' ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

- a. Many understand this text in reference to the general judgment at Christ's return.
 1. Matthew 25 describes three pictures of judgment. Vs.1-13 focuses on those who are not prepared to endure or wait for Christ's coming. Vs.14-30 focuses on those who have been poor stewards of their gifts. Vs.31-46 focuses on those who have failed to treat God's family properly.
 2. The general judgment, in this view, includes:
 - b. The great white throne judgment of Rev.20:11-15,
 - c. The judgment seat of Christ in Rom.14:10,12; II Cor.5:10,
 - d. The judgment of the nations Matt.25:31-46
 3. But this raises some difficult questions.
 - a. In what sense do believers escape judgment? Jn.5:24, Rom.8:1-2
 - b. In what sense are believers judged on the basis of their moral merit (as is suggested by Matt.25, Rev.20, and many other passages).
 - c. In what sense has Christ been judged for us so that we do not have to stand before God on the basis of our moral merit?
 - d. How does the judgment of I Cor.3 fit the judgment scenes of Matt.25 and Rev.20?
- b. Others try to avoid some of these problems by seeing Matt.25 as referring to “the nations” in their posture toward God's people (Israel) during the period of “tribulation” before Christ's second coming.
 1. Verse 32 suggests that “nations” not individuals are in view here. This is unique. Nowhere else does the Scripture speak of the judgment of God as focused on

nations. While vs.34 and following seem to talk about “individuals” it is possible that nations are in view. But this raises the question, “In what sense do nations inherit eternal life apart from individuals?”

2. The basis of the judgment is the treatment of “these brothers of mine.” This expression is never used to describe “all of mankind.” It can refer to “Israel” or “Christians” both of which are in a covenant relationship with God.
 3. Faith in Christ may be in view here. Faith is described in this passage in terms of care for Christ’s family.
9. The Scripture speaks of a divine judgment that is temporal (in this life). Gal.6:8
- a. It can be of nonbelievers
 1. Individually - Rom.1:18-32
 2. Corporately - Matt.11:20-24
 - b. It can be of believers
 1. Individually
 - a. It can be a form of discipline for growth. Heb.12:3-15; Jn.15:1-3
 - b. It can be a removal from usefulness. Jn.15:5-9; Matt.5:13; Lk.8:18; I Cor.5:5; Heb.6:7-8
 - c. It can mean physical death. I Jn.5:16; I Cor.11:32; Acts 5:1-11
 2. Corporately
 - a. The seven churches of Asia in Rev. 3.
 - b. Other churches in the N.T. - Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, etc.

B. Basic facts about human judgment.

1. As Christians we will one day be judges with Christ. I Cor.6:1-3
 - a. We will judge the world. I Cor.6:2
 - b. We will judge angels. I Cor.6:3
2. All believers are to judge themselves. I Cor.11:31
 - a. To see if they are “in the faith.” II Cor.13:5
 - b. To evaluate their ministry. Gal.6:4
 - c. To avoid God’s discipline. I Cor.11:31-32
 - d. The believer is not to compare his work with others but only with what God is expecting of him. Gal.6:4-5
3. Those in positions of spiritual authority must often pass judgment on others. I Cor.6:1-6
 - a. With respect to the world. I Cor.2:15
 - b. With respect to the church. I Cor.5:3,12; I Tim.1:20
4. Unauthorized judgment by believers is forbidden. Lk.6:37
 - a. Others will judge us by our own standard of judgment. Matt. 7:1-2
 - b. We are in no position to judge when we refuse to subject ourselves to the same moral standards. Jn.8:7 “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”
 - c. We are not to judge the motives of others. I Cor.4:5; Jas.4:11

- d. We are to be especially patient with younger believers. Rom.14:1
 - e. We are not to pass judgment on others in areas of doubtful conduct. Rom.14:3,4,10,13; I Cor.8-10
 - f. We are to take initiative in correcting others. Gal.6:1-2 “¹ Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, **restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.** ² Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.”
5. God has authorized the state to exercise judgment in civil matters. Rom.13:1-7
 6. Some markers of a judgmental spirit.
 - a. The failure of others makes me feel better about myself and decreases my concern for my own faults.
 - b. The failure of others gives me a desire to see that they suffer.
 - c. I am eager to tell others about the failure of someone else.
 - d. The failure of others prompts me to review their past failures.
 - e. I have trouble forgiving others even when they repent.
 7. A judgmental spirit is often related to other problems.
 - a. Prejudice and Discrimination that is irrationally based on superficial characteristics like age, race, gender, etc.
 - b. Slander and Gossip
 - c. Murder and Violence
 - d. Legalism and Pride
 8. Common misconceptions related to human judgment
 - a. Jesus loved his enemies and therefore tolerated everything but intolerance.
 - **Jn.5:22** “The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son . . .”
 - **Jn.5:27** “The Father has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man”
 - **Acts 10:42** He was “ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead”
 - **Acts 17:30-31** “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”
 - b. Evangelical Christians are often seen as too judgmental. Why?
 - People don’t want to be accountable for their behavior to any external authority.
 - Christians don’t understand how to present their values in a pluralistic society. (see notes on Tolerance #110)
 - Christians don’t understand the limits of their responsibility in judging others. (see points #1-5 above)
 - Christians are hypocritical.
 - a. Don’t give reason for offense.
 1. Understand and respect legal / political pluralism.
 2. Humility, confession of sin, and grace silence hard hearts.

3. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to react.
 4. Flexibility, forbearance, and fairness do not necessarily reflect a lack of respect for holiness, values, and faith.
- b. A check list for judging others.
1. Have you audited your own life?
 2. Do you have the right motives (love)?
 3. Do you have the authority, sensitivity, understanding, and relationship to proceed?
 4. Can you respect and protect the privacy of sinners?
 5. Are your objectives realistic?
- c. What can I do about a judgmental spirit?
1. Acknowledge it as sin.
 2. Replace it with thanksgiving, grace, and a commitment to help others.
 3. Ask others to remind you when you speak judgmentally of people.
 4. Pray grace upon those you tend to judge.
 5. Don't take responsibility for things you can't control or for things that are none of your business.
- c. There are no universal moral values only different perspectives. (see notes on Truth #110, and Postmodernism #109)
- “A culture that claims to believe in nothing is committed to believe in anything and everything.”
 - Postmodern culture is most offended by social hypocrisy and psychological shame. Both are a gesture of respect for values. Without values, there is no hypocrisy or shame. To eliminate hypocrisy and shame, simply eliminate universal normative values.
- d. The Bible says that we should not judge others. Matt.7:1 (That is not all that it says. See points #1-5 above)
- **Matt.7:1-5** “¹ Do not judge lest you be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”
 - a. It is obvious from vs.6 that discerning between good and evil is assumed and valued.
 - b. The context suggests that the proper posture in correcting a sinning brother is in view.
 - c. The point of this text seems to be the protection of the sinner from premature public exposure.
 - **Matt.7:6** “Do not give what is holy to **dogs**, and do not throw your pearls before **swine**, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

- **II Thess. 5:21-22** “**Test all things**; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil”
- **Eph. 5:11** “. . . Have no fellowship with the **unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them**”
- **I John 4:1** “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”
- **I Cor.6:1-3** “¹ Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? ² Or do you not know that the **saints will judge the world**? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent {to constitute} the smallest law courts? ³ Do you not know that **we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?**”