

JUDGMENT

Of The Christian

The overcomer has exciting times ahead of him beyond the grave. Just the idea that we will be in a paradise environment where righteousness will be prevalent is, in itself, thrilling to dwell upon. But this is only a small part of it! In this paradise environment we will never again be plagued with thoughts of anxiety, discouragement, frustration, fear, doubt and the like. Glory, honor and peace are in our future (Rom. 2:6-11). This paradise environment isn't all we have to look forward to. The Bible also reveals that rewards for faithful service in this life will also be given out at the Christian's Judgment. This study will deal with this subject, so that you won't only be informed but also more prepared, hopefully, for this awesome future event. (What is inevitable should be prepared for.)

When will the Christian be judged so that he may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether **good** or **bad** (2 Cor. 5:10)? This will occur at the point of the Rapture (the resurrection of the righteous), Lk. 14:14; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 22:12. The place will be in heaven before the Lord Jesus, while all the other Christians and the holy angels will be viewing your life. [That is, viewing your life since you became a Christian, because our life before we were saved is both forgiven and forgotten (Heb. 8:12).]

Knowledge of the judgment seat of Christ was of great incentive for Paul to live a life of faithful service for his Lord. He said:

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:9,10).

Furthermore, we will be speaking for ourselves then, accounting for our earthly lives (Rom. 14:12). We will have to account for all that God has entrusted to us. At least in part, this will include our time, money, spiritual gifts and knowledge of God's will. In other words, our works or deeds will be considered. [We are **not** saved by works (Eph. 2:8,9), but our good works, and the motives from which they are done, will determine our eternal rewards. Therefore, because of this and other reasons, let's adopt Paul's teaching: "Keeping God's commands is what counts," 1 Cor. 7:19.] Both joy and regret, for the **good** and **bad** done, will be in store for those there.

The day is coming when all will know the **real you!** This will occur at the Christian's Judgment. Your **secret** motives which drive you a certain way, either **good** or **bad**, will be openly revealed before all:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1 Cor. 4:5).

(What an awesome thought!) The most dedicated, zealous, faithful, humble and loving Christians who ever lived will be watching your life. Paul will be in this group, watching your earthly life as it is revealed and your deeds tested for possible rewards. At this time, many will be surprised as they see the **real reason** why certain words were spoken, certain deeds were or were not performed and the whole truth behind your excuses. You too will be surprised, even shocked, as certain TV and/or radio ministries or personalities are exposed. "God will judge men's **secrets**," Rom. 2:16. It's going to happen to them and it's going to happen to **you**. The car

you drove, the house you lived in, the job you had and your circle of friends won't have any value then. These things won't mean anything to you at that time. That's why, at least in part, we read this:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal (Mt. 6:19,20).

Please notice that Jesus wants you to be rich with heavenly treasures. He exalts heavenly treasures over earthly treasures because (1) He loves us; and (2) He knows which is better for us.

These heavenly treasures **cannot** and will **not** ever be exhausted or depleted, as earthly treasures are:

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys (Lk. 12:33).

Furthermore, the righteous throughout all eternity will know how fruitful your earthly life (your time of testing) was by looking at your treasures and rewards, which will endure eternally. Also, they must have real value in God's Kingdom, for they are called treasures. In fact, the **only** time Jesus ever told his followers to leap for joy was in regard to great rewards in heaven coming to us for being persecuted for righteousness' sake:

Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets (Lk. 6:22,23).

Jesus never went into detail as to why we should leap for joy over our great rewards, but we can be sure such is justified or He would not have told us to do it! How rich will **you** be in God's eternal Kingdom? You are now determining the answer by your faithful labors for His Kingdom or lack thereof.

Do you realize that there is no verse in Holy Writ that teaches that all in heaven will be enjoying it to the same degree there? Certainly, everyone in heaven will experience glory, honor, peace, gladness and joy continually forever (Rom. 2:10; Isa. 35:10; Rev. 21:4; etc.), but there will be different degrees of the above, especially **honor**, that the righteous there will be eternally enjoying, because of their treasures and rewards. Right now you can send these spiritual treasures and rewards ahead of you. The question is: **How much are you sending?** This is done by your faithful labors for God's Kingdom, motivated by love for God and man.

Regarding the crowns that will be awarded by Jesus to the righteous, there are at least three specific crowns named in the Bible: The crown of life, the crown of righteousness and the crown of glory. Everyone there, with no exception, will be given the crown of life. This crown will be given to all overcomers, that is, those who remained faithful to Jesus, even through persecution unto physical death. If a Christian doesn't overcome, he'll be hurt by the second death:

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put

some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death (Rev. 2:10, 11).

Furthermore, we read of this same crown in Jam. 1:12:

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

(This life is only a *test*.) Therefore, all in God's Kingdom, even the dying thief who got saved immediately before he entered God's Kingdom (Lk. 23:42,43) and had no time to send eternal treasures and rewards ahead of him, will have this crown of life to go with his clean, white, linen robe made to fit perfectly (Rev. 6:11; 7:9,13,14; 19:14). But note the warning the Lord Jesus gave Christians after He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven:

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown (Rev. 3:11).

Another crown that will be awarded is the crown of righteousness. The only time that we read of this crown is in 2 Tim. 4:8:

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

There the Greek reveals that in order to qualify to be a recipient of this crown, we must have a fixed love for the Lord's return! This crown is appropriately named the crown of righteousness because it reflects our personal righteousness as the name implies. **Only** the fully committed Christian, and not the Laodicean-type (Rev. 3:14-22), would love, from his heart, the Lord's return so that he could leave this corrupt world system. Finally, the crown of glory will be awarded to only elders (or ministers) who have met all the requirements listed in 1 Pet. 5:1-4.

In summary, all those in heaven will have the crown of life; many there will not have the crown of righteousness and only faithful ministers will receive the crown of glory. How many crowns will **you** have? Remember, these crowns will last forever (1 Cor. 9:25).

The writer of Hebrews laid down many convincing arguments for Christianity over the Jewish system and warnings to those who *drift away*:

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him (Heb. 2:1-3).

This was necessary because the Hebrew Christians, to whom this letter was addressed, were thinking about reverting back to Judaism because of their persecutions (Heb. 10:32-39; etc.). Verse 34 of that passage says that in the early days of their conversion to Christianity, they joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property, because they knew that they had "better and lasting possessions." These possessions, better and lasting than their earthly property, were their rewards and treasures in heaven! Just to know this truth about our heavenly bank account will bring joy to the persecuted Christian, as it did for them. How do we store up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:20)?

First, it is done by loving your enemies (Mt. 5:46). This is one of the ways that we let our *light shine* before others. Jesus taught that even the greatest sinners (tax collectors) love others who love them. When we merely do the same, our *light* is **not** shining. However, it certainly does when we love our enemies. The unsaved do **not** act this way! Loving our enemies would include sincerely praying so God would save them and bless them, even as we would like our own family to be blessed. (This does wonders with unforgiveness too.) Stephen loved his enemies, who were stoning him, by praying for their spiritual condition (Acts 7:60).

Second, rewards come when we are insulted, persecuted and slandered because of Jesus (Mt. 5:11,12). When persecution occurs we should rejoice and be glad, because of our great reward in heaven. This is why the apostles were rejoicing after they were flogged (whipped bloody):

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:40-42).

See also Paul's and Silas' attitude after their flogging (Acts 16:22-25).

Third, rewards can come to our heavenly account from any act of righteousness (Mt. 6:1; Eph. 6:8). Imagine the kind of eternal rewards in heaven one would have if he devoted himself to good works, as in 1 Tim. 5:10.

Fourth, when we give to the needy (poor, crippled, lame and blind), we are storing up heavenly rewards (Lk. 14:12-14). Jesus said, "Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." [The resurrection of the righteous is the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:41,52; 1 Thess. 4:16,17).] However, if we give to the poor to be honored by men, we forfeit our reward. That is why we are to give in secret:

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Mt. 6:1-4).

Verse 1 of this same chapter reveals that an impure motive will negate our reward from any of our acts of righteousness! Our motives will be the consideration for our possible rewards (Prov. 16:2 cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15). This seems to hold true also for our praying (Mt. 6:5,6) and fasting (Mt. 6:16-18). Surprisingly, Jesus said we will even receive a reward for such a small act as giving a cup of cold water to one of His disciples of little influence (Greek), if we do it because he is Jesus' disciple (Mt. 10:42). There also seems to be a prophet's reward and a righteous man's reward (Mt. 10:41).

The key to fruitful living, IF done, is also the way to assure that a Christian will **never** be cut off from the Vine and thrown into the fire:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned (Jn. 15:5,6).

Both the Apostle Paul and Peter addressed this important subject of fruitful living. Paul wrote his young co-laborer Timothy and said, "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). He wrote this in contradistinction to an apparent first century heresy that taught: "Godliness is a means to financial gain," v. 5. Please know that the Prosperity Message, as taught by well-known faith teachers, is in this same category—heresy! In fact, this same teaching promotes an eagerness for money and material possessions, which has caused some Christians to have "wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim. 6:10).

"Great gain" in heaven is stored up for the contented godly. In fact, godliness has value in both "the present life AND the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). The Apostle Peter expands on Paul's key to fruitful Christian living with the following to be added to their faith—making every effort to do so:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

IF you do this, the following conditional promise is yours:

... they [these qualities] will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, v. 8.

This is the key—possess these qualities in increasing measure (v. 11):

... **If** you do these things, you will **never fall**, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(This is also how you can make "your calling and election sure," v. 10. Notice the human responsibility in this!) As important as it is to store up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:20), taking preventatives so we will **never** fall is even more important. That's why Peter put this first in verses 10,11. Peter believed a Christian's position was "secure," but **not** so secure that he could never fall from it. See 2 Pet. 3:17. Plan for the future by living godly now and the rest of your earthly life.

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