Chapter 32: Of the Last Judgment

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Starting last week, we jumped from doctrines of the Church, to eschatology. That's the doctrine of last things. We started with what happens at death–how our bodies separate from our spirits, and begin to decompose; how in our spirits we go to either a place of peace or a place of torment. And, finally, in the third paragraph, we have a universal resurrection. Paragraph 3 of chapter 31 said "The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by His Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to His own glorious body." Today, we talk about what happens next.

In these last couple of chapters there is no difference of real consequence between our confession and the others; the Savoy, and the Westminster.

1 The concept of the last judgment

I want to start with the scripture references so that they'll be fresh in our minds. That way we can see how they're woven together in our paragraph.

- Ac 17:31

  > [31] Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

- Jn 5:22, 27

  > [22] For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:... [27] And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

- 1Co 6:3

[3] Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

- Jude 6

  [6] And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

- 2Co 5:10

  [10] 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.

- Ecc 12:14

  [14] For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

- Mt 12:36

  [36] But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

- Ro 14:10,12

  [10] But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. [11] For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. [12] So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

- Mt 25:32-46

  [32] And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: [33] And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. [34] Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: [35] For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a

> stranger, and ye took me in: [36] Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. [37] Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? [38] When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? [39] Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? [40] And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. [41] Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: [42] For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: [43] I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. [44] Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? [45] Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. [46] And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Our first paragraph says,

> God hath appointed a day wherein He will judge the world in righteousness, by Jesus Christ;(1) to whom all power and judgment is given of the Father; in which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged,(2) 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.(3)

So we have the Father, appointing a day for judgment of the whole world; no one is excluded.

Thomas Blake wrote in 1665,

> You must stand before the judgement-seat of Christ, every soul must appear at that great Tribunal, from which there is no exemption by any means whatever: and the presence and glory,

> the dread and majesty of that day is more, and another kind of thing, [than] any dispensation upon earth can be supposed to be; therefore how to hold up the head and stand with comfort at such a time, is the great thing that we are especially to be solicitous about, and that which our souls should be making out the hardest after[1].

God the Son will do the judging, and he'll do it righteously, fulfilling the will of the Father (John 5:22ff). John 5:23 says that the Father committed all judgment to the Son so "[23] That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."

Matthew 16:27 says, "[27] For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." Romans 2:6 says there's a "day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ."

Louis Berkhof says that this

> doctrine of a final general judgment was from the very earliest times of the Christian era connected with that of the resurrection of the dead. The general opinion was that the dead would be raised up, in order to be judged according to the deeds done in the body. As a solemn warning the certainty of this judgment was stressed. This doctrine is already contained in the Apostolic Confession[2]:

"On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead."

Renihan says,

> The great Lord and King, creator of heaven and earth, has a purpose for His creation and creatures—an end to which all is inexorably moving. This is the final day—not a period bound by the rising and setting of the sun—a moment when His righteousness will be displayed to the entire moral universe in the judgement of the world through the Mediator, Jesus Christ[3].

There are many ways people spiritualize the Day of the Lord, or the Last Judgment. But we should remember the last paragraph of the previous chapter. It says the resurrection is universal. It says the unjust shall be raised,

[1] Cited from Renihan. Location 12027.

[2] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology.* `https://ccel.org/ccel/berkhof/systematictheology/systematictheology.viii.iii.iv.html`

[3] Renihan, *Baptist Symbolics, Vol. II.* Location 12012.

as well as the just. Those two categories are exhaustive of all humanity for all time. So on that Day of Judgment, we will stand before the Lord just as bodily as we worship him in the sanctuary this morning. Therefore, this isn't a metaphorical day; it can't be identified as the continuous process of history. "God hath appointed a day." It's a real day and hour, and if we knew when it was, we could circle it on our calendars.

From Romans 1 we learn that all men know that they're accountable to God. This is properly basic knowledge that humans have by virtue of being humans. Unless they sear their consciences, people fear, and expect a reckoning. There's the example of the pagans on the island of Malta. Because of a storm, Paul, who was *en route* to Rome in a prison ship, escaped a shipwreck. The pagans there knew all these fellows washed up from a prison ship. So, after they saw Paul bit by a venomous snake, in verse 4, they said "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live."

2 The goal of the last judgment

- Ro 9:22-23.

> What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: [23] And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

- Mt 25:21,34. [Read above.]

- 2Ti 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 unto all them also that love his appearing.

- Mt 25:46. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

- Mk 9:48 talks about "hell fire: [48] Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

- In 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff, Paul comforts the troubled, and describes how Christ will make everything right the Last Judgment:

  > when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, [8] In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: [9] [they] shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord...

  Our paragraph says,

  > 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:(4) for then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness 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,(5) and punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.(6)

So the purpose given here is to show God's glory; both in his mercy, and in his justice. There are at least a few things to be said here which tie into earlier parts of the confession.

First, many have wondered, Why would God decree the Fall? What's the benefit? I cited this somewhat long passage from Jonathan Edwards' before[4], but it's golden.

> It is highly proper that the effulgent glory of God should answer his real excellency; that the splendour should be answerable to the real and essential glory, for the same reason that it is proper and excellent for God to glorify himself at all. Thus it is necessary, that God's awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God's glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of the divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they would scarcely shine forth

[4]"Of God's Decree." Back in '24, 29th of December.

> at all. [. . .] as it is necessary that there should be evil, because the display of the glory of God could not but be imperfect and incomplete without it, so evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, [. . .] because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and sense of his love. And if knowledge of him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionately imperfect[5]; . . .

In other words, were it not for the fall, we would not be able to witness his glory in mercy and justice. And, since our lasting joy consists in knowing God, even the fall brings us joy because it results in a display of otherwise unknowable glories of God. (Even more could be said about the wisdom of this decree, but not to the point of this paragraph.)

Second, I think it's wise here to stress the asymmetry of election and reprobation. When they're set side-by-side like this one might think both things are positive actions of God–the idea that God, in his providence wants to destroy some people, and forces them to sin. This is called double-predestination. This is not the way it is. Rather, by default, we are each destined for hellfire. Those who are reprobate are merely passed over. God would be just to damn everyone, so we can't say he's unjust in selecting *some* for salvation. When God elects some to salvation, *that's* a positive act. He leaves the reprobate alone. But, for the elect, we see calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, and so on–real work on God's part.

Third, if anyone is destined for eternal salvation, they got that way through Christ alone[6]. It's not to be fair, and it's not through our own merit.

Fourth, notice how the two categories of salvation and damnation leave no room for a third category. The Scriptures leave us no room for purgatory, or limbo. Nehemiah Coxe said,

> There is no middle way, if persons enter not in at the straight gate that leadeth to eternal life, they must go in at the wide gate that leadeth to destruction; and if their names are not found in the book of Life, they must be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, where they are tormented forever and ever[7].

[5]Edwards, Jonathan. "Miscellaneous Remarks." The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume Two, Banner of Truth Trust, p. 529, ch. III, § 16.

[6]See "Of Christ the Mediator" (§8¶6), and "Of Justification" (§11¶4).

[7]Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*. Cited from Renihan. Location 12071.

Last, in the previous chapter we talked about the intermediate state. That place of peace, or suffering is temporary, and spiritual. Remember that the previous chapter ended with a universal resurrection. The everlasting life and everlasting torment of *this* paragraph will be experienced bodily.

The erroneous doctrine of *annihilationism* came up in discussion of the last chapter. This actually isn't a novel idea from the liberals. There were some even in the early church that held to it. But the doctrine of eternal punishment was always considered fundamental to Christianity. Scripture describes the endlessness of punishment in the same terms it uses to describe the endlessness of our salvation. So an argument denying eternal torment works just as well to deny eternal bliss.

Not only shall our reward continue forever, it'll continue *undiminished* forever. We're not going to get bored with it. Living on earth, it's hard to imagine fully appreciating the "ups" without the "downs." But after this life it'll be always "further up, and further in" (Lewis, *The Last Battle*). Thomas Harrison described it like this:

> The long Enjoyment of Celestial Pleasures will not make us to grow weary of them. There is an infinite variety in God, and whatever is truly desirable is eminently injoy'd in him. An infinite Good produces always the same pure equal compleat Joy, because it arises from its intrinsic Perfection that wants no foil to commend it. In a word, this Joy is no ravishing Rapture, but a constant height of Affection[8].

3 The impact of the last judgment (practically and presently)

- 2Co 5:10-11.

> [10] 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. [11] 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.

- 2Th 1:5-7.

[8]Thomas Harrison, *A Funeral Sermon on Mordecai Abbott Esq.* Cited from Renihan. Location 12085.

> [5] Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: [6] Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; [7] And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

- Mk 13:35-37.

> [35] Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: [36] Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. [37] And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

- Lk 12:35-40.

> [35] Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; [36] And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. [37] Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. [38] And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. [39] And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. [40] Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

- Rev 22:20.

> [20] He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Our paragraph says,

> As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin,(7) and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity,(8) 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,(9) and may ever be prepared to say, "Come Lord Jesus; come quickly".(10) Amen.

The Lord wants us to be sure there is a day of reckoning to come. This is meant to deter sin, but it's also a comfort for the godly. Whatever is wrong in this life the Lord will make right. Last week, Deacon Cook explained the intermediate state. We're not meant to be separated forever from our bodies. So, although there is, in paradise, a place of suffering, and a place of peace, that place of peace isn't as fully satisfying as the Final Judgment. Consider 2 Corinthians 5:4:

> [4] For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

It's not that we want to lose our flesh. We want our flesh redeemed, and restored. Our "amphibious" nature is essential. Being both spirit, and physical is essential to our nature. Revelation 6:9 says,

> [9] When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

These souls are in the intermediate state in paradise, yet they hope for the resurrection, and the Last Judgment. They are at rest, but not fully satisfied.

So this doctrine of a Final Judgment is a comfort to the godly, but it also deters sin, and warns the ungodly. Note that the Lord makes the day unknown. The object is keep us from feeling secure in our sin. The Lord doesn't want planned deathbed conversions. The Lord used Jonathan Edwards' preaching on this very aspect of the final judgment to spark the greatest revival America ever had. His text was Deuteronomy 32:35: "Their foot shall slide in due time." In other words, the wicked don't even have a *temporary* ground of security. Here's how Edwards put it:

> You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but do not see the hand of God in it; but look at other

> things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw his hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it[9].

So this doctrine–this hope–calls us to holiness, and watchfulness.

In light of all this, we also have a duty. Renihan says,

> All people know intuitively, based on their observations of the world around them, that the day of judgement is coming. But they do not know its true character nor its timing. In order for them to know, the gospel must be proclaimed[10].

[9] Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.* `https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/edwards/edwards_angry.html`

[10] Renihan. Location 12100.