

Introduction

What happens after the Resurrection? Our Confession does not leave us to speculate:

WLC 88 What shall *immediately* follow after the resurrection?

A. Immediately after the resurrection shall follow the general and final judgement of angels and men; the day and hour whereof no man knoweth, that all may watch and pray, and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord”

This General Judgement is the subject of the final chapter in our Confession:

On the General & Comprehensive Scope of Judgement

33.1 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.² In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged,³ but likewise all persons that have lived upon 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.⁴

¹ Acts 17:31; ² Jn 5:22, 27; ³ 1 Cor 6:3; Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4; ⁴ 2 Cor 5:10; Eccl 12:14; Rom 2:16; 14:10, 12; Matt 12:36–37.

- a. The appointed Judge will be the Lord Jesus Christ: “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:... [God] hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (Jn 5:22, 27).
- b. That judgment will be in a day, i.e., with no events intervening: “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” (Acts 17:31).
- c. This Day of Judgement will involve the world—all the elect and reprobates who ever lived. This is clear from the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31–46:
 - ☞ ³¹When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: ³²And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: ³³And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then 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: ³⁵For 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: ³⁶Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.... ⁴¹Then 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: ⁴²For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ⁴³I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.... ⁴⁶And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.
- d. This judgement will involve everything that is ever done in this life by every individual. We shall then have “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.” This is the emphatic teaching in many passages of Scriptures such as:

- ☞ “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” (2 Cor 5:10).
- ☞ “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mt 12:36–37).
- ☞ “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecc 12:14).

“There is a place that is better than heaven and worst than hell: this present life for our lot in eternity will be determined in this life” (John H. Gerstner).

- e. Apostate angels will also be judged on that day as they are now “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6; cf. 2 Pet 2:4).

On the Purpose of the General Judgement

33.2 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 damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord: but the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.¹

¹ Matt 25:31–46; Rom 2:5–6; Rom 9:22–23; Matt 25:21; Acts 3:19; 2 Thes 1:7–10.

- a. The purpose of this judgement will be the display (i) “of the glory of His *mercy* in the eternal salvation of the elect”; (ii) “of His *justice* in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient.”
 - “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: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (Rom 9:22–23).
- b. Those who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ are deemed righteous and will enter into everlasting life, and “receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord.” “His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Mt 25:21). Edwards, who is aptly known as the theologian of heaven and hell, puts it beautifully:
 - “The souls of departed saints with Christ in heaven, shall have Christ as it were unbosomed unto them, manifesting those infinite riches of love towards them, that have been there from eternity: and they shall be enabled to express their love to him, in an incomparably better manner than ever they could while

in the body. Thus they shall eat and drink abundantly, and swim in the ocean of love, and be eternally swallowed up [in] the infinitely bright, and infinitely mild and sweet, beams of divine love; eternally receiving that light, eternally full of it, and eternally compassed round with it, and everlastingly reflecting it back again to its fountain” (Jonathan Edwards, *Works* 2.29a).

- c. All unbelievers are accounted wicked for their sin and their refusal to obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They “shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (cf. 2 Thes 1:7–9). Note that this does not mean that hell is where God is not as if the wicked will no more have anything to do with God. It is the wrath of God that makes hell so terrible. Though hell will have a form of literal fire which will torment the bodies of the wicked, it is the presence of an angry God that makes the suffering intolerable. Thus Edwards preached:
 - “Tis the infinite almighty God himself that shall become the fire [of] the furnace exerting his infinite perfections that way.... The appearance of the presence of an angry God in them and everywhere round about them, can be represented by nothing better than by their being in the midst of an exceedingly hot and furious fires...” (Unpublished sermon on Job 41:9–10).

On our Response to Eschatology

33.3 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:¹ so will He have that 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 be ever prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.²

¹ 2 Pet 3:11, 14; 2 Cor 5:10–11; 2 Th 1:5–7; Lk 21:7, 28; Rom 8:23–25; ² Mt 24:36, 42–44; Mk 13:35–37; Lk 12:35–36; Rev 22:20.

- a. Eschatology has always been a subject of great interest to Christians throughout the ages. This is not wrong since a good proportion of the Scripture deals with the subject. Unfortunately, it has also become a subject of great differences and contention among believers. Moreover, it has also become the chief preoccupation of many a Christian and church so much so that other important doctrines revealed in the Word of God are neglected or not given due proportion of attention.
- b. What is the purpose of eschatology? Our Confession offers two pastoral points: *Firstly*, the knowledge that there will certainly be a day of judgement ought to deter men from sin (2 Pet 3:11–12). *Secondly*, believers who are suffering adversity may have greater consolation knowing that the Lord not only knows their sufferings, but will bring all things to justice and will vindicate the righteous:
 - ☐ “[The endurance of persecution and tribulation] 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: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2 Th 1:5–6).
- c. For these reasons, God does not reveal to us the exact timing of Christ’s return (and the resurrection and judgement): “But of that day and hour knoweth no man,

no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Mt 24:36). For if men know when Christ will return, then they will become complacent.

- d. In view of the knowledge of the soon return of Christ:
- (i) We should live in constant watchfulness (Mt 25:1–13; Mk 13:33; Rev 16:15), to be ready to receive Christ and to be received of Him at His return. This requires us to endeavour to live holy lives according to the Word.
 - (ii) We must be mindful to live as pilgrims in this world (1 Pet 2:11), not amassing wealth or storing up treasures upon the earth at the expense of treasures in heaven that have eternal values.
 - (iii) We should serve the Lord and invest our time in what would last (cf. 1 Cor 3:13–15). We should be more fervent in evangelism and preaching since there would be no more opportunity of repentance when the wrath of God is poured out in judgement (cf. Mt 25:14–30).
 - (iv) We should not neglect worship and fellowship; but constantly exhort one another in the things of God as we see the day approaching (Heb 10:25), knowing that apostasy will be rampant in these last days (2 Tim 3:1–5).
 - (v) We should continue to walk worthy of our vocations (Eph 4:1), to glorify God with our lives. We are not called to sell all we have and to wait in inactivity, rather we are to occupy till He comes (Luke 19:13).
 - (vi) We should redouble our efforts to study the Scriptures and theology to prepare for our future reign with Christ.
 - (vii) We should work out our salvation with fear and trembling and examine ourselves honestly to make sure that we are indeed in the faith (Phil 2:12; 2 Cor 13:5).
 - (viii) We should not quarrel over who is right (2 Tim 2:24–25).
 - (ix) We should be ever prepared to say, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen” (cf. 1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20).

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