

Jesus Christ's Work of Judgment
A Series on Divine Judgment: Part 3

Is Jesus' divine work of judgment the same as or different than His Father's?

While Jesus tells the Pharisee Nicodemus that the Son of God was not "sent to judge the world" (John 3:17), He tells other Jewish religious leaders, offended by Jesus calling God His Father and making Himself equal to God, just the opposite!

For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. **For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son**, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.** Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; **those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.** I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 5:20-30)

"For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son"

Judgment here is with the sense of "condemning." Because the Old Testament has multiple examples of the judgment of God the Father taking place during the physical life of human beings, the implication is that His Son Jesus will be doing all of the judging afterwards in the future when human beings are physically dead. Jesus repeats this idea throughout this passage to Jewish religious authorities to emphasize the supremacy of His divine authority (John 5:21, 24, 27, 29) and in accordance with His Father's will (John 5:20, 26, 30).

This view is expressed by the disciples in the book of Acts.

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)

"He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

Jesus might be alluding to His message of salvation that He shared with Nicodemus earlier (John 3:14-18) and its implication through a figure of speech of life and death as a reference to one's spiritual state.

"Those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment"

Jesus is more explicit about what happens to human beings after physical death. At the appointed time (when all shall hear His voice), there will be a resurrection of all of the dead and an accounting for one's life when physically alive.

In His ministry, Jesus explicitly states that He determines who enters the kingdom of God, which takes place after the physical death of a person (Matt 7:21-23; 25:31-46; Luke 13:22-28). While Jesus is fully aware of the life of each individual, this determination is based on whether or not Jesus personally knows him.

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Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. (Matt 7:21-23)

Who might these people be who are apparently doing good works (but not the will of His Father) that Jesus denies knowing? The story of the withered fig tree may be an illustration of what was happening in the first century and is the only record of Jesus, incarnate as a human being, carrying out a judgment (Matt 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-25). While the accounts of Matthew and Mark are similar, they differ in the sequence of the Temple cleansing; however, this does not affect the meaning of the symbolism that Jesus intended for His disciples.

Mark records that Jesus is attracted to a fig tree in leaf, because, despite being out of season for harvesting, the immature but edible fruit is present when the fig tree is in leaf (Mark 11:13). However, none is found and the tree is cursed (Mark 11:14).

Jesus enters Jerusalem and cleanses the Temple and teaches a message that is contrary to the Jewish priests and scribes (Mark 11:15-18).

The disciples are surprised that the fig tree has withered so quickly (Mark 11:20-21), and Jesus teaches to "have faith in God," because genuine faith enables one to pray powerfully with results; but be forgiving (Mark 11:22-26).

The leaves of the fig tree advertised its fruit, which was symbolic of the Jewish religious authorities advertising their works as an indication of faith. As a fig tree provides nourishment for life, a Jewish priest provides nourishment for spiritual life.

However, as Matthew 7:21 indicates, only "he who does the will of My Father" is judged as worthy of entering the kingdom of God. For Jewish religious authorities, the will of God the Father, is "that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29), which is stark contrast of what they were teaching. The fig tree whose leaves advertised the presence of fruit, which was not present, symbolized the hypocrites and their absent faith.

In failing to recognize that Jesus came to fulfill the Law (Matt 5:17-20), this disobedience of God's word is equated with lawlessness (Matt 7:22-23). As Jesus fulfills the Law of Moses, He determines the nature of its continuity.

The symbolism of the barren fig tree with Jewish religious authorities places an emphasis on "faith in God" (Mark 11:22). Genuine faith can do mighty works for God (Mark 11:23-24); but, with a humble heart that forgives and seeks forgiveness (Mark 11:25-26).

Although Jesus taught this in the first century, the lesson still applies today especially for those who are religious leaders.

Well after His resurrection, the meaning behind Jesus' words, "all judgment has been given to the Son" (John 5:22), becomes clearer in the last book of the Bible in Revelation, in which He has five exclusive roles.

With the authority bestowed by His death and resurrection, Jesus' first exclusive role was the banishment of Satan and his angelic followers from the heavenly realm of God (Rev 12:7-11). Martyred saints no longer had to hear Satan accuse them before God day and night.

This first role is significant, because it signals to Satan that "he has only a short time" (Rev 12:12).

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In His second exclusive role in judgment (Rev 5:1-3), Jesus Christ is the only One who can take the scroll out of His Father's hand to break its seals (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1) and unleash His Father's judgment upon the earth that includes war (Rev 6:4), famine (Rev 6:6), death (Rev 6:8), and supernatural disasters (Rev 6:12). It is apparent that the scroll is about God's judgment of earth and those human beings physically alive at the time.

Jesus Christ's second role in judgment is significant. He releases His Father's wrathful judgment at the appointed time (Rev 9:13-16). Resulting in the tribulation, God's unfolding plan of judgment is the orderly progression of the seals, trumpets, and bowls upon the earth and those human beings physically alive. God's judgment at the end does not occur decisively at one moment but over a period of time and with a progression of magnitude in devastation and lethality.

Jesus Christ's third exclusive role in judgment occurs at Armageddon (Rev 19:11-16), after the last bowl of God's wrath has been poured and prior to the Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20:1-3). The beast, false prophet and the kings of the earth are arrayed to make war at Armageddon in an attempt to deny Jesus Christ of His kingdom (Rev 16:13-16; 19:17-19).

Armed with a sharp sword coming from His mouth, Jesus Christ meets His adversaries from heaven (Rev 19:11). The imagery is difficult to understand with certainty; however, one possibility is that the sword represents the Holy Spirit and the word of God (Eph 6:17).

Nonetheless, the beast and the false prophet are seized and "thrown alive into the lake of fire" (Rev 19:20), and Jesus Christ kills the rest with "the sword which came from the mouth" (Rev 19:21).

Jesus Christ's third role in judgment is significant. The beast and false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire, and this the first time that Jesus Christ is recorded as carrying out a judgment of death upon human beings who are physically alive.

Jesus Christ's fourth exclusive role in judgment is implied but not entirely certain. At the end of the one thousand year reign of Jesus Christ, Satan is released, and he deceives and gathers the nations for a final battle with Israel (Rev 20:7-10).

Because Jesus Christ is Israel's reigning King, Satan's attack is directed towards Him. As the One whom God the Father has given all authority and judgment, it is implied that Jesus Christ throws Satan into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10).

Jesus Christ's fourth exclusive role in judgment is significant for removing Satan forever.

Jesus Christ's fifth role in judgment is when He sits upon the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15; 2 Cor 5:10). Here the dead, who were not the first set of Believers who completed their resurrection process (Rev 20:4-5), are resurrected and come before Jesus to see if their name is in the Book of Life.

Jesus Christ's sixth and final role in judgment is to cast death and Hades into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14). The last enemy of God, death, is finally abolished.

Contrasting their roles of divine judgment, it appears that:

1. God the Father has the plan and schedule for judgment.

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2. It is the wrath of God that is dispensed upon human beings who are physically alive throughout human history with the exception at the very end when Jesus metes out the death penalty for the remaining unrepentant (Rev 16:9, 11; 19:21).
3. Jesus Christ is responsible for tossing the beast, false prophet and Satan into the lake of fire and removing them forever from God's creation.
4. Jesus Christ is responsible for judging the resurrected souls of all human beings ever created and determining who lives in the new heaven and earth, and who is thrown into the lake of fire.
5. Jesus Christ removes the last enemies of God, death and Hades, forever.

Understanding Jesus Christ's role in judgment is fundamental in understanding His role as King. The purpose of Jesus Christ's reign is to abolish all rule, authority, and power; He must put all enemies under His feet and abolish death itself (Rev 20:14-15). When all things are subjugated, then Jesus Christ Himself subjects Himself under the authority of His Father by handing back the kingdom.

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:22-28)