

# What Will the Final Judgment Mean for You?

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By John Piper December 31, 2007

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## Revelation 20

I am writing this on New Year's Eve. The ending of 2007 moves my mind to other endings—like the final judgment. Ponder with me, if you wish, what it will be like to go through the last great judgment. It is good to settle in our minds what it will be like. If we could see it clearly, it would make those who trust Christ the happiest and bravest people in 2008.

I do believe we will all face a final judgment with the rest of the world. “We will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). When Jesus says, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. *He does not come into judgment*, but has passed from death to life,” I take him to mean that we will not be *condemned* in the final judgment, because our sentence has already been passed—not guilty. So why are we there at the last judgment?

The picture is given in Revelation 20:12-15.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

There are “books” (v. 12), and there is a “book” (vv. 12, 15). The “book” is called “the book of life.” The “books” are the record of the deeds of all people. This is implied when John says, “The dead were judged by what was written in the *books*, according to what they had done . . . and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done” (vv. 13, 14).

All the dead are judged in view of what is written in the books. This includes believers and unbelievers, elect and non-elect. This is a judgment of all people: “I saw *the dead*, great and small” (v. 12). “*The dead* were judged” (v. 12). “The sea gave up *the dead* who were in it, Death and Hades gave up *the dead* who were in them, and they were

judged” (v. 13). So believers and unbelievers face what is written in the books. It matters. But how does it matter?

To answer that, we need to see what it means to have your name written in the “book of life” (vv. 12, 15). In Revelation 13:8, John says, “All who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.” Two things are crucial here:

One is that the names have been in the book of life since before creation. So this is a reference to the elect (Revelation 17:4)—those who would certainly believe on Christ and be saved through him.

Secondly, being written in the book of life insures that a person will not worship the beast. This is implied in saying everyone will worship the beast *except* those whose names are written in the book of life. If your name is in the book of life, you *will not* worship the beast. That is not a coincidence. Being in the book means belonging to God who keeps his elect from demon-worship. John says the same thing again in Revelation 17:8: “The dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast.” Being in the book insures that you will not marvel at the beast.

So we come back to the judgment in Revelation 20. In verse 15, it says, “If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” This implies that being in the book of life insures that one will not perish. Salvation is secured for all who are written in the book of life.

The reason that being written in the book of life secures our salvation is that the book is called “the book of life *of the Lamb who was slain*” (Revelation 13:8). The names in this book are not saved on the basis of their deeds. They are saved on the basis of Christ’s being slain. He “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Revelation 1:5). We have been ransomed by his blood (Revelation 5:9).

So how then does the record of our lives contained in “the books” have a part in our judgment? The answer is that the books contain enough evidence of our belonging to Christ that they function as a public confirmation of our faith and our union with him. Consider Revelation 21:27: “Nothing unclean will ever enter [the New Jerusalem], nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Here the result of “being written in the book of life” is not only not perishing, but not practicing detestable, sinful behaviors. In other words, just like in Revelation 13:8 where being in the book of life insures that one will not worship the beast, so in Revelation 21:27, being in the book of life insures that one will not make a practice of detestable deeds.

Therefore, our deeds confirm that our names are in the book and should be in the book—that is, they confirm that we trust Christ and are united to him. Our deeds are the fruit of our faith and union with Christ.

For example, consider the thief on the cross. Jesus said that he would enter paradise (Luke 23:43). But what will judgment be like for him when the books are opened? 99.9% of his life will be sin. And only the final hours will be the fruit of faith. I think God will open the book of life and show the name of the thief on the cross. His salvation will be secured by the blood of Christ. Then God will open the books and will use the record of sin to glorify his Son's supreme sacrifice, and he use the last page to show the change that was wrought in the thief's attitudes and words. That last page—the last hours on the cross—will be the public confirmation of the thief's faith and union with Christ.

Therefore, when I say that what is written in the books is a public confirmation of our faith and of union with Christ, I do not mean that the record will contain more good works than bad works. I mean that there will be recorded there the kind of change that shows the reality of faith—the reality of regeneration and union with Christ. There will be enough evidences of grace that God will be able to make a public display of what is in the books to verify the born-again reality of those written in the book of life. No one is saved on the basis of his works. But everyone who is saved does new works. Not perfectly, but with humble longing for more holiness. That is how I enter 2008, confident that my condemnation is past (Romans 8:3), and that my name is in the book of life, and that the one who began a good work in me will bring it to completion at the day of Christ. I pray for you, that you are with me.

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