

Chapter Twenty-seven

The Final Reckoning

The believers in Christ is free from the Law – according to Romans 8:2, delivered from the Law – according to Romans 7:6, and dead to the Law according to Galatians 2:19; for Christ is the end of the Law to everyone that believes – according to Romans 10:4. This does not mean, however, that the believer is not responsible to God and will not be judged by him for his conduct after he is saved. God will certainly require an accounting of how this freedom and liberty has been used or abused. There is a payday coming for the believer. We studied earlier about the responsibility of the believer in this present walk, and the provision God has made for his cleansing and forgiveness. Let's look now at the judgment of the believer's works that will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ. For our Scripture we will turn to 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, and remember that this passage of Scripture was written to believers. It has nothing to do with salvation, but is a matter of rewards for service and loss of rewards for unfaithfulness.

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 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” (1 Corinthians 3:11-14).

Then notice especially the 15th verse:

“If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Corinthians 3:15).

This was the thing that Paul feared above all things. It wasn't so much that Paul feared losing out completely with God. He seemed assured of that – but he did fear losing out on the reward and the crown at the end of the road. He feared that after a lifetime of preaching he might in be careless and succumb to the flesh and be set aside and taken out of service. His assurance of salvation seems clear from his words in 2 Timothy 1:12,

*“...I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”
(2 Timothy 1:12).*

Paul was not worried about his ultimate salvation; however, there was something Paul did greatly fear. He says in 1 Corinthians 9

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain... 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” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Note in this passage that has brought about a certain amount of confusion, that Paul is not here speaking about eternal salvation, but rather he is referring to rewards and the crown for faithfulness. He compares the Christian life with running a race. While salvation is a free gift, Paul feared that, after a life of service, he might play the fool and lose out on the reward and be put on the shelf. If such a case would happen, God would deal with him at the Judgment Seat of Christ. At this judgment Christians will see all the wood, the hay, and the stubble – [like word, dry grass and cut stems] – go up in smoke, and he himself be saved *“so as by fire” – “pulled out of the fire with nothing saved but he himself!”*

The Greek word translated as *“castaway”* in the King James Version is translated *“disqualified,” “rejected,”* and *“fail shamefully of the prize,”* in other versions of the Bible. It has to do with being disqualified for a reward.

When Will This Judgment Seat of Christ Occur?

To have a proper perspective of what will take place in the future, we must determine at what time and what place the Judgment Seat of Christ will occur. There are many Scripture passages dealing with this truth, however, it seems that many believers know little or nothing concerning it. The belief that the believer can live as he pleases and no ill results will follow is so pleasing to the flesh, that the teaching concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ has been passed by lightly and neglected. Note a number of passages that deal with this matter.

“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 counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Corinthians 4:5).

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10).

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12).

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 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”

(2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

These and many other passages clearly indicate that the time of the Judgment Seat of Christ will be when the Lord Jesus Christ returns for His saints. When this has happened there will follow a time of terrible judgment on this earth during the Tribulation Period, when the Lord will judge the nations of the earth and the nation of

Israel. It will be a time of judgment not only on the earth, but there will also be a judgment in the air as well for then it will be that the Lord will judge His people. During this time, between the Rapture of the Church and Christ's Second Coming to rule on earth, there will be a time of preparation for the Bride in anticipation of the Wedding of the Lamb, and the return of the Bride with her Lord to the earth. Before this can take place, the Bride – (the Church, every born-again believer) – must be clean. The Lord will call the Church out of the world *before* the Tribulation Period, but many members of His Bride will not be ready. Their garments will be soiled and defiled and they will be caught unawares, and before the Lord does anything else, the Bride must be made ready. This is the function of the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is to this time that Paul refers when he warns the believer to be careful what manner of material he builds on the true foundation.

Two Classes of Christians

Scripture teaches that when Jesus returns for His Bride there will be two kinds of believers: *spiritual* and *carnal*. Both are saved, but there will be a tremendous difference in their rewards. While the faithful ones will receive eternal rewards at the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ, those who have been carelessly and have not lived their best for Christ – Scripture teaches that they will pass through the fires of the Judgment Seat, until all of their works that were nothing but wood, hay and stubble will be burned away, and all the dross consumed. What they counted on will go up in a puff of smoke! What little of gold, silver and precious stones that they have accumulated will be purified and separated from their combustible works. This will not be a happy experience. There will undoubtedly be much regret and sorrow, and Paul says that they *“will suffer loss; but they themselves will be saved; yet so as by fire.”* There will no doubt be a great deal of confessing at this time that should have been done down here on earth. Many tears will be shed as wasted opportunities and loss of rewards are realized. It is not in vain that the word, *“God will wipe away all tears from their eyes,”* does not take place until after the Judgment Seat of Christ and Christ's glorious reign.

Rewards and Promotions

These two classes of Christians – (the *“spiritual”* and the *“carnal”*) – who will be caught up in the Rapture are described by many figures in the Bible. We have seen them in 1 Corinthians 3 as those who will *“receive a reward,”* and those who will *“suffer loss.”* 1 John 2:28 tells us that some will have *“confidence”* while others will *“be ashamed”* at Christ's appearing. Some will have *“an abundant entrance,”* while others will be *“saved, yet so as by fire.”* In 2 Timothy 2 we are told:

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12).

The position of the believer in Christ's coming Kingdom will be determined on the basis of how much *“gold, silver and precious stones”* will be left after the fires of the Judgment Seat of Christ have burned away the wood, hay and stubble. When this judgment is over and the Lord has prepared His Bride – the Marriage Supper of the Lamb takes place – then the Lord will return with His Bride to set up His Kingdom –

every single saint will be clean, but they will not all have the same reward. Some will hold an exalted position in the Kingdom, and others will have a place of lesser authority and service. All of this is determined on the basis of what we have done for Christ during the brief period of our Christian life. How tremendously important becomes each day of opportunity and every privilege for service that we have here below! The opportunities for serving Him today that we have neglected, will take just that much from the rewards we will receive up there.

The Bride Is Ready!

Finally at the close of the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Bride has been made ready! She is now arrayed in the “*robe of Christ’s righteousness*,” received the moment of salvation – and the “*robe of rewards*,” that is briefly but dramatically described in Revelation 19, just before the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign:

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints”
(Revelation 19:7-8).

Notice exactly what John writes here, “*His wife hath made herself ready.*” She was not ready before, however, now, in Revelation 19 – seven years after the Rapture of the Church that takes place in the fourth chapter of Revelation. Revelation 4:1-2, the Church is caught away from the earth when Christ returns **FOR** His saints and never appears again in the book of Revelation until she is seen here in chapter 19 just before the glorious return of Christ, when He returns **WITH** His saints. In chapters 6 to 19, God’s judgments are described as being poured out upon the earth, while at the same time God is also judging the Bride in the air in preparation for the marriage Supper of the Lamb and Christ’s reign upon the earth. Now, after the cleansing is complete she appears “*clean and white.*” The clean white robe, we are told is her **righteousness**. The original word translated “*righteousness of the saints*” is really “*the righteous acts of the saints.*” Her robe consists of the material she herself has provided here upon the earth; and now, cleansed from all wood, hay, and stubble, she is to be arrayed for the wedding in the robe of her own making.

Let me ask you, “*What kind of a robe will you wear? Is your life a life of service and righteousness, or a life of selfishness and fleshliness? Are you seeking your own, or are you seeking the glory of God.*” What a disappointment it will be to stand before Christ, and to find that we have forfeited and bartered away the opportunity for a place of highest honor in His kingdom, for a few of the fleeting, evanescent, paltry pleasures of this temporary life. I don’t know whether we will sing the songs up there that we sing down here, but if we do. I imagine many members of the Bride will have to sing the song with sorrow and tears,

*“Oh, the years of sinning wasted;
Could I but recall them now.
I would bring them to my Master;
At His feet I’d humbly bow.”*

This truth of the Judgment Seat of Christ is a needed truth for these days in which we live. There has been a great deal of unbalanced preaching of grace, as though the very fact that we are not under Law, but entirely under grace, gives the Christian the right to live as he pleases. However, the Bible says that they is a payday coming. As a result the Church of Jesus Christ has lost her testimony and become a reproach before the world with her bickering, malice, and selfishness.

There is one more lesson I would like to drive home, and it is this. Yes, we are saved by grace, and grace alone, without the works of the Law – or the rules and regulations of man – however, every believer will have to give an account of what he has done with this grace. Scripture tells us that the believer must give account of *every* deed that he has committed and *every* word that he has spoken, from the day he was saved until the final day of his life here on earth. We will be called upon to give an account of what we have done with our time, our opportunities, and our talents. The Apostle Paul says, “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12). This is the responsibility of the believer. We have received salvation as the free gift of God, and now it is our responsibility as to what we do with that which we have received. Every man will be called to render an account of stewardship, those who have received one talent as well as those who have received ten; the servant whose pound grained ten ponds, as well as the one who hid his pound and came back before the Lord with nothing at all.

The following story illustrates this great truth.

A wealthy Christian woman had a poor gardener who worked for her for many years. She was selfish and worldly, while the gardener was faithful in his service. He lost no opportunity to witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, while the wealthy matron was riding in her luxurious limousine enjoying the selfish pleasures of her wealth and of her position. Then both the rich lady and her gardener died.

The poor man went home to glory just a little while before his employer. When she was ushered into Heaven and greeted, an angel came to her and said, “Now I will show you the home that has been prepared for you here. You are a child of God and of course you have a mansion in the sky.” So they walked along a beautiful avenue with resplendent buildings, and when she saw a particularly beautiful one she murmured to herself, “*That must be mine. I remember how I gave a thousand dollars to missions and another thousand to charity. Surely this must be my home.*” But the angel answered, “*No, that belongs to your rich woman.*”

The next beautiful building, to her surprise belonged to her gardener, and she became thrilled at the thought of what a magnificent home she would receive. She reasoned, “*If these poor, humble ones who had been able to do so little for the Lord were entitled to such magnificent mansions and dwelling places, what must her mansion be like?*”

They came to the end of the street and there stood a very small, unimpressive little cottage, scantily furnished and unattractive, and over the door was written her name. She couldn't believe her eyes, and shuddered and cried out, “*There must be some*

mistake. Surely this is not mine. How is it that I who have given so much in life would have so little compared with those who have done but a fraction of what I have done?"

The angel answered, *"It is not what, or how much you have done, but what you **might** have done, and did not do that determines your home up here. We build only with the material that is sent up from earth. That which is sent in the energy of the flesh and selfishness is rejected before it goes into the new home. The poor gardener did all that he could; hence, his great castle. And wile you did far more then he did as far as the mass is concerned – you did only a fraction of what you could and might have done."* The rewards are going to be on the percentage basis.

This is the principle of the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is not a matter of how much we have done for the Lord, but how much we could have done and left undone. Someone has aptly said, *"God never looks at the amount on the face of our check, but He looks at the balance on the stub."* It is not how much we have given but how much we have held back for ourselves. The greater our talents, the greater our responsibility; the greater our opportunities, the greater is our debt to the Lord.

It would be well to close with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 12:

"And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more"

(Luke 12:47-48).