

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. William Macleod

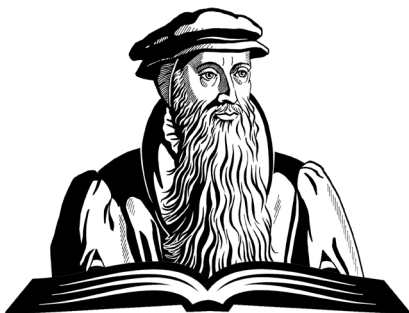
Module 7:

ESCHATOLOGY—

THE DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

Lecture 8

**THE DOCTRINE OF
THE JUDGMENT**



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module 7 ~ The Doctrine of Last Things

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Module 7 ~ Lecture 8

The Doctrine of the Judgment

We now come to lecture #8 in Eschatology, and our subject is The Judgment. Following the resurrection, comes the Final Judgment. Historical Millennialists and Dispensationalists have several resurrections, and several Judgments. Dispensationalists, for example, have a Judgment of the saints at the rapture, and then, seven years later when Jesus returns again, a Judgment of the Jews who were converted during the seven year period of the tribulation. They also have a Judgment of the nations, which is separate, and they have the Judgment of the great white throne on the last day following the millennium. The Bible, however, describes only one Judgment Day, and it comes at the end of world history. True, when an individual dies, they go either to heaven or hell. But this is not a judgment as such, and there is no appearing before a judge, nor examination of evidence. From the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, it is plain that, when the unconverted die, they open their eyes immediately in hell—Luke 16:23. In contrast, the converted open their eyes in heaven. The angels carried the soul of Lazarus to Abraham’s bosom—verse 22. For the true Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord—2 Corinthians 5, verse 8. The psalmist says, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”—Psalm 17, verse 15. An individual’s destiny is fixed at the moment he dies. John the Baptist warned, “Now also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringing not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire—Luke 3, verse 9. In Ecclesiastes, it is explained that as the tree falls, so shall it lie: “If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be”—Ecclesiastes 11, verse 3.

So what then is the purpose of the Judgment Day? It will change nothing. The destiny of each individual is already fixed at death. The purpose of the Judgment Day is to reveal God’s justice and mercy. It will demonstrate the righteousness of the righteous, and the wickedness of the wicked. God’s people will be openly acknowledged and acquitted. The wickedness of the wicked will be fully exposed. All secrets of every heart and life will be revealed, and as it has been said, there will be a resurrection of reputations of the righteous who have been maligned in this world. Hypocrites will be unmasked. Every mouth shall be stopped, and all mankind will acknowledge that God is just, and right, and true, and that his judgment is just.

John received a revelation of what will happen at the end of the world. There will be a great falling away from the faith. Satan, being loosed, will gather his forces to persecute and to destroy the Christian church. It will seem as if the Lord’s people are about to be exterminated. The camp of God’s people, the church, will be, as it were, surrounded. But then fire comes from heaven, and burns up their enemies. Satan is arrested and cast into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night for ever and ever. The end of the world has come. The Judgment Day has arrived: “And I saw a

great white throne, and him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire”—Revelation 20, verses 11–15.

We notice here that a great white throne is set up. It is a great throne, because it is vastly above every other throne. And before this throne, every other throne, and every other individual will have to give account. It is the judgment throne of God, the Supreme Being. It is white, that none worry that he will not receive justice. The throne is pure, and the justice administered will be perfect. No bribery or corruption will take place. No preferential treatment will be offered to any. God is no respecter of persons—Acts 10:34.

Who will judge the world? Who sits on the throne? The One from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. Paul explains further that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”—Acts 17:31. Christ humbled himself to death for the salvation of his people, and then God exalted him by his resurrection, his ascension, his sitting at the right hand of God, and then his coming to judge the world at the last day.

In the British justice system, juries composed of fellow citizens are employed, so that the individual is judged by his peers. God will judge us by a man, again, one of ourselves, who “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”—Hebrews 4:15. Jesus fully understands what it is like to live in this world, constantly tempted by sin and Satan. None will be able to turn round to the Judge and say, “You do not know how hard it was to live in this world.” Our Lord stated, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him”—John 5:22–23. So it is the God-man, the Savior who died on the cross for our sins, who will judge us. And that is a great encouragement to the Christian. Our Mediator, our Friend, and our Brother is the Judge.

Who will be judged? John states: “I saw the dead, small and great stand before God.” The kings and mighty men of the earth will be there, but also the ordinary folk, the working men and women, the beggars, and the savages. It does not matter what happened to the body. We are told, “The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.” Some are drowned at sea. Their bodies are eaten by crabs, and other sea creatures. These creatures are eaten by others. But still the sea will give up those who died in it. Even if the body is burnt and the ashes scattered in the water, the sea will give up the dead which are in it. Almighty God will raise them up. Death will deliver up all who die. Hell, Hades, the realm of the dead, and even the realm of the wicked dead will send their dead to stand before the throne. Nebuchadnezzar and Silas, the Pharaohs and the Caesars, Stalin and Hitler, they will be there, along with the peasants, the slaves, and the disabled. The great patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the Reformers, along with ordinary Christian men and women, boys and girls will all be there. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and atheists will all be there. Certainly Christians will not be judged. But the Scripture is clear that all will be judged. Paul wrote, “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of

Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”—Romans 14:10–12. Paul includes himself and the Roman Christians among those who are judged. In another epistle, he further emphasizes this when he wrote: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences”—2 Corinthians 5, verses 10–11. Christians must also appear before God’s Judgment Seat to give their account.

What is the standard used in judgment? We are told that “the books were opened, and another book was opened, which was the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” God partially reveals himself and his will in nature, and in the human conscience. Sadly, individuals do not even live up to the standard of their own consciences. God has given a much fuller revelation in his law and gospel in the Scriptures. The Bible teaches what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. Judges on earth judge according to the law of the land, and so the Divine Judge judges according to the law of God. Sin is a crime against God, and is defined as, “any lack of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” The books which are opened on the Judgment Day contain the complete record of our lives, and our lives are measured and judged according to God’s Word, the Scriptures.

We are also told here about a book of life. It is important, of course, to remember that the language is symbolical. There is no actual book, but it is as if there was, and the picture or metaphor of a book helps us to understand what is implied. So the book of life is, as it were, a register of those who are entitled to receive eternal life. This book was referred to several times in the Old Testament. With regard to the enemies of the Messiah, the psalmist states: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous”—Psalm 69, verse 28. In another Psalm, we find the words: “Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written”—Psalm 139, verse 16. Daniel is told about a time of severe persecution, and some would be preserved because their name was in the book: “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” In the New Testament, there are seven references to this book in Revelation. The persevering faithful are encouraged by Christ: “I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels”—Revelation 3, verse 5. Later, we are told of the beast that arises out of the sea: “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”—Revelation 13, verse 8. Here, the book of life is equated with the elect. Later, we read of those “whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”—Revelation 17, verse 8. This makes plain that the names were entered into this book in eternity, before the creation of the world. None shall enter heaven, but those whose names are in the book of life—Revelation 21, verse 27. A warning is given to those who remove or delete part of the Scriptures, that “God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book”—Revelation 22, verse 19.

So whose names are in the book of life? It is plain that it is the elect of God. But who are the elect? Only God knows. Another way of looking at the book of life is to think of it as all true Christians. John wrote: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath

not life”—1 John 5:12. We possess the Son of God when we, by faith, receive and embrace him as our personal Savior. He is freely offered to all, however, those who are dead in sin see nothing precious in Christ, hate him, and will not believe in him. Those who are in the elect are effectually called and regenerated, and convicted of their sin and need of a Savior, and are granted the gift of faith to believe in him. All the elect will eventually, in this life, believe in Jesus.

Revelation 22 warns of some whose names will be removed from the book of life. Surely, if the book contains the names of the elect, this can never happen. But then, there are many who think their names are in the book of life. They show, by their rejection of Scripture, that they are not true believers, and so, in that sense, their names are removed. Also, it is here a warning to the faithful. Paul warned the Corinthians: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”—1 Corinthians 10:12). There is a huge difference between thinking you stand, and actually standing. On the Judgment Day, we could say that the first book considered is the book of life. All whose names are in the book of life will enter heaven. And all whose names are not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. So a radical distinction is drawn between the righteous and the wicked. There is no gradation between the two. There is no dubiety as to who gets to heaven.

Sometimes it is stated that we are justified by faith in this life, but we will be justified by works on the Judgment Day. There is a sense in which this is true. Paul wrote: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”—Romans 5, verse 1. Our initial justification is by faith alone. It is totally on the basis of the work of Christ. He atoned for our sin, and his merit is our righteousness. James then writes that we are justified by works, because our works show the nature of our faith, and whether it is real saving faith or not: “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works”—James 2:17–18. He adds: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”—verse 24. He concludes: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”—verse 26. Jesus said: “By their fruits ye shall know them”—Matthew 7:20. In that sense, we shall be judged by our works on the Judgment Day, whether they be good or evil.

Now, thinking of the Judgment Day itself. Our Lord Jesus presents us with a very vivid picture of that day in Matthew’s Gospel, in chapter 25: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left”—Matthew 25, verses 31–33. When Christ returns, it will be to judge, not to rapture the saints, not to perform some preliminary judgment of the nations. Every man and woman will be brought before him, and he will separate them as a shepherd does the sheep from the goats. One group will be set on his right hand, and the other on his left. To those on the right hand, he will say: “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—verse 34. To them is given the new heavens and the new earth. To those on the left, he will say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”—verse 41. It is worth noticing that hell was prepared initially for the devil and his angels, and not for mankind. But sinners who do not believe in Jesus, and reject the gospel, will end up there. And then it’s added: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”—verse 46. It is not some temporary judgment, but a final one. The word that is used in the Greek for describing the state of the righteous and the wicked is the same: *aionios*—eternal. For the one enters eternal life and the other enters eternal misery.

The basis for the Judgment is enlightening. He shall say to those on his right hand, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me”—verses 35–36. Interestingly, the godly feel that they have done nothing worthy of heaven: “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?”—verses 37–39. But the Judge responds: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me”—verse 40. Where true faith is, it cannot remain alone, and it must express itself in works. These works demonstrate the reality of the faith. Showing love to a Christian for Christ’s sake, shows that a man or a woman has been born again. Love to Christ and his people is a great mark of the Christian. Summarily, we see the judgment of the wicked. The King will say to those on his left hand: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not”—verses 41–43. But they are pictured as responding in surprise: “Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?”—verse 44. But the Judge explains: “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me”—verse 45. As we noted, where real faith exists, it will express itself in love. A lack of care for the suffering of God’s children shows a lack of love for Christ. No work done in faith and love for Christ will go unrewarded. The smallest action of love and kindness shown to a child of God is appreciated: “Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward”—Matthew 10:42.

Some people might think that, from this, it is their good works that, in a way, balance out their evil works. Most of us have this idea of the balances, and hope that their good works will eventually outweigh their evil works. But this is contrary to the true Christian religion. But many professing Christians think that way. There is, and always have been many hypocrites, self-righteous people in the church. Jesus told a parable to explain the impossibility of us being saved by our good works. Think, he said, if you have a servant or a slave working in a field, and at the end of the day he comes home, you do not say to him, Sit there till I prepare a meal for you. You do not thank your servant for doing that which was commanded him to do, and which it was his duty to do. So Jesus concludes: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do”—Luke 17, verse 10. Our duty is to keep all the commandments, all the time. We are constantly to be doing good works. If we are to be judged according to our works, none of us would get to heaven. One sin is enough to condemn us to hell. We can only be saved by trusting in Christ to save us. His good works are meritorious. His death atones for our sins. His blood washes away all our guilt. We have no merit but the imputed merit of Christ. However, once we are saved, our works show that we are truly saved. And these works are purified from wrong motives and faults by the blood of Christ, and so they are pleasing to God.

Thinking now of rewards and punishment. Will there be different degrees of punishment in hell? And on the other hand, will there be varying degrees of reward in heaven? Jesus makes plain that that is the case. He states that there will be some in a worse hell than others: “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe

unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of Judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of Judgment, than for thee”—Matthew 11:20–24. Some had greater privileges. There were those in Chorazin and Bethsaida who saw the miracles of Christ, which were signs from heaven that Jesus was Messiah. There were people in Capernaum who experienced what it was for Jesus to live amongst them. These people of Galilee had heard wonderful teaching and had seen his holy life. Jesus is saying that the heathen cities like Tyre and Sidon will get off lighter on the Day of Judgment than these privileged people. Sodom is set out in Scripture as the most wicked city because of its immorality, yet Jesus argues that if it had witnessed the teaching and miracles of Christ, it would have repented. From this, we can gather that there will be different degrees of punishment in hell. The greater our privileges, the more we know of the law of God and of the gospel, and the more we witness around us of true Christianity, the greater our sufferings will be in hell, if we end up there.

One of the parables would seem to teach that the rewards of the righteous are the same, however long, and however diligently they labor for God. Jesus spoke of the owner of a vineyard who hired some men to work for a penny a day—or a denarius a day, which was then the going rate for laborers. Later that day, he went out and he found other laborers unemployed, and he told them also to go and to work in the vineyard, and he would give them what was appropriate. In the late afternoon, he found other unemployed workers, and he sent them also into the vineyard, promising to pay them. At the end of the day, the laborers were called and given their wages, starting with those who had worked only for one hour. He gave each of them a penny. When those who had worked all day came, they thought they would get more. But they also got a penny. They then complained: “These last have wrought for one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day”—Matthew 20, verse 12. But the owner of the vineyard rightly answered one them, saying, “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen”—Matthew 20:13–16. This parable is simply emphasizing, though, that salvation is by grace, and none of us have any merit. We cannot demand anything. We must not have the attitude of the Pharisees. We all who trust in Jesus as our Savior and follow him will get heaven. Some have only labored a short time, but yet they too will get heaven. The thief who was saved as he died on the cross beside Jesus will get the same heaven as the apostle or missionary who labored all their life for the master.

However, there are some other parables which teach that although all who get to heaven, there will be differences of reward in heaven. The parable of the talents—Matthew 25, verses 14–30), and the parable of the pounds—Luke 19:11–27, both indicate that the rewards will vary. Further, we are commanded by Christ: “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal”—Matthew 6, verse 20. Wealth should be accumulated in the bank of heaven, rather than in the earthly banks. Zeal and godliness are noted by God. Humble, faithful labor for Christ is rewarded. In the parable of the unjust steward, it concludes: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations”—Luke 16, verse 9. There a

specially-blessed heaven for charitable Christians. All who have saving faith in Christ get to heaven, but some will have a greater heaven than others. All will be full, but some will have a greater capacity to enjoy heaven. Shells on the seashore vary in size, but when the tide comes in, they are full of water. Paul writes interesting words to the Corinthians: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire”—1 Corinthians 3:11–15. It is made clear that, on the Judgment Day, some will be saved, but their work lost. If we build with wood, hay, and stubble, it might look impressive in this world, and receive much praise from man, but it will not stand the test of the fire of the day of Judgment. You might be thought of highly here, but on the last day, there will be no reward for this work.

Reward is also meant to be an incentive to the Christian. Our great incentive is, of course, the cross. Paul states: “For the love of Christ constraineth us”—2 Corinthians 5:14. But yet, Christ encourages us: “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward”—Mark 9:41. Paul himself states: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”—Philippians 3, verse 14. He wants his beloved Philippians to be richly rewarded. “I desire,” he says, “fruit that may abound to your account”—Philippians 4:17. We are warned, “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”—Revelation 3:11.

Will the sins of God’s people be revealed? When we become Christians, all our sins are pardoned and washed away. If they were to be revealed on the Judgment Day, would that not be a form of punishment, and leave us suffering and ashamed? Surely Christ has suffered for our sins, and they are all blotted out. We are told: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us”—Psalm 103, verse 12. East and west will never meet, so surely, we will never meet our sins again. Yet, we are told that the books shall be opened, and we will be judged according to our works. Indeed, Jesus warns his disciples: “That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgment”—Matthew 12:36. All our words are recorded—what a thought! There cannot be punishment for the Lord’s people, but all their sins will be revealed and shown to be sin. This will, in turn, encourage the song of the redeemed: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”—Revelation 1, verses 5–6. By this stage, all Christians will be perfectly holy, so there will be no room for pride, or boasting, or envy. All Christians will be full of love to one another, and to their Savior.

Another interesting point is that you shall judge angels. Paul explains that Christians will have a role in the Judgment: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?”—1 Corinthians 6:2–3. Christians in Corinth were falling out with one another, and suing each other at law. Paul asks, Are there no wise men among you to whom you can go for judgment, rather than to take your disputes before the heathen. Surely it is better to suffer loss than to allow such a terrible witness before the world. Somehow, Christians will join Christ in the Final Judgment. They will even be involved in pronouncing sentence on angels. Much is mysterious, but some things are clear. We rejoice with the apostle, who could say, as his end approached: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”—2 Timothy 4, verse 8. Amen.