

Arlington Church of Christ

Wednesday Bible Study

**Judgment and Degrees of
Rewards and Punishments**

Following the Scriptural Trail



In previous lessons, it was shown that when we die, our spirit is separated from the body. The body returns to the dust from which it was made and our spirit goes to Hades, the waiting place of spirits. The spirits of every person who has lived and died from Adam to our present day is currently in Hades. We saw that Hades is made up of two parts – one place of rest and comfort called Paradise (Luke 23:43)

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

and the other a place of punishment called Torment (Luke 16:23),

Luke 16:23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

and that there is no going from one side to the other (no purgatory) (Luke 16:26).

Luke 16:26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

We also saw that what determines which part of Hades we find ourselves in is determined by whether or not we obeyed the plan laid out in the scriptures for our salvation. This brings us to the question of judgment – most think of it as a time when everyone who has ever lived will stand before God to be judged for their deeds and hear whether they will be in heaven or hell. But those in Hades already know what their fate will be, and the scriptures make it clear that what good deeds we do will not merit heaven for us – Matt 7:21-23 –

Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

that it is only those who do the will of God – follow the instructions given in the Bible who will be given heaven.

The only ones who will be separated into ‘sheep and goats’ (saved and lost) at the time of Jesus’ return are those who are still alive at that time – those who have died and are in Hades already know where they will spend eternity.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Speaking to those who would still be alive when Jesus returns and are living faithfully to Him:

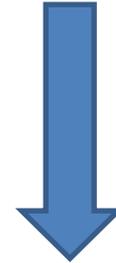
1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Speaking to those who would still be alive when Jesus returns and are not obedient to Him:

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. ⁸ **He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.**



Note this also answers the question of what will happen to those who have 'never heard' the gospel, as well as those who have heard and rejected it.

Angels will be involved in the separation process:

Matthew 13:47-50

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ **This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

And while that separation is indeed part of the return of Jesus, the 'judgment' applies to all people including those in Hades, as well as those alive at the time, and the scriptures indicate that it involves the giving of degrees of rewards and punishments based on the deeds we have done.

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Matthew 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

Romans 2:5-11

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ **To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.** ⁸ **But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.** ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ **For God does not show favoritism.**

Where do we go when we die?



The amount of reward or punishment throughout eternity is based on the things we have done in our lives which are recorded in 'books' -

Revelation 20:12-15

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

**So what determines whether we will receive a reward?
What 'things' will be written in the books?**

Not only will what we have done be written in the books, but also the motivation of our hearts while doing it.

Colossians 3:23-25

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

(Doing things as the Lord wants out of respect and love for HIM will bring a reward, not just doing ‘good deeds’ to impress people or because it is your ‘duty’)

Doing things like what?

Mark 9:41

Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose **their reward**

(Helping fellow Christians with whatever is needed – be it as small as a drink of water)

Luke 6:33-36

And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

(Do what is right to all people, even for those who do not reciprocate and who take advantage of your goodness.)

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Note about these verses:

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Note about these verses:

1) This is speaking to 'Christians' – and is speaking about doing good things because we are Christians trying to follow the teachings of Jesus.

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Note about these verses:

- 2) Not everything done will receive a reward –it must 'pass the test'.
But loss of the reward does not mean loss of salvation.



What 'tests' will be applied to determine the quality of our work?

Faithfulness in the midst of persecution –

Matthew 5:11-12

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because **great is your reward in heaven**, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Our intentions behind the actions-

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, **they have received their reward in full.** ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. **Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, **they have received their reward in full.** ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. **Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, **they have received their reward in full.** ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and **your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

Greater rewards for some than others

Matthew 25:14-30

“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘**Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.** Come and share your master’s happiness!’

22 “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

23 “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

24 “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came.I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ 26 “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant!

28 ““So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. 29 For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Note : a ‘bag of gold’ = (talent) = 75 pounds (In today’s money, this is equal to about 2 ¼ million dollars)

Luke 19:12-24

He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. ¹³ So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’¹⁵ “He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it. ¹⁶ “The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ ¹⁷ ““Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied.

‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

¹⁸ “The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’

¹⁹ “His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

20 “Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. 21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man.

22 “His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man... 23 Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

24 “Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’

Note a ‘mina’ = 100 days wages

Matthew 19:27-29

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” ²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

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Revelation 21:14

The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Luke 15:7

I tell you that in the same way **there will be more rejoicing in heaven** over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

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I tell you that in the same way **there will be more rejoicing in heaven** over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. **(greater rejoicing!)**

**What does the Bible indicate our
'reward' might be?**

In all of these scriptures, the faithful ones were given authority (in charge of cities, given authority to judge). In fact, Paul says in 1Cor 6:3

“Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!”

It would also include reigning with Christ:

Revelation 22:3-5

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Ephesians 2:6

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

Romans 8:17

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Now we are also told that God will destroy this earth and create a new heaven and earth -

Revelation 21:1-3 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

It will be a place where God lives with us. Back in the garden of Eden, God gave Adam a job to do:

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

And God gave the man authority over things, in Gen 1:26

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So it may be that in heaven our reward will be that of serving God and caring for the ‘new heaven and new earth’ and that some will be given more authority in that position than others.

Remember that Jesus said that the ‘greatest in the kingdom was the one who served’:

Matthew 23:11-12 The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Degrees of Punishment

Luke 12:47-48

“The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸ But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Even those who ‘did not know’ were punished, only to a lesser degree.

Matthew 11:21-24

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. ²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

2 Peter 2:20-21

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹ It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

Greater punishment for those who turn back after becoming a Christian.

Hebrews 10:29

How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

This is speaking of a Christian who continues to sin willfully – they have lost their forgiveness and rejected the only solution – Jesus Christ.

Matthew 23:13

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

A parent who refuses to accept Jesus and who does not encourage their children to do so – will face greater punishment because their actions caused another to be lost!

Woe to you => severe judgment and punishment

2 Peter 2:15-19

They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. ¹⁶ But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

¹⁷ These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸ For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”

Those whose life is caught up in greed and seeking money and who are willing to do anything to get it, even if it means dragging others down with them – will receive greater punishment.

Jude 11-13

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

¹² These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

One who claims to be a 'Christian' but does not offer the right 'sacrifices' (Cain), is caught up in greed (Balaam), or who rejects God's authority for their own (Korah)

Our salvation depends on whether we accept Jesus as the only way to gain salvation and obey the plan of salvation laid out in the scriptures – having our sins washed away in baptism and living a life that is faithful to the instructions in the Bible.

At judgment day, we will be given our rewards for those things done in accordance with God's will (His Word) and be with Him forever in heaven, or will be assigned the degree of punishment we will endure throughout eternity in hell. The choice is up to us – God has put the plan in place and we can choose to follow it and be rewarded for those things done in love for Him and according to the scriptures, or we can ignore or we can reject His plan and suffer the consequences of our actions away from Him in hell forever.