The Final Judgment and Eternal Punishment

Regardless of one’s views concerning the order and actuality of various eschatological events, the Bible gives a clear indication that there will be a final judgment after the second coming of Christ. The final judgment will include believers and unbelievers; as believers are judged according to their faithfulness toward God, and unbelievers are judged according to their sinful record. While believers will continue to live in the New Heavens and New Earth, unbelievers will suffer eternal punishment in a place known as hell. These places represent the only two destinations in the eternal state.

A. The Final Judgment

1. The Certainty of the Final Judgment: While Scripture gives evidence of God judgment upon humans throughout history (the great flood, tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Jewish exiles, personal judgments, etc.), there will be a final judgment to decide one’s eternal fate.

- Revelation 20:11-15 – “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.”

- 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.”

- Romans 2:5 – “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.”

- Matthew 10:15 – “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town” (cf. 11:22, 24; 12:36; 25:31-46).

- 1 Corinthians 4:5 – “Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.”
• **Jude 6** – “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—”

2. **The Time of the Final Judgment:** According to one’s eschatological views, the final judgment will either follow the second coming of Christ (amillennialism/postmillennialism) or the millennial reign of Christ (premillennialism). However, the final judgment will not occur until the great tribulation has ended and God defeats Satan after his final rebellion (Armageddon).

• **Revelation 20:9-12** – “And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 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.”

• **Hebrews 9:27** – “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

3. **The Details of the Final Judgment**

   a. **Jesus Christ will be the Judge:** Just as Jesus Christ is the eternal Lord over all creation, He is also creation’s final judge.

   • **John 5:26-27** – “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”

   • **Acts 10:42** – “And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.”

   • **2 Timothy 4:1** – “Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead.”

   b. **Unbelievers will be Judged:** As a result of sin and unbelief, every person who is unregenerate will stand before Christ and receive eternal judgment. This judgment will expose every work, every thought, every secret, even every word.

   • **Revelation 20:12** – “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.”
• **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…. for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

• **Degrees of Punishment**: The Scriptures teach that unbelievers will be judged according to “what they had done” (Rev. 20:12, 13).

  - **Luke 12:47-48** - Jesus tells a parable about an unfaithful manager, and concludes, “And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.”

  - **Matthew 11:22** – When Jesus speaks of the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, he says, “But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.”

  - **Ecclesiastes 12:14** – “For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

  c. **Believers will be Judged**: While believers will never receive eternal judgment, they will be judged according to how faithful they were after coming to Christ, which will result in varying degrees of heavenly rewards.

    - **Romans 14:10, 12** – “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God...So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”

    - **2 Corinthians 5:10** – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

    - **Revelation 11:18** – “The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

d. **Angels will be Judged**: Judgment is not only reserved for humans, but also angels.

    - **Jude 6** – “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.”

    - **2 Peter 2:4** – “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment;”

4. **The Purpose of the Final Judgment**
• One might wonder why a final judgment would be necessary if humans die beforehand. In other words, why couldn’t unbelievers just arrive in eternal judgment? The purpose of final judgment is to display God’s glory through justice in the presence of all sinners.

• Philippians 2:9–11 – “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

B. Eternal Punishment (Hell)

1. The Reality of Hell: The place known as hell is the realm of eternal conscious punishment for unrepentant sinners. Hell is described as a “lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14) a middle eastern trash heap called “Gehenna” (Mark 9:42-50), and “hades” or “Sheol” (grave).

   a. Scriptural Evidence

      • Matthew 25:30 – “And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (following the parable of the talents)

      • Matthew 25:41 – “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.’” (cf. 25:46)

      • Mark 9:43, 48 – “It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell to the unquenchable fire...where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”

      • Luke 16:22-24 – “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'”

      • Revelation 14:9-11 – “And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

   b. Skeptical Response: Throughout history, some theologians and churches have denied the eternal nature of hell. This teaching is known as “annihilationism,” where after suffering the penalty of God’s wrath for a time, unbelievers will be annihilated by God, so they no longer exist. While still agreeing with divine punishment and judgment for sin, they don’t believe sinners will suffer throughout eternity. In other words, their suffering will be real and
conscious, just not eternal. Such teaching is visible among Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. However, while annihilationism is desirable for many, it is not biblical.

- **Revelation 20:10** – “The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

- **Quote:** “In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: ‘What are you asking God to do?’ To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.” – **C. S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain**

2. **The Reasons for Hell**
   
   a. Hell is an eternal reflection of God’s holiness and glory.

   b. Hell is a reminder of the kingship of Jesus Christ.

   c. Hell is response of God’s justice toward sin, especially for those who go unpunished on earth.

   d. Hell is a remaining existence without God’s grace and mercy.

**Next Week:** The News Heavens and the New Earth