

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE VI: ETERNAL JUDGMENT

Hebrews 6:1-2

[1]Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

*[2]of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and **eternal judgment**.*

Finally we come to the last elementary principle named in this passage. As was said in the last discussion, eternal judgment is tied to resurrection. This life is where each human being has an opportunity to make a choice - whether to submit to God and willingly become a part of His Eternal Family or continue in rebellion against Him and throw away His Offer of Eternal Fellowship with Him. Only in this life do we have any opportunity to make this choice. This is contrary to the Roman Catholic belief that human beings still have purgatory to escape Eternal Condemnation. That doctrine is false and completely unbiblical. There are also the various variations of the idea that after death, some people may be saved because of their good works because they never heard the Gospel or because they did not know that it was true. The notion of Universalism which holds that in the end every human being will be saved and nobody will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire is one such variation. All of these ideas suggest that after life in this world there is still some chance of salvation independent of our choice for or against God in Christ Jesus while we are in this mortal body. All of them are completely false and unbiblical. The following discussion should help to explain what the Bible actually teaches.

Major Scriptural Witness

The following Bible verse is the main guide for our thoughts in this matter.

Hebrews 9:27

*[27]And...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes **judgment**...*

It is important to understand that the above does not speak of how many times any given human being may have experienced death, for example, Lazarus who died and was raised from the dead by our Lord Jesus Christ and has since died again or any of the many other people whom special prophets like Elisha,

our Lord Jesus Christ and Apostles like Peter and Paul raised from the dead and who died again. It speaks instead to our essential mortality, that is, the certainty of an end to our mortal experience. In one way or another. There are three ways we know from the Bible in which physical mortality will end: Enoch's, Elijah's and Moses's departure from life in an unusual manner, normal death from wearing out of the mortal body or some other damage to it and the Resurrection of the Second Advent. See Gen 5:24; 2 Ki 2:11-17; Deut 34:5-7; 2 Ki 13:14,20; 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:16-17. Every human being's time in this world is limited. We will all leave this mortal plane eventually and when we do, we must face judgment.

In our last discussion, we saw that judgment does not happen immediately upon the moment of physical death as it is thought by a number of people. We are now going to discuss exactly what Eternal Judgment means and how it works.

What Eternal Judgment Means

To explain this, we must first remember what we have already learned. We come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because we want to be freed from our sins and the just punishment due to them. Every human being is guilty before God (Rom 3:9-18,23) because of the sin in our flesh that drives us to wickedness (Rom 7:17).

John 3:18

*[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.*

It is to escape this judgment that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without faith in the Lord Jesus, we would have to stand before God to be judged on our own merits. The prospect of any good outcome of that is zero. This is because, as passages shared above show, no one has any righteousness of their own to present to God that is acceptable to Him.

Isaiah 64:6

*[6]For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And **all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment**; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

We were created by God and given a free will to choose whether we will submit to Him and be part of His Family or rebel against Him and reject His offer of eternal fellowship. In Adam, we all rebel against Him. That is, after Adam sinned, his sin-corrupted flesh was passed on to his descendants (Rom 5:12-21) so that from birth every human being, with the exception only of the Lord Jesus Christ, finds themselves in the grip of sin. That is why we are all under condemnation. Without the intervention of the Lord Jesus, we would die and face Judgment only to be formally condemned and thrown into the Lake of Fire. But the Lord Jesus died a terrible spiritual death on the Cross at Calvary to pay the price of every sin ever committed or is being committed today or will yet be committed by every human being. Thus, every human being is automatically answered for before God unless they choose to reject this sacrifice.

In other words, the choice that every human being is faced with is whether to reject the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ in their behalf or not.

This is the main issue of Eternal Judgment: the separation of those who insist on rejecting God from those who accept the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we learn from many Bible passages on judgment.

John 5:22,27-29

[22]For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,

[27]and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.

[28]Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,

*[29]and will come forth; **those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.***

Matthew 25:31-34,41,46

[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]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.

[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;

[46]These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

John 3:18-21

[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.

[19]This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

[20]For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

[21]But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Revelation 20:11-12,15

[11]Then 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.

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

So, those who believe are delivered from this Judgment of condemnation. But everyone who persists in unbelief will eventually face it.

The Timing of Eternal Judgment

Eternal Judgment as represented in the Bible is more complex than we find above. As we learned in the last discussion, there are echelons of Resurrection with the Lord Jesus in the First, the Church in the Second and Millennial Believers and all Unbelievers in the Third and Final echelon. This also applies in Judgment.

a. The Judgment Of The Church

1 Peter 4:17-18

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

[18]And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?

1 Corinthians 3:13-15

[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 on it remains, he will receive a reward.

[15]If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

As passages like the above show, Eternal Judgment will begin with Christians. At the Resurrection that occurs at the Second Advent, every human being who maintained faith in the Lord Jesus (either in God's Promise of a Messiah to save humanity before the Cross or in the actual Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ after the Cross) until the end of their earthly walk or until His Appearing at the Second Advent (for those who live to see that moment) will be given New Resurrection Bodies and called to assemble with the Lord in the Heavens before the final war of Armageddon. After that war, these resurrected human beings (that is, the Church) will be judged in a general assembly over which the Lord Jesus will be presiding seated on a Judgment Seat (Greek: Bema).

2 Corinthians 5:10

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

This is the first judgment. It is not one of condemnation since as we have seen, only those who do not believe are condemned. Belief in the Lord Jesus exempts everyone who possesses it from the Judgment of Condemnation. Lack of it, however, means that the person in question is already condemned and Judgment is only a formality to make it clear to such a person why they are condemned.

This judgment then is one to determine eternal reward. Each believer will be evaluated as to how well they have done with their faith in the Lord Jesus. This evaluation will yield rewards in varying degrees so that there will really be such a thing as "the least of the saints" and "the greatest in the Kingdom". This judgment is the greatest motivator that the Bible offers Christians to run a good race. Otherwise, the trials of the Good Fight of Faith would discourage believers. There is more to say about that but that will be said in future studies.

b. The Judgment of Millennial Believers

Matthew 25:31-34

[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]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.

Revelation 20:11,15

[11]Then 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.

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

Our Lord speaks of the Judgment of the White Throne in our passage in Matt 25:31-34 but in Rev 20 where this Judgment is graphically described, the Millennial believers are not present having already been judged in keeping with the principle that Judgment begins in the Lord's House. It also makes sense to conclude that their Judgment will also be for reward since there is no question but that faith in the

Lord Jesus has already saved the believer from condemnation and lack of it has already condemned the unbeliever.

This judgment occurs at the end of the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus which ends after the last uprising against the Authority of God in the Earth is crushed and the Universe is destroyed. It is also the penultimate Judgment.

c. The Judgment of the Unbelieving

Revelation 20:11-13,15

[11]Then 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.

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

This is the final group of people to be judged. There is a similarity in this judgment to the judgment of believers in that it also involves evaluation of each individual's "deeds". This has led some people to believe that our "deeds" have a say in whether we are ultimately saved or condemned to the Lake of Fire. That is not what Revelation says. A combination of Revelation 20 and Matthew 25 shows that this evaluation of deeds is to provide clear understanding to each individual why they are condemned and will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. It is to be expected that each unbeliever when finally face to face with God Himself and the absolute certainty of the Lake of Fire will want to avoid the latter if they can. And God is gracious enough to listen to their protests and explain to them what their judgment is. Otherwise, it is sufficient that their names are not in the Book of Life where all those who have believed both before the Millennium and in the Millennium remain written.

Conclusion

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:11, knowing the fear of God from the inevitability of Eternal Judgment (whether it be for reward for believers or for condemnation for unbelievers), we ought to be that much more zealous to please God and encourage others to do the same for once we come to that Judgment,

there are no more opportunities to do as we should. God is gracious so He continues to be patient with everyone granting even those who hate Him ample opportunity to turn around and be saved (such opportunity is how and why Paul was saved too even though he was a particularly bitter enemy of the Church's prior). This patience of the Lord's ought not to be counted as weakness (2 Pet 3:9) rather we should receive it as the Great Grace that it is. If the Lord did not wait so patiently for us tolerating our foolishness as much as He has, no one would be saved. And eternity in the Lake of Fire is not pleasant in any description. Let us therefore keep in mind this certainty of Judgment and run in accordance with a hope of a full reward rather than be caught by surprise and suffer the Lord's Rebuke.

Grace remain with you.