

CHAPTER 32 – THE LAST JUDGMENT

The Day of Judgment

1. *God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given all authority and power to judge. At that day the apostate angels will be judged. So too will all persons who have lived upon the earth; they will appear before Christ's judgment throne to give an account of their thoughts, words and deeds, and to receive His award in accordance with what they have done in this earthly life, whether good or evil.*

(a) **The Day is appointed.** The Confession takes its wording from Acts 17:31. The resurrection of Christ is the assurance of judgment because it proves all His teachings are true (see Matthew 25:31-46, 26:64). For a Day of Judgment read Acts 24:25, Romans 2:6, 14:10, 2 Corinthians 5:10.

(b) **Jesus Christ will be the Judge.** God has appointed Christ to be the Judge (Matthew 25:31-32, John 5:22,27, Acts 10:42). Therefore, no distinction should be made between the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10), and the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11). God judges in the Person of His Son. As our Mediator and King He will finish His work in the destruction of His enemies and the complete redemption of His people.

(c) **Angels and men will be judged.**

1. "Apostate angels" – 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6.
2. "All who have lived" – The entire human race of every generation (Matthew 24:32, 2 Timothy 4:1, Revelation 20:12-13).

(d) **Judgment will be according to works.** "Thoughts, words and deeds." The Bible has many very clear statements on this: read Matthew 16:27, Romans 2:6, Revelation 20:12, 22:12. If we are saved by faith, why are we not judged according to our faith? The reason is that true, saving faith is only evidenced by works (Galatians 5:6, James 2:26). These works are not done in order to merit eternal life, but are the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ. Works are not only actions, but words (Matthew 12:36-37), and "every secret thing" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). In Matthew 25:31ff. the sheep express their devotion to Christ by love to Christ's brothers; the goats fail to show love for Christ by failing to show love for Christ's brothers.

Understanding the Day of Judgment is important for at least the following reasons:

1. The history of the world will not go on for ever and ever.
2. The Day of Judgment shows that everything depends upon one's relationship to Jesus Christ.
3. That all will be judged shows that we must give an account for our lives.+
4. Judgment is the final triumph of God and His work of redemption in history.

The Purpose of the Day of Judgment

2. *God's purpose in appointing a day of judgment is to make known the glory of His rich mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and the glory of His justice in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, that is to say, the wicked and disobedient. In that day the righteous will inherit everlasting life, and receive a fulness of joy and glory in the Lord's presence as their eternal reward. But the wicked, who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, will be relegated to everlasting torments and 'punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power'.*

(a) The Day of Judgment is **to make known God's glory**.

1. In the *elect*. The wording is taken from Romans 9:22-23. On that Day all the elect ones will receive 'eternal salvation', not because of any deserving, but because of God's 'rich mercy'. It is mercy because we are hell-deserving sinners and He gives to us a salvation unto all eternity. See Romans 9:15-16,18, Ephesians 2:4, 1 Timothy 1: 13,16, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:3. How glorious God is!
2. In the *reprobate*. On that Day all the 'reprobate' (or wicked, disobedient) will receive 'eternal damnation', because it is what they deserve for their sins.

[Note: 'Reprobate' = rejected, see 2 Corinthians 13:5-7 where it is translated 'fail the test', and Hebrews 6:8 where it is translated 'worthless'. According to His sovereign will God did not choose to save them but passed them by to be judged as they deserve. If you want to know why God has done this, then read carefully Romans 9:14-21.]

At the Day of Judgment God will be glorified for 'His justice' because He will give to the wicked exactly what they deserve. How awful sin must be if it deserves such eternal punishment. Read the following passages that refer to God being glorified in giving such punishment: Proverbs 16:4, Romans 9:22, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Revelation 19:1-5.

(b) The Day of Judgment is **to give God's final judgment**. A question arises: Is this necessary as at death all have gone to their eternal destination (Chapter 31, section 1)? That had reference to their disembodied souls, but the final judgment is for all men after the resurrection, and is public, so displaying God's glory.

1. '*Everlasting life*' for the righteous. Matthew 19:29, 25:46, John 3:15-16, Romans 2:7, 5:21, 6:23, Galatians 6:8, 1 John 5:11. Life does not just mean existence, but a genuine relationship with the triune God (John 17:3, see 10:10). It is a life of perfect freedom from sin in the believer, for we shall be like Christ, and in the new heavens and earth in which we shall dwell (2 Peter 3:13). We shall be with God and the Lamb in the closest possible relationship (Revelation 21:3-4, 22:1-5).
2. '*Everlasting destruction*' for the wicked. Some people think that God could not punish anyone for ever and ever; Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists teach that destruction = annihilation, i.e. ceasing to exist; others want to think that after some punishment everyone will be saved in the end, for which there is no Biblical evidence. Consider the following points that show the Bible clearly teaches the wicked will live in conscious punishment for ever:
 - Punishment is 'eternal' (Matthew 18:8, 25:39,46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, Hebrews 6:2, Revelation 14:11). Eternal life is the opposite of eternal punishment in Matthew 25:46, so the duration of the one is as the other. The word 'eternal' is also used of God in Romans 1:20, 16:26, 1 Timothy 1:17.
 - Punishment is like a fire that is never quenched (Matthew 3:12, Mark 9:43,48, see Revelation 14:10-11), a body that is never consumed (Mark 9:48).
 - Punishment is for sin that is never pardoned (Mark 3:29)
 - Punishment is so terrible that better to enter eternal life crippled (Matthew 18:8) or never born (Matthew 26:24).
 - Punishment leaves the wicked hopeless and angry (Matthew 13:42, 24:51, 25:30).
3. Annihilation is false teaching because it is the same as if one had never been born, not worse; 'destruction' means to ruin not to put something into non-existence; when Jesus suffered the penalty for our sins He was not annihilated but tormented in both body and soul.

The Practical Importance of the Day of Judgment

3. *To deter all men from sin on the one hand, and to give greater comfort to the godly in their adversity on the other, Christ would have us firmly persuaded that a day of judgment lies ahead. For the same reasons He has kept the day's date a secret so that men may shake off all confidence in themselves and, in ignorance of the hour in which the Lord will come, may be ever on the watch, and ever prepared to say, 'Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. Amen.'*

(a) Absolute **certainty** that there will be a Day of Judgment. It is certain because it is revealed in the Scriptures. This certainty is designed to have 2 effects:

1. "To deter all men from sin" – Because we know we will have to give an account to the One who knows everything, even the secrets of the heart (2 Corinthians 5:10-11, 2 Peter 3:11-14). Those who knowingly do what God forbids, are either without sense, or they do not really believe there will be a judgment – they are Atheists in practice.
2. "To give comfort to the godly in their adversity" – One of the ways by which we bear with troubles in this life is knowing that one day it will come to an end, and all wrongs will be righted in God's righteous judgment. So the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 1:5-8), so the martyrs (Revelation 6:9-11).

(b) Absolute **uncertainty** as to the timing of the Day of Judgment. No one knows when Christ will return (Matthew 24:36). We are repeatedly told He is coming like a 'thief in the night', i.e. at a time we do not expect (read Matthew 24:42,50, 25:13, Luke 12:39-40, 1 Thess. 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 16:15). Note: Coming like a thief does not mean coming secretly or silently, but unexpectedly. Why has the time been hidden from us?

1. "That men may shake off all confidence in themselves" – If we knew for sure that our Lord is not coming soon, it might be a temptation to live as we like and not be very concerned about obedience, as the servant in Luke 12:45-46.
2. "That men ... may ever be on the watch" – How often we are told to watch, like an askari awaiting the return of his boss, or looking for the thief (Matthew 24:42-43, 25:13, Mark 13:37, 1 Corinthians 16:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 1 Peter 5:8, Revelation 3:2-3, 16:15). The opposite of watching in a spiritual sense is carelessness, not being devoted to doing the Master's will.
3. "That men ... may be ... ever prepared to say 'Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. Amen'" – We are to live in eager expectation that He may come at any time, even today! Christians are described as those who are 'eagerly waiting' for Him (1 Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 9:28). Why do we want to continue and continue in this fallen world with all its troubles? Why would we want to continue being away from our precious Lord and Saviour? If we love to be with our family members, then we say 'I can't wait' until the holidays come. You wish it were tomorrow, not months away. So we conclude our studies with almost the very last words of the Bible in Revelation 22:20, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"