

## 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 verse is one of the most arresting, sobering and sanctifying in the Bible. It declares a truth of tremendous import to every Christian, one which should cause each of us to consider its implications.

This reference to the judgment seat reminds us of the tribunal of the Roman magistrate, which was the most august representation of justice which the world then exhibited. The judgment seat was 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.

It should be said that the Greek word which is here translated "judgment seat" is "bema." In the Grecian world, at the time the New Testament was written, the "bema" was not a judicial bench upon which the judge sat to pass sentence upon a criminal, but it was an elevated seat on which the umpire or judge sat in the Arena at Athens, and from which he distributed the prizes to the successful contestants or winners of the various games.

Taking up the figure of the Olympic games, at the close of which the judge distributed the prizes to the victorious competitors, the Apostle Paul used the word "bema" and declared that the judgment seat of Christ is a reality. Christ is coming to raise all who have died in the Lord, to translate the living Christians, to take His place upon the judgment seat, and to conduct a personal examination of each child of God. So, the judgment seat of Christ is not a judicial bench, but rather a reward distributing point.

It will not be a trial to ascertain whether the judged are saved or lost, for only the saved can appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Not a single lost person will be there. All of the unsaved will appear before Him at the Great White Throne Judgment. These judgments are separated in point of time by at least one thousand years; the former occurring at Christ's coming before the millenium, and the latter taking place at the close of the millenium.

On the score of who will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, there is much ignorance among church members today. It is a common notion among many of them that the world will go on to the end of time, then Christ will return, all the dead will be raised, and all men, both saved and lost, will appear before Him in judgment, and that the saved will be taken into heaven and the unsaved will be cast into hell. But God's Word does not teach that.

Some also 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 has been with Christ approximately nineteen centuries. Certainly he will not be forced to appear before the judgment seat of Christ in order to have a decision made as to whether or not he is saved or lost. His salvation took place right here on this earth in Syria.

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. "He that believeth on him is not condemned." John 3:18. "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. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1.

The Christian's sins have been dealt with permanently. Christ paid the penalty for them and remembers them no more. Those who have believed on Christ have been removed from any possibility of being brought under the condemnation of sin or being lost. 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. Every Christian should know that his life and works will be judged either to his profit or to his loss.

Writing to the Christians at Rome, but including himself and all others of the household of faith, Paul said, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Romans 14:10. The word "shall" indicates the certainty of it. Every child of God must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, to be examined by Him as to how the life, time, talents, opportunities and responsibilities have been utilized. 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 must render a detailed account of our stewardship and service. Things will then be seen in their true colors and labelled at their real worth by the omniscient Christ.

"Deeds of merit as we thought them  
He will show us were but sin:  
Little acts we had forgotten  
He will tell us were for Him."

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, nobody will ever get a reward for anything which he did before he was saved. Rewards cannot be earned until after salvation has become a reality. God's Word says, "For there shall be no reward to the evil man." Proverbs 24:20.

In giving these rewards Christ will not look at our success, but at our motives; not at our victory, but at the way in which we fought, even in the hour of defeat; not at what we have accomplished, but at how faithful we have been in seeking to accomplish it.

Our admission to heaven is made possible only by the Lord Jesus Christ, but our status in heaven will be determined by us. 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.

With what kind of material are we building? What are the motives which prompt our actions? What are the objects we seek to secure? Is our aim essentially the glory of Christ and the furtherance of His work, or is it self-glorification and the plaudits of men?

Wood--the lifeless timber so aptly figurative of dead works--will be destroyed by fire. Hay--the worthless, inconsequential and insubstantial character of the superficial life--will perish in the flames. Stubble--the remnants of a former glory--will be reduced to ashes.

But the gold--so symbolic of the Deity and of work inspired by heaven and undertaken for His glory--will stand the test. Silver--the reminder of the price of Israel's redemption and the expressive suggestion of the works of a redeemed life--will be unharmed by the flames. Precious stones--in all their radiant beauty reflecting and refracting the glorious colors of the light, appropriately figurative of the life whose sole object is to reflect the glories and beauties of Christ--will be untouched by the fire.

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 2:19-20.

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.