

THE LAST CRISIS

By

Curtis Dickinson

Many people see such tragic events at the riots in Los Angeles, the hurricane in Florida and the flood of '93, as acts of God's judgment upon a nation which has rejected His laws by endorsing homosexuality and abortion. An ominous fear permeates the nation, a fear that constitutional government with its bill of rights will disappear and a tyrannical police state under the rule of a New World Order will take its place.

These fears are well founded. If we know history and believe God, we understand that no nation which despises Him will prosper. There are many ways in which it may suffer, and today we are seeing some of the first pangs of national travail.

However, in our concern for the present political and social crisis and the fear of judgment upon the nation, we can lose sight of a much grater crisis and more significant judgment. This is the ultimate and final judgment in which all are called to an accounting. The judgment-seat of Christ should rise in peerless majesty above all other considerations.

When Jesus was on earth He faced political and religious corruption, violence, and immorality of all kinds. Judea was a powder keg ready to explode in revolution against the Roman occupation, and Jesus clearly predicted that it would be destroyed under God's judgment.¹ Even so, His message and His mission were focused against the background of the **final** judgment of the world at which time all sin is to be accounted for and punished.

In the Sermon on the Mount He warned of the judgment and the danger of being cast into *Gehenna* fire (translated "hell" in the King James Bible).² Those who travel the broad way are to be destroyed,³ and those who hear His words but reject them are doomed like the house built on sand.⁴

It is because of the final and universal judgment that Jesus lived, died, and lives again. He said that He came into the world for this very purpose, to give His life a ransom for many.⁵ As the hour of crucifixion drew near He said, "Now is the figment of this world,"⁶ clearly indicating that His death was for the purpose of giving man a way of escape from the judgment and its consequences.

This accords with the preaching of the apostles. When Paul visited Athens, he was well aware of the crisis in the Roman Empire, that its decline was gathering speed daily and that no Caesar could be trusted. Yet, the gist of his sermon was that men ought to repent, because God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world.⁷

Judgment. Nothing is plainer in all the Bible than the fact of a final judgment at which all unbelievers are to be sentenced to final and permanent death.

And that's the rub: finality. Man cannot stomach the idea that all will come to an end, that all his glorious works will vanish forever, that even people themselves, who reject God's salvation, will actually suffer death and be destroyed, never to see life again.

Evolutionists solve the problem by taking time at both ends and stretching it to infinity — man's beginning was light years in the past, and his evolvement may continue indefinitely into the future, without a Creator, he has no one to call him to judgment.

Pagan religions also deny finality of judgment. Death is not real. Instead of dying man transcends the physical to another (unknown) level. How they learned this is a great mystery, since none of them have returned from death to reveal it.

But Jesus DID return, and He is the one Who reveals the finality of judgment.

Get his warning to the disciples: “And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”⁸ Such destruction has the definite ring of finality.

In His parable of the wheat and tares, the tares are destroyed by fire, while the wheat is stored in the barn. “As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.”⁹

The Apostles took seriously the finality of judgment. Paul wrote of the destiny of the condemned in at last twenty-five places. Eight times he says the wicked are destined to *perish*. *Death* is used to express their fate seven times. Nine times they are said to be *destroyed*, once as *devoured by fire*, and once as **burned**.

To avoid the finality of death at judgment, man has redefined the penalty for sin to be “eternal separation” from God. There are at least three wrong with this. First, scripture does not define death this way and the expression is never found in the Bible. Second, it fails to acknowledge that all life must be provided by God. No one could exist totally separated from God. Third, it ignores completely all scriptures which plainly state that the unredeemed are to be destroyed by fire.

The Apostle Peter leaves no room for doubt concerning judgment and its finality. “But the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men.”¹⁰ Peter reveals that God intends to destroy man at judgment day and has prepared for it by storing the heavens and earth with fire. In the following verses Peter explains that the very “elements are to be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”¹¹

The author of Hebrews considers the final judgment of man to be so firmly established in Christian faith that he calls it “elementary.”¹² He calls it *eternal* because it is final and admits of no appeal.¹³ So Paul speaks of the destruction as eternal¹⁴ because it can never be reversed and from it there is no recovery, so judgment, punishment and destruction may all be denominated eternal. For those who deliberately continue to practice sin, the Hebrew writer says that for them there “remains only a fearful expectation of judgment and of a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”¹⁵ How could language better express finality?

“few things are stated more often throughout the whole Bible than that the wicked will ‘die,’ ‘perish,’ ‘be destroyed,’ pass away, be no more, and be forgotten forever.”¹⁶

The judgment will be of such catastrophic proportions that a complete description has never been written. But history records certain previews. In Noah’s time the earth was totally divested and all the ungodly vanished.¹⁷ In Abraham’s day Sodom and Gomorrah were totally incinerated along with all the inhabitants.¹⁸ Jude writes that this is an example of judgment.¹⁹ When Jesus died under judgment for our sin, the earth trembled and the sun was darkened as an indication of God’s wrath.

In the Revelation, it is said that death and hades are cast into the lake of fire.²⁰ “And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.”²¹ This corresponds to Paul’s statement that “the last enemy to be destroyed is death,”²² and the prophecy of Isaiah that “He will swallow up death.”²³ All that remain after judgment are the redeemed, made glorious after the likeness of Christ,²⁴ so that God may be all in all in a new heavens and earth, the perfected Kingdom of God where righteousness will prevail forever.²⁵

“This final, public act of judgment is the complete vindication of God’s justice both to those who are judged and to the moral universe.”²⁶

Soon we each must meet our Judge! Then nothing else will matter but how we have responded to Him who gave His only begotten Son that we might believe and not perish, but have everlasting life.²⁷ Remember that “he that believes not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”²⁸

We can prepare for that day by taking refuge in the only Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, “who his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree,”²⁹ that instead of judgment, we might receive the gift of eternal life, and hear the joyous welcome from the Judge, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”³⁰

References

1. Matthew 24:1–35, 21:33–45
2. Matthew 5:22, 29
3. Matthew 7:13
4. Matthew 7:24–27
5. Matthew 20:28
6. John 12:31
7. Acts 17:31
8. Matthew 10:28, Luke 12:4–5
9. Matthew 3:40–42
10. II Peter 3:7
11. II Peter 3:10
12. Hebrews 6:1–2
13. Hebrews 6:2
14. II Thessalonians 1:9
15. Hebrews 10:27
16. Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, page 289
17. Genesis 7:11
18. Genesis 19:23–28
19. Jude 7
20. Revelation 20:14
21. Revelation 20:15
22. I Corinthians 15:26
23. Isaiah 25:7–8
24. I John 3:2
25. Romans 8:21, II Peter 3:13
26. William Caven, *Therefore Stand*, page 458
27. John 3:16
28. John 3:36
29. I Peter 2:24
30. Matthew 25:34

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