

The Unconverted “Believer” (14): The Future General Judgment of Works

Today we will examine one of the most frightful passages of all of Scripture. In Revelation 20 we read of what is commonly called The Great White Throne Judgment. This passage of Scripture toward the end of the biblical record declares that there will be a future event in which God will judge every individual of the human race; the outcome will be either entrance into eternal life or consignment into everlasting hell. The seriousness of the matter is staggering, and should lead all people who read it or hear of it to search their souls in order to assess their standing before God and to live in preparation for that day. Here is the passage of the Word of God that speaks to the end of human history and the accounting that all people must render unto God. This is Revelation 20:11-15:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

I suppose that if there was one passage that the Holy Spirit used to convict my soul of the guiltiness of my sin and my certain damnation apart from Jesus Christ, it was this one we just read. It is terrifying to the one outside of Christ, if he believes that the Holy Bible is the Word of God and its statements are the truths of God. There is heaven to gain and hell to escape, and that is possible only through the One that God has appointed and enabled to secure our salvation from sin—Jesus Christ the Son of God. As Peter filled with the Holy Spirit declared, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The Word of God teaches throughout its pages that there will be an accounting rendered to God by all people for how they lived in this world. Even in the Old Testament this idea is pronounced. Solomon had written his counsel to all from what he had discovered through his reflection of his life’s experience:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (Ecc. 12:13f)

The prophet Daniel foresaw the final judgment in which God’s people would receive salvation and the damned would be consigned to everlasting punishment.

And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. ²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan. 12:1f)

Of course it is in the New Testament where references to salvation from sin and God’s eternal wrath are most clearly set before us. The Lord Jesus taught about hell in several places in His sermon on the mount. Here is one:

“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Matt. 5:22)

On another occasion Jesus exhorted His hearers to repent of their sin otherwise they would suffer the unending punishment of hell:

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—⁴⁴where

‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’

⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—⁴⁶where

‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’

⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—⁴⁸where

‘Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.’ (Mark 9:43-48)

And in another place Jesus taught the need to have faith in God and His way of salvation. He taught, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

But it was toward the end of His earthly ministry that Jesus spoke in detail of the final judgment. In Matthew 25 we read of the final separation of the wicked from the righteous:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

⁴¹“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘***Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*** ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ ⁴⁵Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

⁴⁶***And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.***” (Matt. 25:31-46)

The apostle Paul set forth the final judgment of mankind in Romans 2. He warned people, even those who thought quite well of themselves, that they will be judged according to their works, that is, the manner in

which they lived their lives. The outcome of this judgment was either the gift of eternal life or the justice of the indignation and wrath of God.

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. ³And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶*“who will render to each one according to his deeds”*: ⁷*eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality*; ⁸but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—*indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil*, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; ¹⁰but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹¹For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:1-11)

When we address the subject of biblical salvation, although we frequently speak of being saved from sin, both its power and effects, and being saved from alienation from God into a blessed relationship with God, there is always present the understanding that salvation is deliverance from God’s wrath upon sinners in eternal hell. Salvation is often set forth as escaping God’s sentence of damnation on the final Day of Judgment, which is so clearly set forth for us in Revelation 20:11-15. Let us consider this passage in detail.

I. The Great White Throne Judgement (Rev. 20:11-15)

A. The Scene of the Judgment (vs. 11, 12a)

John the apostle wrote what he saw. God gave him a vision of the far distant future at the end of history, when He will render justice to all who lived in defiance and disregard of Him as the one true God. But John also foresaw the deliverance of those who were the recipients of God’s salvation, whose names are recorded in the Book of Life. We read in verses 11 and 12a of all humanity brought before the throne of God.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God...

John saw “a great white throne.” In the ancient world the greatness of a king’s throne displayed the greatness of the king’s authority and power over his realm. We read of king Solomon’s throne:

Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. ¹⁹The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round at the back; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests. ²⁰Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like this had been made for any other kingdom. (1 Kings 10:18-20)

John saw a far greater throne in heaven: “Then I saw a great white throne.”

John saw God who was seated on His throne. All people were brought before Him to be judged by Him. In the Revelation God the Father is often described as sitting on His throne. But Jesus Christ is also reigning along with His Father. Jesus declared to one of His churches, “I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21). And because of other verses of Holy Scripture that declare that the Father has entrusted His Son with the final judgment of mankind (cf. John 5:26f), we know that here John saw Jesus Christ as God sitting on the throne to exercise the final judgment of mankind on behalf of His Father.

That the throne is “white” speaks of God’s holiness and the holy nature of His judgment that He executes in His regal authority. **Greg Beale** (b. 1949) wrote, “The white color of the throne denotes the holiness of God.

The judgment about to proceed from the throne is from the holy God, who judges not only to punish sin but also to vindicate His persecuted people.”¹

God who was sitting upon His throne causes all people and all things to recoil from His glorious presence and from His authority. It would seem that the glory of His “face”, that is His presence, causes the created order to disintegrate before Him. We read of Him, “**from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.**” The Scriptures teach us that one day this entire created order will be incinerated, after which God will create a new heavens and earth. These few words in Revelation 20:11 may depict this event. Peter wrote of this event occurring at the second coming of Christ and the final judgment that would then take place.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

In the book of the Revelation the new heavens and new earth appear in Revelation 21 and 22. John wrote in the first verse of the next chapter, “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1). In Revelation 20:11 when we read, “**from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away**”, it is speaking of this cataclysmic ending of the present order of creation before the new creation is brought into existence. John writes of the earth and heaven, “**And there was found no place for them.**” This last statement may be alluding to Daniel’s vision when the wicked kingdoms of the world through the judgment of God are supplanted by the kingdom of God. They “became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found” (Dan. 2:35).²

John also saw the dead, who are classified as small and great. Verse 12 reads, “**And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God...**” These two adjectives--small and great--are found elsewhere in the book of Revelation. We read in 11:18 of the small and great describing all Christians. “

The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

And in Revelation 19:17 and 18 these two adjectives describe the unrighteous:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, “Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, **both small and great.**”

The use of these two adjectives here in 20:12a may be understood as encompassing all people, both the unrighteous and the righteous, both the “small and great” of all mankind. This is a general judgment of all mankind. And here they are all “standing before God” to be judged by Him and have Him pronounce their eternal destiny of either the new heavens and earth, or of the lake of fire, the second death.

B. The basis of judgment (vs. 12b)

¹ Greg Beale, with David H. Campbell, **Revelation; A Shorter Commentary** (William B. Eerdmans, 2015), p. 458.

² Ibid, p. 459.

We next read of the standard by which the dead will be judged and of what it is about them that will be examined. We read, “...and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the *Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”

John saw some “books” that “were opened.” The dead were judged by the things written in these books. John does not describe specifically the contents of these books, but that has not prevented commentators from proposing what they might be and what they might contain. **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) thought that the books opened were but two books which represented two aspects of God’s dealings with people. First, there is the book of God’s remembrance, which records all thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions of all people within history. But there is another book among these first mentioned books. Edwards posited that this was the Word of God, by which all people will be judged on that final day. He wrote:

Which books seem to be these two, the book of God’s remembrance, and the book of Scripture; the former as the evidence of their deeds which are to be judged, the latter as the rule of judgment. The works both of the righteous and of the wicked will be brought forth, that they may be judged according to them, and those works will be tried according to the appointed and written rule.³

This language of “books” in Revelation 20:12 is parallel with a passage in Daniel which we should understand as a prophecy of this endtime judgment. In Daniel 7:

“I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment *was* white as snow,
And the hair of His head *was* like pure wool.
His throne *was* a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
¹⁰A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated,
And the books were opened. (Dan. 7:9, 10)

But then we read that in addition to these opened books, there is another book which is also opened; it is the *Book of Life*. This is also referenced in the prophecy of Daniel. We read from Daniel 12:1 and 2 earlier:

“At that time Michael shall stand up,
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;
And there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.
And at that time your people shall be delivered,
Every one who is found written in the book.
²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame and everlasting contempt.
³Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

³ Edward Hickman, revised and corrected, **The Works of Jonathan Edwards**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, orig. 1834), p. 195.

C. The comprehensive nature of this judgment (v. 13)

God summons before Him in judgment all people who have lived throughout history. Verse 13a reads, ***“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”***

The first clause shows that God will bring before Him in judgment everyone who has ever lived and died, even though their bodies were consumed or disintegrated. **Jonathan Edwards** wrote of this:

Upon this all the dead shall rise from their graves; all, both small and great, who shall have lived upon the earth since the foundation of the world; those who died before the flood, and those who were drowned in the flood, all that have died since that time, and that shall die to the end of the world. There will be a great moving upon the face of the earth, and in the waters, in bringing bone to his bone, in opening graves, and bringing together all the scattered particles of dead bodies. The earth shall give up the dead that are in it, and the sea will give up the dead that are in it.

However the parts of the bodies of many are divided and scattered; however many have been burnt, and their bodies have been turned to ashes and smoke, and driven of the four winds; however many have been eaten of wild beasts, of the fowls of heaven, and the fishes of the sea; however many have consumed away upon the face of the earth, and great part of their bodies have ascended in exhalations; yet the all-wise and all-powerful God can immediately bring every part to his part again.⁴

Not only will the sea give up the dead, but ***“Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them.”*** “Death” probably speaks of the grave in which the bodies reside. “Hades” may speak of the place where the souls of those who die go upon death. Hades may be regarded here as it is set forth in the Old Testament, a place where all souls of the dead reside. There, as set forth in Luke 16, the souls of the redeemed are separated from the souls of the unrighteous. The righteous souls are enjoying rest, waiting for the day of the resurrection. The souls of the unrighteous, the unsaved, are in Hades or Sheol suffering presently God’s wrath for living and dying in unbelief. But at the end of the age God will cause the physical bodies to be reunited with their souls and they will be summoned before the throne of God to face their final judgment.

All human beings will be raised on that day. The Lord Jesus declared in John 5:28f these words,

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice²⁹and come forth—***those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.***

John saw that all brought before God’s throne are judged. ***“And they were judged, each one according to his works.”*** All people of all times who lived in every place shall be resurrected from the dead. And they all will be judged according to their works. The outcome of this judgment will either be damnation or salvation.

This judgment, then, wherein the dead were judged according to their works (v. 12), includes believers as well as unbelievers, despite the clear teaching of Scripture that salvation is not attained through works (cf. Eph. 2:8, 9; Tit. 3:5). It is an equally clear teaching of Scripture that a Christian is known by his works as surely as is an unsaved man (James 2:15-18; Tit. 1:16; 2:14). Therefore Christians who are saved by grace through faith will be proven to be so as the result of an examination of their works (Matt. 16:27; 25:31ff; 1 Pet. 1:17).⁵

That God is going to judge all people according to their works the outcome of which is either salvation or damnation, is the teaching of all of Scripture. What kind of “works” will God judge? First, God will judge all the **thoughts** of every person who has ever lived. These thoughts are the “secret things” of the soul. Paul wrote in Romans 2:12ff:

⁴ Edwards, vol. 2, p. 194.

⁵ Steve Gregg, ed., **Revelation; Four Views** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), p. 480.

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law... ¹⁶in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

Second, God will judge all of our *actions*, indeed, every deed performed by every person who has ever lived. Paul wrote, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, *that each one may receive the things done in the body*, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). Third, God will judge us for all of the *words* that we have ever spoken. Jesus declared, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36f). Here to be “justified” means to be vindicated. This is not a reference to forensic (legal) justification, which is through faith alone. It declares that when the Lord brings us before Him in the final judgment, our words, that is, our speech, will either prove that we were true Christians or will prove us to be otherwise. And fourth, God will judge each of us regarding the *attitudes* that we have exhibited in life. We read, for example, that unholy *anger* will be condemned by the Lord Jesus. He taught, “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt. 5:22). True Christians are known by the way they think, feel, speak, and behave. On the Day of Judgment their lives governed by faith in Jesus Christ will show forth ample testimony that they were the Lord’s people. On the other hand, the evidence will convict all unbelievers that they lived for themselves, not doing God’s will. The way in which they think, feel, speak, and behave will convict them before their Almighty Judge who sees all things, remembers all things, and judges all things.

D. The outcome of this judgment (vs. 14-15)

We then read in Revelation 20:14 and 15, “*Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*” In verse 13 we read that “Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them.” Here, however, both Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. The apostle Paul wrote that upon His resurrection the Lord Jesus would reign until He defeated all the enemies of God and His people.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (died). ²¹For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. ²⁴Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶*The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.*

The grave is the realm of death and with the resurrection and final judgment of mankind it will be emptied of its former inhabitants. Similarly Sheol is vacant of the souls of those who had formerly occupied that spiritual realm. And so, here in Revelation 20:14 and 15, with Death and Hades being personified, they are both cast into the lake of fire. Of Death and Hades **George Beasley-Murray** (1916-2000) wrote:

Death and Hades are declared in 1:7f to be under the control of the risen Lord. In 6:7f they are personified, as here, but there they represent agents of judgment—death stalking the land in the wake of the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts, and the underworld opening its jaws to receive the dead. John therefore views *death* as evil and an adversary which only the Lord can subdue, and *Hades* as a part of the old order of existence which must give way to the life of the new creation, very much in the same way as Paul in his exposition of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:26, 54f). Death and Hades therefore are thrown into the lake of fire. Their power over man has ended, since they who are acknowledged by the Lamb have risen for participation in the life of the new creation, and those whose deeds condemned them to suffer the second death, i.e. the lake of fire.⁶

⁶ George Beasley-Murray, **The Book of Revelation** (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 302f.

To this event John wrote, “*This is the second death.*” The first death was physical death. The second death is consignment to eternal punishment in the lake of fire. “As there is a second and higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death (ch. 21:4), so after that death there is no more life.”⁷

J. I. Packer (1926-1990) summarized the teaching of the New Testament on hell in this way:

The New Testament views hell (*Gehenna*, as Jesus calls it, the place of incineration, Matt. 5:22, 18:9) as the final abode of those consigned to eternal punishment at the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:41-46; Rev. 20:11-15). It is thought of as a place of fire and darkness (Jude 7, 13), of weeping and grinding of teeth (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), of destruction (2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:7; 1 Thess. 5:3), and of torment (Rev. 20:10; Luke 16:23)—in other words, of total distress and misery. If, as it seems, these terms are symbolic rather than literal (fire and darkness would be mutually exclusive in literal terms), we may be sure the reality, which is beyond our imagining, exceeds the symbol in dreadfulness. New Testament teaching about hell is meant to appall us and strike us dumb with horror, assuring us that, as heaven will be better than we could dream, so hell will be worse than we can conceive. Such are the issues of eternity, which now need to be realistically faced.⁸

II. Issues respecting the general judgement of mankind according to works

When the subject of the final judgment of mankind is addressed, issues arise that should be addressed. These include, first, questions posed about certain details of judgment. Second, there are challenges to the teaching of the eternal duration of the wicked in hell that must be countered. And third, there are alternative interpretations about this future judgment that must be addressed and corrected.

A. Question: Will the sin of believers be made known and considered at the final judgment?

A question that is commonly posed by Christians involves the nature of public disclosure of their sins on the Day of Judgment. Will God make known to all present at the judgment all the sins that we have ever committed? There have been different opinions by good men in answering this question. The pastor and hymn writer, **John Newton** (1725-1807), addressed the issue in a letter to a friend. This is how the letter is headed in Newton’s collected works:

Letter III

A letter to a friend, on the question, Whether the Sins of Believers shall be publicly declared to the great Day? Or how are we to understand the Apostle’s Assertion, “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether good or bad,” 2 Corinthians 5:10, compared with Romans 14:12.

Newton’s response included these words:

I would say, whatever may be the precise meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:10, we are sure it cannot be designed to weaken what we are taught in almost every page, of the free, absolute, and unalterable nature of the believer’s justification; the benefit of which, as to the forgiveness of sin, is signified by the phrases of “blotting out,”—“not remembering,”—“casting behind the back,”—and “into the depths of the sea.”—The sins of a believer are so effectually removed, that even when, or if, they are sought for, they cannot be found. For Jesus has born them away; believers are complete in Him, and clothed in His righteousness.—They shall stand before God without spot or wrinkle. Who shall lay any thing to their charge.⁹

⁷ Quotation of Alford in Robert H. Mounce, **The Book of Revelation** (William B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 367.

⁸ J. I. Packer, **Concise Theology; A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs** (Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), pp. 261f.

⁹ John Newton, **The Works of John Newton**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth trust, 2015, orig. 1839), pp. 97f.

It would seem, therefore, that John Newton would have answered the question, “No, the sins of believers will not be rehearsed before all at their future judgment of works.” But then Newton seemed to back track somewhat. He went on to write:

But it is probable that those stray expressions chiefly, if not entirely, respect the guilt, imputation, and deserved consequences of sin. None can suppose that the Lord will or *can* forget the sins of His people, or that they can ever be hid from His all-comprehending view. Neither can I think they themselves will forget them. Their song is founded upon a recollection of their sins and their circumstances in this life, Rev. 5:9; and their love, and consequently their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done, Luke 7:47. And I think those are the sweetest moments of this life, when we have the clearest sense of our own sins, provided the sense of our acceptance in the Beloved is proportionately clear, and we feel the consolations of His love, notwithstanding our transgressions. When we arrive in glory, unbelief and fear will cease for ever, our nearness to God, and communion with Him, will be unspeakably beyond what we can now conceive. Therefore the remembrance of our sins will be no abatement of our bliss, but rather the contrary...

With respect to our sins being made known to others, I acknowledge with you, that I could not now bear to have any of my fellow-creatures made acquainted with what passes in my heart for a single day; but I apprehend it is a part of a proof of my present depravity, that I feel myself disposed to pay so great a regard to the judgment of men, while I am so little affected with what I am in the sight of the pure and holy God. But I believe that hereafter when self shall be entirely rooted out, and my will perfectly united to the Divine will, I should feel no reluctance, supposing it for the manifestation of His glorious grace, that men, angels, and devils, should know the very worst of me. Whether it will be so or no, I dare not determine.¹⁰

But when I read the views of **Jonathan Edwards** (1704-1758), it is clear that he gave a different understanding of this issue. After he described in vivid terms God’s exposure of the wicked sins of the unrighteous, he declared these words regarding the sins of the righteous on the Day of Judgment:

The good works of the saints will also be brought forth as evidences of their sincerity, and of their interest in the righteousness of Christ. As to their evil works, they will not be brought forth against them on that day; for the guilt of them will not lie upon them, they belong clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Judge Himself would have taken the guilt of their sins upon Him; therefore their sins will not stand against them in the book of God’s remembrance. The account of them will appear to have been cancelled before that time. The account that will be found in God’s book will not be one of debt, but of credit. God cancels all their debts, and sets down their good works, and is pleased, as it were, to make Himself a debtor for them, by His own gracious act.¹¹

The Word of God promises that the Lord Jesus Christ is “able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 24). Nevertheless, the Scriptures also exhort us, “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:14).

B. Challenges to the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked.

I recently obtained a book that was published in 2004 that set forth a biblical defense for the unending eternal punishment of sinners who die without Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It was a collection of chapters by various evangelical scholars who were refuting those in “evangelical” scholarship who deny this

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 98.

¹¹ Edward Hickman, revised and corrected, **The Works of Jonathan Edwards**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, orig. 1834), p. 195.

biblical teaching. It is entitled, *Hell Under Fire; Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*.¹² There are voices among evangelicals who deny the eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked in hell. It is interesting that polls conducted reveal that “a large majority of Americans believe in the existence of hell.” But it is not commonly or popularly proclaimed in the pulpits of many that would claim to believe the Bible, claim to be evangelical.

The opening chapter was written by **Al Mohler**, which was entitled, “Modern Theology: The Disappearance of Hell.” He concluded the chapter with these words:

The revision or rejection of the historic doctrine of hell comes as a great cost. The entire system of theology is modified by effect, even if some revisionists refuse to take their revisions to their logical conclusions. Essentially our concepts of God and the gospel are at stake. What could be more important?

The temptation to revise the doctrine of hell—to remove the sting and scandal of everlasting conscious punishment—is understandable. But it is also a major test of evangelical conviction. This is no theological trifle. As one observer has asked, “Could it be that the only result of attempts, however well-meaning, to air-condition Hell, is to ensure that more and more people wind up there?”

Hell demands our attention in the present, and now confronts evangelicals with a critical test of theological and biblical integrity. Hell may be denied, but it will not disappear.¹³

C. Other views regarding the Great White Throne Judgment

The understanding of the great white throne judgment that we have presented is consistent with the statement of **The Baptist Confession of 1689**. Here are the three paragraphs of Article 32, which is entitled, **Of the Last Judgment**:

1. __ God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ; to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon the earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds, and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. (Acts 17:31; John 5:22, 27; 1 Cor. 6:3; Jude 6; 2 Cor. 5:10; Ecc. 12:14; Matt. 36; Rom. 14:10, 12; Matt. 25:32-46)

2. __ The end of God's appointing this day, is for the manifestation of the glory of his mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of his justice, in the eternal damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient; for then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and glory with everlasting rewards, in the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast aside into everlasting torments, and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. (Rom. 9:22, 23; Matt. 25:21, 34; 2 Tim. 4:8; Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-10)

3. __ As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity, so will he have the day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may ever be prepared to say, *Come Lord Jesus; come quickly*. Amen. (2 Cor. 5:10, 11; 2 Thess. 1:5-7; Mark 13:35-37; Luke 12:35-40; Rev. 22:20)

This understanding of the final, general judgment of all humanity has been the historical view of all Protestants for hundreds of years, that is, until the beginning of the 20th century. All of the older Protestant confessions of faith set forth the general resurrection and judgment of mankind. But with the entrance of dispensationalism teaching of the 20th century this has all changed. Most evangelicals do not view this great

¹² Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, **Hell Under Fire; Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment** (Zondervan, 2004), 256 pp.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 40f.

white throne judgment as a general judgment of all mankind, but that it is a limited judgment of only the unsaved people of history. Furthermore, they do not believe that Christians will undergo a judgment of their works the outcome of which is either salvation or damnation. They teach that the only future judgment that Christians will face is for the purpose of the Lord awarding them with rewards for faithful stewardship. They claim that this will be a separate “judgment”, or better, “assessment”, which is to be conducted 1007 years before they say that this great white throne judgment will take place. Furthermore, they take other passages of Scripture that speak of the final judgment of mankind and they interpret them as other judgments in history having occurred long before this great white throne judgment of Revelation 20. For example, the Lord Jesus taught the end time separation and judgment of the redeemed from the lost in His metaphor of a shepherd separating his sheep from his goats (Matt. 25:21ff). Where our confession of faith equates this judgment with the final judgment of Revelation 20, they teach that it is a judgment of people who are alive at the end of a future seven year tribulation period. If they pass the judgment they will be allowed entrance and to live in a 1,000 year earthly Jewish millennium. But if they are condemned in that judgment, they are put to death to await their final judgment after 1,000 years of earth’s history has passed. But these dispensationalists who, in my opinion, claim falsely that they alone take the Bible literally, fail to deal with other problems that arise from their faulty views of the end times. We would ask of them,

What of all those who die during a future seven year tribulation that they say will come upon the world after the rapture of the Church? When will they be resurrected?

When will those who are saved during the tribulation experience their judgment before Christ since all the redeemed had already passed through that judgment after a pretribulation rapture?

And what of those who live and are converted during the 1,000 year kingdom on earth? When they die, when do they experience their bodily resurrection?

When do they face their judgment of works before the Lord Jesus?

Given their end time views, dispensationalists would require a number of future resurrections and a number of future judgments. It is much simpler and biblical to see that there will be only one final general resurrection of all humanity in which they will then undergo one general judgment before the throne of God. We embrace the truth that the Lord Jesus taught of a general resurrection and general judgment of all mankind in John 5:28f

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice²⁹and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

But dispensationalists refuse to take this verse “literally”, in that they place a period of 1007 years between the resurrection of the righteous (which they claim occurs first) and the resurrection of condemnation which they say takes place 1007 years later. The result of this belief is the failure to present the Biblical doctrine of a single day when Jesus Christ will return, raise all the dead, and bring all people before His judgment seat to be examined according to their works.

D. How do we think and live in consideration of this final day of judgement?

First, may we view all people about us as ones who will one day face God in judgment of their lives and that their only hope of salvation is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul once wrote, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). May we be driven to our prayer for them and our witness to them of the Christless eternity that is before them unless they repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And may we pray for the Holy Spirit to give us boldness that we will speak to them and to give us wisdom to know what to say to them. And may we always pray for our lord to work His grace upon them and in them by which they alone may be saved.

Second, let us be always aware that each of us will one day give account to the Lord for how we are living today. The Lord Jesus warned His disciples:

And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? ⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. (Luke 12:42-46)

May our Lord help us to understand these matters clearly so that we can properly prepare ourselves and seek to properly warn others of the coming Day of the Lord.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty, dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24, 25)

The following are the applications of the teaching of the general judgment of mankind according to their works as set forth in the sermon,

The Final Judgment

Jonathan Edwards
(1703-1758)

The uses to which this doctrine is applicable.

I. THE first use proper to be made of this doctrine is of instruction. Hence many of the mysteries of Divine Providence may be unfolded. There are many things in the dealings of God towards the children of men, which appear very mysterious, if we view them without having an eye to this last judgment, which yet, if we consider this judgment, have no difficulty in them. As,

First, that God suffers the wicked to live and prosper in the world. The infinitely holy and wise Creator and Governor of the world must necessarily hate wickedness. Yet we see many wicked men spreading themselves as a green bay-tree. They live with impunity; things seem to go well with them, and the world smiles upon them. Many who have not been fit to live, who have held God and religion in the greatest contempt, who have been open enemies to all that is good, who by their wickedness have been the pests of mankind. Many cruel tyrants, whose barbarities have been such as would even fill one with horror to hear or read of them; yet have lived in great wealth and outward glory, have reigned over great and mighty kingdoms and empires, and have been honored as a sort of earthly gods.

Now, it is very mysterious, that the holy and righteous Governor of the world, whose eye beholds all the children of men, should suffer it so to be, unless we look forward to the day of judgment. And then the mystery is unraveled. For although God for the present keeps silence, and seems to let them alone; yet then he will give suitable manifestations of his displeasure against their wickedness. They shall then receive condign punishment. The saints under the Old Testament were much stumbled at these dispensations of Providence, as you may see in Job 21, and Psalm 73, and Jeremiah 12. The difficulty to them was so great, because then a future state and a day of judgment were not revealed with that clearness with which they are now.

Second, God sometimes suffers some of the best of men to be in great affliction, poverty, and persecution. The wicked rule, while they are subject. The wicked are the head, and they are the tail. The wicked domineer, while they serve, and are oppressed, yea are trampled under their feet, as the mire of the streets. These things are very common, yet they seem to imply great confusion. When the wicked are exalted to power and authority, and the godly are oppressed by them, things are quite out of joint. Proverbs 25:26, "A righteous man falling down before the wicked, is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring." Sometimes one wicked man makes many hundreds, yea thousands, of precious saints a sacrifice to his lust and cruelty, or to his enmity against virtue and the truth, and puts them to death for no other reason but that for which they are especially to be esteemed and commended.

Now, if we look no further than the present state, these things appear strange and unaccountable. But we ought not to confine our views within such narrow limits. When God shall have put an end to the present state, these things shall all be brought to rights. Though God suffers things to be so for the present, yet they shall not proceed in this course always. Comparatively speaking, the present state of things is but for a moment. When all shall be settled and fixed by a divine judgment, the righteous shall be exalted, honored, and rewarded, and the wicked shall be depressed and put under their feet. However the wicked now prevail against the righteous, yet the righteous shall at last have the ascendant, shall come off conquerors, and shall see the just vengeance of God executed upon those who now hate and persecute them.

Third, it is another mystery of providence, that God suffers so much public injustice to take place in the world. There are not only private wrongs, which in this state pass unsettled, but many public wrongs, wrongs done by men acting in a public character, and wrongs which affect nations, kingdoms, and other public bodies of men. Many suffer by men in public offices, from whom there is no refuge, from whose decisions there is no appeal. Now it seems a mystery that these things are tolerated, when he that is rightfully the Supreme Judge and Governor of the world is perfectly just. But at the final judgment all these wrongs shall be adjusted, as well as those of a more private nature.

II. Our second use of this subject shall be to apply it to the awakening of sinners. You that have not the fear of God before your eyes, that are not afraid to sin against him, consider seriously what you have heard concerning the day of judgment. Although these things be now future and unseen, yet they are real and certain. If you now be left to yourselves, if God keep silence, and judgment be not speedily executed, it is not because God is regardless how you live, and how you behave yourselves. Now indeed God is invisible to you, and his wrath is invisible. But at the day of judgment, you yourselves shall see him with your bodily eyes. You shall not then be able to keep out of his sight, or to avoid seeing him.

Revelation 1:7, "Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." You shall see him coming in the clouds of heaven. Your ears shall hear the last trumpet, that dreadful sound, the voice of the archangel. Your eyes shall see your judge sitting on the throne, they shall see those manifestations of wrath which there will be in his countenance. Your ears shall hear him pronounce the sentence.

Seriously consider, if you live in the ways of sin, and appear at that day with the guilt of it upon you, how you will be able to endure the sight or the hearing of these things, and whether horror and amazement will not be likely to seize you, when you shall see the judge descending, and hear the trump of God. What account will you be able to give, when it shall be inquired of you, why you led such a sinful, wicked life? What will you be able to say for yourselves, when it shall be asked, why you neglected such and such particular duties, as the duty of secret prayer, for instance? Or why you have habitually practiced such and such particular sins or lusts? Although you be so careless of your conduct and manner of life, make so light of sin, and proceed in it so freely, with little or no dread or remorse; yet you must give an account of every sin that you commit, of every idle word that you speak, and of every sinful thought of your hearts. Every time you deviate from the rules of justice, of temperance, or of charity; every time you indulge any lust, whether secretly or openly, you must give an account of it. It will never be forgotten, it stands written in that book which will be opened on that day.

Consider the rule you will be judged by. It is the perfect rule of the divine law, which is exceeding strict, and exceeding broad. And how will you ever be able to answer the demands of this law? — Consider also,

First, that the judge will be your supreme judge. You will have no opportunity to appeal from his decision. This is often the case in this world. When we are dissatisfied with the decisions of a judge, we often may appeal to a higher, a more knowing, or a more just judicatory. But no such appeal can be made from our Divine Judge. No such indulgence will be allowed. Or if it were allowed, there is no superior judge to whom the appeal should be made. By his decision, therefore, you must abide.

Second, the judge will be omnipotent. Were he a mere man, like yourselves, however he might judge and determine, you might resist, and by the help of others, if not by your own strength, prevent or elude the execution of the judgment. But the judge being omnipotent, this is utterly impossible. In vain is all resistance, either by yourselves, or by whatever help you can obtain. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished," (Prov. 11:21). As well might you "set the briers and thorns in battle against God" (Isa. 27:4).

Third, the judge will be inexorable. Human judges may be prevailed upon to reverse their sentence, or at least to remit something of its severity. But in vain will be all your entreaties, all your cries and tears to this effect, with the great Judge of the world. Now indeed he inclines his ear, and is ready to hear the prayers, cries, and entreaties of all mankind. But then the day of grace will be past, and the door of mercy be shut. Then although ye spread forth your hands, yet the judge will hide his eyes from you. Yea, though ye make many prayers, he will not hear (Isa. 1:15). Then the judge will deal in fury. His eye shall not spare, neither will he have pity. And though ye cry in his ears with a loud voice, yet will he not hear you (Ezek. 8:18). And you will find no place of repentance in God, though you seek it carefully with tears.

Fourth, the judge at that day will not mix mercy with justice. The time for mercy to be shown to sinners will then be past. Christ will then appear in another character than that of the merciful Savior. Having laid aside the inviting attributes of grace and mercy, he will clothe himself with justice and vengeance. He will not only, in general, exact of sinners the demands of the law, but he will exact the whole, without any abatement. He will exact the very uttermost farthing (Matt. 5:26). Then Christ will come to fulfill that in Revelation 14:10, "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture, into the cup of his indignation." The punishment threatened to ungodly men is without any pity. See Ezekiel 5:11, "Neither shall mine eye spare; neither will I have any pity." Here all judgments have a mixture of mercy. But the wrath of God will be poured out upon the wicked without mixture, and vengeance will have its full weight.

III. I shall apply myself, thirdly, to several different characters of men. First, to those who live in secret wickedness. Let such consider that for all these things God will bring them into judgment. Secrecy is your temptation. Promising yourselves this, you practice many things, you indulge many lusts, under the cover of darkness, and in secret corners, which you would be ashamed to do in the light of the sun, and before the world. But this temptation is entirely groundless. All your secret abominations are even now perfectly known to God, and will also hereafter be made known both to angels and men. Luke 12:2, 3, "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light: and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops."

Before human judges are brought only those things which are known. But before this judge shall be brought the most "hidden things of darkness, and even the counsels of the heart" (1 Cor. 4:5). All your secret uncleanness, all your secret fraud and injustice, all your lascivious desires, wishes, and designs, all your inward covetousness, which is idolatry, all your malicious, envious, and revengeful thoughts and purposes, whether brought forth into practice or not, shall then be made manifest, and you shall be judged according to them. Of these things, however secret, there will be need of no other evidence than the testimony of God and of your own consciences.

Second, to such as are not just and upright in their dealings with their fellow-men. Consider, that all your dealings with men must be tried, must be brought forth into judgment, and there compared with the rules of the Word of God. All your actions must be judged according to those things which are found written in the book of the Word of God. If your ways of dealing with men shall not agree with those rules of righteousness, they will be condemned. Now, the Word of God directs us to practice entire justice. "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow" (Deu. 16:20), and to do to others as we would they would do to us. But how many are there, whose dealings with their fellow-men, if strictly tried by these rules, would not stand the test!

God has, in his word, forbidden all deceit and fraud in our dealings one with another (Lev. 11:13). He has forbidden us to oppress one another (Lev. 25:14). But how frequent are practices contrary to those rules, and which will not bear to be tried by them! How common are fraud and trickishness in trade! How will men endeavor to lead on those with whom they trade in the dark, that so they may make their advantage! Yea, lying in trading is too common a thing among us. How common are such things as that mentioned, Proverbs 20:14, "It is nought, it is nought, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth."

Many men will take the advantage of another's ignorance to advance their own gain, to his wrong. Yea, they seem not to scruple such practices. Beside downright lying, men have many ways of blinding and deceiving one another in trade, which are by no means right in the sight of God, and will appear to be very unjust, when they shall be tried by the rule of God's Word at the day of judgment. And how common a thing is oppression or extortion, in taking any advantage that men can by any means obtain, to get the utmost possible of their neighbor for what they have to dispose of, and their neighbor needs!

Let such consider, that there is a God in heaven, who beholds them, and sees how they conduct themselves in their daily traffic with one another, and that he will try their works another day. Justice shall assuredly take place at last. The righteous Governor of the world will not suffer injustice without control. He will control and rectify it by returning the injury upon the head of the injurer. Matthew 7:2, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Third, to those who plead for the lawfulness of practices generally condemned by God's people. You who do this, consider that your practices must be tried at the day of judgment. Consider, whether or no they are likely to be approved by the most holy Judge at that day. Proverbs 5:21, "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord; and he pondereth all his goings." However, by your carnal reasonings, you may deceive your own hearts, yet you will not be able to deceive the judge, he will not hearken to your excuses, but will try your ways by the rule. He will know whether they be straight or crooked.

When you plead for these and those liberties which you take, let it be considered, whether they be likely to be allowed of by the judge at the last great day. Will they bear to be tried by his eyes, which are purer than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity?

Fourth, to those who are wont to excuse their wickedness. Will the excuses which you make for yourselves be accepted at the day of judgment? If you excuse yourselves to your own consciences, by saying that you were under such and such temptations which you could not withstand, that corrupt nature prevailed, and you could not overcome it, that it would have been so and so to your damage if you had done otherwise, that if you had done such a duty, you would have brought yourselves into difficulty, would have incurred the displeasure of such and such friends, or would have been despised and laughed at. Or if you say, you did no more than it was the common custom to do, no more than many godly men have done, no more than certain persons of good reputation now practice, that if you had done otherwise, you would have been singular. If these be your excuses for the sins which you commit, or for the duties which you neglect, let me ask you, will they appear sufficient when they shall be examined at the day of judgment?

Fifth, to those who live in impenitence and unbelief. There are some persons who live in no open vice, and perhaps conscientiously avoid secret immorality, who yet live in impenitence and unbelief. They are indeed called upon to repent and believe the gospel, to forsake their evil ways and thoughts, and to return to God, that he may have mercy on them; to come unto Christ, laboring, and heavy-laden with sin, that they may obtain rest of him; and are assured, that if they believe, they shall be saved; and that if they believe not, they shall be damned; and all the most powerful motives are set before them, to induce them to comply with these exhortations, especially those drawn from the eternal world. Yet they persist in sin, they remain impenitent and unhumbled. They will not come unto Christ that they may have life.

Now such men shall be brought into judgment for their conduct, as well as more gross sinners. Nor will they be any more able to stand in the judgment than the other. They resist the most powerful means of grace, go on in sin against the clear light of the gospel, refuse to hearken to the kindest calls and invitations, reject the most amiable Savior, the judge himself, and despise the free offers of eternal life, glory, and felicity. And how will they be able to answer for these things at the tribunal of Christ?

IV. If there be a day of judgment appointed, then let all be very strict in trying their own sincerity. God on that day will discover the secrets of all hearts. The judgment of that day will be like the fire, which burns up whatsoever is not true gold. Wood, hay, stubble, and dross, shall be all consumed by the scorching fire of that day. The judge will be like a refiner's fire, and fuller's soap, which will cleanse away all filthiness, however it may be colored over. Malachi 3:2, "Who

may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap." And Malachi 4:1, "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts."

There are multitudes of men that wear the guise of saints, appear like saints, and their state, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of their neighbors, is good. They have sheep's clothing. But no disguise can hide them from the eyes of the judge of the world. His eyes are as a flame of fire. They search the hearts and try the reins of the children of men. He will see whether they be sound at heart. He will see from what principles they have acted. A fair show will in no degree deceive him, as it does men in the present state. It will signify nothing to say, "Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence; and in thy name have we cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wonderful works." It will signify nothing to pretend to a great deal of comfort and joy, and to the experience of great religious affections, and to your having done many things in religion and morality, unless you have some greater evidences of sincerity.

Wherefore let everyone take heed that he be not deceived concerning himself. And that he depend not on that which will not bear examination at the day of judgment. Be not contented with this, that you have the judgment of men, the judgment of godly men, or that of ministers, in your favor. Consider that they are not to be your judges at last. Take occasion frequently to compare your hearts with the Word of God. That is the rule by which you are to be finally tried and judged. And try yourselves by your works, by which also you must be tried at last. Inquire whether you lead holy Christian lives, whether you perform universal and unconditional obedience to all God's commands, and whether you do it from a truly gracious respect to God.

Also frequently beg of God, the judge, that he would search you, try you now, and discover you to yourselves, that you may see if you be insincere in religion. And that he would lead you in the way everlasting. Beg of God, that if you be not upon a good foundation, he would unsettle you, and fix you upon the sure foundation. The example of the psalmist in this is worthy of imitation. Psalm 26:1, 2, "Judge me, O Lord, examine me, and prove me; try my reins and mine heart." And Psalm 139:23, 24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." God will search us hereafter, and discover what we are, both to ourselves and to all the world. Let us pray that he would search us, and discover our hearts to us now. We have need of divine help in this matter; for the heart is deceitful above all things.

V. If God has appointed a day to judge the world, let us judge and condemn ourselves for our sins. This we must do, if we would not be judged and condemned for them on that day. If we would escape condemnation, we must see that we justly may be condemned. We must be so sensible of our vileness and guilt, as to see that we deserve all that condemnation and punishment which are threatened. And that we are in the hands of God, who is the sovereign disposer of us, and will do with us as seemeth to himself good. Let us therefore often reflect on our sins, confess them before God, condemn and abhor ourselves, be truly humbled, and repent in dust and ashes.

VI. If these things be so, let us by no means be forward to judge others. Some are forward to judge others, to judge their hearts both in general and upon particular occasions, to determine as to the principles, motives, and ends of their actions. But this is to assume the province of God, and to set up ourselves as lords and judges. Romans 14:4, "Who art thou, that thou judgest another man's servant?" James 4:11, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law." To be thus disposed to judge and act censoriously towards others, is the way to be judged and condemned ourselves. Matthew 7:1, 2, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

VII. This doctrine affords matter of great consolation to the godly. This day of judgment, which is so terrible to ungodly men, affords no ground of terror to you, but abundant ground of joy and satisfaction. For though you now meet with more affliction and trouble than most wicked men, yet on that day you shall be delivered from all afflictions, and from all trouble. If you be unjustly treated by wicked men, and abused by them, what a comfort is it to the injured, that they may appeal to God, who judgeth righteously. The psalmist used often to comfort himself with this.

Upon these accounts the saints have reason to love the appearing of Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 4:8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all those that love his appearing." This is to the saints a blessed hope. Titus 2:13, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. This day may well be the object of their eager desire, and when they hear of Christ's coming to judgment, they may well say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). It will be the most glorious day that ever the saints saw. It will be so both to those who shall die, and whose souls shall go to heaven, and to those who shall then be found alive on earth. It will be the wedding-day of the church. Surely then in the consideration of the approach of this day, there is ground of great consolation to the saints.
