

CHAPTER 10 THE END OF THE AGE

I will never forget the morning dad dropped off my brother and me, four or five years old, at the baby sitter's house. Before he left, he warned us not to play outside without wearing our coats. As only good children would do, we agreed to heed his words. Several hours passed, and the sun climbed to its pedestal. Although the sun warmed things up, the wind blew with a slight chill. Soon the time came for us to play outside.

And guess what we did? We left our coats inside...so unlike us to disobey! We were running, jumping, yelling, laughing--having the best time of our lives.

The picture hangs vividly in my head; my brother and I ran around the corner of the house, when suddenly, our grins turned downward and our eyes widened. Our worst fears sprang up faster than those weeds dad complained about in our yard. Dad's car was pulling into the driveway while we stood there in full view, coatless and doomed for punishment. The possibility of concocting a clever lie looked slim at that point. Lies work only as much as people believe them, and dad's facial expression didn't show that he would buy our reasoning. We could have ran and hid, but eventually we were going to need food. Dad had caught us with our coatless bodies on display for the world to see. Justice would soon roll down like water.

Dad's sudden presence that day served as quick and unexpected accountability. Dad didn't smile much on that occasion, and he made sure we didn't either. My brother and I learned a valuable lesson about accountability. Playing outside without our coats on had its pleasures, but it also carried *painful* consequences. Furthermore, we learned that we had to answer to others for our actions.

Accountability to God

Likewise, all people will give an account to God, as my brother and I did with our dad after blatantly disobeying him. Although you are responsible to others, you are *ultimately* responsible to God. This should provoke you to live an effective, godly life.

Joseph (ca. 1890 B.C.) realized his accountability to God in Genesis 39:9 when he resisted a woman's seduction. Also, King David recognized his ultimate accountability to God in Psalms 51:4 by the words he used when he confessed adultery and murder. Whatever you do that's not for God's glory will be worthless and to your shame when you stand before Christ (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The Return of Christ

Although Christians debate the details of the Lord's return, they have always affirmed that the Lord will come back to earth. Whenever God the Father deems it time, Jesus will return to defeat His enemies and to reign upon the earth.

Ponder the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18:

We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. According to the Lord's own Word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the

*Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep [died]. 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. 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. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*¹³⁰

We need to keep in mind the hope that lies ahead. This world falls short of giving us all we truly need. This earth fails to satisfy our true longings because earth isn't our real home. We do well to frequently reflect on Christ's coming return. "If we do not anticipate His return, then we will either be lulled into thinking that what we currently enjoy in this life is enough or lapse into fury for this life not being enough."¹³¹

Judgment

God will evaluate you and me some day.¹³² All people will be judged after death, both Christian and non-Christian (Hebrews 9:27; 1 Peter 4:5). This inevitable judgment consists of at least two aspects.

One aspect of the final judgment concerns nonbelievers. Sometimes believers call this facet of judgment *The Great White Throne Judgment*. God reserves the other judgment for believers, sometimes referred to as *The Judgment Seat of Christ*.

Those who have rejected Christ will not receive a second opportunity for salvation. When unbelievers face judgment, Christ will show them their evil deeds, declare them guilty of rejecting Him, and cast them into hell, where they will suffer forever (Matthew 7:22-23; 25:46; Revelation 20:11-15).

The judgment for believers will be more like an evaluation, and not one last attempt, on God's part, to decide whether or not they get into heaven. Instead, believers will account for how they lived. During this judgment, Christ will reward believers (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Second John verse 8 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 indicate that believers can also lose rewards.

¹³⁰ Also see Luke 21:25-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-12; 2:1-17; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7-18; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 19-22. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1091-1108. Also see R. G. Clouse, s.v. "Rapture of the Church," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 908-910.

¹³¹ *Bold Love*, 142.

¹³² Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Heaven

It's natural to want to go to heaven when you die. After all, Jesus dwells there (Hebrews 4:14). When believers die, they too will dwell in heaven with God (Matthew 6:9; 2 Corinthians 5:8).

God's presence makes heaven wonderful. Although God dwells in heaven, He is not confined to it (1 Kings 8:27, 30). One might suppose that since everything lies within God's presence, then people on earth should be able to see Him. But God manifests Himself in heaven uniquely from how He manifests Himself on earth.¹³³ One day, all Christians will see God face-to-face. (Also see above discussion of glorification under section entitled "Relationship" in chapter 3, "The Cleansing Effect.")

Hell

The Bible teaches that those who reject Christ go to a place of torment. The rich man of Luke 16:23-26 went to a place where he experienced inescapable suffering.

The Bible makes a distinction between the temporary place of suffering, where the rich man found himself, and the permanent place of suffering where all the wicked finally go.¹³⁴ The rich man went to the present place of torment (*Hades*: the abode of the dead or the holding place for the Day of Judgment). This temporary hell is a place designed for all who refuse to trust Christ. Revelation 20:14-15 discusses the future place of torment, namely *hell* or the *lake of fire*.¹³⁵ God will cast all the wicked into this never-ending place of suffering (Matthew 25:46).

Why does hell exist? God originally created hell for Satan and his demons (Matthew 25:41). Hell now functions as God's means to mete out justice by punishing wickedness. Furthermore, Romans 6:23a and James 1:15 say that the payment for sin is death (i.e., separation from God). All who reject Christ's atonement for their sin will be cast into hell, where they will be tormented and separated from God forever (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).¹³⁶

Why would God send or allow anyone to go to hell? He is holy and must judge sin. Those who reject God's provision for sin must receive the penalty for their sin

¹³³ For further reading on the future place of heaven, see Revelation 21:1-22:5.

¹³⁴ The distinction between a temporary and permanent place of torment is my interpretation and not necessarily the consensus of scholarship. There are many scholars who do not make a clear distinction between a temporary and a permanent place of torment. Whether the Bible makes a distinction between the two places or not, its message is clear: all who don't entrust their lives to Jesus will suffer the torment of hell the moment they die. Note that the Bible doesn't teach about purgatory--either someone goes to dwell with God or faces eternal suffering in hell.

¹³⁵ See Matthew 5:22, 29; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6; Revelation 19:20; 20:10; 21:8.

¹³⁶ This is the second death: Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8.

(Proverb 16:4). Since humanity stands guilty of sinning, hell is fair. Thank God that He graciously saves anybody!¹³⁷

Summary

Either through death or Christ's return, all people will stand before God to give an account for how they lived and how they responded to Christ. Unbelievers will stand before Jesus to receive the pronouncement of condemnation. Christ will find unbelievers guilty of rejecting Him and cast them into hell, where they will suffer forever. Believers will stand before Jesus to give an account of how they used their time and energy. God will reward believers accordingly and allow them into heaven.

Assignments

1. Memorize Ecclesiastes 12:14, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."
2. As a believer, picture yourself standing before Jesus during the Judgment. What do you want Him to say about your life? In light of that day, write down how you should live now in order to be unashamed then.

Discussion Questions

1. What, or who, makes heaven a place where believers should desire to go?
2. Does the Bible indicate that hell will be a place of conscious, never-ending punishment? If so, what passage(s)?
3. Knowing that many will be cast into hell, how should this affect the way believers live?

¹³⁷ Admittedly, there's an aspect of hell and God's judgment that I don't understand. It's a mystery and something difficult to think about. But Scripture teaches the existence of hell, that man is sinful, that unrepentant man goes to hell, and that God is just. I believe all of these points, even though I can't fully explain them.

Answers to Chapter 10 Discussion Questions

1. What, or who, makes heaven a place where believers should desire to go? *Although it will be great to see other believers who have gone on before, God will be the highlight of heaven.*

2. Does the Bible indicate that hell will be a place of conscious, never-ending punishment? *Yes.* If so, what passage(s)? See *Matthew 25:46, Luke 16:23-26, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, and Revelation 2:11, 20:14-15, 21:8.*

3. Knowing that many will be cast into hell, how should this affect the way believers live? *Although this may not be your primary motivator, it may provoke you to be more diligent about spreading the gospel.*