



## BELIEVERS IN JUDGMENT

Source: Tim Challies

(<https://www.challies.com/articles/believers-in-judgment/>)



Recently a reader of this wrote me to ask if I had ever written anything dealing with believers and the final judgment. I quickly realized that I had not and thought that today would be a good opportunity to remedy that. So here is a brief look at what believers can expect in the final judgment.

There are several principles we need to keep in mind as we begin.

There will be a final judgment – At the end of days there will be a final judgment. We can offer no greater evidence than the words of Revelation 20:11-15 which vividly portrays this event.

*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.*

In some final day, firmly set in the mind of God but hidden from us, there will be a great event of judgment in which those who are living and those who are dead will be brought before the throne of judgment where they will be examined and judged.

**Christ will be the judge** – Christ will serve as judge. We know this from passages such as 2 Timothy 4:1 where Paul writes of "Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead" and 4:8 where he refers to "the Lord, the righteous judge." John also writes of Christ as judge saying in 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."



**All men are to be judged** – All men, both Christians and unbelievers, will stand before God in judgment. Revelation 20, quoted above, makes it clear that none are excluded from appearing before God's throne. Similarly Matthew 25 speaks of the final judgment. While Jesus does differentiate between the sheep and the goats, he indicates that both will appear before his throne to be separated, the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

**The ground of the judgment will be men's deeds** – Men will be judged according to what they have done, what they have thought, what they have said. Even the secrets of the heart will be brought to light in that day. The true character of each man will be exposed in the sight of God, in the sight of that person and in the sight of all.

**Men will be judged according to God's revelation** – Christ will judge people on this basis of God's revelation of himself. Therefore there will be a greater degree of reward or punishment to those who have had access to a greater measure of God's revelation. To whom much is given, much shall be required.

With these principles in mind, we can now ask how believers will be judged.

In Romans 14 Paul says "we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" and "each of us will give an account of himself to God." Writing to the believers in Corinth he says, "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." It seems clear, then, that believers will need to appear before the Judge.

But this final judgment for believers will not be a judgment of life or death. There is no reason to think that as we approach God's throne we will have pounding hearts, hoping that we will pass the test and be put at his right hand (and similarly there is little reason to think that unbelievers will approach the throne wondering if they are saved; they will know that they approach the throne to hear of their punishment). It is not that kind of a judgment, for all who have put their faith in Christ have already been justified and declared righteous. Christ has already been judged on their behalf. Instead, this final judgment will be a time of the bestowing of reward. Here Christ will evaluate all we have done according to the light given us and bestow rewards accordingly.

Some Christians believe that in the judgment all of our evil deeds will be exposed—that before we receive our reward we will first have all we've said and done brought into the light (see 1 Corinthians 4:5). However, this must be balanced with passages such as Psalm 103:12 ("as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us") and Micah 7:19 ("You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea"). It is my understanding, then, that our sins will not be exposed before others and that Christ will not speak of them in that day, for those sins have already been dealt with and have already been removed. Though Christ will dispense reward or withhold reward on the basis of what we've done or haven't done, he will not bring those sinful deeds before all the world.

We may now ask the question if there will be discontent in heaven that some have received greater reward than others. So accustomed are we to finding joy and meaning in what we possess, and so accustomed are we to feeling that equality in possessions or wealth is a key to true happiness, that we have difficulty understanding how there can be inequality, and perhaps even radical inequality, even in perfect bliss. But if we understand that our true happiness is found not in what we own but in our delight in God, we must then see that all of us will be entirely, perfectly content after the judgment. Furthermore, we will know that God has judged rightly and given to each of us no more and no less than what we deserve. There will be no court of appeals for no one will want or need to appeal his reward.

How then do we live in light of this doctrine? We live righteous lives, storing up treasures in heaven. Somehow in my mind this seems like an ignoble motive—to obey God and to do good things as a means of storing up eternal reward. Yet Christ himself indicated that it is a good motive saying, "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven." And so we can live here and now free from the need to find reward and satisfaction in this life, knowing that in eternity our reward shall be given in full.