

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

by Gene Hawkins

*"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone 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 Scripture often strikes fear in the hearts of dear Christian people because the time and purpose of this ministry of Christ is misunderstood. There are those who teach that God diligently keeps records of every misstep and evil deed and then on "judgment day" all the secrets He has kept over the years, will be made manifest for everyone to see. It is with this thought in mind that we endeavor to dispel some of the myth and mystery surrounding this subject and expound on the personal advantages of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

When do we appear before this judgment seat? Some people suppose that Paul's use of the word "shall" in the text indicates that it is at a future time. As the verse states, the reward will be received at a future time, for it is an eternal one. However, judgment must occur now. Paul declares in I Corinthians 11:32, "when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord." Peter corroborates his statement by saying, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (I Peter 4:17).

Chastening, which is a direct result of judgment, is taking place in our lives now. Likewise, Peter is referring to God's people as being the house of God, and this is where judgment begins - TODAY. The apostle John agrees with these Scriptures, as he describes the Judge and the time of judgment in Revelation 1:13-16. We must understand the entire text from which these verses are taken. In verse 10, we read concerning John, "I was in spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard BEHIND me a great voice, as of a trumpet." The "Lord's Day" refers to the end of this present Church Age. John was caught away in spirit to that day when he heard the voice behind him. He turned and saw seven golden candlesticks, which represent the seven churches listed (verse 20).

Those seven churches represent all the conditions which prevail throughout the Church Age. John also saw the Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, walking in the midst of the candlesticks. He beholds what has already transpired, not that which is yet to be. There is a message from the Judge to each church in chapters two and three. To each church, except Smyrna and Philadelphia, He commands, "Repent." THERE WILL BE NO REPENTANCE after this life, so these words must refer to the present time. The whole of Christendom is found in the conditions pictured by these seven churches. When the Judge scrutinizes and evaluates our lives and points out those things which are wrong, there must be repentance and correction now, not after we are in heaven. The desired purpose is to come to the state expressed by the Smyrna and Philadelphia churches, which record no need for change, but express their rewards.

This thought of being judged and given space to repent, is by no means a new doctrine presented for the first time in Scripture in Revelation. We find it in I Samuel three where God informed the child Samuel that He was going to "reward" the house of Eli for their evil deeds. "For I have told him (Eli) that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity WHICH HE KNOWETH; because his

sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (I Samuel 3:13). Eli accepted that decree, and there is apparently no ignorance on his part as to why it was going to happen.

Nebuchadnezzar exemplifies another case with the same pattern, except that a specific time period is allowed for his repentance. Daniel admonished him, "Wherefore O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquility" (Daniel 4:27). The next events of this chapter take place twelve months later. Pride is still present in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, for we read, the king spoke, and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?" (4:30).

Immediately after this, he is driven out of his house and kingdom and made like unto the wild beasts. This was the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy to him one year earlier.

A third example is found in Daniel five, where Belshazzar sees the handwriting on the wall. Daniel is called in to interpret the writing and declares: "And thou his son (Nebuchadnezzar's grandson), O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, **THOUGH THOU KNEWEST ALL THIS**; but has lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven. . . Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (5:22-27). In all of these cases we must conclude that these people were judged and given a chance to repent **BEFORE** the consequences for evil were exacted. Likewise, the message to the churches is "repent," or else.

Let us notice some of the characteristics of the Judge, which correspond with other Scriptures, and reinforce the fact that He is judging us today. First. His eyes were as a flame of fire. These piercing eyes are able to look deeply into the heart of man. His scrutiny is going on today. Men look on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart (I Samuel 16:7).

Second. His feet were like unto fine or burning brass. In Scripture, brass is symbolic of judgment, as the altar whereon the sacrifices were burned with fire, was made of brass (Exodus 27). The brazen feet of Christ are seen as He walks amidst the churches, judging the flesh where He walks.

Third. Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. This sword is the Word of God, described in Hebrews 4:12 as being "living, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Our thoughts and intents are being judged, or evaluated right now as God's Word goes forth.

This operation of God's unique sword is seen in John 15, as the Heavenly Husbandman judges and purges the fruitful branch that it may bring forth more fruit. We want to emphasize as strongly as we can, that such cutting is taking place today, not after we arrive in heaven.

The judgment seat of Christ, as it is presented here, is actually an advantage to us. Our Apostle, Paul, brings judgment and chastening together in I Corinthians 11:31-32: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, (now), we are chastened of the Lord, **THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE CONDEMNED WITH THE WORLD.**" God is dealing with us as sons and those whom He loves He chastens. Such chastening is far different from punishment for

wrongdoing; rather, it is valuable training and instruction in spiritual things. He wants to present us faultless before the presence of His glory (Jude 24).

Paul projects this same purpose in Philippians 3:15 - "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and IF IN ANYTHING YE BE OTHERWISE MINDED, GOD SHALL REVEAL EVEN THIS UNTO YOU." This is for the present time.

DISPELLING A MYTH

There are some who hold up the judgment seat of Christ as an object of fear to make us watch our every step, so that at the "judgment bar" all our sins and iniquities will not be held up as an embarrassment to us. PRAY TELL. WHAT GOOD WOULD THAT DO? How would a display of such works of iniquity glorify God, or magnify redemption? It is vitally important to realize that God's incentive for overcoming is not FEAR, but DIVINE LOVE. Fear is a very strong human emotion, but only Divine Love never fails and will overcome every obstacle.

Those who promote such thoughts violate some of the most beautiful Scriptures of God's Word. What shall we do with the following statements of God? "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalms 103:12). "For Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back" (Isaiah 38:17). "I even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:25). "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not His anger forever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19). "But now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to PUT AWAY sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26). "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Hebrews 10: 17-18).

All these beautiful verses attest to the fact that our sins were laid upon Christ, and when we accept Him, we will never be judged for them again. Christ has borne that judgment and they have been put out of God's sight forever, by the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God.

REWARDS

"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may RECEIVE the things done in his body." The ultimate result of judgment is that we may RECEIVE A REWARD. Concerning his own ministry, Paul said, "I judge not mine own self ... but He that judgeth (present tense) is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsel of the hearts; and then shall ever man have praise of God" (I Corinthians 4:3-5).

Paul is not only talking about the works that men have done, but also the "counsels of the hearts," or the attitude in doing them. Only God can evaluate the attitudes of men, and in that regard, Paul says, "but with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment" (verse 3). If wrong attitudes or works are found in us today, we

have the option of ignoring them or correcting them. God is faithful to bring to light those hidden things right now; the reward will come only after this life is over. First Corinthians three describes what happens when one's works are fleshly, or as "wood, hay, or stubble." The fire of God's judgment will prove them either to be good or bad, and though his works may be burned and he has no reward, yet he himself, shall be saved (3:12-15).

Paul's own reward, as well as ours, is defined in II Timothy four, and it is quite evident that he knew he had already been judged. He did not leave this life fearing some unknown calamity was waiting for him beyond this mortal veil. He emphatically declares: "For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT. I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE. I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day" (vs. 6-8).

He was confident that the Righteous Judge had finished His work in him and was assured that the crown of righteousness already belonged to him. The subject of rewards is also found in each of the Judges messages to the seven churches in Revelation. We read in each one, "to him that overcometh will I give." Each reward is different, depending upon the DEGREE of overcoming involved.

Every Christian is an overcomer in some measure, by the virtue of the fact that he has accepted Christ as Savior. However, every Christian DOES NOT OVERCOME ALL THINGS as is evidenced by the accounts of these seven churches, along with what we see in Christendom today. There are many things that are brought to light today, but all men will not yield to God's correction, and rectify the situation. Their eternal reward will be limited. Our desire should be that of Paul's: "Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him" (I Corinthians 5:9).

MY PSALM

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want –
What a wonderful promise to me.
When the day has been hard, and the night lone –
Then I repeat Psalm twenty-three.

He leads me in pastures that I should go --
He does this all for my good.
But sometimes my faltering feet are slow
To go in the path that I should.

He bathes my tired head with oil,
His love He will not sever.
And, when my days on earth are o'er,
I'll dwell with Him forever.

- Eula Young