

What is the Final Judgement?

Every day we see a tension in how people deal with wrongdoing. Some are quick to shout, “Don’t judge me!” to silence any criticism. Others hurl condemnation without mercy, reminiscent of modern “cancel culture.” In this confusion, even sincere believers ask: *Are we supposed to judge others or not?* The Bible’s answer is nuanced. Scripture calls us to uphold truth and discern right from wrong, but **how we do so is vital**. God’s Word charts a path that combines moral clarity with compassion. It shows us a Judge who is perfectly just yet merciful, and it invites us, whether devout Christian or curious seeker, to a humble posture of self-examination, repentance, and grace toward others. Let’s explore what our role really is in light of God’s judgment and mercy.

God as the Righteous Judge and Merciful Savior

Before anything else, the Bible establishes that **God is the ultimate judge**. He alone has the authority and knowledge to judge perfectly. *“For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us”* (Isaiah 33:22). Unlike human judgments, God’s judgment is always fair and holy, tempered by His desire to save. Throughout Scripture, God’s judgment serves a purpose: to uphold justice and truth, and ultimately to restore what is broken. For example, in the Old Testament, God sent prophets to warn Israel of judgment for their injustice and idolatry, but these warnings were **always coupled with a call to repent and return**. *“When people or nations strayed from God’s ways, judgment came in the form of defeat or calamity — **but always with a call to return**”*. God’s heart was (and is) to show mercy if people humbly turn back.

The supreme demonstration of God’s justice and mercy together is the cross of Christ. The New Testament reveals that **God judges sin yet offers mercy through Jesus**. Scripture says, *“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him”* (John 3:17). Jesus bore the judgment our sins deserved, so that forgiveness could be extended to us. In this sense **“mercy triumphs over judgment”** (James 2:13), not by canceling judgment, but by satisfying it in Christ and giving us a chance to repent. God *“is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance**”* (2 Peter 3:9). His desire is that no one be destroyed by sin, but that everyone would turn back to Him and live. This mercy, however, does not mean God ignores evil. Wrongdoing still has consequences, and a final Day of Judgment is promised when all will be set right (cf. Revelation 20:12). The hope for those who trust in Christ is that **“there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:1). God’s ultimate plan is to remove evil without removing us, to save us through repentance and faith.

Understanding God's character as **both** just and merciful lays the foundation for our own stance. **We are not the ultimate judge – God is.** Yet, He calls us to respond to His righteousness in specific ways: first by examining ourselves, and then by reflecting His justice and mercy in how we treat others.

Personal Responsibility: Start With Our Own Hearts

When it comes to judgment, the Bible consistently directs us to **look in the mirror before pointing a finger**. Jesus said, *“Do not judge, so that you will not be judged”*. At first glance this sounds like a blanket prohibition on judging anyone. But Jesus' meaning becomes clear as He continues: *“For in the way you judge, you will be judged... Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?”* (Matthew 7:1–5). He is forbidding a **hypocritical, self-righteous** attitude that eagerly criticizes others while ignoring one's own sins. In fact, Jesus uses almost comical imagery – a person with a plank in their eye trying to remove a speck from someone else – to underscore our tendency to be blind to our own faults. His remedy is to **judge ourselves first**: *“first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's”* (Matt. 7:5).

So, are we to judge others, ourselves, or neither? Jesus' teaching implies **our primary responsibility is to judge our own heart and actions**. We are indeed called to exercise discernment (more on that shortly), but any correction we offer others must come from a place of humility and personal repentance. Scripture explicitly urges self-examination: *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). Rather than rushing to pronounce others guilty, we ought to regularly take stock of our own spiritual condition. Are we living in line with Christ's teachings? Are we harboring sin or unforgiveness? Such honest self-judgment is crucial, because if we discipline ourselves, we invite God's grace. As Paul told the Corinthians, *“if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged”* (1 Corinthians 11:31, NASB). In other words, **when we willingly repent and course-correct, we spare ourselves God's discipline**.

This principle applies not only personally but also communally. *“It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God”* (1 Peter 4:17). That means the Church (and by extension each believer) must hold itself to account before it casts judgment on the world. It's hypocritical to denounce the sins of society if we ignore corruption or cruelty in our own midst. Jesus reserved some of His harshest words for religious hypocrites, those who “strain out a gnat but swallow a camel” in moral matters (Matthew 23:24). We shouldn't fall into that trap. **Our role is not to set ourselves up as moral judges over everyone else, but first to come under God's judgment ourselves**, to repent and be made right with Him. Only then can we see clearly to help others.

What about the oft-misquoted “judge not” command? Understanding it properly, we see that **we are neither to be condemning judges nor to abandon discernment**. We are to be repentant sinners who speak to fellow sinners with grace and truth. There *is* a kind of judging we are *not* to do: acting as if we knew people’s hearts or as if we ourselves were sinless. “*Who are you to judge your neighbor?*” Scripture asks pointedly, since “**There is only one Lawgiver and Judge**”, God Himself (James 4:12). Recognizing this should make us humble. We leave **ultimate** judgment to God. Our job is to humbly align ourselves with His will, starting with our own conduct.

The Role of Repentance: Embracing Mercy

If personal responsibility begins with self-examination, the next step is **repentance**. Repentance means having a change of mind and heart, turning away from sin and toward God. It’s not a popular word today, but it is absolutely central in Scripture. From the Old Testament prophets to John the Baptist to Jesus and the apostles, the consistent message is: **repent and return to God**. Why? Because **this is how we escape judgment and receive mercy**. God’s judgment is never capricious; it aims to wake us up to the truth. “*As I live, declares the Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live*” (Ezekiel 33:11). God would much rather see a person sorrowfully renounce evil and find life, than see that person perish in their wrongdoing.

Jesus’ own mission highlighted repentance. He began His ministry proclaiming, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 4:17). He came **not** to rubber-stamp people’s sins, but to offer forgiveness on the condition that they turn from sin. His call to the woman caught in adultery was “Neither do I condemn you, **go and sin no more.**” Repentance is thus the gateway to grace. The Bible promises that “*If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us*” (1 John 1:9). But without repentance, there is no true conversion or healing. One striking biblical promise is “*if my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear... forgive their sin and heal their land*” (2 Chronicles 7:14). This shows that when God’s people repent, He eagerly extends mercy and even restoration. The **expectation of the reader (and every person)** is to respond to God’s warnings with a change of heart, not stubborn pride.

It’s important to grasp that God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). If you sense guilt or conviction about something in your life, that is actually God’s mercy toward you – an invitation to turn back before worse consequences come. For believers, repentance isn’t a one-time action but a continual posture. We live in a spirit of humility, ready to admit wrong and align ourselves again with God’s ways. This ongoing repentance keeps our conscience clear and our fellowship with God intimate. For seekers, repentance

might sound heavy, but it's essentially coming home to the God who loves you. It means dropping our defenses and excuses, and accepting the grace that Jesus made possible. **Our role here is straightforward: when confronted with our sin, either by Scripture, conscience, or others' correction, we are to repent rather than resist.** That is how we escape judgment. As Jesus warned, *"unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:5). The good news is, the moment we do repent, heaven rejoices and mercy flows (Luke 15:7).

And what of God's judgment when we repent? Time and again, the Bible shows that **genuine repentance moves the heart of God from anger to compassion.** Consider ancient Nineveh: when that wicked city heeded Jonah's warning and repented in sackcloth, *"God saw their deeds... and relented concerning the calamity"* He had threatened (Jonah 3:10). The judgment was averted. In our lives, too, while unrepented sin carries a fearful expectation of judgment, repentance opens the door to God's pardon. Therefore, rather than dread God's judgment, we should see it as a loving Father's discipline meant to steer us back to life. *"God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness"* (Hebrews 12:10). The proper response is a contrite heart. **Repentance is how we, the judged, fall into the arms of divine mercy.**

Why Call Out Sin if Jesus Forgives?

At this point a fair question arises, especially for those exploring Christianity: *If Jesus forgives sins, why do Christians and churches still speak out against sin?* Why not just focus on forgiveness and "not judge" anyone? The answer is that **forgiveness is never a license to continue in sin.** Jesus forgives in order to *free* us from sin's power, not to affirm that our sins weren't so bad. Sin is spiritually deadly and often socially destructive. Out of love, it must be addressed. **We call out sin for the same reason a doctor points out disease, not to gloat or shame, but to urge a cure.** In the spiritual family of believers, the Bible actually commands loving accountability: *"If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him"* (Luke 17:3). Notice that rebuke and forgiveness go hand in hand. The goal of calling out someone's wrongdoing is ultimately that they repent and experience the joy of forgiveness.

Openly naming sin can be uncomfortable in our "live and let live" culture, but Scripture says *"Better is open rebuke than hidden love"* (Proverbs 27:5). In other words, gently correcting someone's harmful behavior is a greater act of love than a silent apathy that leaves them in danger. In the early church, this kind of loving confrontation was taken seriously. The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy that unrepentant leaders in the church must be corrected publicly *"so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning"* (1 Timothy 5:20). Public accountability served both to bring the sinner to repentance and to warn others not

to take sin lightly. Similarly, Paul scolded the Corinthian church for tolerating blatant immorality in their midst; their failure to discipline it was actually unloving and harmful to the whole community (1 Corinthians 5:1–6). Paul’s counsel was to address the sin firmly for the sake of the person’s soul and the church’s integrity. This wasn’t done in a spirit of malice, but with hope that the individual would be saved in the end (1 Cor. 5:5).

Even outside the church, there are times when Christians must speak up about sins that harm others, social evils and injustices. Jesus identified Himself with the poor and oppressed, and the prophets constantly exposed the sins of nations: corruption, exploitation, violence. To remain silent in the face of evil is neither loving nor faithful. **“Have no fellowship with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them,”** Paul writes (Ephesians 5:11). That means Christians shouldn’t participate in or wink at wrongdoing, but instead shine a light on it. For example, if there is abuse, racism, fraud, or any such “darkness,” a follower of Christ is called to **lovingly** confront it, not ignore it. This benefits the community and honors God’s justice.

However, **the purpose of calling out sin is not to condemn people to hopelessness**; it’s to lead them toward healing. Think of the Old Testament prophet Nathan. When King David committed a grave sin (adultery and arranging a murder), God sent Nathan to **publicly** expose David’s sin through a story and prophetic word. David was cut to the heart, confessed, and was forgiven (2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51). David still faced consequences, but because his sin was brought into the open, he was able to repent deeply and find mercy. Had Nathan said nothing, David might have continued in self-deception, and the rot would spread. In the same way, the church today sometimes must address sin in its own ranks publicly, not to destroy reputations, but to uphold truth and invite repentance that leads to restoration. It is precisely **because** Jesus forgives that we want people to know they **need** His forgiveness. If we pretend that destructive behaviors are okay, we are depriving people of the chance to recognize their need and turn to Christ.

Yet, this must be done with a redemptive spirit. The Bible lays out a process for confronting sin that starts privately (Matthew 18:15-17) and only becomes public if a person refuses to listen at earlier stages. The end goal is always that the person **“may be won over”** and reconciled, not humiliated. So yes, we still call out sin, but not to elevate ourselves or act as moral police. We do it under God’s direction, with tears in our eyes and prayer in our hearts. **In a world where “truth” is often subjective, Christians are to lovingly uphold God’s definition of right and wrong, all while extending the same grace we ourselves have received.**

Righteous Discernment vs. Hypocritical Condemnation

How can we tell if we are exercising **righteous discernment** or sliding into **hypocritical condemnation**? Jesus gives us a clear standard: *“Do not judge by outward appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”* (John 7:24). Righteous discernment means evaluating things by God’s truth, with a desire to help, whereas hypocritical judgment is based on pride, anger, or superficial metrics. Several principles help us distinguish the two:

- **Check Your Motive: Discernment** is driven by love and a hope for redemption. **Condemnation** is driven by self-righteousness or a desire to feel superior. Before confronting someone or issuing an opinion, we should ask, “Am I doing this to help them and honor God, or just to vent anger or elevate myself?” The difference in motive is often evident in our tone. A loving discernment is sorrowful about someone’s sin; a hypocritical spirit takes secret pleasure in another’s downfall. We are warned that *“judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy”*, a sobering reminder to correct others only with a merciful heart.
- **Examine Yourself First:** As emphasized earlier, Jesus requires us to address our own sins before we address others’ (Matthew 7:5). If I am harshly judging someone for a sin I am equally guilty of, that is the textbook definition of hypocrisy. Paul wrote, *“you have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for you who judge practice the same things”* (Romans 2:1). We lose moral credibility and invite God’s discipline when we do this. Righteous discernment, on the other hand, comes after self-examination. It says, “I too am a sinner saved by grace; let’s help each other overcome this.” There’s a humility in that approach that is totally absent in hypocritical condemnation.
- **Align with God’s Word:** Righteous judgment is **according to God’s standards, not our personal biases**. We must be careful not to label something as sin just because we dislike it, nor to excuse something God calls sin because we happen to like it. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for judging by human standards and missing the “weightier matters” of God’s law, *“justice, mercy, and faithfulness”* (Matthew 23:23). To judge rightly, we need to know God’s Word and let it inform our sense of right and wrong. Hypocritical judges often “major on minors” or apply a double standard. For example, one might condemn others for petty issues while ignoring one’s own greed or pride. Jesus called this *“straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.”* True discernment has a consistent standard, God’s standard, applied first to ourselves and then to others in truth *and* love.

- **Aim for Restoration:** Perhaps the greatest difference is that **hypocritical condemnation seeks to punish or ostracize**, whereas **righteous discernment seeks to correct and restore**. Galatians 6:1 instructs, *“if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently,”* and immediately adds, *“but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”* This single verse captures both the call to help our brother or sister *and* the warning to remain humble (for we too could fall). If our intention in “judging” someone is to bring them back to what is good, for their sake, then we are likely on the right track. If our intention is to assert our own moral high ground or to shame them, we’ve gone off course. Righteous rebuke is an act of love; hypocritical judgment is an act of pride.

In summary, **discernment** is a necessary virtue, we need to distinguish good from evil in our lives and communities. Jesus wants us to use wise judgment about teachings, behaviors, and situations (see Matthew 7:15–20 where He tells us to discern false prophets by their fruits). But **condemnation** in the sense of passing final judgment on someone’s soul or worth has no place in our hearts; that role is God’s alone. We do not write people off as hopeless or irredeemable; nor do we pretend we are above temptation. Instead, we speak truth with empathy, always aware that “but for the grace of God, there go I.” A practical checkpoint is this: whenever we must take a stand against a sin or confront someone, we should do so **with a posture of humility and grief, not glee**. Think of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as He pronounced its coming judgment (Luke 19:41–44), or Paul writing *“with tears”* about those who live as enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18). Their hearts were broken even as they spoke hard truth. Ours should be too, if we are exercising righteous judgment.

A Faithful Posture in Today’s World

What does all this look like in practice, especially when we encounter moral failures, whether in individuals, the church, or society? A **biblically faithful posture** today will stand out from both the harshness and the laxity we often see around us. It’s a posture marked by **humility, courage, and hope**.

- **Humility and Self-Awareness:** When we hear of someone else’s moral failure, our first response should not be gossipy delight or instant rage; it should be sober self-reflection: *“Lord, keep me from falling. Is there any of that in my heart?”* The Bible cautions, *“Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:12). A faithful Christian knows they too are susceptible to sin. This guards us from a prideful dogpile when another stumbles. Instead, **we grieve** that sin has marred another life or witness. We pray for them. We examine if we in any way contributed to a culture that allowed it. For example, if a church leader is exposed in

scandal, a humble congregation will ask, “Did we put them on a pedestal? Did we ignore warning signs?” Such humility doesn’t excuse the sin, but it refuses to adopt a stance of “I’m better than them.” It remembers Jesus’ words: “*He who is without sin, cast the first stone*” (John 8:7). We drop any stones of smug condemnation, and instead take up prayers and, when appropriate, loving counsel or rebuke.

- **Commitment to Truth and Justice:** Humility does not mean passivity or turning a blind eye. In fact, true humility submits to God’s standards zealously. Thus, a faithful posture means we **do not whitewash or minimize evil**, even when it’s “our side” or someone we like who is in the wrong. Whether it’s a prominent pastor’s misconduct, a Christian institution’s cover-up of abuse, or corruption in government, we do no one favors by pretending everything is fine. **Love rejoices with the truth** (1 Corinthians 13:6). In the Old Testament, the priests were told not to show favoritism or be afraid to speak the truth, “*for judgment belongs to God*” (Deuteronomy 1:17). In our context, that means we must be willing to hold even our own communities accountable. If a fellow believer or leader is found in sin, a faithful posture is to pursue appropriate discipline and restoration, rather than denial or dismissal. If our society calls evil good, we must gently “**shine as lights**” by holding out God’s better way (Philippians 2:15). This can include civic action, for instance, advocating for the oppressed, reforming unjust practices, voting our values, always with a spirit of **service, not self-righteousness**. Remember, biblical prophets often spoke hard truths to those in power, but their goal was to bring their nation to repentance and alignment with God’s righteousness, not to grab power for themselves. In the same way, our truth-telling today should be motivated by a desire to see **healing and justice**, not by a desire to win arguments or crush opponents.
- **Mercy and Restoration:** The true test of a righteous posture is how we treat people **after** the truth comes out. Do we extend mercy to the repentant? The church is called to be a community of forgiveness and second chances (with proper wisdom). Paul, after instructing the Corinthian church to discipline a sinning member, later urged them to **forgive and comfort him** once he repented, “*so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow*” (2 Corinthians 2:7). What a beautiful balance: they had taken the sin seriously, but they also eagerly reaffirmed their love when the man’s heart changed. In our context, when someone owns their failure and seeks to make amends, we should be the first to embrace them and help them rebuild. This might mean practical support, accountability partners, counseling, whatever facilitates genuine restoration. On the flip side, if someone persists in evil and refuses correction, a faithful posture may require creating distance or enforcing consequences (for example, removing a leader from authority to protect others).

Even then, our hope for eventual repentance remains. We never cease to pray for redemption.

- **Patience and Perspective:** When facing the moral failures of *institutions* (say, a denomination or a government body), change often comes slowly. A faithful posture doesn't descend into cynicism or despair. Instead, it clings to the long view of God's sovereignty. We labor for reform where we can, because it's right, but we recognize that ultimate justice awaits Christ's return. This keeps us from burning out or resorting to unrighteous methods to achieve "justice now." James 1:20 reminds us "*the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*" So we temper our zeal with patience. We also avoid blanket condemnations. For instance, if one church leader fails, we don't conclude "all churches are frauds." We grieve that one has tarnished Christ's name, even as we remember that **Jesus, the perfect Judge, will one day vindicate His Church and right every wrong.** This hope allows us to persevere in doing good, even when evil seems momentarily to win.
- **Civic Relevance – Salt and Light:** Finally, it's worth noting that when we live out this balanced posture, it has a profound positive impact on society. In a culture oscillating between moral relativism and vicious judgmentalism, a community that embodies **both** moral clarity **and** mercy is a breath of fresh air. Jesus called His followers the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-16). Think of how much our world needs flavorful preservation and gentle illumination! When believers refuse to join unjust mobs (literal or virtual) and instead speak with reason and compassion, we model a better way. When we acknowledge wrongs openly but also extend grace, we show the world a picture of God's own heart. This doesn't mean the world will always applaud us, some will still cry "intolerant" when we uphold biblical standards, and others will call us "weak" for forgiving. But over time, genuine love and integrity are hard to deny. Some will be drawn to Christ by the way we handle crises and controversies differently. They'll notice that in our communities, justice and mercy kiss. They may even say, like the pagans said of the early church, "See how they love one another." That love includes loving enough to speak truth, and loving enough to forgive.

In the end, our role in judgment is a call to **holy discernment wrapped in humble love**. We are not to be either self-righteous judges or apathetic bystanders. Rather, we recognize God alone as the perfect Judge and submit ourselves to Him. We take sin seriously, starting with our own. We repent and seek God's mercy, and then we become channels of that mercy to others. We discern right from wrong through the lens of Scripture, and we hold one another accountable as family, always aiming to restore. We call out evil where it is found, but not with glee or malice, with the longing to see people and systems healed and aligned with God's goodness. We forgive as we have been forgiven, and we defend the truth not to win debates but to win souls. This posture is not easy, but it is Christ-like.

Jesus Himself embodied it perfectly: He could thunder "woe" to hardened hypocrites, yet He wept over the lost. He did not shy away from declaring God's standards, yet He drew near to the contrite and lifted them up. He is our model. If you are a believer, He invites you to follow Him in this balance of **"truth with love, justice with mercy, and discernment with grace"**. If you are a seeker, know that this is the kind of community Christ intends, one where **sin is acknowledged and dealt with, but grace has the final word**. May we all, by God's grace, cultivate this posture in our lives. In a world full of both darkness and unforgiveness, may we shine the light of a Judge who died to save, a Savior who is *"full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). Let us live out humble discernment, so that in us people can see a reflection of God's own heart: **holy, just, loving, and merciful**.