

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

"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." II Corinthians 5:10.

This image reminds us of the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, which was the most august representation of justice which the world then exhibited. The "bema" was a lofty seat raised on an elevated platform, usually at the end of the Basilica, so that the figure of the judge must have been seen towering above the crowd which thronged the long nave of the building.

In the Grecian world the "bema" was not the bench upon which the judge sat to pass sentence upon the criminal, but it was the throne upon which he sat when he distributed prizes to the winners of various games.

Our text tells us that the judgment seat of Christ is a reality. It tells us Who the Judge is going to be--Christ Jesus. It tells us who the subjects are going to be. And it informs us as to the purpose of this judgment scene.

Please remember that only the saved will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Not a single lost person will be there. They will all appear later at the Great White Throne Judgment. Some people have the mistaken notion that one must wait until he stands before the judgment seat of Christ before his salvation is determined. That is not true, for one is saved right here on earth or not at all.

Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." He has been with his Saviour for about nineteen centuries. Certainly he will not be forced to come to this judgment and have a decision made as to whether or not he is saved or lost. His salvation took place right here on this earth.

This judgment is not for the purpose of judging the believer's sins. All of his sins were judged in the person of Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary. "And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts 13:39. "For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." II Corinthians 5:21. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." I Peter 2:24. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John 5:24.

While it is true that the believer's sins have been judged already at Calvary, it is also true that every righteous work and deed of the believer must come into judgment. "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Romans 14:10.

The sins of believers have been cast forever behind God's back. Christ paid the penalty and they are remembered no more. The Christian's sins have been dealt with and judged permanently. All who trust Christ as Saviour will spend eternity in heaven. But, no Christian should presume for a moment that simply because the judgment for sin at Calvary guarantees him an entrance into heaven he can live as he pleases. Let every Christian know that his works will be judged either to his profit or to his loss.

The judgment seat of Christ is for believers only. It refers to that review which will take place when our Lord returns again and gathers all His own before Him. He says, "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12.

At the judgment seat of Christ men's characters shall be made manifest to themselves, and to the world, as they have always been to God, that each one may obtain the wages for the things which they have done through the medium of their bodies according to what they have done in this present life. This judgment is not to determine whether or not we are saved, but rather to reveal the true character of our Christianity.

The day is surely coming, and it may be soon, when every child of God must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to be examined by Him as to how their lives, time, talents, opportunities, privileges and responsibilities have been utilized. Not a born again person will be left out of that judgment. This examination will concern our Christian character, conduct and service. It is destined to be a very thorough investigation of every detail of our service. Whether we like it or not, each of us is destined to render a detailed account of our stewardship and service.

This judgment is for rewards. Over and over again God declares that every righteous deed which we do from the time we are saved shall be rewarded. However, no Christian will ever get a reward for anything he does before his conversion and salvation. Rewards do not begin until after salvation has become a reality. God's Word makes this perfectly clear. "For there shall be no reward to the evil man." Proverbs 24:20.

Our status in heaven will be determined by us. Our admission to heaven is made possible only by the Lord Jesus. None of us are responsible for the status into which we were born. God has taken care of that. He has placed us just where we are because that is the best place for us, that is where we can bring the most glory to His name. But our status in the home above depends upon the quality and quantity of our service here below. We are saved by grace through faith, but our standing in heaven depends upon our service here.

Only as our works abide will there be rewards for us. Our works cannot abide unless they have been pleasing unto the Lord. Many will appear before the judgment seat of Christ expecting great rewards only to find that their works, which in life were not in accord with His Will and Word, shall be burned. God's Word says, "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." I Corinthians 3:13-15.

Even the least thing which a Christian does in the name of Jesus will not be overlooked. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Hebrews 6:10. "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Matthew 10:42. It seems but a very little thing to give a cup of cold water, yet the Lord Jesus has promised a reward if it is done in the proper spirit.

Each Christian on this earth has been saved by grace. When he appears before the judgment seat of Christ, he is going to be rewarded according to his works. By then all of his works will have ended, the returns will all be in, and Christ will judge those works. If they have been good works—those which have been done by a child of God, in obedience to the command of God, for the glory of God and for the good of others,—the Christian will receive a reward. If those works have not pleased and glorified the Lord, there will not be any reward. If you serve the Lord in order to stand high in the estimation of others, your works will perish. If you get angry and quit the Lord's church when everything does not suit you, your works will be destroyed. If your works consist of complaints and criticisms, they will all perish. Only those things which are done in a sweet, unselfish and Christian spirit for the glory of the Lord will be acceptable to Him and rewarded by Him.

In the scriptures crowns are used as symbols of the rewards which are offered to faithful believers in Christ for the service which they render to Him.

1. The crown of rejoicing.
This is the soul-winner's crown. Those brought to Christ by us will be our crown of rejoicing at His coming. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy." I Thessalonians 1:19-20.
2. The crown of glory.
This is the pastor's crown. It is given only for faithfulness and suffering in the gospel ministry. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." I Peter 5:2-4.
3. The crown of life.
This is the martyr's crown. It is a reward for faithfulness under trial. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." James 1:12. Also, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life." Revelation 2:10.
4. The crown of righteousness.
This is the crown for those who love His appearing. "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." II Timothy 4:8.
5. The incorruptible crown.
This is the victor's crown. "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." I Corinthians 9:25-27.

At the judgment seat Christ will give His rewards to those who have served Him. You, as a Christian, will not receive all that is coming to you for your service here during this life. The rewards of the righteous, for the most part, lie beyond this earth. You do not even receive your rewards when you die. People often mention someone who has died and remark that he has entered into his reward. That is an inaccurate statement. Paul said that his rewards were laid by for him. We shall not be rewarded for our works until the fruitage of our lives has come in. A man works faithfully for the Lord while here and then he goes home to be with Him. But that man's work and influence do not cease to operate when he dies. Personally, I want my messages and my writings to continue working long after I am gone. So, your rewards will not be computed until your work is completed. Then, when the Lord comes, He will give us our rewards according to our labors. If you share with another in his rewards, you must share with him in his labors.