

Of the Last and General Judgment.

by John Gill

The last and general judgment is a time of reckoning for all people, where they will be judged according to their works and rewarded or punished accordingly.

Scripture: Matthew 25:31, Hebrews 9:27

Topics: "Accountability", "Judgment"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the certainty and universality of the Last and General Judgment, explaining that all individuals will face judgment after death, either immediately or at the resurrection. He discusses the roles of Christ as the Judge, the criteria for judgment based on works, and the significance of divine justice in the final assessment of humanity. Gill highlights that both the righteous and the wicked will be judged, with the righteous receiving rewards and the wicked facing condemnation. The sermon serves as a reminder of the importance of living a life in accordance with God's will, as all actions will be accounted for in the end.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 7--Chapter 9

OF THE LAST AND GENERAL JUDGMENT

With respect to the last and general judgment, the things to be considered are, 1. The proof of a general judgment: and it may be observed, that there will be a judgment of men in a future state; which is twofold. 1a. A particular one; and which passes upon particular persons immediately after death; and to which it is generally thought the apostle has respect in Hebrews 9:27. "But after this", that is, death, "the judgment"; though if the words are to be connected with what follows, they may respect the judgment that will be at the second coming of Christ.

However, it seems probable enough, if not certain, that whereas at death the body returns to the earth, and the spirit, or soul, to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7) that then it passes under a judgment, and is condemned either to happiness or woe. 1b. A general one, after the resurrection of the dead at the last day; and this is the judgment that proof is to be given of; and which may be given, 1b1. First, from reason: and it may be observed, 1b1a. That the heathens, destitute of divine revelation, and who have had only the light of nature to guide them, have entertained notions of a future judgment; or, however, when

suggested to them, have readily assented to it, and embraced it.

When the apostle Paul preached to the wise philosophers at Athens, upon his discoursing about the resurrection, some mocked, and others more serious, said, they would hear him again of that matter, not being satisfied with what he had said concerning it: but though he had most plainly and fully expressed the doctrine of God's judging the world in righteousness, they did not in the least contradict that, nor make any objection to it. The heathen writers sometimes speak of righteous judges in the infernal regions; as Aeacus, Rhadamanthus, and Minos who judge the souls of the departed brought before them.[1] Sometimes they represent them as sitting in a meadow, where more ways than one meet, two of which lead, the one to tartarus, or hell, and the other to the island of the blessed,[2] or the Elysian fields; which, though but fables, have some truth couched in them.

So it is storied of Er. Pamphilus, what he related after he was restored to life, having been twelve days dead; that he saw two chasms above, and two below, answering one another, between which the judges sat and judged men; and when they had judged them, the righteous on the right hand they ordered to go upwards to heaven, and the wicked on the left hand to go downward:[3] which is somewhat similar to the account in Matthew 25:1-46 and it may be, that some of those things said by them, are only some broken remains of a tradition received from their ancestors; or what some got by travelling into the eastern countries, from the Jews, and their writings: and pretty remarkable is that expression of Plato:[4] "We ought always to believe the ancient and sacred words which declare unto us, that the soul is immortal, and has its judges, and will undergo very great judgments, or punishments, when anyone is separated from the body." 1b1b.

That there is a judgment to come, appears from the accusations of a natural conscience for sin, and from the fears and terrors men are possessed of, and cannot free themselves from; as witness the consternation and dread Belshazzar was thrown into on sight of the handwriting upon the wall; which could not arise from the fear of any temporal evil coming upon him from men, but from a guilty conscience, and the apprehension he had of being called to an account by the divine being, for his impiety and wickedness; so Felix trembled when he heard the apostle Paul discourse of judgment to come: for the doctrine met with the light and conviction of his own conscience, which caused distress and terror. 1b1c.

The truth of a future judgment, may be argued from the justice of God, which requires it; for it is easy to observe, that the justice of God is not clearly displayed in the dispensation of things in the present state. Good men are afflicted, and evil men prosper; which has been a stumbling of saints, and an hardening of sinners: it seems reasonable to believe, that there will be a future state, when justice will take place, and the tables will be turned; and such who have had their evil things now, will have their good things; and such who have had their good things here, will have their evil ones hereafter; for it is a "righteous thing", with God, to render tribulation to them that trouble his people, and to reward his saints according to his gracious promises. 1b1d.

This may be concluded from the relation men stand in to God, as creatures to a Creator. As God is their Creator, he has a right to give them a law; which he has, either written or unwritten; for the breach of which they are accountable to him: so that whether they have sinned without the written law, or in it, they will be judged accordingly; for everyone must give an account of himself to God. 1b1e. This may be reasoned from the judgments of God in this present life; and especially from the chastisements of good men, sometimes called a judging them (1 Cor. 11:32), from whence an argument may be framed in the words of the apostle; "If judgment begin at the house of God", &c. (1 Pet. 4:17), if the one are judged, most certainly

the other will be. 1b1f.

The desires of the saints after it, implanted in their hearts by the Spirit of God, furnish out an argument in favor of it; for however dreadful the thought of it is to Christless sinners, saints can look upon it, and for it, with pleasure; it is now their privilege, that they can "come to God the judge of all", in the righteousness of Christ; as he is, through that, the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; and they know that the Lord, the righteous Judge, when he comes, will be their advocate and friend, and give them the crown of righteousness laid up for them; and therefore, in the view of this, most earnestly desire his coming to judgment; and importunately pray, saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

Now such desires are not implanted in vain. 1b2. Secondly, the truth of this doctrine will more fully appear from divine revelation. In Genesis 4:8 in the Hebrew text, after these words, "And Cain talketh with Abel his brother"; there is a mark for a pause, as if something was wanting, and to be supplied; and which some ancient versions have supplied thus, "Let us go into the field"; but the Chaldee paraphrases add more, and give us an account of the conversation that passed between them in the field; how that Cain said to his brother, "There is no judgment, and there is no Judge, nor another world, &c." but Abel said, "There is a judgment, and there is a Judge, and another world, &c." upon which, Cain rose up and slew him.

Now though this is not to be depended on, nor do I lay any stress upon it; and only observe it, to show the sense of the ancient synagogue concerning this article; we have a more sure word of prophecy to take heed unto, for our direction in this matter; and where this doctrine clearly appears; as, 1b2a. In the prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, recorded in Jude 1:14,15 which, as it is to be understood of the second coming of Christ, since it will be with all his saints; so of his coming to judgment, which will be general; for he will then "execute judgment upon all"; and will judge men, both for their ungodly deeds, and for their hard speeches. 1b2b.

The character Abraham gives of Jehovah, as the "Judge of all the earth, who will do right" (Gen. 18:25), shows that there is a Judge, and that there will be a righteous judgment; and which is committed to the Son of God, who at this time appeared to Abraham in an human form, and was known by him. 1b2c. It may be concluded from the faith of Job, in his living Redeemer, who believed he would stand on the earth in the latter day, and raise the dead, and himself among the rest; and would have his friends know, that there was a judgment, which would then take place (Job 19:25,26,29). 1b2d.

Also from the declaration of Moses, in his song, "The Lord shall judge his people" (Deut. 32:36), vindicate their cause, render tribulation to them who have troubled them, judge their persons, and introduce them into his glory. 1b2e. Likewise from the song of Hannah; "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth" (1Sam. 2:10), even all the inhabitants of it, who have lived in the uttermost parts of it; and that by the Messiah, as is suggested; since it is added, "He shall give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed!" 1b2f.

From some passages in the Psalms; in which God calls to the heavens and earth to be witnesses of his judging his people; which will be, when he comes with a fire devouring before him, and he himself will be judge; when he will come to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with equity (Ps. 50:3,4,6; 96:13; 98:9). 1b2g. From others in the book of Ecclesiastes, where it is said, God will "judge the righteous and the wicked"; and that though young men may indulge themselves in youthful follies and vanities, yet for those things they should be "brought to judgment"; and into which "every work" shall be brought, whether "good or evil" (Eccl. 3:17; 9:11; 12:14). 1b2h.

From various sayings of Christ, recorded by the evangelist; as that whosoever should kill, would be "in danger of judgment"; and he also that was angry with his brother without a cause; and when he exhorts men "not to judge", lest they "be judged"; and upbraids some cities where his mighty works were done, and they repented not; telling them, it would be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, "in the day of judgment", than for them; and when he declares that every idle word must be given an account of in "the day of judgment"; and affirms, that the men of Nineveh, and the queen of the South, will rise up "in judgment" against the wicked generation of the Jews (Matthew 5:21,22; 7:1; 11:22,24; 12:36,41,42). 1b2i.

From the sermons and epistles of the apostles, particularly the apostles Peter and Paul; the apostle Peter in Acts 10:42; 1 Peter 4:9; 2 Peter 2:9, the apostle Paul in Acts 17:31; 24:25; Romans 2:3,5,12,16; 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1,8). 1b2j. From Hebrews 6:2 where eternal "judgment" is mentioned as an article of a creed; either of a Christian creed, as is commonly thought; or of a Jewish creed, to which I most incline;^[5] but understood either way, it is a proof of its being an article of faith to be embraced and professed.

To all which may be added, the partial descriptions of the judgment, which are separately given, and which, when laid together, give a complete view of the whole, and show the judgment to be general. Thus for instance, the calling to account, the examination, trial, and judgment of persons in public work; ministers of the word are apart made mention of in the parable of the talents; who, when reckoned with by the Lord at his coming, he that had received five talents, and had gained five more, and he that had received two, and had gained other two, are commended as good and faithful servants, and rewarded with a rule over many things; in a similar parable it is, with a rule over cities, in proportion to their gain: but he that received one talent, and made no use of it, is condemned as an unprofitable servant (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:15-26).

The description of the judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. I take it, that it only refers to members of churches, professors of religion, good and bad; for this account is only an explanation of the two preceding parables; what is there delivered by way of parable, is here declared without one; which, in other places, is sometimes done by Christ: the first of the parables only concerns the wise and foolish virgins, professors of both characters, in the kingdom of heaven, or gospel church state; and the other only respects persons in a public character, in the same church state, whether good or bad; and this account is of such who have belonged to the same flock, and have been folded together in the same church state; only one were goats and the other sheep, but not known what they were; but now at the judgment it will be known, when the Lord shall judge between cattle and cattle, the sheep and the goats, and divide them from one another.

Besides, what the wicked are upbraided with, show that they were such who had dwelt among Christians, and had been associates with them, and saw them in distress, and did not relieve them; but this cannot be said of multitudes who never heard of Christ, nor ever saw any of his people in distressed circumstances, and showed them no pity; and moreover, the sentence pronounced upon them, is the same which elsewhere it is said will be pronounced on such that have bore the Christian name, yet bad men, either preachers of the word, or members of churches (Matthew 7:22,23; Luke 13:26,27).

I am aware what will be objected to all this, that it is said, that "all nations" shall be gathered before the Judge: but then it should be observed, that the word "all" is frequently to be restrained, and taken in a limited sense, according to the subject treated of; as it must be here: for if what has been said is sufficient to prove, that only professors of religion are spoken of, then the sense must be, that professors in all

nations of the world shall be summoned, and brought before the Judge.

Likewise the text in Revelation 20:12 seems only to respect the wicked; the dead said to stand before God, are the wicked dead, the rest of the dead, who lived not till the thousand years were ended (Rev. 12:5), and are the same, who, being raised, shall encompass the camp of the saints, the beloved city; but being defeated in their enterprise, shall be brought, and stated as criminals before God, the Judge of all, and be judged out of the books opened, according to their works: and what may further strengthen this sense, no other use, as appears, is made of the book of life; only that those whose names were not found in it, were cast into the lake of fire, which must be the wicked.

However, putting all these descriptions together, they are a full proof of the general judgment, both of good and bad men, of men under every character and class, and of every age. 2. The next enquiry is, who the person is that shall be the Judge, preside in judgment, and carry on the judicial process to the end? God is, and will be Judge, and he only; hence we read of God the Judge of all (Heb. 12:23), and of the judgment of God; and of the righteous judgment of God, (Ro 2:3,5 and John saw in a vision, the dead, small and great, stand before God (Rev. 20:12), but not God the Father; "for the Father judgeth no man" (John 5:22), that is, no man separate and apart from his Son; nor in a visible form, for he never assumed any: but then he will judge the world by his Son, as he is expressly said to do (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16), so that he is not excluded from a concern in the judgment; nor the Holy Spirit.

The triune God will be the Judge, as to original authority, power, and right of judgment; but according to the economy settled between the three divine Persons among themselves, the work is assigned unto the Son, and is appropriate to him: hence we read of appearing and standing before the judgment seat of Christ, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing and kingdom (Rom. 14:1; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1), this work belongs to him as Mediator, and is a part of his office as such; it is what is "committed" to him by the Father, and which he has an "authority" from him to "execute" (John 5:22,27), it is what he was "appointed" to in the council and covenant of God (Acts 10:42), it is a branch of his kingly office, and therefore in the administration of it he is spoken of as a King; "then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come ye blessed", &c. and when they shall say, Lord, when saw we thee so and so; "the King shall answer and say", &c. (Matthew 25:34,40).

Yea, Christ, by his death and resurrection, has obtained a right of dominion over all, as to be the Judge of them; "for to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom. 14:9), that is, so as to judge both quick and dead, as the following verses show. And accordingly, upon his resurrection from the dead, all power in heaven and earth were given to him as Mediator; and upon his ascension to heaven, he was made, or declared, Lord and Christ; and at his second coming, he will come as the Lord, the righteous Judge, with an acquired, as well as an allowed right to judge the world; and this office he will execute as God man, in both his natures, human and divine; which are both necessary to the execution of it. 2a.

It is highly proper that the Judge of all the earth should be God. The work requires divine omniscience, infinite wisdom, almighty power, and strict justice and faithfulness; all which are to be found in Christ the Son of God. "Omniscience" is necessary to this work, which is proper to God; for all the works, words, and thoughts of men, must be known by him, in order to judge them; to know all the works, words, and thoughts, of only one man, for the space of sixty, seventy, or eighty years, is more than any mere creature can know; but what is even this knowledge to that of all the individuals throughout a kingdom and nation? and what is that to the knowledge of all the works, words, and thoughts, of the millions of individuals in all

kingdoms and nations? and of those in every age of the world, from the beginning of the world to the end of it?

Such knowledge is too wonderful for us to conceive of; yet this is in Christ, as God; who knows all persons and things, before whom every creature, and all things, are manifest, naked, and open; even before him with whom we have to do; or to whom we must give an account, as the words may be rendered. He is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart and needs not to be told any thing of man, for he knows all that is in him and done by him. Wisdom and sagacity are necessary to a judge.

Solomon, by his judgment between the two harlots, became very famous and respectable among his people; but a greater than Solomon is here: one who is the all wise God, the wisdom of God, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and on whom the Spirit of knowledge and wisdom rests; a Judge whose head, and whose hairs, are white as wool, as white as snow, his great gravity and wisdom; who is able, as it is necessary he should be, to distinguish between man and man; between that which has only the appearance of a good action, and that which is really such.

"Almighty power" is likewise requisite in the Judge of the world, to do what must and will be done by him; as to raise the dead, summon all before him, and not only pronounce the decisive sentences on them, but carry them into execution; for which purpose he is said to come "with power", as well as with great glory: and such an one is Christ, who is the mighty God, styled most mighty, yea, the Almighty. Strict "justice" and "faithfulness" are qualifications in a temporal judge, who is to execute true judgment; is not to be bribed, nor to respect persons; nor to pass sentence in a cause through favor and affection; and such a Judge, and one infinitely more so, is necessary to judge the world in righteousness and the people with equity; and such an one is Jesus Christ the righteous; and who will appear to be the Lord the righteous Judge, and his judgment to be just and true; for he will not judge according to the sight of his eyes, and the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge, and reprove with equity; righteousness will be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins (Isa. 11:3-5). 2b.

That Christ should appear in human nature, when he comes to judge the world, is highly necessary; for God has appointed to judge the world by "that Man" whom he has ordained; so that Christ, as man, must be concerned in the judgment of the world; yea, the Father has given him authority to execute it, "because he is the Son of man" (Acts 17:31; John 5:27), because he has assumed human nature, and so can appear visibly in it, as it is proper a judge should be visible. The sight of a judge is very striking; it commands awe and reverence in all; it fills the criminal with terror, and the just man with pleasure: so Christ, the Judge, will come in such a visible manner, that every eye shall see him; he will appear to the joy of some, and to the shame and confusion of others.

A judge usually appears, and it is proper he should, in some external pomp and splendor, in his habit, in his retinue, and attendants; and as placed on a seat, or throne, a bench of justice, with a court set around him: Christ, the Judge of all, will come in great splendor and glory, in the glory of his human nature visible, the rays of his divine nature beaming through it; attended by his mighty angels, and with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; a glorious great white throne will be prepared for him, on which he will be visibly placed, and thousands, and ten thousands standing about him, and ministering unto him; it is proper he should appear in human nature, to deliver out, with an articulate voice to be heard, the sentences, both the one and the other; "Come ye blessed", and "Go ye cursed!"

Moreover, since he, as man, was arraigned at the bar of man, and stood before a judge, and was unjustly condemned by him, and dealt with injuriously by men; it seems highly proper, that when he comes as a Judge he should come as man, and the tables be turned; and he that was his judge stand before him, and see the very man he used so ill, and receive his sentence from him; as well as all such who have spoken against him, his person, doctrines, and ordinances, and maltreated his people; and who will be obliged to confess, "that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11).

As for the concern of others in the judgment, angels or men, nothing is to be admitted, that derogates from the glory of the office of Christ, as Judge of the world. Angels will be no otherwise concerned, than as they will be attendants on him at his coming; be employed by him in gathering and bringing to him the elect, raised from the dead, in the several parts of the world, at the first resurrection; and in the binding up of the tares, the wicked, and casting them into hell, after the second resurrection, and final judgment: approvers of the righteous judgment no doubt they will be; but as assisting and advising in it, as there will be no need of it, there is no reason to believe it: how far they may be evidences and witnesses in some cases, I will not say; since they are frequently in religious assemblies, and have been employed in many things in this lower world, and must be privy to many things done in it.

As for the saints, there seems to be more that is said of them; as that thrones will be set for them, and judgment be given to them; the apostles are said to sit on twelve thrones, in the kingdom of Christ, and to judge men; and the apostle Paul says, that the saints shall judge the world; yea, judge angels (Rev. 20:4; Luke 22:36; 1 Cor. 6:2,3), not that the saints will be co-judges with Christ, and assistants to him in judgment; whatever may be said for them, as sitters, by, and approvers of it, as no doubt they will be; and besides this, it is generally allowed, that they, as members of Christ, and as considered in him, their head, will judge the world; and also that their holy lives and conversation will rise up in judgment against their wicked neighbors and condemn them; as that of righteous Lot will rise up against the inhabitants of Sodom. 3.

The persons that will be judged; angels and men: as to good angels, nothing is said of the judgment of them in scripture; nor does it seem probable, since they never sinned; were confirmed in their original state by the grace of Christ, and have always been in a fixed state of happiness, always beholding the face of God in heaven: how far their perfect obedience to God, and the faithful services they have performed to men, at his command, may be brought into judgment, to receive their just praise and commendation, I will not say.

But as to the case of the evil angels, it is notorious that they will be judged; for if the saints shall judge angels, that is, evil ones, much more will Christ: these, indeed, as soon as they sinned, were cast down to hell, as into a prison; and as criminals are committed to prison, and laid in chains, until the assize, or session comes; so these are laid in chains of darkness, and reserved to the judgment of the great day, when they will receive their final sentence and enter into full punishment; in which it seems they are not as yet (2 Pet. 1:4; Jude 1:6; Matthew 8:29).

But the judgment spoken of in scripture chiefly concerns men, good and bad; for as the wise man says, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" (Eccl. 3:17). 3a. The righteous: and these shall be judged first alone; for "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment" with them, "nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous", and they will be first judged; not only according to the order of the words in Ecclesiastes, before mentioned, on which no stress is to be laid; but their judgment will be dispatched first, as represented in Matthew 25:1-46.

Besides, they will be raised first; "The dead in Christ will rise first"; even a thousand years before the rest; and it is not reasonable to suppose, that their judgment will not proceed; but be deferred until the rest are raised. Besides, Christ will "judge the quick and the dead", the living saints changed, and the dead ones raised, "at his appearing and kingdom"; their judgment will be at the beginning of his kingdom, and be continued in it; and it will be proper that they should be judged first, that they may receive the distribution of rewards, made in the kingdom state; though indeed, they may at once be put into the possession of distinguished favors, and have marks of respect, immediately, as soon as that state begins, and their judgment be brought on, to show the justness of the distribution made to them.

Moreover, since they are to judge the world, and to judge angels, it is necessary they should be first judged themselves. Here would have been the proper place to consider the question, whether the sins of the righteous will be brought into judgment? but that I have given my thoughts of this in another place.[6] Thus much for the judgment of the righteous. Some have thought that Enoch and Elijah, and so those who rose after the resurrection of Christ, and of whom it may be supposed, that they went with him at his ascension to heaven; that those will not come into judgment, since they have been so long in a state of perfection, both in soul and body, which will not be the case of the other righteous at the coming of Christ; but this I will not take upon me to determine. 3b.

The wicked will be judged; such who have indulged themselves in the gratification of sinful pleasures, and may have been so hardened in sin as to imagine they shall escape the judgment of God; yet they shall not (Eccl. 3:17; 11:9; Rom. 2:3-5), even all the wicked shall be judged. These are the "dead" John saw stand before God, "small and great"; all the wicked dead from the beginning of the world to the end of it; who will not live again, or be raised from the dead, till after the thousand years are ended (Rev. 20:5,12), so that the judgment of those will not be till after the thousand years reign of Christ and his saints, and after the second resurrection; after which, all the wicked being raised, shall be brought to judgment, "small and great"; that is, such as were so when they died, being either children or grown persons; though now as they will rise as persons in manhood, will so stand before God: or as high and low, rich and poor, kings and peasants; for now shall the rich and poor meet together, though not now distinguished as such; but having been such in their mortal state, shall not be exempted from the judgment of God: or as greater and lesser sinners, and accordingly shall receive their just punishment; for however it may be a question, whether there will be degrees in the ultimate glory; there is none concerning degrees of punishment; since it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for some cities where Christ preached and wrought his miracles, yet repented not nor believed in him.

I am aware, that there are some objections to be made to what has been said concerning the judgment of the righteous before the wicked; as, 3b1. That it seems to contradict the account given of the judgment of both (Matthew 25:1-46), as appearing together, then separated and placed, the one at the right, and the other at the left hand of Christ. To which it will be sufficient to answer, that in descriptions taken from men, and delivered after the manner of men, and in allusion to what is done among men, it is not to be expected that there should be an exact correspondence in every circumstance of them; the general design of them is what is to be attended to: and if that is answered it is enough.

Now the general design of this description is, to show that both good and bad men will be judged; that they will be distinguished in judgment, and one will not be taken for the other; the nominal professor will be unmasked: and as for the position of them, at the right and left hand of Christ, it cannot be understood of a natural position to the right and left; any more than in the petition of the two sons of Zebedee, to sit, the one at the right hand, the other at the left hand of Christ, in his kingdom.

The allusion is to a sanhedrim, or court of judicature with the Jews; when, whom the judge absolved, he placed at his right hand; and whom he condemned, he placed at his left. So that the whole of what is intended by this description is, that both sorts of persons shall be judged; that they shall be distinguished, and appear to be what they really are; that the one will be acquitted, and the other condemned. All which may as well be done by supposing the judgment of the one to precede the judgment of the other, as if together; and according to the description itself, the judgment of the righteous will be first dispatched. 3b2.

It is objected, that this account of the judgment seems to make two days of judgment. Not at all: there will be but one day of judgment, though it will be a long one. We are not to imagine, that the day of judgment will be only a natural day, consisting of twenty four hours: surely it cannot be thought, that all the affairs of kingdoms, states, and churches, and particular persons, from the beginning of the world to the end of it, which will be brought into judgment, and laid open there, will be huddled over in so short a space of time; when this judgment may well be supposed to be with the utmost precision and exactness.

No, this day of the Lord will be a thousand years; and for which reason it may be called a "great day", because of its great and long duration; as well as because of the great things done in it, and by a great Person; and may be also one reason why it is called "eternal judgment", the word eternal, or everlasting, being sometimes used for a long time only, as this will be: the judgment of the righteous will proceed at the beginning of the thousand years, and continue in them; and during this time things will be preparing for the judgment of the wicked, at the close of them; and so things will go on successively till the whole is finished: as the resurrection of the just will be on the morning of this day, so will their judgment begin then; and as the resurrection of the wicked will be at the evening of this day, so likewise their judgment: and as the evening and the morning make but one day, so it will be in this case; there will be but one day of judgment. 3b3.

Should it be further objected, that there seems no necessity for such a length of time to judge the world in, seeing Christ, the Judge, is omniscient, and knows all men and their works; and therefore can pass judgment upon them at once. I answer, if there is anything in this objection, it lies as strongly against any formal judgment at all, whether of a shorter or longer space. Besides, the length of time is not taken, and the strict and accurate examination of things entered into, for the sake of the information of the Judge, but that all things might be made clear and plain to every man's conscience; and that it might be evidently seen, that the distribution of favors by the Judge, in the kingdom state, is made to everyone according to his works.

God could have made the world at once, in a moment, but he thought fit to take six days in doing it, to show the greatness of the work, his wisdom, and the counsel of his will in it; so when the affairs of the world, for six thousand years, and how much longer we know not, shall be called over, the Lord is pleased to take a thousand years for it, to show his exactness and accuracy, strict justice and equity, with which all things shall be managed; and the rather, since the determination is for an eternity to come, in the final issue of things. 3b4.

It may seem inconsistent to some, that the time of the saints reigning with Christ, and their being judged by him, should be together. That so it will be, seems most certain, since Christ will judge "the quick and the dead", the living saints changed, and the dead saints raised, "at his appearing and kingdom"; when he shall appear and enter on his visible and glorious kingdom, and take his saints to reign with him: nor can I see any inconsistency in this; since the saints, while they are judging, will be in a sinless, perfect state, be like to Christ, both in soul and body, and shall enjoy his personal presence; so that their judgment will not

in the least break in upon their felicity in reigning.

Besides, they will not stand before the Judge as criminals, but as the favorites of heaven; and this judgment will not be of their persons, on which their final state depends; but of their works; and that it might appear, that the distribution of favors to them, in this kingdom state, is just and equitable. Before this point is dismissed, it may be proper briefly to observe, what of men will be brought into judgment. 3b4a. All their works and actions, whether good or evil (Eccl. 12:14; 1 Tim. 5:24). 3b4b.

All the words of men, every hard speech against Christ and his people; yea, every idle word, and much more every profane and blasphemous expression (Jude 1:15; Matthew 12:35-37). --Nay, 3b4c. Every thought, good or bad; for there is "a book of remembrance" written, for those that "thought" on the name of the Lord, which are registered there, in order to be observed and taken notice of hereafter (Mal. 3:16). "God will judge the secrets of men"; not only their secret works, but their secret thoughts, "by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel"; and the Lord the Judge will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart" (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). 4.

The rule of judgment, according to which it will proceed, and from whence the evidence will be taken, are certain "books opened" (Rev. 20:12), the same is observed Daniel 7:10 where the judgment of antichrist, the emblem of this judgment, is described; only there is no mention made of the other book, the book of life; because that only respected what will be done in this present life; but this respects the life to come, and the state of men in it. 4a. The book of divine omniscience will be opened; Christ, the Judge, who is God over all, knows all persons; the "eyes" of his omniscience are "everywhere", throughout the whole world, "beholding the evil and the good"; evil men and good men; evil actions and good actions; "his eyes are upon all the ways of men", and he observes every step they take, and none can hide himself from him, who fills heaven and earth with his presence; and when he comes to judge the world, this book of his omniscience will be opened; he will let all the churches, and all the world know, that he it is who searches the hearts, and tries the reins of the children of men.

What is unusual in human courts of judicature, for the judge upon the bench to become an evidence, and be a witness against the prisoner at the bar, will be the case now; "I will come near to you to judgment, saith the Lord, and will be a swift witness against the sorcerers", &c. (Mal. 3:5). 4b. This book seems to be the same with the "book of remembrance" (in Mal. 3:16), not that God needs anything to assist and refresh his memory; he has a strong memory, to remember the sins which are written by him in his book, "with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond"; and what is written with an iron pen, or cut with a diamond, is not easily erased; great Babylon will come up in remembrance before God, with all her sins; and so will the sins of wicked men be remembered, be brought into judgment, and meet with their deserved punishment.

Though the above book seems to be written for them only that fear the Lord, whose sins he remembers no more; but then he is not forgetful of their good works, which flow from his own grace; and even when they have been forgotten by them, they will be remembered by him, as appears from Matthew 25:37. 4c. The book of the creatures, or creation, will be opened. Every creature of God is good and useful to men; but those which are given for use are often abused to gratify one carnal sensual lust or another; and which will be produced as witnesses against the sinner. 4d.

The book of providence will be opened: the providential goodness of God extends to all his creatures; and such who have despised the riches of his goodness bestowed upon them, which should have led them to

repentance, and have abused the forbearance and longsuffering of God towards them, in his providence, will find that by the hardness and impenitence of their hearts, they have treasured up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; when the providential dealings of God with them shall be brought as an evidence against them (Rom. 2:4,5). 4e.

The book of the scriptures will be opened, both of law and gospel: the law of Moses will accuse those who have lived under the law, and been violators of it, and pronounce them guilty before God; they that have "sinned in the law shall be judged by the law"; nay, the Gentiles will "judge" them "who by the letter and circumcision transgress the law"; that is, will rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them (Rom. 2:12,27). Such who have lived under the gospel dispensation, and have neglected, despised, and rejected the gospel of Christ, will be judged according to it and by it; "The word", says Christ, "that I have spoken, the same shall judge him" that rejects it "in the last day" (John 12:48).

"God", says the apostle, "shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (Rom. 2:16), and the grand rule in it, according to which judgment will proceed, is that in Mark 16:16 nay, even the law and light of nature will be a rule of judgment respecting those who have only had the benefit of that; "for as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law" (Rom. 2:12). 4f. The book of conscience: in this are recorded the actions of men; and from thence are they to be brought forth upon occasion; and which either accuses or excuses for them, when it does its office; unless cauterized and seared, as it were, with a red hot iron; and even such, in the day of judgment, will have their consciences awaked, and which will be as a thousand witnesses against them. 4g.

There is another book that will be opened; and that is "the book of life"; in which the names of some are written, which is the same as to be "written in heaven"; and means no other, than the ordination and appointment of them to eternal life in heaven: this is the Lamb's book of life, the book of eternal election, in which all the names of all the elect are written; and the use of this book in the day of judgment will be, that such whose names are found written in it, will be admitted into the new Jerusalem, the holy city, and partake of the privileges thereof (Rev. 21:27), and that such whose names are not found written in it; or, as it is expressed in Jude 1:4 who are "forewritten to this condemnation", those shall be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15).

Now the "dead" will be "judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12), which must be understood of the wicked "dead", when raised and brought to stand before God who will have sentence pronounced upon them according to their wicked works; between which, and the punishment condemned to, will be a just proportion; "the wages of sin is death"; eternal death is the just demerit of it: but as there is a difference in the sins of the wicked; some more, others fewer; some greater, others less; some more, and others less aggravated; their punishment will be proportioned to them, as will be seen in the next chapter: and so everyone will be judged according to his works, in the most just and equitable manner.

Indeed, good men also will be judged according to their works; but not adjudged to eternal life according to them; for there is no proportion between the best works of men and eternal life; "eternal life is the free gift of God through Christ": but upon the judgment of them, the distribution of rewards, or of peculiar and distinguished favors, more or less, in the kingdom state, will be according to every man's works. This judgment out of the books, and according to works, is designed to show with what accuracy and exactness, with what justice and equity, it will be executed, in allusion to statute books in courts of judicature, to be referred unto in any case of difficulty. 5.

The circumstances of the judgment, as to time and place. 5a. First, the time of it; the particular judgment of men, or of particular persons in their souls, will be immediately after death; according to Hebrews 9:27 the general judgment, or the judgment of all men, in soul and body, will be after the resurrection; the judgment of the righteous, after the first resurrection; and the judgment of the wicked, after the second resurrection. It is often spoken of in scripture as though it would be quickly, particularly in Revelation 22:7,12,20 to alarm men, and keep up a constant expectation of it.

There is a "day appointed" for it, as may be reasonably thought; for if there is a "time to every purpose", a time appointed to everything done under the heavens, then certainly for a business of such moment, and of so great importance, as the general judgment is; and, indeed, this is expressly affirmed; "he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31), the time of it is unknown to men, (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:6,7), hence the Judge is represented as coming "at an unawares", as a thief in the night, at an hour unthought of; and therefore men should watch and pray, and be ready to meet him. 5b.

Secondly, the place. This is also uncertain. Some, because of some passages in Joel 3:2,12 have thought of the valley of Jehoshaphat; but no valley can be supposed large enough to hold all that will be judged at the day of judgment; nor does it appear from scripture that there ever was such a valley of such a name; nor does this seem to be the proper name of the valley, whatever valley is intended; in Joel 3:14 it is called, "the valley of decision"; it properly signifies, the judgment of the Lord, and so is applicable to any place where the Lord should judge the enemies of his people, and bring destruction upon them: and to me it seems to refer to the battle, at Armageddon, where will be a great slaughter of the kings of the earth; which will make way for the latter day glory.

The two more probable opinions are, that the judgment will be either in the air or on the earth. Some think it will be in the air, because the Judge will come in the clouds of heaven, and the living saints will then be changed, and the dead saints raised; and both will be caught up together unto the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. But I rather think it will be on earth; the judgment of the saints will be on the new earth, on which they will descend from the air with Christ; and which will be the seat of his reign with the saints, and of theirs with him; and which will be the time of their judging: and as for the wicked dead, who will live again after the thousand years are ended, they will come upon the breadth of the earth, where will be the camp of the saints, the beloved city, and encompass that; and being defeated in their design, they will be at once brought to judgment, and stand before God, the Judge of all, and receive their sentence. 6.

The properties of this judgment, as may be gathered from what has been said about it, and from express passages of scripture. 6a. It is "future", yet to come: the apostle Paul reasoned before Felix, among other things, "of judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). But because it seems to be deferred, and does not immediately take place, some have their hearts set in them to do evil, and put away this evil day far from them, as they reckon it, and put it very far away indeed, and fancy it will never be.

But, 6b. It is "certain"; purpose and prophecy make it so: God has, in his purposes, appointed a day for it, and he will keep it; and fit purpose is never disannulled; Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of it, as well as others; and the word of prophecy is a sure one, and will certainly be fulfilled: therefore let young and old know, that for the things they have committed God will bring them into judgment (Eccl. 11:9). 6c. It will be "universal", both as to persons and things.

All men will be judged, sooner or later; in the morning, or in the evening of that day; none shall escape it: and all works will be brought into it, good or bad. 6d. It will be a "righteous judgment"; so it is called (Rom. 2:5). The world will be judged in righteousness; the Judge of all the earth will do right; Christ the Lord will be a righteous Judge, and his judgment just. 6e. It will be the last judgment: it will be when the last trumpet shall sound, that the dead shall rise in order to be judged; and it will be at the last day, when the word of Christ, and Christ according to it shall judge men. (1 Cor. 15:52; John 12:48). 6f.

It is called "eternal judgment" (Heb. 6:2), not only because it will be a long time about, as has been observed; but because it will issue in the final state of men; either in their everlasting destruction, or in their everlasting happiness, (Mt 25:46 which are next to be considered. ENDNOTES:

[1] Homer. Odyss. 4. v. 563, 564. & 11. v. 567, 568. Apollodorus de Deor, Orig. l. 3. p. 130, 184. Plato in Axiocho, p. 1308.

[2] Plato in Gorgias, p. 357.

[3] Plato de Republica, l. 10. p. 761.

[4] Epist. 7. p. 1283. Ed. Ficini.

[5] See my Exposition of Heb. vi. 1, 2. See Gill on "Heb 6:1". See Gill on "Heb 6:2".

[6] Book 6. c. 7. p. 359. See point 7c. in topic 1017.

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