



## Part 2

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# Eternal Judgement



I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” Here stand the thrones where judgment is given, the thrones of the dynasty of David.

**Psalm 122:1&5, ESVUK<sup>1</sup>**

The last foundation stone is Eternal Judgement. Although we might think of this as something purely in the future, being ‘eternal’ it is instead past, present and future. When we are joined to Christ we become subject to God’s eternal judgement and start to live in the light of it.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the English Standard Version Anglicised (ESVUK) © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, unless otherwise stated.

# 1 The Nature Of God's Judgement



## 1.1 Judgement Involves Separation

The Greek word for judgement used by the writer to the Hebrews in our text is 'krima'. This is derived from the associated noun, krino, which is usually translated 'to judge' in our English Bibles. However, when we look more closely at the Greek it helps us to understand the biblical concept of judgement:

**Krino** - primarily denotes to separate, select, choose; hence, to determine, and so to judge, pronounce judgement.”<sup>2</sup>

Inherent in the concept of Godly judgement is therefore separation by deliberate selection. In the account of creation, we can see God separating elements from one another and making judgements as a result. Through the Old Testament we see God separating His Holy people to Himself from other nations, who worshipped false gods. The law of Moses was prescriptive in setting the rules by which the people could separate themselves (and thus cleanse themselves) from uncleanness.

Ultimately, eternal judgement will mean separation. Two biblical pictures Jesus uses are that of the sheep being separated from the goats, and the wheat being separated from the chaff<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.2 Judgement Begins With God

As we saw when we looked at 'Authority' in our Distinctives module, all authority comes from God, which means that all judgement is ultimately sourced from Him as well. He stands as the highest authority (like the highest court in the land) in all things. The Word declares His right to judge all things.

The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge! Selah

**Psalm 50:6, ESVUK**

Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve!

**Psalm 94:2, ESVUK**

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Hendrickson, pp.620,621

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 3:12 and 25:31-33

You have come to God, the judge of all men, ...

**Hebrews 12:23, NIV**

The clear message of the Bible is that God is simply the undisputed judge of the living and the dead.

### 1.3 God's Judgement Is Just

Justice is something highly prized by most people. However, justice can be defined differently in any given situation by those involved. The judicial system in any country is supposed to bring an unbiased ruling into a dispute, judging against the standard of the law of the land.

We must be careful in considering God's judgement and the dispensing of His justice, that we don't anthropomorphise<sup>4</sup> Him with our own standards and faults. When God judges He does not apply the law of the land, but He simply pronounces judgement because He is the highest authority. He Himself is the standard against which judgements are made, that is His own nature.

A W Tozer explains how justice is simply an attribute of God's own nature,

*"It is sometimes said 'Justice requires God to do this', referring to some act we know he will perform. This is an error of thinking as well as of speaking, for it postulates a principle of justice outside of God, which compels Him to act in a certain way. Of course, there is no such principle. If there were it would be superior to God, for only a superior power can compel obedience. The truth is that there is not and can never be anything outside of the nature of God, which can move Him in the least degree. All God's reasons come from within his uncreated being. Nothing has entered the being of God from eternity, nothing has been removed, and nothing has been changed.*

*Justice, when used of God is a name we give to the way God is, nothing more; and when God acts justly he is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion, but simply acting like himself in a given situation. As gold is an element in itself and can never change or compromise, but is gold wherever it is found, so God is God, always only, fully God, and can never be other than he is. **Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the nature of God and evil as it fails to do so.** God is his own self-existent principle of moral equity and when he sentences evil man or rewards the righteous he simply acts like himself from within, uninfluenced by anything that is not himself."<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Anthropomorphise - ascribe human features or attributes to something.

<sup>5</sup> The Knowledge of the Holy, A W Tozer (© 1976).

## 1.4 God's Judgement Is Good

In considering judgement, many people immediately begin to think in negative terms. They think of condemnation and punishment. However, the judgement of God is the separation of that which is in conformity with his nature to that which is not. Therefore, God's judgement is as much about rewarding the righteous as it is punishing the wicked. God's people rejoice in his justice and worship him as their judge. The Psalms declare,

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.”

**Psalm 96:11-13, NIV**

Many have often wondered whether there is a conflict between the **justice** and **mercy** of God. Archbishop Anselm<sup>6</sup> posed just such a question and answered it. We turn again to Tozer for his paraphrase of the answer.

*God's being is unitary; it is not composed of a number of parts working harmoniously, but simply one. There is nothing in his justice which forbids the exercise of his mercy. To think of God as we sometimes think of a court where a kindly judge, compelled by law, sentences a man to death with tears and apologies, is to think in a manner unworthy of the true God. God is never at cross-purposes with himself. No attribute of God is in conflict with another.<sup>7</sup>*

God can love and judge all at the same time. He is not like us and to think of Him as so makes Him less than He really is.

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<sup>6</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury, Saint Anselm (AD. 1033-1109)

<sup>7</sup> The Knowledge of the Holy, A W Tozer (© 1976)

## 2 The Operation Of God's Judgement



### 2.1 God's Judgement Brings Deliverance

Now that we have a clear understanding of God's judgement, we need to understand an important connection in the Word of God between judgement and deliverance. Judgement is not the same as punishment. Punishment can follow judgement, but only for the unrighteous.

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy

**James 4:12, ESVUK**

Throughout the Word of God we can see how God's judgement brings deliverance: -

- **God's Judgement Protects Us** - The Judges in the Old Testament brought deliverance. Othniel who became Israel's judge went to war for Israel to deliver the people (**Judges 2:15-16**). God also raised up judges to save the people from raiders (**Judges 2:15-16**). The key here is the protective nature of God's judgement.
- **God's Judgement Cuts off our Enemy** - The Red Sea brought deliverance. When we looked at baptism, we saw how the Red Sea cut off the enemies of Israel, separating them from the pursuing Egyptian army, and so protected God's people. The waters of baptism cut off the power of our past life, and the ability of the enemy to use it against us.
- **God's Judgement Deals with Sin** - The Cross brought us deliverance and although most recognise the saving work of the cross not all appreciate the judgement which took place on the cross. As we have said, God acts entirely consistently, so as Christ hung on the Cross His Father unleashed His full wrath and judgement for all the sins of the world. He became sin so that we might become righteous<sup>8</sup>. Jesus sweat drops of blood because He knew what He was facing. We must resist the view, which sanitises the cross, by separating God into Old Testament fire and brimstone and New Testament loving God - He is one God<sup>9</sup>, and remains the same yesterday, today and forever.<sup>10</sup>

We are born again and judged by the record of Christ, to be counted as righteous as He is. Having been justified in Christ, we are to continue in our

<sup>8</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>9</sup> John 10:30

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 107:27 and Hebrews 13:8

freedom from sin by living according to the Holy Spirit within us (**Galatians 5:16**). We maintain our position of righteousness by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us, where necessary correcting us, as we live under God's kingdom rule and reign in their lives.

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

**1 Corinthians 11:32, ESVUK**

As those born of the Spirit of Christ, we can welcome His on-going judgement into our lives, because we recognise that they will keep us within God's will and purpose for our lives.

## 2.2 God's Judgement Is Delegated

Just as God delegates His authority, He also delegates His judgment. Throughout the Old Testament we see those who move in God's delegated authority, bringing God's judgement to His people. Stephen referred to Moses as having been sent by God Himself to be a "ruler and deliverer" for His people (**Acts 7:35**). We have already noted the example of the Old Testament judges who brought God's rule as well as his deliverance to His people.

In the New Testament we see that Christ has delegated His authority through the Apostles, and those whom they also subsequently set in places of authority, such as elders. Peter states clearly that God's judgement in the world must start in the house of God,

For it is time for judgement to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

**1 Peter 4:17, ESVUK**

There are two areas of judgement which are worth us considering.

- **Church Government Judgement**
  - **James** acted in judgement at the Council of Jerusalem (**Acts 15**). He weighed everything in light of the Word and made a judgement. The other Apostles and the people were able to submit to this righteous judgement.
  - **Paul** the Apostle brought judgement against the brother in Corinth opening flouting the rule of God (**1 Corinthians 5:1-5**). Paul was able to exercise this judgement even though he was not bodily present. The power of Christ was present, and it was recognised that Paul



was bringing Christ's judgement into a situation. The aim of the judgement was to bring the brother back to repentance.

Leaders in the church must exercise great care when exercising the judgement of the Lord. It must always be carefully weighed against the plumbline of the Word and always motivated entirely by Christ's love and desire to see restoration.

- **Personal Judgement**

Personal judgement is not forbidden by Christ. Many Christians take his words out of context (**Matthew 7:1-5**) and they think that we must not judge, or we too will be judged. Jesus was warning his listeners not to judge in a hypocritical way according to human standards as the Pharisees did (**John 8:15**).

On another occasion He gave an explicit instruction to make right judgements (**John 7:24**). If we judge righteously and graciously, we will be judged that way too – something that we are to welcome. The Bible therefore clearly warns us against certain types of personal judgement: -

- Hypocritical judgement: **Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1-4**
- Partial/Prejudiced judgement: **John 7:24; James 2:1-4**
- Premature judgement: **Acts 5:34-39; 1 Corinthians 4:5**
- Irrelevant judgement: **Romans 14:1; Colossians 2:16-17**
- Slanderous judgement: **James 4:11-12**

- **Self-Judgement**

This is not the same as self-condemnation. For none of us can be rightfully condemned, not even by ourselves!<sup>11</sup> Eternal judgement has already begun in the church, and it must begin for each of us as individuals as we willingly judge ourselves.

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement.

**1 Corinthians 11:31, NIV**

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 8:1

with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

### **Romans 12:3, NIV**

Paul cautions the Corinthians to submit themselves to sober self-judgement before partaking of the covenant meal together.<sup>12</sup> The church, he said, had already experienced the potential effects of not doing so.<sup>13</sup> No doubt the famous incident of Ananias and Sapphira may have also been retold to them.

We need to examine ourselves with the help of the Holy Spirit (**Psalm 139:23-24**) and recognise those areas where we need to change. Where the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we ourselves make a judgement by deciding to repent. Remember our definition of judgement in terms of separation. In repenting we are separating what is righteous (us) from what is unrighteous (the sin). Repentance is a gift from God and is our means of deliverance.<sup>14</sup>

God disciplines His children as a father, motivated by love (**Hebrews 12:4-11**), so that we will grow up in Him and become mature. Remember that eternal judgement, as one of our Hebrews 6 foundations, is part of us becoming mature.

God uses several means to discipline us, where we have failed to judge ourselves. These form His provision toward us.

- His Word: **2 Timothy 3:16,17**
- His Spirit: **John 16:13**
- His People: **Colossians 3:16**
- His Leaders: **Hebrews 13:17**
- Circumstances: **Hebrews 12:7-11; 1 Corinthians 11:30,31; Jonah**

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:28

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:29-30

<sup>14</sup> 2 Timothy 2:25

## 3 The Finality Of God's Judgement



### 3.1 The Inevitability of Final Judgement

We must not be tempted to lose sight of the inevitability of final judgement. God delays the day of judgement out of kindness and patience, not wanting anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:8-10). But that day will come. There will be reward for those who have sought God's kingdom and His righteousness. There will be punishment for those who have been self-seeking and who have rejected the truth to follow evil (Romans 2:4-10).

No one will escape the final judgement. We saw in our study of the resurrection of the dead that Hades (Sheol) will have to give up its dead (Revelation 20:12; cf. 2 Timothy 4:1). The Bible teaches a resurrection for the wicked as well as the righteous (Daniel 12:1-3; John 5:28,29; Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:6-11,16).

Both will be resurrected on that final day and will face judgement. The wicked will be separated from the righteous for punishment (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) and there will be no opportunity after death for the wicked to repent (Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:24-26).

### 3.2 How Will It Happen?

- Judgement will take place before the throne of God: -

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.

**Revelation 20:11,12, NIV**

- Judgement will involve Separation: -

We should not think of this final judgement before God's throne as the place where He finally decides whether we qualify as righteous or as wicked. Judgement is about separation. The final judgement is the point at which people are separated according to what they have already done. It is the public exposure of what has already been determined.

- The Father will preside as Judge: -

We will be judged by God the Father (**Romans 2:5; 14:10; Hebrews 12:23; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 14:7**) through Jesus the Son (**John 5:22-27; 8:16; Acts 10:42; 17:30,31**). The judgement seat of God (**Romans 14:10**) may equally be referred to as the judgement seat of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:10**).

- The Son will be Advocate: -

Jesus is the Son of Man who fully understands our humanity. As such He is our Great High Priest who lives to intercede for us (**Hebrews 7:25**). In choosing whether or not to stand for us before God He Himself acts as our judge (**John 5:27**).

- The Books will be opened: -

We will all be judged according to what we have done, as recorded in the books that are opened before the throne. We will be separated from the wicked, because our names are already recorded in the Book of Life:

**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 ... **15** And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

**Revelation 20:12,15, ESVUK**

### 3.3 Who Will It Involve?

Christians are not exempt from judgement. We too will stand before the judgement seat of God to give an account for our lives (**Romans 14:10-12**). Both believers and unbelievers will be judged on the basis of what they have said and done in this life (**Matthew 12:36,37; 16:27; Romans 2:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:10**).

We know that for us as Christians, however, there is no condemnation (**John 5:24; Romans 8:1**). Our salvation is already assured, based entirely on God's grace. The final judgement is as much about the righteous receiving their reward as it is about the wicked receiving their punishment:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

## Revelation 11:17-18, NIV

### 3.4 What Will Follow?

Jesus said His followers would sit on thrones with Him to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (**Matthew 19:28**). Paul taught that Christians would judge the world (**1 Corinthians 6:2**). It is not clear whether these verses refer to us judging those who have rejected Christ at the final judgement, or to a continuing role of judgement in the future age.

We will also be involved in judging angels (**1 Corinthians 6:3**). The Bible indicates that we shall be ruling in an age to come exercising God's eternal judgement.

### 3.5 How Then Should We Live?

Jesus continually taught people that they should live in the light of the judgement that is to come (**Matthew 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; 25:31-46**). God's judgements in the past should serve as a reminder of the judgement to come (**2 Peter 2:4-9**).

## 4 The Eternity Of God's Judgement



Once the present age is complete, two things will clearly follow for all living things.

### 4.1 Eternal Reward

It is in God's nature to reward the obedience and faithfulness of His people:

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

**Hebrews 11:6, NIV**

Some Christians mistakenly think that it is wrong to expect reward from God. Jesus consistently assured His followers of wonderful rewards to come:

- Compensation to the Persecuted (**Matthew 5:11-12**)
- Reward for doing good to our enemies (**Luke 6:35**)
- Hundredfold repayment for sacrifices made for the Kingdom (**Mark 10:29-30**)
- Payment in proportion to what we have done (**Matthew 16:27 and Revelation 22:12**)

Whilst every believer will inherit eternal life (**John 3:16**), Jesus' parable of the ten minas (**Luke 19:11-27**) shows us that we will experience varying degrees of reward. Some will be called least in the kingdom, and some will be called great (**Matthew 5:19**).

It is possible for a Christian to suffer the loss of their reward and to merely be saved as one escaping through the flames (**1 Corinthians 3:10-15**).

*The way we live under eternal judgement, in this age, will determine the extent of our eternal reward in the age to come.*

Paul repeatedly referred to his eternal reward as a great inspiration and motivation in running after God (**1 Corinthians 9:26-27; Philippians 3:14; 2 Timothy 4:7-8**).

## 4.2 Eternal Punishment

Jesus declared that the only way to come to the Father is through Him (**John 14:6**). We have already seen that every person is judged based on what they have said and done in this life. Those who have put their faith in Christ have had His righteousness accredited to them and therefore receive eternal life. But since the unbeliever has failed to put their faith in Christ, they will be found to be unrighteous and therefore condemned:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

**John 3:18, ESVUK**

Once all that is unrighteous has finally been separated from all that is righteous, unrighteousness will be completely removed from the earth:

**31** “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** 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. **33** And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left ...**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 ... **46** And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

**Matthew 25:31-46, ESVUK**

Universalists claim that to picture the God of love, who wills that all should be saved, punishing men for their sins by excluding them from His presence forever, is to deny His omnipotence. They argue that God is surely able to achieve that which, motivated by His intense love, He longs for.

God is indeed the God of love, but He is equally motivated by an intense longing for justice and righteousness. All of God’s attributes must be understood in the context of His holiness. In all that He is, God is holy. He never contradicts His own nature.

Annihilationists teach that for those subject to eternal judgement they will simply cease to exist after they are cast into the lake of fire with the devil. It is beyond the scope of our studies to examine this view. The weight of Scripture however points toward an eternal suffering for the unrepentant, “*for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever*” (**Jude 13**). Given there is plenty of pictorial language at work, we cannot elaborate on what it will be like.

Rather than try to second guess what the pictures of darkness mean, we should focus our efforts on reaching out to a lost world under pending judgement, with the love of Christ.



## 5 Conclusion

So, what then can we say in conclusion to our studies? Consider once more our source text for this module: -

**1** Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. **3** And this we will do if God permits.

**Hebrews 6:1-3, ESVUK**

We have looked at each of these foundation stones in turn, some seemingly from the past and some from our future to discover that ***we are experiencing each of them now***, because the Holy Spirit is forming Christ within us, moulding and shaping us into His image.

- He keeps our heart **repentant** before the Lord, turning away from Adamic to Christ-thinking, showing us how to live, like Christ, in perpetual **faith** (trust) in the Father.
- He frees us every day, through the instrumental power of our **baptism**, from an enemy that does not wish to let us go and He fills us with the fullness of Christ, to the point whereby we overflow to the world around us as we **lay hands** on and impart to others.
- He is showing us the secret of living in **resurrection life**, enabling us to overcome any enemy, and to live in the light of the **eternal judgement** of God - which delivers, protects, and separates us from all that would do us harm; so that we can look forward to the coming age with excitement.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him

**1 Corinthians 2:9, ESVUK**