

THE HEAVENLY CALLING

consider . . . Jesus

Heb. 3:1

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The Time of the End

Part VI

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Unto the angel of the Church of Ephesus... Smyrna... Pergamos... Thyatira... Sardis... Philadelphia... Laodicea write... (Rev. 2:1a, 8a, 12a, 18a; 3:1a, 7a, 14a).

The seven epistles directed to seven Churches in Asia in Revelation chapters two and three form a continuation from introductory, foundational material in chapter one. And if this connection between chapter one and chapters two and three is not understood, the main thrust of that presented in these seven short epistles will be missed.

In the first chapter, the seven Churches are seen in heaven in Christ's presence in the Lord's Day, not here on earth separated from Christ's presence (a personal, bodily presence, as seen in this chapter) during Man's Day (v. 10). And these seven Churches are further seen in Christ's presence when He is exercising a position as Judge (a future role which Christ will enter at the conclusion of the present dispensation), not a position as High Priest (Christ's office and work throughout the present dispensation in the heavenly sanctuary, on behalf of Christians).

Thus, the entire scene is not only future and judicial but removed from the earth and in the heavens. Since the complete Church, shown by the number of the Churches ("seven," showing the completeness of that which is in view) is seen in heaven, this can only have to do with events following the removal of the Church from the earth at the end of the dispensation; and since the complete Church is seen in Christ's presence at this time, with Christ occupying a judicial role, this can only

have to do with the future appearance of all Christians before the judgment seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10, 11).

This, in turn, provides the basis for the continuation of the same subject matter in chapters two and three, where specific information is provided relative to each of the seven Churches previously introduced in chapter one. And though it is evident that a history of Christendom is shown through activity in these seven Churches existing in the first century at the time John penned these two chapters, the epistles, in their contextual setting, can only show more particularly things future — things surrounding the judgment seat, continuing from chapter one.

Each epistle is structured exactly the same way, following a brief, descriptive depiction of the Son:

- 1) Beginning with Christ's statement, "I know thy works."
- 2) Then, a call to repentance, or to heed the Lord's command.
- 3) Then, an overcomer's promise.

And this is in perfect keeping with the judicial scene presented in chapter one, introducing chapters two and three, with chapter one providing necessary foundational material which would allow an individual to properly understand Christ's words to the seven Churches within their contextual setting. That dealt with at the judgment seat will be 1) works, which will show whether those being judged 2) did or did not repent, or obey the Lord's command. And this will be with 3) a view to realizing or not realizing an overcomer's promise, which has to do with realizing or not realizing an inheritance with Christ during the coming age.

I Know Thy Works

The basis for all judgment in Scripture is works. God judged sin at Calvary on the basis of His Son's finished work (John 19:30); Christians will be judged at the end of the present dispensation on the basis of works (I Cor. 3:12-15; II Cor. 5:10, 11); individuals coming out of the future Tribulation will be judged on the basis of works (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:4-6); Israel will be judged following the Tribulation on the basis of works (Ezek. 20:34-38; 44:9-16); and even the unsaved will be judged following the Millennium on the basis of works (Rev. 20:11-15).

Faith though cannot be separated from works in the preceding respect (except for the unsaved, who are in no position to exercise faith), for "without faith it is impossible to please him [God]" (Heb. 11:6a). But, in relation to judgment, God looks at the final analysis of the matter. Works emanate out of faith, with works forming that which results from faith (James 2:14-26). And it is these resulting works which are at the forefront when judgment is in view.

A saved person can either exercise faithfulness or unfaithfulness, with works emanating from both. In I Cor. 3:12, this is set forth in the two types of works presented. One type is depicted by the words "gold, silver, precious stones," and the other type is depicted by the words "wood, hay, stubble." Works will be tried by fire at the judgment seat (v. 13). That depicted by "gold, silver, precious stones," emanating out of faithfulness, will pass through the fire unscathed; but that depicted by "wood, hay, stubble," resulting from unfaithfulness, will be consumed by the fire.

Those individuals shown to have possessed works described by the former

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(“gold, silver, precious stones”) will experience the end result of the salvation of their souls, which will allow them to have a part in activities attendant the bride and Christ’s coming reign. But those individuals shown to have possessed works described by the latter (“wood, hay, stubble”) will, instead, “suffer loss” (the loss of their souls), though they themselves will be “saved [their eternal salvation unaffected]; yet so as by [‘through’] fire” (I Cor. 3:15).

Relative to the unsaved, “faith” is not in the picture. But, still, even though “faith” is absent, all that can remain to come under judgment are *works*. Thus, the unsaved, as the saved, are judged on the basis of *works*, for there is nothing else upon which they could be judged.

The unsaved can’t be judged on the basis of prior *unbelief* in Christ, no more so than can the saved be judged on the basis of prior *belief* in Christ. According to John 3:18, the unsaved *have already been judged* (as the matter pertains to Christ and His finished work at Calvary, for they have not believed), and no judgment awaits the saved (also as the matter pertains to Christ and His finished work at Calvary, for they have believed).

This remains true of both the saved and the unsaved because God has already judged sin in the person of His Son. Thus, this is *a completed and closed matter, for God has already been satisfied*. And, resultingly, there can be no further judgment on this issue:

“He that believeth on him is not condemned [‘is not judged’]: but he that believeth not is condemned already [‘has already been judged’], because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God.”

The second word “condemned [‘judged’]” and the subsequent word “believed” (both used relative to the unsaved) are both in the perfect tense in the Greek text, pointing to action completed in past time with the results of this action existing during present time in a finished state. Consequently, for the unsaved, this will *never* be an issue in future time. It can’t be an issue in future time. Such would be impos-

sible. Relative to their eternal destiny, the unsaved have already been judged (past) because of unbelief (past). *Nothing* surrounding judgment, as it pertains to this matter, can be carried beyond this point in past time.

And exactly the same non-judgmental situation exists for the saved relative to their eternal destiny, for the same reason. The saved, exactly as the unsaved, have already been judged. But in their case, *belief*, not *unbelief*, enters into the matter. And, exactly as in the case of the unsaved, *nothing* surrounding judgment, as it pertains to this entire matter, can be carried beyond this point in past time.

For the saved though, unlike the unsaved, judgment has taken place through a Substitute Who has paid sin’s penalty (death) on their behalf. And everything surrounding the matter has been taken care of in past time, by Another, with *God being satisfied*.

(In the preceding respect, as seen in John 3:18, because judgment has taken place for the saved through a Substitute, there can be no past judgment for *the individual per se*. But, for the unsaved, since a Substitute is not in view, this past judgment would have to pertain to *the individual himself*. And this is why this same verse refers to a past judgment for *the unsaved alone*.)

Because the basis for all “judgment” in Scripture is *works*, and because *judgment* is centrally in view in Revelation chapters two and three (contextually, continuing from chapter one), Christ’s words in each of the seven epistles begins with the statement, “I know thy works.” With *judgment* centrally in view — not judgment relative to their eternal salvation (an impossibility) but judgment relative to that which lies out ahead, relative to the Messianic Era — *these epistles could begin no other way*.

Repent...Heed the Lord’s Command

God’s Son, described in Revelation chapter one, Whose eyes were as “a flame of fire,” knew exactly what had been and was presently occurring in each of the seven Churches. The Son, with exactly the same full knowledge (omniscience) possessed by the Father — for He was, is, and always will be the

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Father manifested in the flesh — knew all there was to know about everyone and everything in each of the seven Churches. And after He states to each, “I know thy works,” He makes their works known, dealing with those in each Church on the basis of their works.

Exactly the same thing will occur yet future relative to that which this section of the book deals with. All Christians will stand before Christ in judgment, exactly as the matter is revealed in chapter one. They will stand before the One Whose eyes are as “a flame of fire,” eyes which can and apparently will penetrate into the very soul of each individual (*cf.* Luke 22:61, 62).

In fact, the material in Revelation chapter one could be made even more specific, for that stated in this chapter concerning the Church in Christ’s presence is not just a statement concerning how things will be in that future day. Rather, *this is the actual scene* surrounding the future appearance of all Christians in Christ’s presence, before His judgment seat.

John was moved from the present time into a future time, in the Lord’s Day. And in this future time, in the Lord’s Day, he was allowed to see different things occurring before they actually occurred. But that can be turned around, saying, the things which John was allowed to see, yet to occur, will have to occur for the simple reason that they have already occurred. And one can no more change these things set in the future (which have already occurred) than he can change things set in the past (which, as well, have already occurred).

The first thing which John saw in this respect was Christians appearing before Christ in judgment. In other words, that seen in the latter part of chapter

one is not just something similar to or like that which will occur. Rather, *this is that which will occur!* And John was shown that which will occur — recording that which will occur, to be made available to *all Christians* during the opening years of the present dispensation (directed to “seven Churches,” showing *completeness*) — in order that *all Christians* throughout the dispensation might have an eye-witness account of that which they will one day experience, leaving them even further without excuse at the judgment seat.

This introductory material then allows the seven epistles to seven Churches in Asia, which immediately follow, to each be structured after a manner which continues the thought of *judgment* from chapter one. And not only is this structure seen in each of these seven epistles, but at least two other things can be seen in these epistles as well, which reflect on events during present time, preceding events surrounding the judgment seat:

1) The order in which these epistles appear depicts a history of the Church throughout the dispensation (from Ephesus, which left its “first love,” to Laodicea, described as “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”).

2) Dealing with these seven existing Churches in the manner seen not only allowed the Lord to deal directly with all the Churches during the time in which John lived but also to provide vital information for all the Churches which would exist throughout subsequent time during the complete dispensation. And, as both the text and context clearly show, this would be with a view to *future judgment* and *the Messianic Era*.

Everything about these epistles — their structure, that stated about each, the order in which they were given, the reason for the call to repent, the reason for the exhortation and commands — points out ahead to *the judgment seat* and then to *the Messianic Era* beyond. The deterioration seen within the existing Churches and also seen in the order of their arrangement in chapters two and three necessitates

the call to repentance, the exhortations, and the commands. Then, this call for repentance, the exhortations, and the commands look ahead to *the judgment seat*; and all of the overcomer’s promises are *Messianic* within their scope of fulfillment.

Everything at the end of Scripture remains in *complete keeping* with that seen at the beginning of Scripture — *a seventh day of rest following six days of restorative work*. And there is *nothing* within these seven epistles which moves beyond that point within the scope of their fulfillment (*i.e.*, there is *nothing* in these epistles which moves beyond the seventh day, the Messianic Era). There is *nothing* in these epistles about eternal life, the ages beyond the Messianic Era, etc. *All of the material* in these epistles is about events occurring during time within that foreshadowed by *work* during the six days in Genesis chapter one, progressing to that foreshadowed by *rest* during the seventh day in Genesis chapter two, not about things which will occur during the eternal ages beyond this time.

(For a correct and proper interpretation throughout Scripture in the preceding respect, one must remain within the time-frame set forth in the first thirty-four verses in Scripture, in Gen. 1:1-2:3 [six and seven days foreshadowing six and seven thousand years]. A septenary structure is set forth in these opening verses, establishing at the very outset a foundation upon which all subsequent Scripture rests [refer to Chapters I-IV in the editor’s book, THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE].

There are a few places in Scripture which deal with events outside the scope of the septenary structure in Gen. 1:1-2:3 [*i.e.*, events both preceding Man’s Day and events following the Messianic Era]. But when Scripture does move outside the septenary structure set forth at the beginning [*e.g.*, Ezek. 28:14-19; Rev. 21, 22], it is always quite evident that this is being done. And this has apparently been done at times so that man can better tie the whole of the matter together, understanding why things existed as they did preceding Man’s Day on the one hand, and understanding the goal toward which everything moves following the Messianic Era on the other hand, when the Son delivers the kingdom up to His Father [I Cor. 15:24-28].)

To Him That Overcometh

The manner in which most interpret the seven overcomer’s promises, one to each of the seven Churches in chapters two and three, centers around these promises relating to one’s eternal salvation. Most erroneously interpret these promises as either 1) a call to unsaved individuals within the seven Churches to be saved and realize these different promises, or 2) as statements to saved individuals in these Churches, showing that they will realize these different promises simply on the basis of the fact that they have been saved. And I John 5:1-5 forms verses usually referenced in an effort to substantiate the second part of the preceding.

This line of erroneous teaching emanates mainly from man’s failure to see anything in Scripture except salvation by grace, *i.e.*, saved-unsaved issues. Practically everything is made to relate to this one subject. And this type teaching, brought over into the seven epistles in Revelation chapters two and three, results in not only the Church often being viewed from an incorrect perspective (usually seeing the Church comprised of both saved and unsaved individuals) but it also leaves little room for the overcomer’s promises to be viewed from a correct perspective.

However, contrariwise, within the New Testament usage of the word “Church,” as it is used relating to *the one new man* “in Christ,” there is no such thing as a Church comprised of both saved and unsaved individuals. A person is either within or without the Church, depending on his saved or unsaved state. He is either a Jew, a Gentile (both without), or a Christian (within [I Cor. 10:32]).

Nor can unsaved individuals be thought of as *professors* instead of *possessors* and find themselves within the Church after the manner in which the word “Church” is used in the New Testament. Scripture knows nothing about *professors* as opposed to *possessors*. Scripture knows only *possessors* (the saved) and *non-possessors* (the unsaved).

The overcomer’s promises, in the preceding respect, would, thus, relate to

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Christians alone. Further, these promises are worded after a fashion which clearly reveals that Christians can go in either of two directions relative to the promises. They can either *overcome* and realize the promises or they can *be overcome* [by the world, the flesh, and/or the Devil] and fail to realize the promises.

(The word “Church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, a compound word which means “called out” [*ek*, meaning “out”; and *klesis*, meaning “to call”]. The word is used 115 times in the N.T., and in all except five instances it is used of Christians. It is used of the nation of Israel or those in Israel three times [Matt. 18:17; Acts 7:38], and it is used of a gathering of mainly unsaved Gentiles twice [some Jews present (Acts 19:32, 39)]. And in the five instances where the word is not used of Christians it could be better translated “assembly,” understanding that “the assembly” was a *called out group* [Israel called out of the nations (Acts 7:38), or individuals called out of this nation (Matt. 18:17), or individuals called out from a Gentile nation (Acts 19:32, 39)].

The Hebrew text of the O.T. uses a corresponding word, *qahal*, which the Septuagint [Gk. version of the O.T.] usually translates by using *ekklesia*. *Qahal* is found 112 times in the O.T., almost an equal number of times that the corresponding word, *ekklesia*, is found in the N.T. *Qahal* is usually translated in the English text as “assembly” [Deut. 9:10; 18:16] or “congregation” [Deut. 23:1-3; I Kings 8:14], and sometimes as “company” [I Sam. 19:20]. The word is used mainly of Israel or those in Israel, though a few times it is used of groups from among Gentile nations [Gen. 35:11; Ezek. 23:46, 47; 26:7; 38:4, 7, 13, 15].

Thus, when the Greek text of the New Testament uses the word *ekklesia*, where Christians are involved [110 of the 115 times that the word appears], it is dealing with *the saved alone* [the saved of the present dispensation, those comprising

the one new man “in Christ”]. The word “Church” [*ekklesia*] is never used in the N.T. referring to an assembly of both Christians and Jews [including saved Jews comprising the nation during the time of the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel (from 33 AD to about 62 AD)] or to an assembly of both Christians and Gentiles. Rather, the word is always used *only* as a reference to those forming *the one new man* “in Christ,” which is neither Jew nor Gentile [Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:10, 11].

In this respect, the Church [the *ekklesia*] of the N.T., having to do with Christians alone, is one thing; and the usage of a corresponding word in the O.T. [*qahal* (usually translated *ekklesia* in the Septuagint)], and the usage of *ekklesia* having to do with Israel or those in Israel three times in the N.T., is another thing entirely. The word Church in the N.T., when referring to the saved who are taken from among both the Jews and the Gentiles during the present dispensation [110 of the 115 times the word is used], began on the day of Pentecost in 33 AD and will be removed at the end of the dispensation.

And any type teaching to the contrary is no more or no less than man’s flawed ideology brought over into their understanding of Scripture, seeking to interpret, through natural means, that which is spiritually discerned. Scripture though is to be interpreted *solely* from the spiritual side of matters, *never* from the natural. Scripture is to be interpreted *in the light of Scripture, comparing that which is spiritual with that which is spiritual* [I Cor. 2:10-13], with man’s thoughts and ideas on the matter of *no moment whatsoever*.)

As previously stated, I John 5:1-5 is often erroneously referenced by those seeking to show that the thought of *overcoming* in Revelation chapters two and three relates to eternal salvation. And the thought of *a bringing forth from above*, used three times in these verses, is the key to show how the verses should *correctly* be understood.

The expression, “born of God” or “begotten of him,” referring to *a bringing forth from above*, is used ten times in I John

(2:29; 3:9 [twice]; 4:7; 5:1 [three times], 4, 18 [twice]). The expression also appears in two other New Testament books — four times in John’s gospel (1:13; 3:3, 5, 7), and two times in I Peter (1:3, 23). And *every time* the expression is used in John, I Peter, and I John, both textually and contextually, *the saved*, not the unsaved, are in view.

(Refer to the editor’s book, BROUGHT FORTH FROM ABOVE, for a comprehensive treatment of this subject in all three N.T. books.)

I John 5:1-5 is actually a companion passage to John 20:30, 31. These two verses in John’s gospel have to do solely with Israel during the time of the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel, providing the reason for the eight signs in John’s gospel. And I John 5:1-5 (apparently written at or about the same time as John’s gospel) would seemingly have to do with Israel during this time as well. But, unlike John 20:30, 31, it would also have to do with Christians throughout the dispensation since the epistle was written centrally to Christians and signs are not in view in the passage (*ref.*, the editor’s book, “Signs in John’s Gospel”).

In this respect, John 5:1-5 has to do with instructions concerning how Christians can overcome *the world* — “*by faith*” (v. 4), with instructions given elsewhere concerning how Christians can overcome *the flesh by mortification* (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5) and *the Devil by resistance* (James 4:7; I Peter 5:9). And, as in all of the other passages pertaining to being *brought forth from above*, the unsaved are not in view at all in any of these passages having to do with overcoming.

(For a more comprehensive discussion of the seven Churches in Revelation chapter two and three, refer to the editor’s book, JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST [Revised Edition], Chs. V-XI.)

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