

Is Anybody In Heaven or a Fiery Hell Yet?

The author of the book of Hebrews said that men are destined to die once and after that the judgment. [See [Hebrews 9:27](#)]. So is this saying that a person is judged right after he dies? Some may think that's the case, but the Bible speaks of a specific day or event in the future when Jesus Christ will be the judge of everyone [see [Acts 17:31](#)]. The Apostle Paul said we must all appear before Jesus Christ as he sits in judgment. And that everyone will receive what they are due based on what they did when they were alive, in their earthly body [see [2 Corinthians 5:10](#)]. The time of this judgment will be at the return of Jesus when he appears and sets up his kingdom on the earth. At that time he will judge everyone dead and living [see [2 Timothy 4:1](#)]. The latter half of Matthew chapter 25 uses symbolism to give more detail. When the son of man (i.e. Jesus) returns with all his angels, he will sit on his throne and the people from every nation (i.e. everybody) will be gathered before him and as a shepherd separates sheep from goats he will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. As King, Jesus will say to the sheep on his right, "Come you who are blessed by my father take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." To the goats on his left he will say, "Depart from me you who are cursed into the Eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. The unrighteous (represented by the goats) will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous (represented by the sheep) to eternal life. [see [Matthew 25:31-46](#)]

Let's look at another example. Jesus said the day was coming when **all** those in the graves would hear his voice and be resurrected to be judged. Those who have done what is good during their lifetime will rise from the grave to live, and those who have done what is evil in their lifetime will rise from the grave to be condemned. [see [John 5:28,29](#)] Verse after verse consistently indicates the judgment happens in the future and the outcome of that judgment affects everybody; the living and the dead, both the righteous and unrighteous.

If a wicked person went to a fiery hell immediately after death we know it wouldn't involve their body because everyone's body remains in the grave after death. Commonly it is taught that the soul of the wicked or unrighteous person goes to a fiery hell after death. Yet Jesus never described Gehenna (The "fiery

Hell”) as a place for souls without bodies. When he spoke of Gehenna and gave any details he always spoke of a place where the unrighteous persons body would be destroyed. [see [all instances of Gehenna in the New Testament](#)] On the day of judgment the wicked are raised to life, but not immortal life and then they are destroyed by fire. In Revelation 20 the judgment of the dead takes place and those that don't measure up (i.e. those not found in the book of life) are thrown into the lake of fire. Once again we're dealing with bodies not disembodied souls, as is born out by some of these dead coming out of the sea or ocean (verse 13). The ocean is not a repository for the souls of the dead by anybodies teaching. [see [Revelation 20:13-15](#)]

If at death a wicked person's soul goes to a fiery Hell it would bring about a strange order of events. First, it would mean he would be punished before the judgment, which the Bible never even suggests; then on the actual day of judgment his body would be rejoined with his soul, resurrected, judged and then thrown into a fiery Hell again. The Bible never mentions a double trip to a fiery Hell or Gehenna. In fact you won't find any instances where the wicked are punished without their body. Well perhaps one instance; in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus the rich man was buried and woke up in Hades tormented by the fire. There's no indication that his body was anywhere but in the grave; but since this Parable was based on what some of the Jews of Jesus' day believed instead of scripture it's not really suitable for use as proof that Bible teaches the soul will be punished without the body.

So do the righteous or some part of them go to be with the Lord in heaven at death? Again we know the body remains in the grave at death like everybody else; yet many of the same issues exist for the righteous as they do for the wicked. Both the righteous and the wicked are judged on the day of judgment and receive their reward at the Lord's return. Just as it would be strange for a wicked soul to be punished before the judgment then at the judgment be united with their revived body and thrown back into a fiery Hell to be punished; wouldn't it be strange for a righteous soul to receive it's reward before the judgment then at the judgment be united with their revived and now immortal body and rewarded again? And isn't the reward eternal life in a body that lives forever? But is this really what happens? We need to dig deeper.

In [Romans 2:5-16](#), Paul said, in the day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ he will render a verdict based on a persons deeds. In that day those who do good will receive eternal life or immortality while the evil doer will

receive indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish. The indication here is that the righteous receive eternal life on the day of judgment not sometime before. Paul, knowing the end of his physical life was near, said, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” [see [2 Timothy 4:6-8](#)] So is Paul saying that he would receive this crown on the day of his death or is he saying that on the day of the Lord's appearance when he acts as judge he will award him his crown? I believe the key indicator for understanding these verses is that the Lord acting as judge would not only reward **Paul on that day, but also everyone else** that is longing for his appearing. These verses are not talking about the day of Paul's death if all believers also receive their reward on that day.

There are a few important background points to remember in conjunction with what 2 Timothy 4:6-8 briefly touches on.

- 1) Over and over again the Bible says the judgment takes place on a day in the future, not at death.
- 2) While 2 Timothy 4:6-8 focuses on the righteous, the Bible says everyone, dead and living, both the righteous and the unrighteous will be judged on that day.
- 3) That day happens at the Lord's appearing when he returns. [see [2 Timothy 4:1](#)]
- 4) Jesus said when he returned, not at a person's death; he would reward each person according to what they have done [see [Revelation 22:12](#)].

In the earlier chapter, “Follow the body,” I introduced the importance the Bible places on our bodies. You won't find any mention of people inheriting eternal life without their body (which is changed to an immortal body for the righteous). This is why such importance is placed on the resurrection of Jesus' body in the New Testament. Without the resurrection of Jesus' body there would be no basis for any of his followers to hope for a resurrection of their bodies to eternal life [see [1 Corinthians 15:16-18](#)].

The Bible in multiple places and in plain language states that the judgment of all men, living and dead, righteous and unrighteous occurs at a future time; and

that time is when the Lord returns to set up his kingdom here on the Earth. Until the future judgment day what's going on with those that have already died? We'll tackle that question a little later. But first I want to deal with an instance in the book of Revelation that appears to contradict the idea that the righteous have to wait until judgment day to receive their reward.

1 Corinthians 15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.