THE FINAL SORTING

Catechism Two, Lesson 31

Reading: John 5:17–30

1. What Do We Mean By “Eternal” Judgment?

Eternal judgment is the last of the six foundation stones to be experienced before we can go on to maturity. As we lay this foundation, we become vividly aware of the consequences of our thoughts, words, and actions. These consequences not only affect this life but the age to come. The more real this knowledge of God’s weighing our works becomes to us, the more our behavior and inner motivations are conformed to God’s will through the fear of the Lord.

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences (2 Cor. 5:9–11).

The knowledge of eternal judgment permeates all our motives and goals in this life. We learn to base every decision on eternal values.

2. Are All Of God’s Judgments “Eternal”?

No. Some of God’s judgments are temporal, affecting only this earthly life. Some of God’s decisions can be reversed. Some are intended to be reversed by creating the right response in us while they are yet only warnings. Our response in a temporal judgment can cause God to “repent,” that is, change His mind. (See Joel 2:13; Zechariah 8:14; Jonah 3:8–10.)

Eternal judgment cannot be changed. This is the final score. The game will not be replayed nor will the time be extended. This is the ultimate and final decision on God’s part. Eternal judgment is final, fixed, and irreversible. Once God has made His decree known, the results are inevitable—whether or not they are immediately apparent.

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it (Num. 23:19, 20).

Eternal judgment is everlasting in result, going beyond the boundaries of time as we know it. It determines the eternal destiny of men and angels. It is God’s final verdict, determining the destiny of each individual’s spirit, soul, and body forever. The worst thing that can happen to us in this life is physical death, that is, the separation of the spirit and soul from our body. This we call “the first death.” But something worse can happen to us in eternity. We can experience the “second death,” which means we will be separated from God’s presence forever and ever. This is why Jesus said:

And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him (Luke 12:4, 5).

In other words, we are to fear God, for He alone will settle the final score. He will do the final sorting out of people and will assign them to their eternal destiny, which we call “eternal judgment.”

3. Who Is The Judge Of All?

God Himself is the Judge of all. Both the Old and New Testaments teach this. But God has given the authority to execute (carry out) His judgment to the Son, Jesus Christ.

… and to God the judge of all … (Heb. 12:23).

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22).

Jesus Christ is Himself the divider of men. Men divide or sort themselves into two groups according to their reactions to Christ. Some believe and submit to Him; others refuse to believe and die to face judgment for their rejection of Christ.

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life (1 John 5:12).

4. What is Involved In The Process Of Judgment?

Judgment is a sorting process. God separates the good from the evil by examination, trial, and decree. The key thought to remember is “separation.” The Greek verb krino (kreeno) means “to separate or make a distinction; to judge, to exercise a judgment upon; to try as Judge, bring to trial, to sentence; to determine or decide.” Closely related is the Latin verb cerno, found in such English words as “discern.” It means to sunder or divide, speaking of a sieve which separates.

God does not judge in the same way our earthly courts do, by examining the evidence, hearing arguments on both sides, and then rendering a verdict. The processes of examination required in earthly courts are unnecessary with God. God has no need to ascertain guilt or merit because He already knows all things. God has perfect and complete knowledge of all man’s thoughts, words, and deeds. He also understands all our motives or reasons for doing what we do. For this reason, no argument, jury, or testimony is needed.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:13).

Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men (Prov. 15:11).

All judgment will be determined by the nature of God and the truth of the situation being judged. All His judgments will be:

a. righteous or right (Psa. 96:13);

b. impartial, that is, without favoritism (Rom. 2:11);

c. true and accurate (Rev. 19:2);

d. just rather than arbitrary (Rev. 20:12);

e. thorough (Matt. 12:36);

f. on the basis of the gospel (Rom. 2:16).

5. Since God Already Knows All Things, Why Is Judgment Necessary?

God wants all of us to know what He knows. He wants to demonstrate the righteousness of His judgments by open exposure. The necessity of this kind of judgment is built into the very fibre of this moral universe. For actions to be moral, they must have consequences; evil must be punished and good rewarded. Without moral government, all behavior would be meaningless.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal. 6:7).

It is the nature of life that everything must culminate in a final moral sorting.

A. Human justice at its best is inadequate, and sometimes justice is corrupted.

Justice in its absolute sense demands a final culmination, when all wrongs will be righted, and the unjustly accused will be vindicated.

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked (Isa. 11:4).

B. God by nature is absolutely just; He must definitively deal with good and evil in order to be true to Himself.

God is glorified in judgment because it reveals His true character. During this life many of us misunderstand God because He seems to allow so much evil. We will understand what it was all about when the final books are opened.

But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness (Isa. 5:16).

C. All accusations and objections regarding God’s justice will be publicly answered.

God will bring all His creatures together and judge openly before everyone. He will show both what deeds were done and what judgment He renders. As all observe God’s perfect justice, every complaint will be subdued, every mouth shut. Only praise will be appropriate in that day!

Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus (Rev. 16:5).

D. God delights in judgment.

He wants a universe that perfectly reflects Himself. He will continue to deal with all that falls short of His glory and to eliminate evil. He will not stop until He is perfectly satisfied with the works of His hands.

… I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord (Jer. 9:24).

E. The certainty of coming judgment when every secret will be exposed, creates in us the fear of God and a respect for His moral demands.

Our behavior in this life is definitely changed as we come into the knowledge that God is keeping books and that we will face everything we have done or failed to do. The fear of the Lord is a strong motivation toward doing right.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Eccl. 12:13, 14).

6. What Is The “Fear Of The Lord”?

The fear of the Lord is a wholesome terror of displeasing God which creates in us a wholehearted obedience. It is a spiritual experience resulting from personal encounter with a holy God. His judgments no longer seem distant or mechanical, but very personal and moral. The Holy Spirit works within us an intense desire to gain God’s approval, whatever the cost to us. At the same time, we become keenly aware of those things in our own lives which displease Him. This results in radical change.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13).

The fear of the Lord is not the same thing as timidity or cowardice. The Greek use three different words for fear. The one used to describe the fear of the Lord means reverential awe and healthy dread of displeasing Him. The fear of the Lord becomes a controlling motive in our lives for holiness. It is significant that church history tells us that this fear of the Lord was present in an unusual degree during every major revival.

Home Study: Lesson 31

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is “eternal judgment”?

2. Describe God’s judgments.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

3. Why is final judgment necessary?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

4. What is the “fear of the Lord”?

5. Write out Psalm 86:11 and tell why this is related to eternal judgment.