

# Christians at the Judgment Seat

In that coming day when Christians appear before the judgment seat of Christ, “Every man’s work shall be made manifest... it shall be revealed by [‘in] fire.” There will be works comparable to “gold, silver, precious stones”; and there will be works comparable to “wood, hay, stubble.” One set of material reveals works of intrinsic value, which will endure the fire; but the other set of material reveals valueless works, which will be burned in the fire.

Works performed by Christians during the present time can vary a great deal in worth. Such works can be performed under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and redound to the praise, honor, and glory of the Lord; or such works can be performed under the leadership of man and redound to the praise, honor, and glory of man.

At the judgment seat, all will be revealed; for “the fire shall try *every man’s work* of what sort it is.”

## **“Works...Revealed by Fire”**

Works emanate out of faithfulness to one’s calling and bring faith to its proper goal, which will result in the salvation of one’s soul (cf. James 2:14-26; I Peter 1:5-11). At the judgment seat, the worth of every man’s work in this realm will be revealed; and decisions and determinations emanating out of this judgment will determine every man’s position in the coming kingdom (cf. Matt. 16:24-27; 24:45-51; 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27).

“Judgment” on the basis of *works* is alien to the thinking of many Christians, for they have been exposed time and again to a proclamation of salvation by grace through faith apart from works, *unbalanced* by the proclamation of the coming judgment of Christians on the basis of works. The emphasis has been placed almost entirely upon the finished work of Christ at Calvary, with little regard given to Christian living, the coming judgment seat, and the coming kingdom.

Teachings of this nature have centered almost solely around the salvation which we presently possess; and things having to do with the inheritance awaiting Christians, the salvation of the soul, etc., have been removed from their respective contexts and applied to our present salvation. Ministries centering around this type teaching in the Churches have produced both confusion and complacency in Christendom.

Then, there is another type widespread teaching in the Churches which recognizes works but has every Christian performing good works. The reasoning of those who teach along these lines often centers around the thought that if a person is really saved he will produce good works; and if, on the other hand he doesn't produce good works, this simply shows that he was never really saved in the first place.

Aside from being completely contrary to any Scriptural teaching on the subject, such a teaching produces both *an erroneous view of salvation by grace through faith and an erroneous view of issues surrounding the judgment seat of Christ.*

If every Christian produces good works to show that he has been saved, then works enter into an area where works cannot exist.

“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6).

*(“Grace” is that which God is able to do completely apart from human intervention or merit.)*

The presence or absence of works on the part of Christians can have no connection whatsoever with their prior reception of the finished work of Christ. Christ's finished work *allows* an individ-

ual to be placed in the position where *he can produce good works*. There is nothing in Scripture which teaches that he, of necessity, *will produce good works*. Such would be completely contrary to the teaching of salvation by grace through faith apart from works. Man's works simply cannot enter into salvation by grace at any time, either preceding or following salvation.

Relative to eternal salvation, man simply cannot do anything to:

- 1) *Be saved.*
- 2) *Stay saved.*
- 3) *Show that he has been saved.*

If man could do any one of the three, salvation would cease to be by grace through faith, for man's works would have entered into an area where works of this nature cannot exist.

If it be maintained that every Christian *must* produce good works to show that he has been saved, then it *must* follow that every Christian would appear at the judgment seat of Christ with works which would "abide" the fire. Possessing works of this nature, every Christian would "receive a reward."

But such a thought is at once seen to be erroneous by reference to the text in I Corinthians chapter three. There will be Christians appearing at the judgment seat who will "suffer loss" and "be saved; yet so as by ['through'] fire" (v. 15). *ALL* of their works will be burned, but they themselves will "be saved," *i.e., they themselves will be delivered*. And this *deliverance* will occur "through fire."

This *deliverance* at the judgment seat can have nothing to do with eternal salvation, for all issues surrounding one's eternal salvation, whether during the present time or at the future judgment seat, are *past issues* (e.g., Christ's finished work at Calvary, the Spirit's finished work of breathing life into the one having no life, allowing him to pass "from death unto life"). God judged sin in the person of His Son at Calvary, God is satisfied, and the Spirit can breathe life into the one having no life on the basis of this finished work of God's Son.

And this work of the triune Godhead is a *past, finished deliv-*

erance which could never be referred to in *the future sense* seen in I Cor. 3:15.

The *deliverance* seen in I Cor. 3:15 is, contextually, *a deliverance out of the fire at the judgment seat*. Though all of the person's works will be burned and he will appear naked in Christ's presence (Rev. 3:17, 18), he himself will not be burned. Rather, he will be delivered — *delivered from being burned with his works*.

But, though he himself will be delivered in this respect, "so as by ['through'] fire," he will be unable to escape the dire consequences which will result from his works being consumed by the fire and his consequent naked appearance. And there can be no deliverance from these consequences, for there will have to be a "just recompense" — exact payment for services rendered in the house during the time of the Lord's absence. If not, God would not be perfectly just and righteous in His dealings with His household servants.

One-sided views of the judgment seat which maintain that every Christian will appear with good works are little different than the teaching which ignores works. Confusion and complacency, once again, can only be the ultimate result.

Much of the preceding, erroneous teaching is fostered by a misunderstanding of I Cor. 4:5. This verse in the King James Version reads,

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."

The problem emanates from both a mistranslation in the text and a noncontextual understanding of the words, "then shall every man have praise of God." The words "every man" could be better translated "each man"; and the reference is back to *the faithful stewards* in verse two. Faithful stewards will, individually, receive praise from God; but there is nothing in Scripture which teaches that "every man," which, apart from the context would also include *unfaithful stewards*, will receive such praise. To the contrary. Scripture quite clearly reveals that *both faithful and un-*

*faithful stewards* will appear at the judgment seat, that the judgment seat will be operable in *two realms*, and that *faithful stewards alone* will receive praise of God.

### **“If Any Man’s Work Abide”**

“Rewards” are being reserved for *the faithful alone*. This is one side of the judgment seat. Christians have been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Works of this nature, performed by a Christian exhibiting faithfulness to his calling, will “abide” at the judgment seat. They will be manifested as works comparable to “gold, silver, precious stones” and will endure the fire. Such works will result in the Christian receiving a reward and a position with Christ in the kingdom.

Works which endure the fire will be the type works necessary to bring faith to its proper goal, resulting in the salvation of the Christian’s soul. Following the testing of such works, the Christian will receive *praise* from his Lord. He will hear his Lord say,

“Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things...” (Matt. 25:21a, 23a).

And he will subsequently be positioned, in a regal capacity, among those destined to rule as joint-heirs with Christ (Matt. 24:45-47; 25:19-23; Luke 19:15-19).

### **“If Any Man’s Work Shall Be Burned”**

“Suffering loss” is in store for the unfaithful. This is the other side of the judgment seat. It is possible for a Christian to appear before the judgment seat of Christ without one single good work to his credit. He will possess works, but not works done under the direction of the Holy Spirit, for the praise, honor, and glory of the Lord. Such works, comparable to “wood, hay, stubble,” will be burned. They will not endure the fire. But the Christian himself “shall be saved [‘delivered’]; yet so as by [‘through’] fire.”

The presence of works, the absence of works, or the type works can have no bearing on his eternal salvation, *wrought completely apart from his own works*. He will come out of this judgment, as Lot from Sodom, with nothing to show but escape from the condemnation befalling the unregenerate.

Works consumed by fire will be the type works unable to bring faith to its proper goal, resulting in the loss of the Christian's soul. Following the testing of such works, the Christian will be *rebuked* by his Lord. He will hear his Lord say,

"Thou wicked and slothful servant..." (Matt. 25:26a).

Then, that which had been entrusted to him during the time of his Lord's absence will be taken from him. He will be denied a position with Christ in the kingdom, a position which could have been his had he previously exercised faithfulness in his calling; and he will then be appointed "his portion with the hypocrites." (Matt. 24:48-51; 25:19, 24-30; Luke 19:15, 20-26).

He will then find himself cast "without," into the place which Scripture calls, "the outer darkness" (ASV). In this place there will be "the weeping and the gnashing of teeth [an Eastern expression denoting deep grief]" (ASV) on the part of Christians who realize too late that they could have occupied one of the proffered positions with Christ in His kingdom. Their rights as firstborn sons — the rights of primogeniture — will have been forfeited; and they, as Esau, will *lift up their voices and weep*.

### **Receiving Rewards, Suffering Loss**

*Receiving rewards or suffering loss* at the judgment seat of Christ are grave issues about which most Christians seem to know very little, or, for that matter, appear to even be concerned. But such will have no bearing upon the fact that there is a day coming in the not too-distant future when every Christian *MUST* render an account to his Lord for the "things done in his body" (II Cor. 5:10).

*Events of that day* will come to pass at the end of the present dispensation, immediately preceding the Messianic Era; *issues of that day* will surround a review of the works performed by

Christians in view of their receiving rewards or suffering loss; the *purpose of that day*, aside from providing a “just recompense,” will be to make decisions and determinations concerning Christians occupying positions with Christ in His 1,000-year rule from the heavens over the earth.

Everything is moving toward that 1,000-year Messianic Era when God’s Son will reign supreme. Man’s Day, in conjunction with *his rule* over the earth under Satan, is about to end; and the Lord’s Day, in conjunction with *His rule* over the earth with His co-heirs, is about to commence.

