

JUDGMENT

Paul shares with his Jewish antecedents the conviction that God as Creator has the right to call people to account for their behavior and allot their destinies accordingly.

1. Terminology and Meaning
2. Continuity and Discontinuity with Judaism
3. Judgment and the Gospel of Christ
4. Judgment According to Works
5. Judgment of Christians

1. Terminology and Meaning.

Two main word groups occur frequently in Paul's letters. Like the English verb *to judge*, the Greek *krinō* can mean "form an opinion," "decide" (1 Cor 2:2), but commonly refers to the assessment of human beings by others (1 Cor 4:5; 6:1) or by God (Rom 2:16). Related words include *krima* ("judgment," "sentence," Rom 2:2; 13:2); *katakrinō* ("condemn," 1 Cor 11:32); *katakrima* ("condemnation," Rom 5:16). Words derived from *dikē* ("justice," "punishment," 2 Thess 1:9) include *ekdikēsis* ("punishment," 2 Thess 1:8) and *ekdikos* ("punisher," Rom 13:4; 1 Thess 4:6). But Paul expresses his thought also in other images, such as wrath (*orgē*, Rom 1:18), destruction (*phthora*, Gal 6:8; see Wrath, Destruction), "paying back" (*antapodidōmi*, 2 Thess 1:6) and reward (*antapodosis*, Col 3:24).

2. Continuity and Discontinuity with Judaism.

In many respects Paul takes over perspectives familiar in Jewish literature. Non-Christian Jews would find nothing strange in Paul's expectation of a final "day" of judgment (Rom 2:16) when all "will appear before God's judgment seat" (Rom 14:10) to be judged "according to their deeds" (Rom 2:6; 1 Thess 4:6; cf. 1 Enoch 45:3; 4 Ezra 7:33–44; see Eschatology). But they would be shocked by his reversal of common Jewish assumptions about the outcome of judgment. Because God exercises impartiality in judgment (Rom 2:11), Jew and Gentile alike face both the prospect of judgment and the possibility of salvation through Christ.

3. Judgment and the Gospel of Christ.

For Paul, the process of judgment is integrally related to his message of salvation through Christ. Although he can speak of God's righteous judgment (Rom 2:5; 2 Thess 1:5), God's wrath (Rom 1:18) and God's judgment seat (Rom 14:10), he regularly associates judgment with Christ. He cites with reference to Christ OT texts which originally referred to judgment by Yahweh (2 Thess 1:9–10; citing Is 2:10, 19, 21). He links judgment with the "day" of Christ's Parousia (2 Thess 1:6–10; 1 Cor 4:3–5), when "we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10).

The criterion by which people will be judged is their attitude or relationship to Christ: the key question is whether they "believe" (see Faith) in him, whether they "know" (see Knowledge) God and "obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus" (2 Thess 1:8, 10).

1 Enoch Ethiopic Enoch

The outcome of the final judgment also is expressed in terms of relationship to Christ. Unbelievers will suffer “exclusion from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess 1:9), while the destiny of believers is to be “at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8; *see* Intermediate State). Paul is quite reticent about going further than this in describing human destiny. He does not use terms such as *Gehenna* (Mk 9:43, 45, 47) or the vivid imagery of some Jewish apocalyptists (*see* Apocalypticism). He prefers more abstract terms such as “life” (*zōē*) and “death” (*thanatos*, Rom 6:23; *see* Life and Death), “destruction” (*olethros*, 1 Thess 5:3; *apōleia*, Phil 3:19; *phthora*, Gal 6:8; *see* Wrath, Destruction). He is more concerned to warn of the danger of missing life in Christ than to explore the precise form which this loss might take.¹

ENEMIES (Love/Hate/election/Jacob-Esau)

4.2. God’s Enemies. It is important when approaching references to God’s wrath and hatred in the NT not to read these in light of corresponding human emotions. God, unlike sinful humanity, is not given to vindictiveness, fitful rages or the urge to retaliate. Divine anger in the NT is a controlled response of a holy being to the sinful actions of humanity; divine hatred is intense aversion toward any sort of wickedness. “Because of such things,” Paul says, “God’s wrath comes upon those who are disobedient” (Eph 5:6). The essential incompatibility of holiness and sinfulness is evident from the fact that not even God’s chosen people can escape from becoming “objects of God’s wrath” when they sin (Rom 9:22).

References to God’s wrath far outnumber references to his hatred in the NT. Indeed, there is only one reference to divine hatred in the Pauline letters—albeit a widely debated one. In Romans 9:13 Paul cites from Malachi 1:2–3: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated [*emisēsa*].” One of the major difficulties in interpreting this text is that “hate” here is not a divine response to human sin. For it was before the twins were born, or had done anything good or bad, that God “hated Esau” but “loved Jacob.” How then is one to understand this divine polarity?

It is clear from the context that what is in view is not Jacob and Esau per se but the nations they represent. Paul is concerned in the broader context with “those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom 9:4–5). This is confirmed by Genesis 25:23, cited by Paul in Romans 9:12, which speaks of “two nations” being in the womb and by Malachi 1:2–6, where Israel (= Jacob) and Edom (= Esau) are specifically addressed. Moreover, what is in question in Romans 9:1–29 is not the destinies of two nations but their functions in salvation history. “‘The older will serve the younger,’ just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved but Esau I hated.’” “Hate” and “love” are therefore not to be equated with “condemnation” and “salvation.” Furthermore, God’s love/hate relationship with Israel and Edom is not based on their differing characters or their respective deeds but on God’s sovereign will: “not by works but by him who calls” (Rom 9:12).

How then are God’s “love” and “hate” to be construed within these contextual restraints? Did God determine before the birth of either nation to love the one and hate the other? Some think that the word “hate” is an instance of the Semitic use of a direct

¹Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 516 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

opposite to express a lesser degree of comparison: “God loved Jacob more than Esau.” But this does not take into account the overarching theme in [Romans 9](#) of God’s sovereign choosing and rejecting. Others have taken “hate” at face value to refer to God’s intense animosity toward and ultimate condemnation of Esau/Edom. This, however, overlooks the intimate link in [Romans 9:12–13](#) between “the older serving the younger” and God’s hatred of Esau (“as it is written, Esau I hated”). The solution surely lies in seeing that Paul’s overall argument in [Romans 9:1–29](#) has to do with corporate “election” and “rejection” based on promise as opposed to natural descent. Here the very act of choosing the one (= “love”) by default results in rejecting the other (= “hate”). That “hate” can be used of the rejection implicit in the action of choosing one party over another is well illustrated by [Matthew 4:24](#), where to choose between two masters is to “love” the one and “hate” the other, and by [Luke 14:26](#), where to choose to follow Christ is effectively “to hate father and mother.”

4.3. The Believer’s Enemies. Christians are not encouraged by Paul to hate their enemies but are rather commanded to do good to them ([Rom 12:21](#)). This includes satisfying their thirst and hunger ([Rom 12:20](#)) and in “blessing” them ([1 Cor 4:12](#); [Rom 12:14](#)). Believers are forbidden to respond in kind to their enemies ([1 Thess 5:15](#); [Rom 12:17](#)). Vengeance is the sole prerogative of God ([Rom 12:19](#)). The regularity of this teaching in Paul indicates that it was a standard part of early Christian catechism.

Some think that there is a fundamental contradiction between Paul’s “love” ethic and the *lex talionis* (“an eye for an eye”) principle found in the OT. Yet Paul himself cites [Leviticus 19:18](#) (“Do not seek revenge, . . . but love your neighbor as yourself”) and [Proverbs 25:21–22](#) (“If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat; if they are thirsty, give them water to drink”) in support of his love dictum (e.g., [Rom 12:20](#); [13:10](#); [Gal 5:14](#)). The point of the OT eye-for-an-eye principle was not retribution but to guarantee legal fairness. Nor is this principle absent from the NT. But it is the prerogative of the secular courts, as ordained by God, and not the church, to ensure due process ([Rom 13:1–7](#); cf. [1 Cor 5:12–13](#); see Civil Authority).

For Paul, love of one’s enemy is grounded in the mercy of God. Believers are to love their enemies because at one time “we all were enemies [of God].” Yet out of his great love, God sent his Son to die for those who were still his enemies ([Rom 5:10](#)). Are believers, as God’s children, to do any less?²

²Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 237 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

JUDGMENT

Judgment is the process whereby God calls people to account for their behavior and allots their destinies accordingly. The theme is prominent in the teaching of Jesus, which echoes many features found in the OT, apocalyptic and rabbinic literature (*see* Rabbinic Traditions).

1. Terminology and Meaning
2. The Message of Jesus
3. Emphases of the Gospel Writers

1. Terminology and Meaning.

Like the English verb “judge,” the Greek word *krinō* can mean “form an opinion” (Lk 7:43). But normally in the NT it describes the passing of a sentence—either in a law-court (Mt 5:40) or metaphorically with reference to divine judgment (Mt 7:1–2; Jn 5:22, 30). Often the focus is on the negative aspect of condemnation (Mt 7:1; Jn 3:17–18). The noun *krisis* normally refers to the act of judging (Mt 5:21–22; Lk 11:31–32), while *krima* connotes the verdict or sentence (Lk 23:40). But this distinction is sometimes blurred (e.g., *krima* in Jn 9:39). The influence of the LXX, where the word group usually translates *šp̄t*, can be seen in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, where *krisis* means “justice”; and in Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:30, where *krinō* probably means “rule.” Although the noun “judge” (*kritēs*) occurs in parables (Mt 5:25; Lk 18:2, 6), it is not used as a description of God in the direct sayings of Jesus.

Other expressions to be considered are “condemn” (*katakrinō*, Mt 12:41–42; *katadikazō*, Mt 12:37), “punishment” (*kolasis*, Mt 25:46), the *dik-* word group (*see* Justice, Righteousness), translated variously as “punishment,” “retribution,” “vindicate,” “justice” (Lk 18:1–8; 21:22), “visitation” (*episkopē*, Lk 19:44) and references to the “day” (*hēmera*) of judgment (Mt 7:22; 12:36; Lk 21:34; *see* Eschatology). In addition there is a rich variety of parabolic images of judgment.

2. The Message of Jesus.

Jesus rejects the widespread idea that the wealth or suffering of individuals is God’s reward for righteousness or punishment for sin (Mk 12:38–44; Jn 9:2–3). In Luke 13:1–5 the lesson to be learned from the sufferings of some Galileans at Pilate’s hands and from the disaster in Siloam is not that the victims were especially wicked but that everyone must repent in the face of God’s judgment (*see* Repentance).

2.1. Judgment on the Nation. Much of Jesus’ most vivid teaching consists of warnings to his contemporaries that an unrepentant Israel is heading for imminent historical catastrophe. According to the parable of the children in the marketplace (Mt 11:16–19), “this generation’s” refusal to “play the game” with either John the Baptist or Jesus shows its defiance of God. The phrase identifies Jesus’ contemporaries with the rebellious generation of Deuteronomy 32:5, 20; Psalm 78:8 and Jeremiah 7:29. This is the last generation of a rebellious people, destined now to pay in full the accumulated debt of the nation’s resistance to God (Lk 11:47–51; Mk 12:1–12). There is still time for

a change of heart, but a strictly limited time (Lk 13:6–9).

Jerusalem and its religious leaders are the main target of these warnings. In the manner of an OT prophet, Jesus laments Jerusalem's failure to respond to his call and prophesies its desolation (Lk 13:34–35; 19:41–44). Judgment takes the form of God's abandonment of Israel to its enemies, as in Jeremiah 7:25–34; 12:7; 25:4–11 and Hosea 9:15–17; 10:13–15.

It has been argued, notably by C. H. Dodd and J. Jeremias, that several parables, which in the Gospels are addressed to disciples and relate to Jesus' final coming and the final judgment, were originally addressed by Jesus to his opponents or to the crowds (*see* People, Crowd), and referred to the coming catastrophe for Israel (e.g., Mt 24:45–25:30). But since Jeremias concedes that Jesus expected a final judgment, it is better to allow that some parables allude to Israel's impending crisis, others to the final judgment of all people (*see* Marshall). But we may of course agree with Jeremias that Jesus gave no clue that the gap between Jerusalem's destruction (*see* Destruction of Jerusalem) and the final judgment would be extended for centuries.

2.2. The Final Judgment. Jesus speaks of a judgment of all people on the “day” when the Son of man comes to establish his kingdom in its fullness (Mt 7:22; Lk 17:30–35; *see* Kingdom of God). God is the judge (Mt 10:28). Jesus' own role at the judgment is sometimes that of witness for or against the person judged (Mt 10:32–33), but sometimes he is the judge (Mt 7:21–23; 16:27). There is some force in the argument that in the earliest Son of man sayings Jesus is witness rather than judge, and that the depiction of him as judge is therefore a later development. Yet the fact that the Son of man sits at God's right hand (Mk 14:62) shows how easily one concept could pass over into the other.

2.2.1. Judgment as Separation. The judgment involves a division between two kinds of people—“sons of the kingdom” and “sons of the evil one” (Mt 13:38), “wise” and “foolish” (Mt 7:24–27), “sheep” and “goats” (Mt 25:31–46), those who “enter into life” and those who are “thrown into hell” (Mk 9:42–48). This reflects the radical distinction between “the righteous” and “the wicked” found in much apocalyptic literature and in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

2.2.2. The Criterion and the Outcome of Judgment. Jesus maintains the Jewish emphasis on judgment according to works (Mt 7:21–23; 12:36–37; 25:31–46). He provides examples of particular kinds of deeds which will seal a person's condemnation—e.g., causing “little ones” to sin (Mk 9:42), lack of care for the poor (Lk 16:19–31; Mt 25:31–46), failure to forgive (Mt 18:21–35), being judgmental toward others (Mt 7:1–2). His warnings of condemnation are almost never directed at those who, for example, commit adultery (*see* Marriage and Divorce), collect taxes dishonestly, **but at the pious who would exclude such people from the community** (Mt 23:33; Lk 18:9–14).

In some judgment sayings, works are bound up with relationship or response to Jesus. In Matthew 7:24–27 we read, “everyone who hears *these words of mine* and does them is like a wise man . . .” In Matthew 25:31–46 care for the needy (or lack of it) is taken as evidence of people's reaction to Jesus. Other sayings declare that reaction to Jesus will be the key criterion at the judgment. “All who acknowledge me before other people, the Son of Man will acknowledge them before the angels of God. Those who disown me before other people will be disowned before the angels of God” (Lk 12:8–9; cf. Mk 8:38; Lk

10:8–16; 11:29–32).

Luke 12:8–9 also indicates that, just as the *criterion* of judgment is relationship to Jesus, so the *outcome* of judgment will be expressed in terms of relationship to Jesus or to God. It will involve acceptance into fellowship with God or rejection from that fellowship. Those who do not know him—who are not in genuine, obedient relationship to him—now, will not know him then. In the parables of Matthew 25 and Luke 13:25–27 the outcome of the judgment is also expressed in terms of coming into or departing from God’s presence.

Apart from the language of relationship, Jesus uses other more pictorial language to depict human destiny beyond the judgment. God’s family will sit at the Father’s table, while others are thrown outside (Lk 13:28–29). They will see God (Mt 5:8) and experience eternal life (Mk 10:30). A negative outcome is described as unquenchable fire or Gehenna (Mk 9:43, 45, 48; Mt 5:22; Lk 12:5). Those excluded from God’s kingdom will “weep and gnash their teeth” (Mt 13:42, 50; Lk 13:28). It is not clear whether such language can be taken to imply eternal torment as traditionally understood. Such imagery, together with the reference to “eternal punishment” in Matthew 25:46, may be intended not so much to describe the specific character of punishment as to underline the irreversible and negative force of separation from God’s presence.

It must also be noted that, in comparison with much Jewish literature (e.g., *1 Enoch* 21–22), Jesus’ references to the destiny of the wicked are remarkably allusive and unspecific; and that such references occur mostly in exhortations to the hearer to respond to Jesus’ message, not in descriptions of the fate of someone else.

2.2.3. *The Main Thrust: Relationship Rather Than Retribution.* The evidence suggests that Jesus’ understanding of judgment focuses not on a strictly retributive justice, whereby rewards and punishments are recompense for human deeds. Rather, the focus is on relationship to Jesus, or to God through him. The relationship chosen by people when confronted by the message of God’s kingdom will be confirmed at the final judgment. When the language of judgment according to works is used, the character of the works is understood as evidence of a person’s relationship to God, or as showing whether the basic direction of one’s life is toward him or away from him.

This perspective on Jesus’ message is reinforced by three other images of judgment. The motif of the Two Ways, already familiar in Judaism (e.g., *1 Enoch* 94:1–4; *1QS* 3:13–4:26), suggests that human destinies are not rewards or punishments imposed from outside, but the inherent outcome of the choices people make (Mt 7:13–14). The image of treasure in heaven (Tob 4:3–10; *Pss. Sol.* 9:9; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 14:12; 24:1) pictures people’s destinies as the end-result of their desires. Those whose hearts are fixed on submission to God’s rule will gain the riches of his kingdom (Mt 6:19–21; Lk 12:33–34). Finally, in the image of the banquet invitation (Lk 14:16–24), everything turns on the refusal of those invited to come to the feast. They have excluded themselves while the poor are open to the insistent gift of the host.

1 Enoch Ethiopic *Enoch*

1QS Serek hayyahad or *Rule of the Community, Manual of Discipline* from Qumran Cave 1

Pss. Sol. *Psalms of Solomon*

2 Apoc. Bar. *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch*

2.2.4. *Conclusion.* Jesus rejects speculation about many aspects of final judgment and its outcome. He is silent about the geography of God's kingdom or of Gehenna (*see* Heaven and Hell). Rather than speculate about the number of those saved (2 Esdr 8:1), he urges his hearers to make sure of their own entry into the kingdom (Lk 13:23–24). And he tempers stern warnings of judgment with a greater emphasis on the infinite care of God for his creatures (Lk 12:4–12). There are also hints that his own suffering and death involve taking on himself the judgment of God on behalf of others (Mk 10:45; 14:36; 15:34).³

³Joel B. Green, Scot. McKnight and I. Howard. Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 408 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992).