

THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Life is a strange thing. It seems as though we can never get enough of it, and to make matters worse, it seems to travel at an ever-increasing rate of speed. When you are a child, life crawls along. By the time you are a young adult, the crawl has turned into a walk. When you get to be 40 or more, life begins to run, and it runs faster and faster. Someone has said, "Life passes like a flash of lightning whose blaze barely lasts long enough to see." It is very important that we keep before us the fact that the race we call life has an end. One day we are going to say our final goodbye and move into the next life. The question is, "are we ready for what comes next?" According to the bible, our lives are being observed by an all-knowing God who will hold us accountable for the things which we've done in this life at what is called the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Accountability is something that we should expect because we have lived with it all of our lives. Can you imagine what it would be like to live in a world where there was no accountability? Your children would do whatever they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it and without anyone to answer to. If they wanted to go to school, they would, and if they didn't, then they wouldn't. If they got bored, they may break into the neighbor's home and take what they wanted, and there would be no thought of answering to anyone for what they had done. Likewise, when you went to work, you would do whatever you wanted and so would all the other employees. We all know it doesn't work that way. Obviously, without accountability, the world would be an impossible place to live. If we expect to be accountable to other human beings, how much more should we expect to be accountable to the one who made us?

Alexander the Great, in pondering about life once said: "The one thing that I look at now and wonder about is this: that the things I should have paid most attention to, particularly the hereafter, I have ignored, and I was wrong."

Our average life span is 70 years, and then we are gone. Listen to this obituary:

- He brushed his teeth twice a day
- The doctors examined him twice a year
- He ate low-carb, low-fat every day
- He gave up his tonsils, his adenoids, his gall bladder ... and traded in a few worn-out glands
- He golfed ...but never more than 18 holes (moderation in all things)
- He got 8 hours of sleep every night
- He slept with the windows open to get plenty of fresh air
- He carried an umbrella in case of rain
- He didn't smoke, drink, or chew .. or run around with those who do
- He drove the speed limit
- He jogged and did weight training 5 days a week
- He was set to live to be a hundred years old. He is survived by
- 18 specialists, 3 surgeons, 4 health institutes, 6 gyms and numerous manufacturers of health foods and vitamins

So many people are like that man. They think about their health, they enjoy the pleasures of life, but they forget that they are not going to live forever. No matter how well we take care of ourselves, someday every one of us will die, and eternity is everlasting. It has no end. If that is true, wouldn't it make good sense to think about the hereafter?

UNDERSTANDING THE JUDGMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN

There are basically 3 judgments that we as Christians face.

1. Our past judgment as sinners

When someone comes into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ, that person's sins are immediately judged and paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

God's forgiveness can be illustrated by what happens when a computer screen goes blank; all that was on it is now gone. That's what God did with our sins when we came to know the Lord; they all went blank, and we will never face them again.

2. Our present judgment as children

Although our sins are paid for, God deals with us as our Father while we are on earth to lead us into the very best life possible for us.

Hebrews 12:5-7, "And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,

"My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. 6 For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child." 7 As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?

God says, "I love you, and I am going to be a good Father to you. I will discipline you when you do wrong."

3. Our future judgment at the judgment seat of Christ

The Judgment Seat of Christ is an event that takes place after the Lord comes back.

Paul told the Corinthian believers:

"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 Cor. 4:5)."

The word used for "judgment," in the "Judgment Seat" was a very familiar one in Paul's day. It was the word "bema." In the large Olympic arenas, there was an elevated seat on which the judge of the contest sat. After the contest was over, the successful athletes would come before the "Bema" to receive their rewards, or crowns. So, the "Bema" was not a judicial bench where someone was being condemned; it was a reward seat. The picture is of you standing before the Lord so that He can evaluate your life. It is as though you and the Lord walked together back through all the scenes of your life, and He pointed out to you the real nature of what you did, what you said, and why you did what you did.

There is no truth more clearly taught in God's word than the fact that we must answer to God.

Romans 14:10-12 says, "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So, then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

That Scripture is telling us that we will have to answer for the words, actions and attitudes that we have each day.

The nature of the judgment seat of Christ

1. The judgment seat is going to be a day of revelation.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "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."

He says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. To "appear" doesn't simply mean that we will be there. The Greek word means we will be led into the light. It means what we are will be revealed. So the judgment seat of Christ is a time of revelation. As hard as people may try, no human evaluation will ever be perfect. There are too many things about the person that we're evaluating that we don't know. There are too many circumstances that we don't understand. But when we stand before Jesus Christ, every mask, every pretense will be ripped from us, and we will be seen for exactly

what we have been. Everything that we have done for Christ or have failed to do for Christ will be revealed.

2. It is going to be a time of rewarding.

Notice what Paul says:

2 Cor 5:10, "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."

Paul said the purpose of the judgment seat is that you may receive according to what you have done in this life, whether it's good or bad. The word for "bad" doesn't mean sinful or evil. It refers to something that is trivial. In other words, some of us will fail to receive good rewards, not because we have done evil things, but because we have wasted our time on things that really didn't matter. That doesn't mean you have to be reading the bible or witnessing to someone all the time. Sometimes, one of the most profitable things you can do is to take a nap, to recharge your batteries so that you can continue serving God. The things that will go unrewarded are things that ultimately bring no glory to God.

Remember the story of Solomon. Solomon was on a pursuit to find meaning in life apart from God. He built a house for himself that took 13 years to build. It was bigger than a football field, more than four stories in height. He had 1400 chariots and 12 thousand horses. In addition, he had 700 hundred wives and three hundred concubines. After many years of self indulgence, Solomon only had one thing to say: "it is all meaningless." And that's what it will be at the judgment seat of Christ-meaningless.

In 1Corinthians 3, Paul illustrates the way we live our lives by two different kinds of building materials.

First Corinthians 3:12-15, "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Every day, all of us are building our lives with either permanent materials (gold, silver and costly stones), or are we are building our lives with temporary, perishable materials (wood, hay and straw). If the focus of your life is own serving Christ, and you seek to honor him with what you do, then you are building with permanent materials that will be rewarded. If you have spent your life doing things that are not for God's glory, then you have built with straw that will be burned up. According to these verses, some people go to heaven empty handed as someone who is just escaping through the flames. That's like

having your house catch on fire. You are able to barely escape, but everything you own is destroyed. You take nothing with you.

3. It will be a time of regret

1 John 2:28 says "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming."

How will it feel to know that you have had a lifetime of chances to serve and glorify God, but you traded those opportunities for things that really didn't matter?

Martha Snell Nicholson said:

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ
And He shows me His plan for me,
The plan of my life as it might have been
Had He had His way, and I see

How I blocked Him here, and I checked Him there,
And I would not yield my will-
Will there be grief in my Saviour's eyes,
Grief, though He loves me still?

He would have me rich, and I stand there poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
While memory runs like a hunted thing
Down the paths I cannot retrace.

Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break
With the tears that I cannot shed;
I shall cover my face with my empty hands,
I shall bow my uncrowned head...

Lord of the years that are left to me,
I give them to Thy hand;
Take me and break me, mould me to
The pattern Thou has planned

UNDERSTANDING OUR ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Our accountability is based on the "light" that has been given to us

The principle here is simple-God expects you to use what He has given to you. The more that He gives, the more you are responsible for. That's true in every area of life.

If I were a teacher in a school, I would not expect my students to be responsible for more than I had taught them, but I would expect them to be responsible for those things which I had labored to impart to them. In the same way, parents expect more from an 18 year old than they do from an 8 year old.

Matthew 11:20-24, "Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.""

Tyre and Sidon were guilty of unbelief and disobedience, and throughout Scripture Sodom and Gomorrah typify gross unGodliness and immorality. But according to Christ, none of these were as guilty as Capernaum or Bethsaida or Chorazin, because these three New Testament cities not only had the light of the Old Testament, but the very light of God's Messiah Himself. They had more light and were therefore responsible to live up to that light.

You are responsible to live up to what God has given you. That means you can never be satisfied with being today what you were supposed to be yesterday. You could live on a spiritual level this month that would have been very pleasing to the Lord 1 year ago and be displeasing to Him now. That's because He expects you to live today in light of what He has taught you over the last year. James says, "To him who knows to do good and does it not, it is sin."

2. Our accountability is based on the opportunities, which have been given to us

Joseph was a slave to the Egyptian man, Potipher.

Genesis 39:4 says, "Joseph found favor in his (Potipher's) eye and became his attendant (steward). Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned."

Just as Joseph was responsible for the opportunity given him to manage Potipher's possessions, God holds us responsible to manage our lives for Him. That's the principle of stewardship that we saw a few weeks ago. In biblical days, every household that could afford one had a steward who managed the food, the clothing, the money and the property that belonged to the master of the house. The Lord used this concept to illustrate our responsibility to Him. He has made us His stewards, and we are responsible to use the opportunities He gives us for Him. Those opportunities will probably not look easy. In fact, many times they will seem beyond your abilities. They also will not knock loudly. Many other things will knock loudly. The constant flow of unexpected difficulties in our lives seem like they're beating the door down. The desire for pleasure or fortune knock loudly, and we are urged by our society to give our lives to the obtaining of those things. But the opportunities that God gives you to bring glory to him can be missed very easily, and once they're gone, they're probably gone forever.

When I was six years old, I began my formal education at the local elementary school. From all that I can remember, I did very well. By the time I had arrived at middle school (seventh grade), I lost my motivation for schoolwork, and my grades reflected that lack of motivation. I found out some things during that period of time that illustrate life. First, I learned that when you are entering a new semester, it seems like you have a long time to go. Back in those days, six weeks seemed like forever, but it was not. The weeks passed by very quickly. I also found out that I could goof off and not do my work as I should, but every day brought me closer to that time of reckoning when the report cards were handed out. I always wished that somehow my parents would not realize what day it was, and I could just slip by without them ever seeing a report card. That never happened. As much as I didn't want to, I had to face my parents and suffer the consequences. When I think about it, life is just the same. When you start off as a young child, life seems to stretch out forever before you. And you have the choice just as I did as to how you're going to use those days. But sooner or later, you have to face the father with your grades. If you have been obedient and done well, you'll be rewarded. If you don't obey, you lose your reward, and you'll never be able to go back and do it over. Picture yourself standing before the judgment seat of Christ and think about all the things that you would wish at that time that you would have done while on earth. Then make it your goal to live that way so that you will be glad when the time comes.