

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Church and Last Things, Session 19, The Last Judgment, Purposes, Circumstances, The Eternal State, Eternal Punishment

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This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on Doctrines of the Church and Last Things. This is session 19, The Last Judgment, Purposes, Circumstances, The Eternal State, Eternal Punishment.

We continue our study of last things, specifically of the last judgment.

Having determined that the timing was at the end of the age, after Christ's return, after the resurrection, and before the new heavens and new earth, we began discussing the purposes of the last judgment. The primary purpose is not dealing with human beings but with God. The primary purpose is to display the last judgment.

The primary purpose of the last judgment is to display the sovereignty, righteousness, power, truth, holiness, and glory of God. A secondary purpose is, I need to say it both negatively and positively, not to determine who will be saved and who will be lost. That is determined before death.

John 3:16 to 18, For God so loved the world that he gave his unique Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but will have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17 to 18, Whoever believes in him is not condemned already now.

Whoever does not believe in him is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. The primary purpose concerns the glory of God. The secondary one is not to determine eternal destinies, but to assign eternal destinies.

We've seen this numerous times in John 5:27 to 29. An hour is coming when all who are in their tombs will hear his voice and come out. There will be a resurrection.

Those who have done good to a resurrection of life, those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment, or back to Matthew 25, sheep and goats, to those on his right hand, the returning shepherd king, Jesus will say, Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Receive the kingdom prepared for you before the creation of the world.

To those on his left hand, he will say, Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

The primary purpose of the last judgment is the glory of God. The second purpose is not to determine eternal destinies, but to assign them. And then thirdly, a tertiary purpose of the last judgment is to determine degrees of punishment, evangelicals agree, and rewards. There is some disagreement.

I'm going to turn to a few passages. I'm going to turn to a few passages. First of all, degrees of punishment make sense.

Because although the punishment of hell is everlasting, it is the same in duration; it differs in intensity of judgment according to the sinfulness of one's lifestyle. And that makes sense. Some have thought that rewards hinder grace and malign grace.

And so the best a friend of mine who, an educated friend of mine can do is say, Yes, there are definitely rewards. But we're given crowns, and then we give them right back to the king. Well, it's all to God's glory.

But it looks to me like not only are there degrees of punishment, but there are degrees of reward. Luke 19:16, and 17. I'm going to go pretty quickly and try to just point out some of those things along the way.

Luke chapter 19:16, 17, and 19, the parable of the 10 minas. Lord, your minna has made 10 minnas more. Well done, good and faithful servant, good servant.

Luke 19:17, because you've been faithful in very little, you shall have authority over 10 cities. His reward is great. The second one says, Lord, your mina has made 5 minas.

And the master said You're to be over 5 cities. It looks to me like a degree of gifts and responsibility is commensurate with different rewards. Listen, to be part of the kingdom is the greatest reward ever.

This is sort of on top of that. Is it literal in terms of responsibilities in the new earth? I don't know, maybe so. Lord, here's your minna.

I put it in a handkerchief. I was afraid because you are a severe man. He's criticizing God, the master.

You take what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow. I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant. And he banishes him to slaughter them before me.

It does not look good. It looks like he is condemned, he is judged. As a matter of fact, his reward is taken away and given to the guy who had the 10.

So, it looks to me like that doesn't say degrees of punishment, but it looks like degrees of reward. Romans 2.5, you are storing up wrath for yourself, Paul tells the hypocrites. You're storing up wrath.

It looks like degrees of punishment. Luke 12 seems to have both. Luke 12:47 and 48.

Jesus told a parable concerning readiness, which we saw was the main purpose of the last judgment passages, certainly in the Gospels. Luke 12, the master of that servant, will come on a day he does not expect, and at an hour he does not know, he'll cut him to pieces and put him with the unfaithful. And the servant, that servant knew the master's will.

The servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act accordingly will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved the beating 'll get a light beating. Isn't this a degree of punishment? I understand it's a parable, but the point of the parable seems to be degrees of punishment.

Severe beating, light beating. Matthew 11:22 and 24. Matthew 11:22.

It'll be more bearable on the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you, Tyre and Sidon. He more bearable for the land of Sodom than for you, Capernaum. This is surely a degree of punishment.

1 Corinthians 3:12 to 15 is our final passage. In this context, those who build seem to be the elders, the leaders of the church. Paul uses two images, one of a horticultural image.

He plants, and others build upon his church, his foundation. I'm sorry, the plants, and others cultivate a building image. He lays the foundation, and others build upon his foundation.

In the context here, if anyone builds, it looks like it's the elders of the church, especially by interpretation; application refers to every believer. If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw, each one will become manifest, and the day will disclose it. The day they make it with a capital D-E-S-V, speaking of the last day.

Because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he'll receive a reward. Faithfulness seems to be what's going on.

Faithfulness is rewarded with a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss of reward though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Both are saved. The faithful elder will gain a reward. The other one will lose his reward.

So, it seems to me. The most important purpose of the last judgment is that God will be glorified in the judgment of every person. That is not to cut the nerve cord of evangelism, gospel witness, church planning, and missions, however, because God loves sinners.

He commands the gospel to go to the whole world. He gives the free offer of the gospel. And yet, God will not lose.

He will be glorified in the fate of every human being. Secondly, the last judgment doesn't determine destinies, and it assigns them. Thirdly, there are plain degrees of punishment commensurate with God's justice.

Apparently, there are also degrees of punishment. The reward for the faithfulness of believers. Circumstances of the last judgment.

God will be the judge. In about half the passages, it is the father. 1 Peter 1:7, if you address as a father the one who judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were redeemed by Christ.

The father is the judge. Also, we're not going to turn. Romans 14:10. The son is also the judge in my estimation.

Half the passages. Matthew 25, sheep and the goats. The king Jesus assigns the eternal destinies.

Matthew 16:27. For the son of man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his father. Then, he will repay each person according to what he has done. The son is going to repay.

The son is the judge. We saw it the same in John 5:28,29. At the voice of the son of man, those who are in their graves will come out to a resurrection, either of life or judgment. Acts 10:42 is important in this regard.

Where Peter says, God commanded us, Peter says, to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one who appointed God to be judge of the living and the dead. Appointed God to be judge of the living by God. To him, all the prophets bear witness.

And everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.
That's the son. That's the son.

Likewise, 17:31. God has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man he has appointed. And of this, he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. The judge is the father.

The judge is the son. Is the judge ever explicitly the Holy Spirit? No. And so I would say, so if I were asked a question as a systematic theologian, who is the judge on the last day? I would say Scripture attributes about half the passages to the Father, half to the Son, and never to the Spirit.

But since the one God is inseparable from the three persons, I would say the Holy Trinity is the judge on the last day, especially the father and the son. I would specifically mention that scripture never ascribes that judgment to the spirit, thus keeping a biblical, strict, exegetical foundation in my theology. But then I would make a step and identify it as systematization, including the Holy Spirit.

The closest we have is John 16. He'll convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It's not the last judgment.

It does show a convicting work of the spirit, however. Who will be judged? Angels and all human beings. Angels.

A perplexing verse. 1 Corinthians 6:2, and 3. The Corinthians are taking each other to court, brother against brother, and Paul is upset. Don't you have elders among you who can serve as judges? You're going before unbelievers.

What is your problem? Don't you know that we will judge angels? 1 Corinthians 6:2, and 3. What in the world does that mean? Teaching these things for years and thinking about it, the best I can do is to say, I don't know, but maybe we will say amen to God's judgment. And then, lo and behold, I look in my favorite 1 Corinthians commentary by Ciampa and Rosner, and that's what they say. I was very happy.

Do you not know we will judge angels? We will judge the world. 2 Peter 2:4 has God condemning the evil angels. He did not spare the angels when they sinned but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until judgment.

Jude 6 is similar. Matthew 25:41, King Jesus at the sheep and the goat says, depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. The devil is a fallen angel as well.

He and his demons, presuming that demons are the same as fallen angels, will be condemned to hell. Revelation 20:10 says that the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are, and they, in its plural, will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Angels will be judged.

All human beings will be judged. Romans 2:5 and 6, we've read this a number of times: hypocrites are storing up judgment for themselves. Verse 6, God will render to each one according to his works.

To those who, by patience and well-doing, seek for glory, honor, and immortality, he'll give eternal life. This is not salvation by works; it is judgment by works. But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Then God reverses it. A, B, and then B prime, A prime. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first, also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first, and also the Greek.

For God shows no partiality. I'll acknowledge another interpretation, that of Doug Moos, which says this is hypothetical, and yet Thomas Schreiner, C.E.B. Cranfield, and the majority of commentators eventually will say, no, it's talking about not justification, but sanctification. And when God saves somebody, it's not merely he gives them an acquittal of what will be true on the last day.

Justification is crucial, but he gives them his spirit, and he produces good works, love, and so forth in them, demonstrating the reality of their justification, by ongoing sanctification. In any case, all human beings will be judged.

Romans 3 and verse 6, Paul is accused of preaching too much grace. It's going to lead to a license. Paul is so mad.

By no means is God unrighteous to bring wrath. It's unthinkable for Paul. By no means, for how then could God judge the world? That is a given.

That is so much a presupposition of his thought; he could say, of course, God's going to judge the world, and that demonstrates that he will justly punish sin. He is not unjust to inflict wrath. Because we all know he will judge the world.

It's the world of sinners in Revelation 20:12 and 13, to which we will return, has all human beings, great and small, before God at the great white throne. Who's the judge? Sometimes the father, sometimes the son. Systematic formulation, I would say the Trinity.

Who's judged? Evil angels, evil human beings. What is the basis of judgment? To use shorthand as scripture usually does, it's deeds, it's works, it's actions, revealing what is in the heart. Longhand, thoughts, words, deeds.

1 Corinthians 4:5. I'm committed to exegetical theology wherever it leads. If it modifies my this or that, so be it. If it modifies other things, that's okay with me.

At the end of the day, I would rather be biblical than theological. You mean you'd leave loose ends in your system? Yes. You would leave antinomies, apparent contradictions, and paradoxes.

I wouldn't agree to actual contradictions, but yes, I'd rather be biblical than theological. Do I really want to make the Bible fit my system? No. And I acknowledge the Bible is not a systematic theology book; it's a storybook, it's God's story, but he teaches a lot of theology along the way, and we can put together most of it.

Another thing is, as Calvin says, when God opens his holy mouth, that is when he speaks in scripture, we believe it, we receive it, we obey it, even whether we like it or not. I could give you some doctrines that are not my favorite. Original sin, double predestination, and eternal punishment are the top three.

Do I believe them? Yes, rightly understood because I have no doubt that scripture teaches them. In any case, in 1 Corinthians 4:5, Paul says, talking about his ministry, do not pronounce judgment before the time before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

The motives and the purposes of the heart will be revealed. Has this ever happened to you? Happened to me again recently. I have some bad thoughts about somebody. I'm so glad I didn't say anything, and then I found out the situation.

I was dead wrong. They weren't being devious or lying. I only had a very partial understanding of the situation.

It was a different situation. God does not have a partial understanding of the situation. And the last day will reveal the motives, NIV, the purposes, ESV, of the heart.

Are we to keep up late at night worrying about that? No. Jesus died for all of our sins. We're to be sincere as far as we understand our motives.

Do we perfectly understand them? No. Is that my job to ruminate, to go inside and try to clear out all? No, no. That's misguided.

No, you go ahead, you live for the Lord. As things come to light, you confess them. I've known believers who, for years, had things in their lives that shouldn't have been there.

They didn't even know it, and something happens, and then they see, oh my word, I've been nourishing bitterness in my heart for 20 years toward that person. It was there. They never knew it.

God made it known to them. They immediately repented. Do you really think you know all your sins? But thankfully, God does, and Jesus died for them.

You laugh, and you cry. Every careless word will be judged. Matthew 12, 36.

Jesus is a tough preacher. Wow. The tree is known by its fruit.

A good tree is known for good fruit. Bad tree is known by bad fruit. You brood of vipers.

Man, he didn't have Norman Vincent Peale, of course, of being how to speak kindly to everybody. No, he's being merciful, and he blasts the religious leaders who need it. I'm amazed at Acts chapter 6, where many, even among the priests, believed in him.

Would they have done so if he had pussyfooted around them all? No, no. He blasted them, and that stuck in some of their minds. They started to question, and it created doubts, and later, by God's grace, they believed. How can you speak good when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

The good person, out of his good treasure, brings forth good. The evil person, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil. So, I tell you, on the day of judgment, that kind of gives the timing, people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words, you'll be justified, and by your words, you'll be condemned.

Judgment is based upon what we do. No, it's based upon grace and faith. What we do flows from grace and faith.

If we have believed, if we haven't, we're the bad tree producing the bad stuff, the bad words, the bad thoughts, the bad actions, and we are justly condemned. People are not condemned for not believing in Jesus. Don't get me wrong.

The only escape is believing in Jesus, but how fair would that be of God? You never heard, so you're condemned. No, they are condemned, and they are condemned if they never heard, to the best of my understanding, for their sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. That's why there is no appeal at the judgment passage.

Oh, Lord, you don't understand. I did more good. No, they're just quiet.

They're just condemned. But most of all, over and over again, judgment is based on deeds. We saw it in Matthew 5:18 and 19.

I'm not going to turn again. At the voice of the Son of Man, the tombs will open up, and people will come out. Those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment.

Boy, that makes a lot of sense. That is good. That is just.

Those who have done good to a resurrection of life, is that salvation by works? No, it's a judgment by works. Guess who those who have done good are? The people who believe in Jesus are saved by God's free grace. And as John Murray reminded us, he agreed with my Romans 2 interpretation by the way.

He says, look. He doesn't say look. His Romans commentary, John Murray, the old NICNT volume.

Salvation is not only justification. It is also lifelong sanctification. That is as much God's salvation as justification.

Sanctification is God acquitting us once and for all when we believe in Jesus and have Christ's righteousness applied to our spiritual bank accounts. Salvation is his work, too. And that can show up in the last judgment.

Faith can show up. James 2, I'll say it again. You show me your faith without works.

That's impossible. And I'll show you my faith by works. Revelation 20.

Very fascinating. In a few passages, there are predestinary and judgment passages. In few judgment passages, are there predestinarian themes?

But there is in the big one. Gregory Beale is right in his magisterial Revelation commentary. The reviews of that commentary by everybody, including liberals, say this is a remarkable interpretation of the apocalypse.

But the emphasis at the great white throne judgment is on deeds. Then I saw thrones. That's not it.

Then I saw a great white throne. That's it. 20:11.

And Him who was seated on it, earth and heaven flee from him as we said before. Then I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne. And books were opened.

It's the books of deeds. But another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done.

That's the books, according to what they had done. That's deeds.

The sea gave up the dead who were in it. In other words, resurrection is everybody, everywhere, and it doesn't matter how they die or where. Death in Hades, death in a grave, gave up the dead who were in them.

And they were judged, each one of them, guess what, according to what they had done. If anyone's name was not written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. So, two ways of talking about it.

In terms of human responsibility, we're judged according to work. Either revealing we were saved by grace through faith in Jesus or that we weren't. What is this book of life? Beal was right, Gregory Beale, Commentary on Revelation.

It is the heavenly register of the people of God. It is the census of the new Jerusalem. It is the list of the elect.

It is the predestinarian strain. In a few other passages, we have hints of this. Matthew 7, I never knew you, depart from me you workers of evil.

Implication? If he knew them savingly, they would be saved. He didn't know them savingly. He knows everybody.

He knows everything about them. He's not talking about his omniscience. He's not denying that.

No, he's talking about John 10. I know my sheep, and they know me. He's talking about a knowledge of salvation.

But that's not the accent. The accent is a judgment based on deeds. Full picture, thoughts, words, and deeds.

Thus, to summarize the doctrine of the last judgment. It's going to happen at the end of the age after Jesus returns after people are raised, they got to be raised to appear before the judge, before the new heavens and new earth. And, I should say, before

the millennium, if the premills are right, and then before the new heavens and new earth.

Everybody agrees on that. Purposes. God will be glorified in every human beings fate.

The secondary purpose, and very important, is not to determine destinies but to assign them. Thirdly, there will be degrees of punishment. It looks like there will also be degrees of reward, and that doesn't impugn grace.

It's a result of grace mixed with human faithfulness to the glory of God. Furthermore, let's say that cities in the parable are literal. Alright? My godly friend, David Calhoun, let's just say he gets ten cities, and let's say Peterson gets one.

Guess what? It all belongs to Jesus. He belongs to me. I belong to him.

So, if Petersonville has one city, and Calhounville has ten, I can go to Calhounville whenever I want. So, my goodness, I'll tell you what, to be raised, glorified, sanctified, and be on the new earth as part of the whole deal, that's all there is in my book. The other is icing on the cake, and if God wants to reward some of his servants more, praise his name.

That's wonderful. I love it. Circumstances of the last judgment.

God is the judge. Explicitly, in half the passage is the father, in half the passage is the son. My goodness, the son is God, my friends.

No mere man or angel takes the place of God at the last judgment. Who's judged? Evil angels are judged. Not only so, but evil human beings are judged.

Will not all human beings appear before judgment? Yes. In this context we mean judged negatively. We will be declared righteous before men and angels.

The gospel we hear now is an accurate, already verdict of the verdict of the last day, the not yet verdict of our justification. Technically, justification, as it says in Romans 5:19, and the Matthew passage where Jesus said, by your words you'll be saved. Matthew 12:35, right in there, 35, 36, 37.

By your words, you'll be justified; by your words, you'll be content. Justification is most technically and properly, like every other aspect of salvation, not yet. Oh, it's really. We get it now, really, really, but we get it in part.

You haven't seen anything yet. We're going to be justified on the last day. Unfailingly, all those who truly were justified by Jesus in this life, in the already, will be declared righteous before God and angels on that day, as a not-yet aspect of salvation.

Although it's hard for some to coordinate this, which is the function of systematic theology, with other biblical data, judgment will be based not on faith, but on faith manifested. You can't judge faith and God just to judge; judge us faithfully. Faith, as it were, shown, show me your faith by your deeds.

That's exactly what he does. And the evil fruit of the bad trees leads to condemnation. The good fruit of the good, how did I become a good tree? By grace through faith.

And by the way, that lifelong sanctification, which is where those good works show up, is the work, isn't it mine? Yes, it's, we work. We don't work in justification. We cooperate with God in sanctification.

Ah, so it's all to our glory, right? No. Good grief. It is to the glory of the Trinity.

The Trinity produces those good fruits. Give me evidence. I'll be happy to.

It is God, Philippians 2, round verse, I better stop saying a round verse. It is God, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Creator, who works in us to will and to work for his good pleasure. Philippians 2:12 and 13 specifically.

The Son produces fruit. We can do nothing apart from him, John 15. The good works that show up in the judgment by which we are acquitted are the fruit that we produce, that the Lord produces in and through us with our cooperation, by our being joined to the vine who is Jesus.

Am I saying that the good works of sanctification are the works of the Father and the Son? Yes, and of the Spirit, Galatians 5. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, and patience. The Trinity produces those things in us. So, there's no sense that we do them.

Oh, we definitely do them. We have been saved freely by God's grace. Our bound will have been liberated, and now we cooperate with God all to his glory.

The Father, Son, and Spirit work in us, and we, as the junior partner in the law firm, as the player, God's the manager, we obey. We trust his power. We praise his glory.

We walk with him, and that too is by his grace. We move on to the eternal state, eternal punishment. Hell, in the not-yet sense, there is an intermediate hell, as we saw.

Luke 16, the rich man goes there. 2 Peter 1, 2 Peter 2:9, but that's really not the hell we're talking about by and large. Hell's the final state.

It follows the second coming. Sheep and the goats, Matthew 25:31. Son of man comes in his glory, divides the nations.

Depart from me, you are accursed into the eternal fire, Matthew 25:31. It follows the resurrection. At the voice of the son of man, they'll come out of their graves, out of the tombs, some to a resurrection of judgment.

Eternal punishment follows the last judgment, Revelation 20:11-15. I saw the great white throne. Everybody stands before him, and those, some are cast into the lake of fire.

So, eternal punishment is hell as the final, not the intermediate state. Secondly, the master of hell. It's hard for me to believe there's been confusion on this point, but there has been in the history of the church.

The master of hell, as the master of everything else, is the Lord God Almighty. My goodness. Not Satan.

Satan gets the worst punishment in hell. Matthew 25:41. Depart from me, and you are accursed into the eternal fire.

Prepare for the devil and his angels, Revelation 20:10. The devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire, where he, false prophet and the beast, will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The devil's not the Lord of anything.

Well, he's the Lord of his evil kingdom. How's that? He certainly isn't the Lord of heaven or hell. God is the master of heaven and earth and hell.

If there's anything else I'm missing, he's the Lord of that, too. He is God. Luke 12:5. I tell you, verse 4, Luke 12, do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more they can do.

But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell. Is that the devil? No, it is God, of course.

A very shocking fact to many is that God is present in hell. It shouldn't really surprise us. God is everywhere present.

Oh, come on, where do you get this God present in hell business? Revelation 14, as a matter of fact, it's the lamb, the most prevalent picture of Christ in the apocalypse. Revelation is the lamb. As a matter of fact, every time but once, perhaps there are like 14 uses, I don't have the exact count.

Once it's used in a meta-simile, the beast coming out of the sea has horns like a lamb. Every other time, it's the son of God. Of course, speaking of his sacrifice, of his being Savior.

And Revelation 14 is powerful. Revelation 14, idolaters in the last day, 14:10, will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger. And he'll be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. There's no rest day or night. The holy angels will be in hell, not suffering but glorifying God for his glory.

And the holy, holiness, justice, wrath. Jonathan Edwards is right. God is everywhere present.

Oh, he's not everywhere present in the same way. He is present in heaven or the new earth in grace, fellowship, love, mercy, communion, and glory. He is present in hell in glory.

He is present in heaven or the new earth in glory, holiness, righteousness, and wrath. God is present in hell. In our next lecture, we will describe hell and then move on, hallelujah, to describe the new heavens and the new earth.

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