

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 3:10-15 - A Field Guide to Final Judgment

This morning we are going to look at the issue of final judgment. Remember that Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for clamoring over their favorite leader. Part of the way he rebukes them through the rest of this chapter is to remind the Corinthians of final judgment. And his point is that we tend to focus on the role of people in God's Kingdom: apostles, pastors, missionaries - those seem like the top tier roles. But the reality is that when we stand before God in judgment, it won't be based so much on our role, but how faithful we are in whatever role God has given us.

If you've ever towed a heavy trailer you know you need a lot of things to do it well. You need a strong engine. You need good brakes. A good suspension. But you also need a good cotter pin. You know what a cotter pin is? It's that little piece of metal that looks like it was made from a metal hanger that keeps the hitch pin in place so so your hitch stays attached to your vehicle. If the cotter pin fails your trailer will separate from the truck and it's absolute disaster. We take for granted faithful cotter pins.

Cotter pins don't get a lot of glory. You can barely see them and they're often a pain to get off and on. No one talks about how strong and powerful cotter pins are. How many horsepower they have. There's not much of an aftermarket for them. But they are essential.

If I may: there's a lot of cotter pins in the Kingdom of God. People who are absolutely essential to the Kingdom but who get zero glory and zero recognition. And Paul's point in all of this is: it doesn't matter your place in the Kingdom - because God decides your place - it matters if you're faithful in your place.

Most of you guys probably know the sad story of Ravi Zacharias. He was the head of a huge international ministry organization that focused on apologetics: defending the faith. And he died about this time last year. Up until last year most people would have thought the reward that Ravi Zacharias was receiving in heaven was incredible because of how renowned he was. *Until* allegation and allegation of sexual misconduct came out, hosts of people showing credible proof of unbelievable sexual sinfulness. And now - if I can just be blunt - we don't know if he's in heaven at all.

It's faithfulness to the Lord in your life that matters. That's all that matters. That's all you will be judged on on the Last day. As followers of Jesus, our only concern is that final day when we stand before the Lord. He won't ask us: well why didn't you have a bigger ministry? Why didn't you have a different role? You know why he won't ask that? Because that's all up to him. He will ask us whether or not we were faithful.

And what we want to hear is "Well done, good and what? Faithful servant. That's on us.

Now, I don't know about you, but sometimes thinking about standing before the Lord in judgment is confusing. On the one hand we should be excited to see Jesus - whether he comes back tomorrow or whether we die tomorrow and go see him. On the other hand we have warnings about how we live our lives because we will give an account to Jesus in judgment. We see those kind of realities here in this passage. **Read 8, 14, 4:4**

These are all images of judgment that believers will face.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I first became a Christian I was pretty confused about judgment and our attitude about it. I became a Christian because I knew I was a sinner and God was going to throw me into hell unless my sins were forgiven through believing in Jesus. But then as I read the Bible it seemed like there was still a judgment to come. And then I wasn't sure if I was supposed to be happy to see Jesus or scared.

So here's what I want to do this morning. I want to actually take this morning and give you a crash course in final judgment. And then we will zoom back in and look at the passage. I hope this will be helpful as we sort through these issues.

So let's talk about final judgment. In theology this is called personal eschatology. Usually when we talk about eschatology we're talking about general eschatology which is what the Bible says about how the world is going to end and how God is going to bring that about. Those are the discussions of rapture and millennium

and new heavens and new earth. It's called general eschatology because it's the big picture. Eschatology is the study of the last things.

Personal eschatology is what happens to individuals when they die or in the future as we stand before the Lord in judgment. And it's personal eschatology that we're focusing on here. I titled my sermon A Field Guide to Final Judgment because this is just an overview.

## Slide

This slide is on the back of the bulletins and hopefully it is helpful. So let's break it down a little bit. Notice the big divide down the middle from top to bottom. That divide represents where someone's soul goes the moment they die.

Everyone is made up of two parts, body and soul. Or we could say body and spirit.

When Jesus says love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength he's not making a claim on how many parts we are made of. It's just saying love God with all you are. It's like the whole kit and caboodle, the whole nine yards.

But what we see throughout the Bible is that there is an immaterial part of us and the material part. When someone dies their body goes into the ground but their soul, or we could say spirit, goes either to heaven or hell. If they truly believed in the Lord Jesus, they go instantly to heaven to be with Jesus in glory.

**2 Cor. 5:8** Paul says that for believers to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

If you're a believer and you die, your soul goes to be with Jesus. Your body is in the ground, but your soul is with the Lord.

**Phil. 1:23** Paul says that his desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

When he dies, he knows he will be ushered into the presence of Jesus. Every believer has that confidence. That's why when a believer dies we say they went home to be with the Lord. The Lord is in heaven, and heaven is our true home.

If someone does not believe in Jesus, when they die they go to hell. Hell is referred to as different things in the Bible. It's called Gehenna, which was a garbage dump outside of Jerusalem where trash was continually burned. It's called Hades, which is a dark underworld. It's called outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is described as a place of torment and agony where the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die.

Hell is for all those who did not live by faith in God in the OT and those who did not live by faith in Christ in the NT. Hell is eternal and final and there's no way to escape. There are no second chances.

I will just say that usually the first clear teaching in the Bible that gets tossed out by academics and people who think they know God better than the Bible is the Bible's teaching about hell. They say no loving God would send someone to hell forever because of sin. Hell is just a metaphor. Well, what is it a metaphor for? They don't know.

As much as God is love - we saw that last week - God is also holy and any sin anyone commits is primarily against him. There is no such thing as a victimless crime or a victimless sin - all sin is a personal attack on the holy Creator God who will vindicate his holiness on the last day. People don't go to hell because God is mean and unloving, they go to hell as a punishment for sin in the sight of a holy God.

**Rom. 3:23:** We all sin and fall short of the glory of God.

**Rom. 6:23:** The wages of sin is death, but free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The death Paul has in mind includes physical death, but he also has in mind eternal punishment in contrast to eternal life.

Hell is not like a Farside cartoon where the devil is down there and he's in charge of the place having fun tormenting people and God is just up in heaven ignorant of what's happening.

**Turn to Revelation 14:9-11.** This is instructive for us to understand that hell is actually the place where Jesus personally pours out wrath on people who did not believe in him.

Now, this section talks about the mark of the beast - we're not going to get into all that. The main point I want you to see is Jesus is the one pouring out wrath on people who worship other gods. **Read 9-12**

So John is describing what we call hell. And the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is there along with all of his angels superintending the punishment of those who rejected him. Sin is personal to God because it is personal against him. It is a rejection of his authority over all life.

Okay, back to the chart: So all who die either go to heaven or hell.

Now, something we need to understand is that God didn't tell the OT saints all there was to know about heaven and hell at the beginning. Like many other truths in the Bible, it seems as though God revealed more and more information over time. He clarified as time went on.

So, throughout most of the OT, it seems like the place everyone goes after they die is Sheol. As we've read through Ecclesiastes you've probably noticed that Sheol is mentioned a lot. The wise and the foolish both go to Sheol. Animals even go to Sheol. So what is Sheol? It sounds bad.

Well, if you look through the whole of the OT you realize that Sheol is sort of a generic place of the dead. All people go to Sheol. Sometimes it's used to describe the grave or even the sea. When Jonah was in the sea he said that Sheol had swallowed him up.

Sheol is not a literal place that's different from heaven or hell. Sheol is just the OT God didn't reveal everything there was to know about heaven and hell.

It's like when you go to camp and ask what's for dinner, what do they tell you? Stewed bugs and onions. Every time. You know it's not stewed bugs and onions, but you don't get much more information about it until the bell rings and you're in line.

That's kind of how it worked in the OT. God didn't give the saints all the info a first - they didn't need it to be faithful. But he added more as time went on. The OT saints did know that there was a separation of people in Sheol. The wicked were punished and the righteous were in a place of joy with their faithful ancestors.

Now, **turn over to Revelation 20.**

So here's what we see: in the OT, the concepts of heaven and hell are vague. In the NT they are clarified. But then we get this picture at the end of Revelation that even heaven and hell are not the final destination. Ultimately hell is replaced with the Lake of fire, and what we understand as heaven is replaced with the New Heavens and New Earth. I'm going to read a long stretch here, but bear with me because I think it's helpful to see this. **Read 20:7-8**

Now, this is a little bit where personal eschatology and general eschatology overlap. But what we see is that Satan and the beast and the false prophet are defeated and they and all who follow them are thrown into the Lake of Fire. And all those who worship Jesus enjoy a new heaven and new earth where we live with the Lord forever and ever.

Let me just pause, because I think this is huge: This is what is at stake in the gospel. Where someone spends forever hinges on what they do with Jesus. It's not just These realities should keep us in prayer, these realities should keep us vigilant to share the gospel, and live our lives as a testimony to God's glory and grace.

Now, getting a little closer to home for us. Look at the bottom of the chart. What the Bible says is that the experience in hell is not the same for everyone and the experience in heaven is not the same for everyone. They severity in hell varies and the reward in heaven varies.

Let's talk about the severity part first.

**Turn to Matt. 10:5-15.** This is where Jesus sends out the 12 apostles to preach and heal throughout the towns in Israel. Notice the warning he gives to those towns who reject the message of the apostles. **Read**

So I think it's pretty clear that Sodom and Gomorrah are at the low end of the totem pole when it comes to morality. There are few cities with worse reputation that they because of the gross sexual and homosexual immorality. But Jesus says that those cities will have a cake walk on judgment day compared to these towns if they reject the message. Why is that?

It's because the more you know about God, the more accountable you are. That's a big principle throughout the Bible. The more you know, the more accountable you are.

I think it's safe to say there's a lot of confusion about

1 Peter 1:13: Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

When I first became a Christian I think I had a lot of confusion about final judgement.