

OUR APPROACHING EVALUATION

A STUDY OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

MARTIN PURYEAR

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*WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE FUTURE
WILL DETERMINE HOW WE LIVE IN THE PRESENT.*

*FOR WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF GOD ... THEN
EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD.*

– ROMANS 14:10, 12

OUR APPROACHING EVALUATION***A SNAPSHOT OF THE COURSE***

The Leaning Bale of Hay	6 - 8
Who Will Stand Before this Judge?	9 - 12
Who Is the Judge?	13 - 14
When / Where Is This Judgment?	15 - 20
What Is Not the Issue at this Judgment	21 - 23
What Is the Issue at this Judgment	24 - 27
The Character of Our Choices	28 - 30
The Apple Farmer's Steward	31 - 33
Our Stewardship of God's Properties	34 - 43
The Temporary Rewards We Will Joyfully Surrender	44 - 56
Casting Our Crowns before the Throne of God	57 - 58
The Everlasting Rewards We Will Gratefully Keep	59 - 65
The Loss of a Reward	66 - 73
A Final Appeal	74 - 75
Appendix A: The Judgment Seat	76
Appendix B: Discussion Questions	77 – 89
Appendix C: God's Prophetic Plan	90

THE LEANING BALE OF HAY

When I was in the 7th grade, my family lived on 11 acres of land with a large creek as one of its boundaries. My father used this property to graze his small herds of Black Angus cattle and Shetland ponies. My mother used this property to grow her vegetable garden. And I used this property to have a whole lot of fun, usually down by the creek with my dog, sleeping bag and fishing gear. But another way I had fun there was with my bow and a quiver full of target arrows. To feed our livestock during the winter months, my father kept our barn loft stocked with bales of hay. I would roll out a bale from the loft and, propping it upright on one of its ends, use it as an archery target.

One day I propped a hay bale upright, walked away about 20 yards, turned around, fitted my arrow, aimed ... and then stopped. The bale was leaning slightly forward. Thinking that I could straighten it up by shooting the arrow into the top of the bale, I let it fly. But instead of straightening it, the arrow caused the bale to lean just a little more forward. "I didn't hit it hard enough," I thought. So, I shot again. But that only caused it to lean a little bit *more* forward. With exceptional smart, I kept shooting my arrows – one by one – into that bale of hay, trying to knock the top of it backwards. But with each one, all I did was cause it to lean more *forward*.

Even today in my mind's eye, I can still see what happened with arrow # 19. As it thudded into its target, the bale of hay fell forward into a cloud of dust, its full weight cracking and splintering and breaking every one of my arrows. All nineteen of them were ruined!

Tell me, how is it that a somewhat sane 12-year-old could not realize that all those good arrows were going to be shattered while trying to prop up a lost cause! Was it not obvious that the bale would fall forward? Did I not have enough foresight to see that it was only a matter of time before this tottering target would come crashing down? Why did I fail to see the inevitable?

You know, it is possible for us, as believers, to do that same thing ... to "shoot our arrows into a leaning bale of hay." We can be so distracted toward promoting our own *earth-bound* self-interests that we end up investing the bulk of our priceless time ... and strength ... and resources ... and opportunities ... and abilities in something that will one day pass away.

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD NOR THE THINGS IN THE WORLD ... THE WORLD IS PASSING AWAY. (1ST JOHN 2:15-17)

Do you believe that? Do you believe that

THE HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY WITH A ROAR AND THE ELEMENTS WILL BE DESTROYED WITH INTENSE HEAT, AND THE EARTH AND ITS WORKS WILL BE BURNED UP. SINCE ALL THESE THINGS ARE TO BE DESTROYED IN THIS WAY, WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE OUGHT YOU TO BE IN HOLY CONDUCT AND GODLINESS, LOOKING FOR AND HASTENING THE COMING OF THE DAY OF GOD, BECAUSE OF WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL BE DESTROYED BY BURNING, AND THE ELEMENTS WILL MELT WITH INTENSE HEAT! BUT ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE WE ARE LOOKING FOR NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, IN WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS. THEREFORE, BELOVED,

*SINCE YOU LOOK FOR THESE THINGS, BE DILIGENT TO BE FOUND BY HIM IN PEACE, SPOTLESS AND BLAMELESS.
(2ND PETER 3:10-14)*

We, the children of light, are not in the dark. We have been told what is coming. We do not know the *when*, but we do know the *what*. We know from God's Word that "the earth and its works" will one day be destroyed.

THIS "BALE OF HAY" IS GOING TO COME CRASHING DOWN.

Furthermore, according to the Word of God, we will one day be examined by One Who fully knows all the details of our lives. One sitting on heaven's throne ... lofty and exalted ... the train of His robe filling the temple (Isaiah 6:1). One Whose head and hair are white ... like white wool ... like snow ... Whose eyes are like a flame of fire ... Whose face is like the sun shining in its strength ... and Whose voice is like the sound of many waters (Revelation 1:14-16).

*I, THE LORD, SEARCH THE HEART; I TEST THE MIND, EVEN TO GIVE TO EACH MAN ACCORDING TO HIS WAYS,
ACCORDING TO THE RESULTS OF HIS DEEDS. (JEREMIAH 17:10)*

God's Word tells us that every true believer has a scheduled appointment with God. And dear friends, once we have been ushered into His Presence,

YOU AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE THE FRANKEST DISCUSSION OF OUR LIVES

*FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL
GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." SO THEN, EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD.
(ROMANS 14:11-12)*

Every reborn follower of the Lord Jesus Christ faces this time of accounting. It is an unbreakable appointment. And it approaches like the wind. We would, therefore, do well to prepare ourselves for this divine examination. That is the purpose of this course, "Our Approaching Evaluation: a Study of the Judgment Seat of Christ."

The *goals* of this study are for each of us

to be sobered by the *certainty* of this scheduled, face-to-Face appraisal by our all-knowing Master,

to become aware that we – who are saved by grace – will be judged according to the *quality* and *motive* of our works, and

to realize that this evaluation of our lives will result in varying degrees of rewards and losses.

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been given the “heads up” as to what is in front of us; and we should not ignore it. Knowing that our approaching evaluation is certain, let us not squander our God-entrusted resources for the fool’s gold this tottering world dangles in front of us, a world that is scheduled to burn like a match. Let us cultivate an eternal perspective. Let us give ourselves to the King of kings. Otherwise, we will spend our entire life shooting our arrows into a leaning bale of hay.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED UP WITH CHRIST, KEEP SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS, SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD. SET YOUR MIND ON THE THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON THE THINGS THAT ARE ON EARTH. FOR YOU HAVE DIED AND YOUR LIFE IS HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD. (COLOSSIANS 3:1-3)

WHO WILL STAND BEFORE THIS JUDGE?

WILL BELIEVERS ACTUALLY STAND BEFORE GOD IN JUDGMENT?

The Apostle Paul had a good bit to say about the Judgment Seat of Christ. He writes,

*FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, SO THAT EACH ONE MAY BE RECOMPENSED FOR HIS DEEDS IN THE BODY, ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE, WHETHER GOOD OR BAD.
(2ND CORINTHIANS 5:10)*

Let's begin our study by identifying the recipients of this evaluation. Who is this "we" that will be examined by Christ at this judgment?

Does it refer to all humanity, both believers and unbelievers?

And will this be a judgment of individuals or of a group?

When the Apostle Paul wrote,

"WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST"

he included himself – a believer – in this judgment. This apostle faces a divine *judgment*! Since that is so, would that not mean that *all believers* face this divine evaluation? To answer this question, let's consider Paul's greeting at the beginning of this letter to the Corinthians:

PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS BY THE WILL OF GOD, AND TIMOTHY OUR BROTHER, TO THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH IS AT CORINTH WITH ALL THE SAINTS WHO ARE THROUGHOUT ACHAIA (2ND CORINTHIANS 1:1)

This verse identifies the "we" of 2nd Corinthians 5:10 to be "Paul ... Timothy ... the Church of God which is at Corinth ... and all the saints who are throughout Achaia." So, according to this letter's introduction, those who appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ are Christ-followers.

That believers will be examined in this judgment is further supported by Paul's letter to the Romans:

WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF GOD. (ROMANS 14:10)

The greeting of his letter to the Romans reads

PAUL, A BOND-SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS, CALLED AS AN APOSTLE, SET APART FOR THE GOSPEL OF GOD ... (AND) TO ALL WHO ARE BELOVED OF GOD IN ROME, CALLED AS SAINTS. (ROMANS 1:1, 7)

Here, the "we" of Romans 14:10 refers to "Paul ... (and) all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints." Once again, those who stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ are believers.

But what about unbelievers? Will they also bow before Christ at *this* judgment?

UNBELIEVERS WILL NOT BE EXAMINED AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

According to 1st Corinthians chapter 3 and 2nd Corinthians chapter 5, the Judgment Seat of Christ is reserved for believers only.

Unbelievers Cannot “Build” upon a Foundation that Has Not Been Laid

According to 1st Corinthians 3, those who are summoned to this examination are those whose “works” were built upon a certain “Foundation.”

FOR NO MAN CAN LAY A FOUNDATION OTHER THAN THE ONE WHICH IS LAID, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST. NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN'S WORK. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:11-13)

Here, we are introduced to the purpose of this judgment. It is an appraisal of the “materials” an individual used to build upon a certain Foundation.

The Foundation, we are told, is Jesus Christ.

The materials used to build upon this Foundation (gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw) refer to “*the quality of each man's work.*”

Those who will appear before Christ at this judgment have an established relationship with the Savior (through faith in His work on the Cross). Indeed, that relationship with Him is what qualifies them to be there. The conversation they will have with their Master, therefore, will not concern whether this Foundation exists or not (because it does).

Therefore, this judgment does not apply to unbelievers. The unsaved cannot build upon a “Foundation” that has not been laid in their lives.

Unbelievers Cannot Make Certain Claims that Only Believers Can Make

Furthermore, this judgment is reserved only for those who can make certain claims. In 2nd Corinthians 5 Paul describes the physical body a believer will be given to live in the realm of glory:

FOR WE KNOW THAT IF THE EARTHLY TENT WHICH IS OUR HOUSE IS TORN DOWN, WE HAVE A BUILDING FROM GOD, A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH HANDS, ETERNAL IN THE HEAVENS. FOR INDEED IN THIS HOUSE WE

GROAN, LONGING TO BE CLOTHED WITH OUR DWELLING FROM HEAVEN, INASMUCH AS WE, HAVING PUT IT ON, WILL NOT BE FOUND NAKED. FOR INDEED WHILE WE ARE IN THIS TENT, WE GROAN, BEING BURDENED, BECAUSE WE DO NOT WANT TO BE UNCLOTHED BUT TO BE CLOTHED, SO THAT WHAT IS MORTAL WILL BE SWALLOWED UP BY LIFE. NOW HE WHO PREPARED US FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE IS GOD, WHO GAVE TO US THE SPIRIT AS A PLEDGE. THEREFORE, BEING ALWAYS OF GOOD COURAGE, AND KNOWING THAT WHILE WE ARE AT HOME IN THE BODY WE ARE ABSENT FROM THE LORD — FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT — WE ARE OF GOOD COURAGE, I SAY, AND PREFER RATHER TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND TO BE AT HOME WITH THE LORD. THEREFORE, WE ALSO HAVE AS OUR AMBITION, WHETHER AT HOME OR ABSENT, TO BE PLEASING TO HIM. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:1-9)

He then concludes with the reason our life's ambition ought to be "pleasing to Him":

FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, SO THAT EACH ONE MAY BE RECOMPENSED FOR HIS DEEDS IN THE BODY, ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE, WHETHER GOOD OR BAD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:10)

We should take note that the first word of verse 10 ("For") places this verse in the context of the preceding verses. That is, the Judgment Seat of Christ is connected to those being described in verses 1-9. (The "we" of verse 10 refers to the same people as the "we" in verses 1-9.)

Notice that those who "appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ"

- are promised "a building from God ... not made with hands ... eternal in the heavens." (vs. 1)
- will experience their mortality being "swallowed up by life." (vs. 4)
- have been given "the (Holy) Spirit as a pledge. (vs. 5)
- are those who "walk by faith, not by sight. (vs. 7)
- and will be "at home with the Lord" once they are "absent from the body." (vs. 8)

An unbeliever cannot make any of these claims. These are declarations of a believer and only a believer. Therefore, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not for all humanity. It is an evaluation reserved only for believers.

WILL THIS BE A JUDGMENT OF INDIVIDUALS OR A GROUP?

FOR WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF GOD. FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." SO, THEN EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD. (ROMANS 14:10-12)

According to Romans 14, the Judgment Seat of Christ will not be an evaluation of the Church *as a whole*. The issue will not be whether the Body of Christ, throughout her history, was mature or immature, obedient or disobedient, effective or ineffective. Nor will this be an evaluation of any *group* of believers. No rewards will be given to a local church for its spiritual condition. Nor will rewards be given to a *team* of believers that had worked together in a ministry. God's people are not going to be judged en masse.

Rather, this judgment will be a one-on-One appraisal of individual Christians. Each of us will bow before our Master ... one at a time. And there "*each one of us* will give an account of *himself* to God."

*NOW HE WHO PLANTS AND HE WHO WATERS ARE ONE; BUT EACH WILL RECEIVE HIS OWN REWARD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN LABOR. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:8)*¹

CONCLUSION

Only believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. No unbelievers will be there. Furthermore, this will be an appraisal of individual believers. The Church will not stand together before Christ Jesus at this evaluation.

If you are born again through faith in Christ Jesus, you can be *certain* of this one thing: the Judgment Seat of Christ is in your future. May all of us be challenged to live every day we are given in such a way that when we bow before our Master, we will hear His words of praise:

WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT ... ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER. (MATTHEW 25:21)

¹ **Promise:** "*each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*" Even though two (or more) believers often minister as a team (that is, they "are one"), Christ will not reward them *as a team*. He will reward each team member *individually* for the quality of his own service and his own devotion to Christ. Within any given team, there may be differing levels of quality, motivation, and devotion.

WHO IS THE JUDGE?

According to the New Testament God *the Father* will not judge anyone directly. Instead, He has turned the judgment of all mankind over to His Son. Jesus Christ will serve as the Father's Agent in judgment.

GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN THROUGH CHRIST JESUS. (ROMANS 2:16)

I SOLEMNLY CHARGE YOU IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND OF CHRIST JESUS, WHO IS TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD (2ND TIMOTHY 4:1)

The believer's life will not be evaluated by a panel of judges. Nor will there be a jury to deliberate the case. This judgment is reserved for the Lord Jesus Christ and for Him alone.

FOR NOT EVEN THE FATHER JUDGES ANYONE, BUT HE HAS GIVEN ALL JUDGMENT TO THE SON (JOHN 5:22)

WHY THE JUDGMENT OF JESUS CHRIST IS RELIABLE

Can the believer expect a fair and just assessment of his life? Let's carefully observe what the judgment seat is called:

*FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF **CHRIST**, SO THAT EACH ONE MAY BE RECOMPENSED FOR HIS DEEDS IN THE BODY, ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE, WHETHER GOOD OR BAD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:10)*

*FOR WE WILL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF **GOD** ... SO THEN EACH ONE OF US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF TO GOD. (ROMANS 14:10, 12)*

When comparing these two descriptions of the judgment seat, it is clear: to be judged by Jesus Christ is to be judged by God. And because He is God, He will have no need for anyone to take the witness stand to inform Him of the facts. As an ever-present, all-knowing Eyewitness of our lives, He will already know "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" about each person that bows before Him. His evaluation will be 100% accurate.

I, THE LORD, SEARCH THE HEART; I TEST THE MIND, EVEN TO GIVE TO EACH MAN ACCORDING TO HIS WAYS, ACCORDING TO THE RESULTS OF HIS DEEDS. (JEREMIAH 17:10)

"God knows those innermost thoughts and motives that an individual might hide from all others. Therefore, God could justly render to each person what his deeds deserve." (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 1, Old Testament, Jeremiah, Charles H. Dyer, page 1151)

On the other hand, the believer should not attempt to judge *his own* quality and motives of service. Being limited in knowledge, his self-assessment would be inaccurate.

*BUT TO ME IT IS A VERY SMALL THING THAT I MAY BE EXAMINED BY YOU (THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH), OR BY ANY HUMAN COURT; IN FACT, I DO NOT EVEN EXAMINE MYSELF. FOR I AM CONSCIOUS OF NOTHING AGAINST MYSELF, YET I AM NOT BY THIS ACQUITTED; BUT THE ONE WHO EXAMINES ME IS THE LORD. THEREFORE, DO NOT GO ON PASSING JUDGMENT BEFORE THE TIME, BUT WAIT UNTIL THE LORD COMES WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS HIDDEN IN THE DARKNESS AND DISCLOSE THE MOTIVES OF MEN'S HEARTS; AND THEN EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:3-5, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*²

“From a human point of view (Paul) was not competent to judge even his own motives, much less the quality of his service ... Therefore, premature judgment, whether it led to the exaltation of some ministers (3:21) or to the humiliation of others (4:10), was wrong. Only at the *divine* bar would all the facts be known and, even there, grace will be displayed – each faithful minister will receive ... praise.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 2, New Testament, 1st Corinthians, David K. Lowery, page 512)

² “will bring to light ... and disclose.” Christ can judge believers’ motives with a just and thorough scrutiny because of His penetrating omniscience.

*THEN I TURNED TO SEE THE VOICE THAT WAS SPEAKING WITH ME. AND HAVING TURNED I SAW ... ONE LIKE A SON OF MAN, CLOTHED IN A ROBE REACHING TO THE FEET, AND GIRDED ACROSS HIS CHEST WITH A GOLDEN SASH. HIS HEAD AND HIS HAIR WERE WHITE LIKE WHITE WOOL, LIKE SNOW; AND **HIS EYES WERE LIKE A FLAME OF FIRE** ... AND HE PLACED HIS RIGHT HAND ON ME, SAYING, “DO NOT BE AFRAID; I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST, AND THE LIVING ONE; AND I WAS DEAD, AND BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOREVERMORE (REVELATION 1:12-18)*

*FOR NO MAN CAN LAY A FOUNDATION OTHER THAN THE ONE WHICH IS LAID, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST. NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE **IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN'S WORK.** (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:11-13)*

“the things hidden in darkness.” The focus of Christ’s careful examination is not only on the believer’s outward actions (his “works”) but also on his inward devotion, revealed by the *motives, thoughts, and attitudes* behind his actions.

“then each man’s praise will come to him.” Having evaluated the quality of a laborer’s outer service and inner devotion, Christ will make known His findings to the one under investigation, praising each of His servants for his faithful stewardship.

WHEN IS THIS JUDGMENT?

We have identified those who will be examined at the Judgment Seat of God as being reborn followers of Christ. We have also identified the Judge before Whom they will stand as being the Son of God. The question now before us is the time of this evaluation. *When* will the Judgment Seat of Christ take place? To help us answer this question, we first need to become oriented to two future events in God's prophetic program: the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ.

There are several passages in the New Testament that describe "the Return of Christ." Unfortunately, many believers have mistakenly assumed that all these verses refer to the same event. But upon careful examination, there are several differences within these passages that lead one to conclude that two events, not one, are being presented.³

The first event is known as *the Rapture of the Church*. This event focuses on *believers*, those who willingly submitted their lives to the authority of Christ Jesus. At the Rapture *the true and living Church* will be removed from a world that is about to fall under the full wrath of God. The purpose of the Rapture is that of *deliverance*.

The second event is known as *the Second Coming of Christ*. This event focuses on *unbelievers*, those who defiantly rejected the authority of Christ Jesus. At the Second Coming *all rebels – both human and angelic –* will be removed from the earth in anticipation of the establishment of Christ's righteous Kingdom. The purpose of the Second Coming of Christ is that of *judgment and subjection*.

Let's consider the differences between these two events in more detail.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH AND THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The Location of Christ in Relation to the Earth

When the Rapture takes place, the Lord Jesus does **not** come down to earth for His Bride. Instead, the Church goes up to meet Him in the air. She physically rises from off the earth into the clouds.

³ See Appendix C, "God's Prophetic Plan," (2) "Church Removed" and (8) "Christ Returns," page 90.

FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, WITH THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL AND WITH THE TRUMPET OF GOD, AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, AND SO WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD. (1ST THESSALONIANS 4:16-17)

AT THE RAPTURE CHRIST DOES **NOT** COME DOWN TO EARTH.

On the other hand, the Second Coming of Christ describes the Lord as descending all the way to the earth, "His feet (standing) on the Mount of Olives."

I WILL GATHER ALL THE NATIONS AGAINST JERUSALEM TO BATTLE ... THEN THE LORD WILL GO FORTH AND FIGHT AGAINST THOSE NATIONS, AS WHEN HE FIGHTS ON A DAY OF BATTLE. IN THAT DAY HIS FEET WILL STAND ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. (ZECHARIAH 14:2-4)

AT THE SECOND COMING, CHRIST **DOES** COME DOWN TO EARTH.

The Location of the Church in Relation to Christ

When the Rapture takes place, the Church is portrayed as being on the earth *waiting for Him to come for them*.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY DWELLING PLACES; IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU; FOR I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF, THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO. (JOHN 14:2-3)

FOR OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN, FROM WHICH ALSO WE EAGERLY WAIT FOR A SAVIOR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. (PHILIPPIANS 3:20)

AT THE RAPTURE THE CHURCH IS **NOT WITH CHRIST** WHEN HE APPEARS.

THEY GO UP TO *MEET HIM* IN THE CLOUDS.

But when the Second Coming takes place, the Church is portrayed as *already being with Christ*. In fact, we are told that, when He returns to earth, His saints ("holy ones") will come with Him.

WHEN CHRIST, WHO IS OUR LIFE, IS REVEALED, THEN YOU ALSO WILL BE REVEALED WITH HIM IN GLORY. (COLOSSIANS 3:4)

THEN THE LORD WILL GO FORTH AND FIGHT AGAINST THOSE NATIONS, AS WHEN HE FIGHTS ON A DAY OF BATTLE. IN THAT DAY HIS FEET WILL STAND ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES ... THEN THE LORD, MY GOD, WILL COME, AND ALL THE HOLY ONES WITH HIM! (ZECHARIAH 14:3-5)

LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD AND GIVE THE GLORY TO HIM, FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB HAS COME AND HIS BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY. IT WAS GIVEN TO HER TO CLOTHE HERSELF IN FINE LINEN, BRIGHT AND CLEAN; FOR THE FINE LINEN IS THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE SAINTS ... AND I SAW HEAVEN OPENED, AND BEHOLD, A WHITE HORSE, AND HE WHO SAT ON IT IS CALLED FAITHFUL AND TRUE ... AND THE ARMIES WHICH ARE IN HEAVEN, CLOTHED IN FINE LINEN, WHITE AND CLEAN, WERE FOLLOWING HIM ON WHITE HORSES. (REVELATION 19:7-8, 11, 14)

AT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH IS **ALREADY WITH CHRIST** WHEN HE APPEARS.
THEY COME DOWN TO EARTH *WITH HIM*.

The Purposes

The Rapture of the Church has a different purpose than that of the Second Coming of Christ. Its purpose is *to deliver God's people from God's wrath*.

The Rapture focuses on those who willingly submitted their lives to the authority of Christ Jesus, the true and living Church. As with Noah and his family (and, on a smaller scale, Lot and his family), the Son of God will deliver the righteous from the divine wrath of the Father that is soon to encompass the entire world (during a period of great tribulation).

(DELIVERANCE) *YOU TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS TO SERVE A LIVING AND TRUE GOD, AND TO WAIT FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN, WHOM HE RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THAT IS JESUS, WHO RESCUES US FROM THE WRATH TO COME. (1ST THESSALONIANS 1:9-10)*

(DELIVERANCE) *BECAUSE YOU HAVE KEPT THE WORD OF MY PERSEVERANCE, I ALSO WILL KEEP YOU FROM THE HOUR OF TESTING, THAT HOUR WHICH IS ABOUT TO COME UPON THE WHOLE WORLD, TO TEST THOSE WHO DWELL ON THE EARTH. (REVELATION 3:10)*

THE PURPOSE OF THE RAPTURE IS ONE OF **DELIVERANCE**.

The purpose of the Second Coming is different. It focuses on those who rebelled against the authority of Christ Jesus. As with the world in Noah's day (and, on a smaller scale, Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot's day), the Son of God will return to earth *to destroy the unrighteous* (expelling them from His presence) and *to subject both the nations and creation to the authority of the Father*.

(JUDGMENT) *... THE LORD JESUS WILL BE REVEALED FROM HEAVEN WITH HIS MIGHTY ANGELS IN FLAMING FIRE, DEALING OUT RETRIBUTION TO THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD AND TO THOSE WHO DO NOT OBEY THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS. THESE WILL PAY THE PENALTY OF ETERNAL DESTRUCTION, AWAY FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD AND FROM THE GLORY OF HIS POWER, WHEN HE COMES TO BE GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS ON THAT DAY, AND TO BE MARVELED AT AMONG ALL WHO HAVE BELIEVED — FOR OUR TESTIMONY TO YOU WAS BELIEVED. (2ND THESSALONIANS 1:7-10)*

(JUDGMENT AND SUBJECTION) AND I SAW HEAVEN OPENED, AND BEHOLD, A WHITE HORSE, AND HE WHO SAT ON IT IS CALLED FAITHFUL AND TRUE, AND IN RIGHTEOUSNESS HE JUDGES AND WAGES WAR ... FROM HIS MOUTH COMES A SHARP SWORD, SO THAT WITH IT HE MAY STRIKE DOWN THE NATIONS, AND HE WILL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; AND HE TREADS THE WINE PRESS OF THE FIERCE WRATH OF GOD, THE ALMIGHTY. (REVELATION 19:11, 15)

(SUBJECTION) AND THE LORD WILL BE KING OVER ALL THE EARTH; IN THAT DAY THE LORD WILL BE THE ONLY ONE, AND HIS NAME THE ONLY ONE. (ZECHARIAH 14:9)

(SUBJECTION) BUT NOW CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRST FRUITS OF THOSE WHO ARE ASLEEP. FOR SINCE BY A MAN CAME DEATH, BY A MAN ALSO CAME THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, SO ALSO IN CHRIST ALL WILL BE MADE ALIVE. BUT EACH IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST THE FIRST FRUITS, AFTER THAT THOSE WHO ARE CHRIST'S AT HIS COMING, THEN COMES THE END, WHEN HE (GOD THE SON) HANDS OVER THE KINGDOM TO THE GOD AND FATHER, WHEN HE (GOD THE FATHER) HAS ABOLISHED ALL RULE AND ALL AUTHORITY AND POWER. FOR HE (THE SON) MUST REIGN UNTIL HE (THE FATHER) HAS PUT ALL HIS (THE FATHER'S) ENEMIES UNDER HIS (THE SON'S) FEET. THE LAST ENEMY THAT WILL BE ABOLISHED IS DEATH. FOR HE (THE FATHER) HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS (THE SON'S) FEET. BUT WHEN HE SAYS, "ALL THINGS ARE PUT IN SUBJECTION," IT IS EVIDENT THAT HE (THE FATHER) IS EXCEPTED WHO PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION TO HIM (THE SON). WHEN ALL THINGS ARE SUBJECTED TO HIM (THE SON), THEN THE SON HIMSELF ALSO WILL BE SUBJECTED TO THE ONE (THE FATHER) WHO SUBJECTED ALL THINGS TO HIM (THE SON), SO THAT GOD MAY BE ALL IN ALL. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:20-28, PARENTHESES ADDED)

THE PURPOSE OF THE SECOND COMING IS ONE OF **JUDGMENT** AND **SUBJECTION**.

Comparing the Rapture of the Church with the Second Coming of Christ, we have seen that

the locations of Christ relative to the earth are different,

the locations of the Church relative to Christ are different,

and the purposes of these two events are different.

It is, therefore, believed that the Rapture and the Second Coming are two distinct events.

With this in mind, we are now ready to answer the question, "When will the Judgment Seat of Christ take place?"

***THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IS
SOMETIME AFTER THE CHURCH IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH ⁴***

In Luke 14 we find Jesus at a dinner party in one of the Pharisees' houses. While there, He used the occasion to impress upon these religious leaders their (apparent) need for humility. In the process He spoke these words to His host:

WHEN YOU GIVE A LUNCHEON OR A DINNER, DO NOT INVITE YOUR FRIENDS OR YOUR BROTHERS OR YOUR RELATIVES OR RICH NEIGHBORS, OTHERWISE THEY MAY ALSO INVITE YOU IN RETURN AND THAT WILL BE YOUR REPAYMENT. BUT WHEN YOU GIVE A RECEPTION, INVITE THE POOR, THE CRIPPLED, THE LAME, THE BLIND, AND YOU WILL BE BLESSED, SINCE THEY DO NOT HAVE THE MEANS TO REPAY YOU (LUKE 14:12-14)

And then He gave them an incentive for doing so.

FOR YOU WILL BE REPAID AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS. (LUKE 14:14)

From this passage we see that the distribution of rewards is to take place at the time the saints are bodily resurrected.

Since deceased Church-Age saints will be raised from the dead at the Rapture (1st Thessalonians 4:16-17) and since believers will be "repaid (rewarded) at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:13-14),

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST MUST TAKE PLACE
SOMETIME **AFTER** THE CHURCH IS RESURRECTED (AT THE RAPTURE)

"Though not specifically stated, this judgment will apparently take place immediately after the Rapture of the church, since the twenty-four elders, who likely represent believers, have their crowns in the scene in heaven at the beginning of the Tribulation." (Basic Theology, Charles C. Ryrie, Moody Press, page 597)

It is, therefore, not correct to say that when a believer dies, "He has gone to his reward." The believer does not receive his reward at death. He will be repaid sometime after his bodily resurrection when the Lord returns to receive His Church.

"Those who have fallen asleep in Jesus are now in His personal presence, but they still look forward to the day of reckoning and recompense." (Lectures in Systematic Theology, Henry Clarence Thiessen, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, page 353)

⁴ See Appendix C, "God's Prophetic Plan," (2) "Church Removed," page 90.

**THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IS
SOMETIME BEFORE THE CHURCH RETURNS TO EARTH WITH CHRIST ⁵**

When the Lord returns in glory for the entire world to see, the Church will be coming with Him. And when we come, we are portrayed as having already been rewarded.

LET US REJOICE AND BE GLAD AND GIVE THE GLORY TO HIM, FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB HAS COME AND HIS BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY. IT WAS GIVEN TO HER TO CLOTHE HERSELF IN FINE LINEN, BRIGHT AND CLEAN; FOR THE FINE LINEN IS THE RIGHTEOUS ACTS OF THE SAINTS ... AND I SAW HEAVEN OPENED, AND BEHOLD, A WHITE HORSE, AND HE WHO SAT ON IT IS CALLED FAITHFUL AND TRUE, AND IN RIGHTEOUSNESS HE JUDGES AND WAGES WAR ... AND THE ARMIES WHICH ARE IN HEAVEN, CLOTHED IN FINE LINEN, WHITE AND CLEAN, WERE FOLLOWING HIM ON WHITE HORSES. (REVELATION 19:7-8, 11, 14)

Notice from the above passage that the Church is described as clothed “in fine linen, bright and clean.” These linen garments are described as being “*the righteous acts of the saints*.” This does not refer to “the righteousness of God” every believer receives upon conversion (Philippians 3:9). These are the good works “of” (performed by) the saints for which they have been rewarded. They are, as Charles Ryrie puts it, “the righteous deeds that have survived the examination of this judgment.” (*Basic Theology*, Charles C. Ryrie, Moody Press, page 597)

THEREFORE, THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST MUST TAKE PLACE
SOMETIME **BETWEEN** THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH AND THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

WHERE IS THIS JUDGMENT?

Although not stated directly, the Lord’s examination of each believer’s life will likely take place in the sphere of the heavenly realms to which the Church has just ascended at the Rapture.

⁵ See Appendix C, “God’s Prophetic Plan,” (8) “Christ Returns,” page 90.

WHAT IS NOT THE ISSUE AT THIS JUDGMENT

FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, SO THAT EACH ONE MAY BE RECOMPENSED FOR HIS DEEDS IN THE BODY, ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE, WHETHER GOOD OR BAD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:10)

Once the believer realizes that his life will be examined by the Lord Jesus, he may – very naturally – wonder

WHAT IS THIS ALL ABOUT? WHY DO MY “BAD” DEEDS NEED TO BE REVIEWED? I THOUGHT ALL MY SINS HAVE BEEN FULLY AND FOREVER WASHED AWAY!

The thought of a believer having to give an account of every single one of his sins is highly disturbing, to say the least. It is also incorrect. That view contradicts what God *promised* regarding the sins of His people:

AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST, SO FAR HAS HE REMOVED OUR TRANSGRESSIONS FROM US. (PSALM 103:12)

HE WILL AGAIN HAVE COMPASSION ON US; HE WILL TREAD OUR INIQUITIES UNDER FOOT. YES, YOU WILL CAST ALL THEIR SINS INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE SEA. (MICAH 7:19)

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT. (ROMANS 4:7-8)

AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE. (HEBREWS 10:17)

So, before we consider what the subject of conversation *will* be at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we need to clearly understand what it will *not* be.

According to the Apostle John’s eyewitness account, Jesus concluded His work of atonement with this declaration: “It is finished” (John 19:30). The Greek word John used in recording this declaration of victory was “Tetelestai,” a word that carries the meaning, “Paid in full.” That is,

THE BELIEVER’S DEBT OF DEATH HAS BEEN FULLY PAID OFF THROUGH THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

Because Christ was punished for the sins of the world, those who accept His payment of death on their behalf are delivered from the wrath of God.

THEREFORE, THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION (NO PUNISHMENT) FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS. (ROMANS 8:1, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, HE WHO HEARS MY WORD, AND BELIEVES HIM WHO SENT ME, HAS ETERNAL LIFE, AND DOES NOT COME INTO JUDGMENT, BUT HAS PASSED OUT OF DEATH INTO LIFE. (JOHN 5:24)

Indeed, the believer is guaranteed – by the One Who cannot lie – that he will be found “blameless” upon Christ’s Return.

... OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ... WILL ALSO CONFIRM YOU TO THE END, BLAMELESS IN THE DAY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (1ST CORINTHIANS 1:7-8)

So, let us be fully convinced of this one thing: The sins of every believer have been washed away by the blood of his Savior. He has been fully cleansed and forever forgiven of his moral crimes against God.

AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, THE BELIEVER’S **SINS** WILL **NOT** BE THE ISSUE.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT. (ROMANS 4:7-8)

“It is to be observed carefully that the issue here is not to determine whether the one judged is a believer or not. The question of salvation is not being considered. The salvation given the believer in Christ has perfectly delivered him from all judgment. To bring the believer into judgment concerning the sin question, whether

his sins before his new birth,
his sins since his new birth,
or even his unconfessed sins since the new birth,

is to deny the (worth, value) of the death of Christ and nullify the promise of God that ‘their sins and iniquities will I remember no more’ (Heb. 10:17).” (*Things to Come*, Zondervan Publishing House, J. Dwight Pentecost, page 222, parenthesis added)

“My sin – O, the bliss of this glorious thought –
my sin, not in part but the whole,
is nailed to the Cross and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!”

“It Is Well with My Soul”
Horatio G. Spafford

WHAT ABOUT YOU? HAVE YOU SETTLED THIS ISSUE WITH GOD?

Are you depending upon the death of Jesus Christ to serve as the payment for your sins? If not, then I must warn you: you are in a deadly situation.

You have broken the moral laws of a holy God ... repeatedly.

Because your sins are an offense to the God of sinless perfection, they are capital crimes. And capital crimes deserve capital punishment.

... *THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH (ROMANS 6:23)*

No matter how moral you consider yourself to be, you deserve to die. And there is not one thing you can do to fix that problem. Your death sentence will not go away if you apologize to God for your sins. It will not go away if you “straighten up and promise to do better.” It will not go away by doing good deeds. Your debt of death cannot be paid off by becoming religious or by helping people. There is only one way you can settle your debt with the God you have offended. You must die.

But God does not want you to die. That is why God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of His great love for you, He sent Jesus Christ to die for you ... in your place ... as your Substitute ... so you would not have to. This is the whole point of the Crucifixion.

It is only *through His death* that *you can be delivered from eternal death*. No other religious leader has ever died for your sins.

Nor has any other religious leader been raised from the dead. But *because God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, you, too, can have eternal life*. (The only One Who *can* offer you life after death is One who Himself has been raised from the grave.)

My dear friend, you can either accept Christ’s Payment of death to serve as the punishment for your sins ... or you can pay for those sins yourself. But one of you will pay this penalty.

God offers you His full pardon. It is possible for you – right now – to be completely cleansed and forever forgiven of your sins ... through faith ... in the finished work ... of the resurrected Christ.

May the God of mercy help you understand that His Son is your *only hope* to be rescued from eternal death and raised unto everlasting life.

WHAT IS THE ISSUE AT THIS JUDGMENT?

THEREFORE, WE ALSO HAVE AS OUR AMBITION ... TO BE PLEASING TO HIM. FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, SO THAT EACH ONE MAY BE RECOMPENSED FOR HIS DEEDS IN THE BODY, ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE, WHETHER GOOD OR BAD. THEREFORE, KNOWING THE FEAR OF THE LORD, WE PERSUADE MEN (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:9-10)

We are told in 2nd Corinthians 5:10 that each believer will “be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done” ... including the “bad” ones. We have already seen that the believer’s sins will not be the issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To what, then, do these *bad* deeds refer?

When Paul wrote that our deeds will be judged as “good or bad,” the Greek word he used for “bad” was *phaulos*. This word does not carry the idea of something ethically or morally evil. To express that thought, the apostle would have used either the word *kakos* or *poneras*. The word *phaulos* has the idea of something that is “good-for-nothing” or “worthless.”

So, the deeds of 2nd Corinthians 5 – “whether good or bad” – do not refer to one’s moral conduct. They refer to the *quality and motive of one’s service as a believer*.

Was his service to Christ the best he could give ... or was it half-hearted?

Was his labor for the sake of Christ’s Church an asset ... or a detriment?

Did he strengthen the Church, weaken the Church, or make no mark on it at all?

Were his deeds worthy of Christ’s Name ... or did they fall short of the honor He is due?

When a believer bows before Jesus Christ, the issue to be discussed will not be his sins; it will be his

STEWARDSHIP

WAS HE FAITHFUL TO USE THE RESOURCES GOD ENTRUSTED TO HIS CARE,
TO STRENGTHEN CHRIST’S CHURCH, FOR THE GLORY OF CHRIST’S NAME?

This scheduled evaluation explains why the Apostle Paul was driven by a healthy “fear of the Lord” to please Christ ... and why he fervently persuaded others to please the Lord with their lives. The thought of himself – or even one of his spiritual children – standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ, having wasted his life, was horrific to Paul.

THE PROPERTIES MANAGED BY THE STEWARD

*WHO THEN IS THE FAITHFUL AND SENSIBLE SLAVE WHOM HIS MASTER PUT IN CHARGE OF HIS HOUSEHOLD TO GIVE THEM THEIR FOOD AT THE PROPER TIME? BLESSED IS THAT SLAVE WHOM HIS MASTER FINDS SO DOING WHEN HE COMES. TRULY I SAY TO YOU THAT HE WILL PUT HIM IN CHARGE OF ALL **HIS POSSESSIONS**.* (MATTHEW 24:45-47)

It is common for us to view the time in our day as being our time ... or the house in which we live as being our house ... or that we accomplished a task using our skills, in our strength. But the fact is, these resources are not really ours. The One who owns these properties is the Lord Jesus Christ. *We are the stewards of **His** property.*

A STEWARD IS A MANAGER OR AN ADMINISTRATOR OF SOMEONE ELSE'S PROPERTY.

There are two key parables that shed some light on this idea of stewardship: Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27.

- In both parables a man owns property, including slaves.
- In both parables the master is about to go on a journey. But before he leaves, he places his property in the care of his slaves.
- In both, the master returns.
- And in both, each slave is summoned to give an account of his stewardship.

Likewise, every true believer is a bond-slave to his Master, Jesus Christ. During this time of His absence (that is, between His First Coming and Second Coming), Christ has entrusted each of them with a portion of His possessions. And one day, each "will give an account of himself to God" regarding the management of his Master's properties (Romans 14:12).

NOW AFTER A LONG TIME THE MASTER OF THOSE SLAVES CAME AND SETTLED ACCOUNTS WITH THEM.
(MATTHEW 25:19)

WHEN HE RETURNED, AFTER RECEIVING THE KINGDOM, HE ORDERED THAT THESE SLAVES, TO WHOM HE HAD GIVEN THE MONEY, BE CALLED TO HIM SO THAT HE MIGHT KNOW WHAT BUSINESS THEY HAD DONE. (LUKE 19:15)

Time ... abilities ... material goods ... finances ... strength ... education ... opportunities ... experience ... exposure to His Word. It all belongs to Christ. And in varying degrees, these resources have been entrusted to our care. Are we responsibly using them to strengthen Christ's Church for the glory of Christ's Name ... or not? Are we faithful stewards ... or not? *This* will be the subject of discussion at the believer's evaluation.

This examination is designed to reveal – not to the Judge Who is all-knowing but to the steward himself – the depth of his faithfulness and devotion. That is, when the test is over, the answer will be clear:

I WAS (OR I WAS NOT) FAITHFUL TO FULFILL THE RESPONSIBILITY GOD ENTRUSTED INTO MY CARE.

THEREFORE, I AM (OR I AM NOT) SOMEONE TO WHOM THE MASTER CAN ENTRUST EVEN MORE RESPONSIBILITY
ONCE HE RETURNS.

SAVED BY GRACE ... JUDGED BY WORKS

The Christian community has grown quite comfortable with the word “grace” ... so much so that we have grown somewhat lax (or even resistant) to the word “works.” We readily quote Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9

FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES, IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD; NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST. (EPHESIANS 2:8-9)

... but often ignore the very next verse

*FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS **FOR GOOD WORKS**, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND SO THAT WE WOULD WALK IN THEM. (EPHESIANS 2:10)*

Perhaps we are hesitant to emphasize the role of works in the Christian life because we do not want to be branded as “legalists.”

Most certainly, salvation is not earned by obeying a system of law but is, instead, a gift (freely given by grace) through faith. But salvation will not be the issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment is for those whose salvation is not in question. Indeed, those who stand before Christ at this judgment would not even be there if they were not already saved. Instead, the focus of this evaluation has to do with what a **believer** has **done**. The issue will be their works.

*NOW HE WHO PLANTS AND HE WHO WATERS ARE ONE; BUT EACH WILL RECEIVE HIS OWN REWARD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN **LABOR**. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:8)*

*EACH MAN’S **WORK** WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN’S **WORK**. IF ANY MAN’S **WORK** WHICH HE HAS BUILT ON IT REMAINS, HE WILL RECEIVE A REWARD. IF ANY MAN’S **WORK** IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:13-15)*

*FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, SO THAT EACH ONE MAY BE RECOMPENSED FOR HIS **DEEDS** IN THE BODY, ACCORDING TO **WHAT HE HAS DONE**, WHETHER GOOD OR BAD. (2ND CORINTHIANS 5:10)*

BEHOLD, I AM COMING QUICKLY, AND MY REWARD IS WITH ME, TO RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE. (REVELATION 22:12)

“Salvation is a gift, but rewards, for those who are saved, are earned. The *quality of our service* is the criterion.” (Ryrie Study Bible, Charles C. Ryrie, page 1822, footnote on 1st Corinthians 3:14)

Beloved in Christ, you and I should be careful not to casually dismiss – in the name of grace – a lifestyle of conscientious obedience and service. Our liberty in Christ does not give us a license to be irresponsible or reckless toward His properties ... resources He has placed in our hands for the glory of His Name and for the good of His people.

AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, **OUR STEWARDSHIP** WILL BE THE SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION.

Therefore, let each of us take to heart this bedrock Truth:

FROM EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN GIVEN MUCH, MUCH WILL BE REQUIRED; AND TO WHOM THEY ENTRUSTED MUCH, OF HIM THEY WILL ASK ALL THE MORE. (LUKE 12:48)

THE CHARACTER OF OUR CHOICES

... EACH WILL RECEIVE HIS OWN REWARD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN LABOR. FOR WE ARE GOD'S FELLOW WORKERS; YOU ARE ... GOD'S BUILDING. ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME, LIKE A WISE MASTER BUILDER I LAID A FOUNDATION, AND ANOTHER IS BUILDING ON IT. BUT EACH MAN MUST BE CAREFUL HOW HE BUILDS ON IT. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:8-10)

In 1st Corinthians 3:8-15 the Apostle Paul describes two different kinds of *believers* that will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ: those whose stewardship will be praised by the Master and those whose stewardship will fall short of His approval. To illustrate the difference between the two, Paul likens their life choices to building materials used in the construction of a house. He begins with the house's Foundation.

THE FOUNDATION

FOR NO MAN CAN LAY A FOUNDATION OTHER THAN THE ONE WHICH IS LAID, WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:11)

There is only one true foundation upon which an individual can build his house (conduct the affairs of his life) and expect his life to withstand the scrutiny of an all-knowing God. That foundation is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and in Him alone.

LET IT BE KNOWN TO ALL OF YOU ... JESUS CHRIST, THE NAZARENE, WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED, (IS) RAISED FROM THE DEAD ... AND THERE IS SALVATION IN NO ONE ELSE; FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN THAT HAS BEEN GIVEN AMONG MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED. (ACTS 4:10, 12)

There is no other way for one to be prepared for eternity. No matter how moral and no matter how sincere, if one's hope of eternal life is not based upon faith in Jesus Christ, that life will "collapse." (It will perish.)

Because they are all reborn Christ-followers, those who stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ share this one Foundation. Yet, as already discussed, the "Foundation of salvation" will not be the issue at this judgment. It is the building materials that will be the subject of discussion at this Examination.

THE BUILDING MATERIALS ⁶

NOW IF ANY MAN BUILDS ON THE FOUNDATION WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES, WOOD, HAY, STRAW, EACH MAN'S WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT; FOR THE DAY WILL SHOW IT BECAUSE IT IS TO BE REVEALED WITH FIRE, AND THE FIRE ITSELF WILL TEST THE QUALITY OF EACH MAN'S WORK. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:12-13)

Once the Foundation of salvation has been laid (through faith in Christ Jesus), there are two categories of “building materials” with which the believer can use to build his house:

GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES
OR
WOOD, HAY, AND STRAW

These materials represent the choices one makes as he conducts the affairs of his life. To determine which were used, each life will be carefully appraised by the One Whose

“EYES (ARE) LIKE A FLAME OF FIRE” (REVELATION 1:14)

“It cannot be determined by outward observation into which class any ‘work’ falls, so that work must be put into the crucible in order that its true character may be proved.” (Things to Come, Zondervan Publishing House, J. Dwight Pentecost, page 224)

Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones

(a God-Centered, Christ-Enamored, Holy Spirit-empowered Life)

Gold, silver, and precious stones are indestructible materials (fire-resistant). They represent the believer's *faithful obedience and service to his Master*. If this is how a believer chooses to conduct his life, he will be rewarded.

IF ANY MAN'S WORK WHICH HE HAS BUILT ON IT REMAINS, HE WILL RECEIVE A REWARD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:14)

Concerning these works that merit reward, may we say this repeatedly throughout our lives: “To God be the glory!” They are *His* works – accomplished through us – for which we will be rewarded. It is all of grace!

⁶ **Promise:** Christ will judge the *quality* and *motives* of a believer's *works* (1st Corinthians 3:12-14; Matthew 6:1-4, 5-6, 16-18; 1st Corinthians 4:5; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:23-24).

Wood, Hay, and Straw

(a Self-Centered, World-Enamored, Flesh-empowered Life)

Wood, hay, and straw are destructible materials (fire-consumable). They represent the believer's *faithlessness toward his Master*. If this is how a *believer* chooses to conduct himself, he will suffer the loss of reward but will, nevertheless, remain saved.

IF ANY MAN'S WORK WHICH HE HAS BUILT ON IT REMAINS, HE WILL RECEIVE A REWARD. IF ANY MAN'S WORK IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE.
(1ST CORINTHIANS 3:14-15)

CONCLUSION

Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ forms the only true foundation of a life that is rightly related to God. And upon that sure foundation the individual believer "builds" his life.

When his life is evaluated at the Judgment Seat of Christ, how he chose to use his God-given resources will determine whether he will receive rewards or suffer loss.

AS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST, WAS THE QUALITY OF HIS CHARACTER AND SERVICE
SUPERIOR (GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES) OR INFERIOR (WOOD, HAY, STRAW)?

Those who *trusted the Holy Spirit* for the motivation and power to *honor Christ with their lives* and to *offer their best in His service* will receive various rewards. These are the construction materials of the Spirit (gold, silver, precious stones.)

Those whose *efforts were half-hearted* and whose *motives were self-promoting* will be denied the rewards they might have had. Though these are the construction materials of the flesh (wood, hay, straw), they will not lose their salvation.

"Only those works which survive God's testing fire have eternal value and are worthy of reward." (The MacArthur Study Bible, John MacArthur, page 1995, footnote on Revelation 22:12)

BEHOLD, I AM COMING QUICKLY, AND MY REWARD IS WITH ME, TO RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE. (REVELATION 22:12)

May we *all* be found faithful at His Appearing!

THE APPLE FARMER'S STEWARD

(Cultivating Faithfulness)

IT IS REQUIRED OF STEWARDS THAT ONE BE FOUND TRUSTWORTHY. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:2)

There was once a man who owned an orchard. In this orchard were ten apple trees. One day in early spring, the man left town to go on a long trip. But before he left, he told one of his field hands to take care of the orchard in his absence.

Each day the field hand was careful to cultivate the owner's orchard. He kept the surrounding ground aerated and watered. And at the proper times, he fertilized the root system with just the right ratio of nutrients.

As the summer passed, however, the field hand became greatly troubled because he saw absolutely no fruit. Not one apple. Week after week, the worker faithfully cultivated the trees. But that fall, there were still no apples to be seen. "Surely, my boss will not be pleased with me," he thought.

Word came that the owner's absence was to be extended. "Whew!" said the worker. "Perhaps next fall, there will be a harvest of apples." And so, the next spring he got an early start. He aerated. He watered. He fertilized. He covered the trees to prevent damage from a late freeze. He prevented insects and disease from harming them. But that fall there were, once again, no apples.

Each year, the owner's absence was extended. And each year the field hand carefully cultivated the orchard. Yet, there were never any apples.

Finally, after seven years, the owner returned. One by one, each worker was called into his office to give an account of their assigned tasks. Expecting to be fired, the steward of the orchard packed his suitcase and, with hat in hand, walked into his employer's office. But to his utter amazement, his boss praised him! And promoted him! And gave him a raise!

And that next fall, there were ten apple trees with branches weighed down with hundreds upon hundreds of bright, red, juicy apples.

There is coming a day when every reborn Christ-follower will bow before the Judgment Seat of God. And there, his level of faithfulness will be evaluated.

Obviously, every believer wants to hear his Master say,

"WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT"

But if that is what we want to hear, there is a certain reality we need to accept. For faithfulness to be dyed into the fabric of our souls, situations *must* exist that tempt us to give up ... to throw in the towel ... to quit being and doing what Christ has given us to be and do. Perseverance promotes faithfulness.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CULTIVATE FAITHFULNESS
WITHOUT GOING THROUGH TRIALS THAT DEMAND “SPIRITUAL GRIT.”

To be aware of that fact goes a long way in understanding why troubles ... and weariness ... and circumstances that don't make any sense are so vital to the Christian life. It explains why God (seems to be) so slow and so silent and so aloof at times.

One thing that tends to discourage us is a certain false expectation. We have been promised that those who remain in intimate fellowship with God through faith and obedience – those who “abide” in Christ – will “bear much fruit.”

I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES; HE WHO ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE BEARS MUCH FRUIT, FOR APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING. (JOHN 15:5)

The false assumption we tend to have is that we will see that fruit. But when Jesus said that fertile soil will yield a crop “some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty,” He did not assure the sower that he would see these results in full, at least on this side of the Resurrection. Maybe he will. But more than likely, he will not. And if he does not, he will be in very good company. Many missionaries have ministered on the field for 20, 30, some even 40 years, yet do not live to see most of the fruit of their labors.

In fact, I don't think I have ever met an effective servant of Christ that has not asked himself at one time or another,

“Am I really doing any good?”

“Should I continue to languish in this ministry that's ‘going nowhere’ when every fiber of my being tells me to ‘throw in the towel’?”

His labor has been skillful. His motive has been Christ-centered. But as far as he can tell, he is having little impact on the lives of those he serves. And this continues until, finally, he just wants to give up.

It is at this point that the bond-slave must ask himself a question ... a “bucket-of-cold-water-in-the-face” kind of question:

HOW MUCH FRUIT MUST I SEE BEFORE I CAN BE FAITHFUL TO MY CALLING?

The answer, of course, is “None.” That's because

FAITHFULNESS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH RESULTS

The fact is that some things can only be forged on an anvil. Faithfulness is one of them. This trait does not come quickly; nor does it come easily. Trustworthiness is seldom tempered by the laborer seeing the full impact he is having on the lives of others. On the contrary, it is most often strengthened when few, if any, results are seen. Reliability is fortified when the laborer doggedly remains in a stagnated situation because he knows that is where his Master wants him to be ... and that's the *only* reason he stays.

During those times, let us be fully convinced of what is taking place in our lives: the Father is cultivating our faithfulness by stretching our endurance.

I AM THE TRUE VINE, AND MY FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER. EVERY BRANCH IN ME THAT ... BEARS FRUIT, HE PRUNES IT SO THAT IT MAY BEAR MORE FRUIT. (JOHN 15:1-2)

To whom, then, should we turn for this “spiritual grit” needed to remain triumphant during this confusing and often discouraging – but necessary – pruning? To the One Who,

FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM, ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND HAS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD. (HEBREWS 12:2B)

Let us not give up. Let us not throw in the towel. Let us not lose sight of “*THE JOY SET BEFORE US.*”

LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF FAITH. (HEBREWS 12:1-2A)

Those trying periods of anguish and confusion that exist in the lives of those who want to please their Master with their lives and service will be well worth every prayer that was poured out and every tear shed. And at the finish line, each of these faithful ones will hear his Master say,

“WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SLAVE”

He will savor that praise throughout eternity.

And eternity is a long, long time.

THEREFORE, MY BELOVED BRETHREN, BE STEADFAST, IMMOVABLE, ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD, KNOWING THAT YOUR TOIL IS NOT IN VAIN IN THE LORD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:58)

LET US NOT LOSE HEART IN DOING GOOD, FOR IN DUE TIME WE WILL REAP IF WE DO NOT GROW WEARY. (GALATIANS 6:9)

OUR STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S PROPERTIES

A STEWARD OF GOD'S GIFTS

(Service)

IN THIS CASE, MOREOVER, IT IS REQUIRED OF STEWARDS THAT ONE BE FOUND TRUSTWORTHY. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:2)

You are the owner of a large business. The nature of your business demands prompt delivery of its goods to local manufacturing companies. This business is so large that it has two warehouses, each having its own manager.

Over the course of time, you notice that the manager of warehouse # 1 always ships each order on the day it comes in.

The manager of warehouse # 2, however, is indifferent toward the need for punctuality. More times than not, the goods are shipped two, three, sometimes four days after the orders are received.

One day, you receive an order for goods that, if delivered on time, will result in many more orders from this company. Otherwise, you will lose their business. To which warehouse manager would you entrust this shipment?

In one of His parables, Jesus tells us which manager *He* would choose.

Faithful Service

In the "Parable of the Talents," Jesus introduces us to "a man about to go on a journey." But before he leaves, he appoints his three slaves as stewards of his property. Each slave was expected to manage the *same kind of property* ("talents"); yet each was assigned a *different amount* (five, two and one). By wisely investing these talents, these slaves were expected to make a profit for their master during his absence.

FOR IT IS JUST LIKE A MAN ABOUT TO GO ON A JOURNEY, WHO CALLED HIS OWN SLAVES AND ENTRUSTED HIS POSSESSIONS TO THEM. TO ONE HE GAVE FIVE TALENTS, TO ANOTHER, TWO, AND TO ANOTHER, ONE, EACH ACCORDING TO HIS OWN ABILITY; AND HE WENT ON HIS JOURNEY.

IMMEDIATELY THE ONE WHO HAD RECEIVED THE FIVE TALENTS WENT AND TRADED WITH THEM AND GAINED FIVE MORE TALENTS. IN THE SAME MANNER THE ONE WHO HAD RECEIVED THE TWO TALENTS GAINED TWO MORE. BUT HE WHO RECEIVED THE ONE TALENT WENT AWAY AND DUG A HOLE IN THE GROUND AND HID HIS MASTER'S MONEY.⁷

NOW AFTER A LONG TIME THE MASTER OF THOSE SLAVES CAME AND SETTLED ACCOUNTS WITH THEM. THE ONE WHO HAD RECEIVED THE FIVE TALENTS CAME UP AND BROUGHT FIVE MORE TALENTS, SAYING,

"MASTER, YOU ENTRUSTED FIVE TALENTS TO ME. SEE, I HAVE GAINED FIVE MORE TALENTS." HIS MASTER SAID TO HIM, "WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SLAVE. YOU WERE FAITHFUL WITH A FEW THINGS; I WILL PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF MANY THINGS. ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER."

ALSO, THE ONE WHO HAD RECEIVED THE TWO TALENTS CAME UP AND SAID, "MASTER, YOU ENTRUSTED TWO TALENTS TO ME. SEE, I HAVE GAINED TWO MORE TALENTS." HIS MASTER SAID TO HIM, "WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SLAVE. YOU WERE FAITHFUL WITH A FEW THINGS; I WILL PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF MANY THINGS. ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER."

AND THE ONE ALSO WHO HAD RECEIVED THE ONE TALENT CAME UP AND SAID, "MASTER, I KNEW YOU TO BE A HARD MAN, REAPING WHERE YOU DID NOT SOW AND GATHERING WHERE YOU SCATTERED NO SEED. AND I WAS AFRAID AND WENT AWAY AND HID YOUR TALENT IN THE GROUND. SEE, YOU HAVE WHAT IS YOURS." BUT HIS MASTER ANSWERED AND SAID ... "TAKE AWAY THE TALENT FROM HIM AND GIVE IT TO THE ONE WHO HAS THE TEN TALENTS ... (AND) THROW OUT THE WORTHLESS SLAVE INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS. IN THAT PLACE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH." (MATTHEW 25:14-26, 28, 30)

Did you notice? Even though the first two slaves handed in *different results*, each received the *exact same commendation*? The master said to both the one who gained five more talents and the one who gained two more talents:

WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SLAVE. YOU WERE FAITHFUL WITH A FEW THINGS; I WILL PUT YOU IN CHARGE OF MANY THINGS. ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER. (MATTHEW 25:21, 23)

In this parable the first two stewards were faithful to the responsibility entrusted into their care. The third one, however, proved to be irresponsible. When the master returned, he rewarded his first two slaves; but he reprimanded – and then expelled from his presence – the third slave.

TAKE AWAY THE TALENT FROM HIM ... (AND) THROW OUT THE WORTHLESS SLAVE INTO THE OUTER DARKNESS. IN THAT PLACE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH. (MATTHEW 25:28, 30)

This parable focuses on the **wisdom and quality of a steward's work**, not the bottom-line results. Though the final number of their talents differed, both the first and second slaves *doubled their investments*, proving they had the *same high level of dependability*. The third steward showed that he could not be trusted with even a little.

But just who are these "slaves"? What does this parable have to do with you and me standing before the Judgment Seat of Christ?

⁷ The word "money" means "silver." In this parable the master is entrusting various amounts of silver to his slaves.

We know from Matthew 26:2 that this story was told two days before Christ was “handed over for crucifixion.” By this time the nation of Israel as a whole – and the Jewish religious leaders in particular – had rejected Jesus as their Messiah-King. Knowing that His departure was near, Jesus used the remaining time to prepare His followers for His absence. A part of that preparation is found in this parable.

In verse 19 Jesus informed His disciples that there would be “a long time” between His departure from them (the Ascension) and His Return (the Second Coming). This period represents the Church Age.

During this interval Christ’s followers would be entrusted with certain resources ... verses 14-15.

Each of His bond-slaves was expected to use his God-given resources to increase and strengthen His Church ... verses 16-18.

After the Lord Jesus returns for them (the Rapture of the Church), each slave would then be summoned to give an account of his stewardship (at the Judgment Seat of Christ) ... verse 19.

It’s an interesting story because it ends with two promises: one positive, one negative.

FOR TO EVERYONE WHO HAS, MORE SHALL BE GIVEN, AND HE WILL HAVE AN ABUNDANCE; BUT FROM THE ONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE, EVEN WHAT HE DOES HAVE SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY. (MATTHEW 25:29)

What exactly does that mean? “Everyone who has” *what*? And “more” of *what* “shall be given” him? Furthermore, *what* does the other one “not have”; and *what* exactly “shall be taken away” from him?

The context is what fills in all the blanks:

*FOR TO EVERYONE WHO HAS A LIVING FAITH THAT MOTIVATES HIM TO FAITHFULLY SERVE HIS MASTER, MORE **KINGDOM-RESPONSIBILITIES** SHALL BE GIVEN, AND HE WILL HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF AUTHORITY AND HONOR;*

*BUT FROM THE ONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE A LIVING FAITH THAT MOTIVATES HIM TO FAITHFULLY SERVE HIS MASTER, EVEN WHAT **RESPONSIBILITY** HE DOES HAVE SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM.*

Once their stewardship has been evaluated, those who were faithful to the Master will be given greater responsibilities in His Kingdom. Those who were not faithful to Him will suffer great loss. The purpose of this parable is to teach that

FAITHFUL SERVICE WILL BE REWARDED

Indeed, even the smallest gesture of service toward a fellow believer who is committed to serving Christ will receive an eternal reward.

FOR WHOEVER GIVES YOU A CUP OF WATER TO DRINK BECAUSE OF YOUR NAME AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, TRULY I SAY TO YOU, HE WILL NOT LOSE HIS REWARD. (MARK 9:41)

Devoted Service

In Luke 19 Jesus presents another parable in which a nobleman entrusts ten of his slaves with one “mina” apiece.⁸ Each was to “do business” with his mina until the nobleman returned from a distant country. Again, we should take note that each slave was entrusted with the *same kind of property* (mina). But, unlike the parable of the talents, these slaves received the *same amount of property* (one mina). That is, in this parable each slave was given the same level of responsibility.

A NOBLEMAN WENT TO A DISTANT COUNTRY TO RECEIVE A KINGDOM FOR HIMSELF, AND THEN RETURN. AND HE CALLED TEN OF HIS SLAVES, AND GAVE THEM TEN MINAS AND SAID TO THEM, “DO BUSINESS WITH THIS UNTIL I COME BACK” ...

WHEN HE RETURNED, AFTER RECEIVING THE KINGDOM, HE ORDERED THAT THESE SLAVES, TO WHOM HE HAD GIVEN THE MONEY, BE CALLED TO HIM SO THAT HE MIGHT KNOW WHAT BUSINESS THEY HAD DONE. THE FIRST APPEARED, SAYING, “MASTER, YOUR MINA HAS MADE TEN MINAS MORE.” AND HE SAID TO HIM, “WELL DONE, GOOD SLAVE. BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE THING, YOU ARE TO BE IN AUTHORITY OVER TEN CITIES.”

THE SECOND CAME, SAYING, “YOUR MINA, MASTER, HAS MADE FIVE MINAS.” AND HE SAID TO HIM ALSO, “AND YOU ARE TO BE OVER FIVE CITIES.”

ANOTHER CAME, SAYING, “MASTER, HERE IS YOUR MINA WHICH I KEPT PUT AWAY IN A HANDKERCHIEF; FOR I WAS AFRAID OF YOU, BECAUSE YOU ARE AN EXACTING MAN. YOU TAKE UP WHAT YOU DID NOT LAY DOWN AND REAP WHAT YOU DID NOT SOW.” HE SAID TO HIM, “BY YOUR OWN WORDS I WILL JUDGE YOU, YOU WORTHLESS SLAVE ... WHY DID YOU NOT PUT MY MONEY IN THE BANK, AND HAVING COME, I WOULD HAVE COLLECTED IT WITH INTEREST?” THEN HE SAID TO THE BYSTANDERS, “TAKE THE MINA AWAY FROM HIM AND GIVE IT TO THE ONE WHO HAS THE TEN MINAS.” (LUKE 19:12-13, 15-24)

Notice that the first two stewards received *different commendations*, based upon the different results of their investments. To the first slave who turned one mina into *ten*, the nobleman said,

⁸ “A mina was a measure of money worth 100 drachmas, or denarii (about three months’ wages).” (*Ryrie Study Bible*, Charles C. Ryrie, page 1660, footnote on Luke 19:13)

*WELL DONE, GOOD SLAVE. BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE THING, YOU ARE TO BE IN AUTHORITY OVER **TEN** CITIES. (LUKE 19:16-17)*

To the second slave who turned one mina into *just five*, he said,

*AND YOU ARE TO BE OVER **FIVE** CITIES. (LUKE 19:18-19)*

Both slaves are rewarded. But the words “*Well done, good slave*” are missing from the Lord’s commendation of the second steward. Furthermore, he is given authority over fewer cities.

But far worse, the nobleman confronts the third slave with a humiliating rebuke, then removes any future opportunity for reward from him.

“YOU WORTHLESS SLAVE” ... THEN HE SAID TO THE BYSTANDERS, “TAKE THE MINA AWAY FROM HIM” (LUKE 19:22, 24)

This parable focuses on each steward’s **level of effort** (as revealed by the results of his labor). Although entrusted with the same number of resources, only the first steward made the most of the nobleman’s property. The efforts of the second steward were not as zealous. And the third steward’s attitude proved to be completely indifferent.

The purpose of this parable is to teach that

DEVOTED (ZEALOUS) SERVICE WILL BE REWARDED

As noted above there is an interesting difference between “The Parable of the Talents” (Matthew 25) and “The Parable of the Minas” (Luke 19). In Matthew 25 each steward received *a different number of “talents.”*

FOR IT IS JUST LIKE A MAN ABOUT TO GO ON A JOURNEY, WHO CALLED HIS OWN SLAVES AND ENTRUSTED HIS POSSESSIONS TO THEM. TO ONE HE GAVE FIVE TALENTS, TO ANOTHER, TWO, AND TO ANOTHER, ONE, EACH ACCORDING TO HIS OWN ABILITY; AND HE WENT ON HIS JOURNEY. (MATTHEW 25:14-15)

In Luke 19, however, each steward received *the same number of “minas.”*

A NOBLEMAN WENT TO A DISTANT COUNTRY TO RECEIVE A KINGDOM FOR HIMSELF, AND THEN RETURN. AND HE CALLED TEN OF HIS SLAVES, AND GAVE THEM TEN MINAS AND SAID TO THEM, “DO BUSINESS WITH THIS UNTIL I COME BACK.” (LUKE 19:12-13)

Ryrie explains: “The minas represent the *equal opportunity of life* itself; the talents (represent) the *different gifts* God gives each individual.” (Ryrie Study Bible, footnote on Luke 19:13, page 1660, parenthesis added).

A “mina” represents *a stewardship common to all* of God’s servants: that all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit ... that all believers possess all of God’s promises and all spiritual blessings ... that all have 24 hours in a day ... and that (most) have copies of God’s Word are examples of the “equal opportunities of life.”

A “talent” represents *the steward’s unique set of strengths*. That each believer has his own spiritual gift, his own level of health, his own level of education, his own level of income, etc. would be examples of “the different gifts God gives each individual.”

In the parables of “the Talents” and “the Minas,” being ⁽¹⁾ *faithful to the Master* and ⁽²⁾ *zealous in service* are the issues. But these are not the only responsibilities God has given each believer. He has also been made ⁽³⁾ *a steward of God’s Word*, responsible to faithfully trust and obey his Lord. And he has been made ⁽⁴⁾ *a steward of God’s love*, the only acceptable motive behind one’s service.

A STEWARD OF GOD’S WORD

(Faith and Obedience)

We have just seen that the Judgment Seat of Christ will be an evaluation of the believer’s *faithfulness and devotion in service*. Had he been a responsible steward of God’s resources ... or not?

Furthermore, this assessment of the believer’s life will also focus on his *willingness to trust and obey his Master*. How had he responded to God’s Truth?

DID HE STRIVE TO BE A RESPONSIBLE STEWARD OF THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD ... OR NOT?

Faith and Obedience

In the “Parable of the Soils” (Luke 8:4-18), a farmer is shown planting a crop by casting his seed upon the ground. This seed falls upon four kinds of soil: hardened, rocky, thorn-infested, and good. Only one kind of soil could produce a crop. The other three could not.

- The hardened soil prevented the seed from taking root.
- The rocky soil was too shallow to hold moisture.
- The thorn-infested soil choked the crop from growing.
- But the good soil provided the fertility that seed needs to take root and flourish.

Jesus then explained the meaning of this parable:

- “the seed is the Word of God,”
- the “sower” refers to the one who rightly explains God’s Word to others,
- and the four “soils” represent four different kinds of hearts and, therefore, four different ways individuals respond to God’s Word.

For three different reasons, three lives bear no fruit (that is, none of the first three respond to God’s Word in true faith and obedience). Only the fourth, “an honest and good heart,” holds fast to the Truth and bears fruit with perseverance.

- *In this setting* Jesus is probably referring to Himself as “the Sower,”
- the “seed” represents the presentation of Himself as Israel’s long-awaited Messiah,
- and the four soils are the Jewish nation’s four different responses (mostly rejection) to His offer of the Kingdom.⁹

After the parable is finished, Jesus then challenges the hearer / reader with a caution:

SO, TAKE CARE HOW YOU LISTEN; FOR WHOEVER HAS, TO HIM MORE SHALL BE GIVEN;

AND WHOEVER DOES NOT HAVE, EVEN WHAT HE THINKS HE HAS SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM. (LUKE 8:18)

What does this mean? Once again, it is the context that helps us understand this verse:

FOR WHOEVER HAS A LIVING FAITH THAT MOTIVATES HIM TO RESPOND TO GOD’S WORD IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, TO HIM MORE UNDERSTANDING SHALL BE GIVEN;

AND WHOEVER DOES NOT HAVE A LIVING FAITH THAT MOTIVATES HIM TO RESPOND TO GOD’S WORD IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, EVEN WHAT UNDERSTANDING HE THINKS HE HAS SHALL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HIM.

To be entrusted with Truth is itself a stewardship:

If one responds to God’s Word with faith and obedience, he is blessed with an *increased capacity to understand and apply even more of God’s Word*. Why? Because he has proven himself to be a wise, faithful steward of the Truth he already possesses. The Lord can entrust him with more.

⁹ The “sower” can also be taken to refer to today’s preachers and teachers who accurately explain the Scriptures (the “seed”) to their audiences. The four responses (the “four soils”) continue to this day.

But if one makes no effort to do anything with the Truth he knows, his capacity to understand God's Word gradually *decreases*. He becomes "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). Why? Because he has proven to be a foolish, unfaithful steward of that Truth. He **cannot** be entrusted with more.

This dulled sensitivity to God's Word is the worst condition in which an individual can find himself. It is worse than terminal cancer. It is worse than paralysis. It is worse than prison. It is worse than the death of a loved one. All these involve the physical body and emotions. And as grievous as these conditions are, they are, nevertheless, temporal in nature.

But the inability to understand the Scriptures affects the soul; and the soul is eternal. If a person cannot understand the Scriptures, then he cannot believe them. And if he cannot believe God's Word, he will not obey God's Word. It is, in fact, the most dangerous of situations.

If he is lost, he will remain lost. How can one be saved if he does not understand the Gospel?

If he is saved, his own spiritual growth will be stunted.

His life will be a detriment to the reputation of God.

His personal witness to a lost world will not present a clear picture of the Savior they need to know.

His local church will suffer from his immaturity.

And he will suffer eternal loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

That is why the Lord Jesus added this warning:

SO, TAKE CARE HOW YOU LISTEN. (LUKE 8:18)

Bible study is risky business. It demands a response. It will produce either a joyous reward or a grievous loss, depending on whether we are doers of God's Word or mere hearers. What we learn, we are responsible for doing. So, the bottom-line question we should all be asking ourselves is this:

WHAT AM I DOING WITH THE TRUTH I *ALREADY* KNOW?

A STEWARD OF GOD'S LOVE

(Motive)

*ALL THE WAYS OF A MAN ARE CLEAN IN HIS OWN SIGHT;
BUT THE LORD WEIGHS THE MOTIVES. (PROVERBS 16:2)*

The motive behind our work will also be a part of the evaluation of our stewardship.

WHY DID WE DO WHAT WE DID?

*THE ONE WHO EXAMINES ME IS THE LORD ... WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS HIDDEN IN THE DARKNESS AND DISCLOSE THE **MOTIVES** OF MEN'S HEARTS; AND THEN EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:4-5)*

No matter what our ministry is, the only proper motive behind our service is our *love for God and for man*. Did we do what we did for the glory of God and for the good of others? Or was the motive behind our actions self-centered, seeking to promote our own interests?

Our Love for Others

*IF I SPEAK WITH THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS ... IF I HAVE THE GIFT OF PROPHECY, AND KNOW ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE; AND IF I HAVE ALL FAITH, SO AS TO REMOVE MOUNTAINS ... AND IF I GIVE ALL MY POSSESSIONS TO FEED THE POOR, AND IF I SURRENDER MY BODY TO BE BURNED, BUT DO NOT HAVE LOVE, **IT PROFITS ME NOTHING**. (1ST CORINTHIANS 13:3)*

Our Love for God

Ultimately, the proper motive behind all we do is our *love for God* ... to do what is in *His* best interest. How does one prove that he loves God?

IF YOU LOVE ME, YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS. (JOHN 14:15)

HE WHO HAS MY COMMANDMENTS AND KEEPS THEM IS THE ONE WHO LOVES ME. (JOHN 14:21)

IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL KEEP MY WORD. (JOHN 14:23)

Our love for God is displayed through our obedience. Obedience is always in God's best interest.

- It proves we believe that His counsel can be trusted.
- It proves we want to honor His Name before man.
- It proves we want what is best for His Church.
- And it proves we want what is best for the lost for whom Christ died.

Did we do what we did so others would love and honor and respect and fear and admire our God and Savior?

“... the examination at the (Judgment Seat) of Christ is to determine that which was done for the glory of God and that which was done for the glory of the flesh.” (Things to Come, Zondervan Publishing House, J. Dwight Pentecost, page 224)

CONCLUSION

There is coming a day when each believer will be ushered into the presence of Christ Jesus. And there he will give an account of himself. Those who are wise will prepare themselves ... now ... for this evaluation:

- Am I using *God's gifts* to *serve* my Master?

Am I *faithful* to God's calling upon my life? ¹⁰

Am I *zealous* (single-hearted) in my devotion to that calling?

- Am I obeying *God's Word* to *represent* my Master?
- Am I doing what I do because I *love those for whom Christ Jesus died*?
- Am I doing what I do because I *love my God and Savior*?

All this will be considered by the Master during His evaluation of our lives. If we give ourselves to these pursuits, we can look forward to seeing the smile on our Master's face as He declares these words:

“WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!”

May we all look to Him to empower us to be all that He has called us to be and do all that He has given us to do.

¹⁰ Christ will hold those who teach God's Word to a higher standard of evaluation (James 3:1).

THE TEMPORARY REWARDS WE WILL JOYFULLY SURRENDER

THE GOLDEN DIADEMS OF VICTORY

AROUND THE THRONE WERE TWENTY-FOUR THRONES; AND UPON THE THRONES I SAW TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS SITTING, CLOTHED IN WHITE GARMENTS, AND GOLDEN CROWNS ON THEIR HEADS. (REVELATION 4:4)

Apparently, one kind of reward believers will receive at their evaluation will be in the form of “golden crowns.” There are two words in the Greek translated “crown”:

The word *diadema* is a crown worn by a *king*.

The word *stephanos* is a crown worn by a *conqueror*, for example, a general in a victory parade who has just returned home from winning a great battle.

The word used by the New Testament writers to describe the crown awarded to a saint is “stephanos.” His reward has to do with the honor and dignity given to one who is victorious ... one who has conquered something.

It is true that believers will “reign with Christ.” But the kingly crown will be worn by Christ and Christ alone. Believers, on the other hand, will wear the crowns reserved for those who have overcome the world. This is what every saint has conquered.

FOR WHATEVER IS BORN OF GOD OVERCOMES THE WORLD; AND THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT HAS OVERCOME THE WORLD — OUR FAITH. WHO IS THE ONE WHO OVERCOMES THE WORLD, BUT HE WHO BELIEVES THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD? (1ST JOHN 5:4-5)

From this passage we should notice that every person “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” has overcome the world. Let’s not miss that! The *status* of “Conqueror” is not reserved for some believers who have overcome the world while other believers have not. *All believers* are victorious because of the extraordinary accomplishment of Jesus Christ, the One with Whom they are identified. Therefore,

THESE GOLDEN CROWNS ARE A TESTIMONY TO
THE VICTORIES OF SALVATION WON FOR THEM UPON THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

The New Testament lists at least four crowns of triumph *available* to the saints:

the Crown of *Life* (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)

the Crown of *Exultation* (1st Thessalonians 2:19-20)

the Crown of *Glory* (1st Peter 5:1-4)

the Crown of *Righteousness* (2nd Timothy 4:8)

We shall soon see that each of these emblems of victory is unique from the other three, each being found within the context of a different circumstance. As the early Christians confronted these various situations, they were encouraged by the apostles to conduct their lives in the same way Christ conducted His ... or they were praised because they had already done so.

So, we should not miss this either. These symbols of victory are not automatically given out. As discussed above, we are saved by grace, but we are rewarded by works. Crowns are earned, bestowed upon those who faithfully submitted their wills to the will of God.

Thus, it is his faith in Christ that gives *every believer* the *exalted position* of “Victorious Conqueror.” But it is his daily *practice* of depending upon almighty God for victory over his enemies that allows the indwelling Spirit of God to work in and through his life. By rightly responding in this way to the world’s persecutions, the flesh’s temptations, and Satan’s oppressions, the *obedient believer is rewarded* with wreaths of triumph.

DO NOT FEAR WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SUFFER ... BE FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE CROWN OF LIFE. (REVELATION 2:10)

THEREFORE, I EXHORT THE ELDERS AMONG YOU ... SHEPHERD THE FLOCK OF GOD AMONG YOU ... PROVING TO BE EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK. AND WHEN THE CHIEF SHEPHERD APPEARS, YOU WILL RECEIVE THE UNFADING CROWN OF GLORY. (1ST PETER 5:1-4)

According to the Scriptures, these crowns are “laid up” for the believers.

IN THE FUTURE THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, WILL AWARD TO ME ON THAT DAY; AND NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING. (2ND TIMOTHY 4:8)

This means that the crown is “safely kept” for us. (Ryrie Study Bible, Charles C. Ryrie, page 1931, footnote on 2nd Timothy 4:8) We might say that our treasures are stored away in a heavenly safe deposit box, “where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.” (Matthew 6:20) These wreaths are indestructible ... enduring ... imperishable.

EVERYONE WHO COMPETES IN THE GAMES EXERCISES SELF-CONTROL IN ALL THINGS. THEY THEN DO IT TO RECEIVE A PERISHABLE WREATH, BUT WE AN IMPERISHABLE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 9:25) ¹¹

It is the view of this Bible student that these crowns are literal crowns. If that is true, these wreaths of triumph are constructed of a special substance, “materials” found only in the realm of glory. They are described as Crowns “of” Life ... “of” Exultation ... “of” Glory ... “of” Righteousness. This word “of” is understood by New Testament grammarians to mean “consisting of.”

For example, the Crown of Righteousness is a crown that “consists of” righteousness. That is what it is made of. Eternal righteousness is its *substance*. Perhaps the only way our minds can accept this is to keep in mind that, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the saints will be in a different dimension ... a heavenly, spiritual dimension ... with its own realities we are yet unable to fully comprehend.

As we shall consider later, these crowns are only temporary possessions. They will be in the believer’s custody for only a short time, soon to be cast before the Throne of Christ during the most extraordinary worship service the Church has ever witnessed.

So, all believers have been assured that their labor, intended to strengthen the Church, has not gone unnoticed.

FOR GOD IS NOT UNJUST SO AS TO FORGET YOUR WORK AND THE LOVE WHICH YOU HAVE SHOWN TOWARD HIS NAME, IN HAVING MINISTERED AND IN STILL MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS. (HEBREWS 6:10)

But what kind of labor? What must believers do to receive these golden wreaths of triumph? After passing the scrutiny of Christ’s examination, specific traits of character and acts of service will be rewarded, each with its own specific crown.¹²

¹¹ “*exercises self-control.*” Strict discipline is essential for one “to receive ... an imperishable wreath” at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To maintain this commitment over the long term, one must cultivate an eternal perspective. This involves saying “No” to certain rights, privileges, and opportunities – designed to promote one’s *temporal* welfare – so that one might say “Yes” to the responsibilities of his God-ordained calling.

“*but we (in order to receive) ... an imperishable (wreath).*” Notice that one’s desire to *gain eternal rewards* is an *acceptable* motive for faithful stewardship. Other appropriate incentives behind one’s labor in Christ’s Name would include *the growth of God’s people* and *the glory of God’s Name*.

¹² “But what kind of labor?” Efforts have been made to identify the work associated with each crown, using the *context* of the passage to do so.

THE CROWN OF LIFE

*A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL PERSEVERANCE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING
(TRIALS, TEMPTATIONS, PERSECUTIONS, OPPRESSIONS, MARTYRDOM)*

BLESSED IS A MAN WHO PERSEVERES UNDER TRIAL; FOR ONCE HE HAS BEEN APPROVED, HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE WHICH THE LORD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. (JAMES 1:12)

DO NOT FEAR WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SUFFER. BEHOLD, THE DEVIL IS ABOUT TO CAST SOME OF YOU INTO PRISON, SO THAT YOU WILL BE TESTED, AND YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION FOR TEN DAYS. BE FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE CROWN OF LIFE. (REVELATION 2:10)

As mentioned above, “the Crown of Life” is to be understood as a “crown *that consists of life*.” This crown is made of *eternal life* itself.

Attention should be given to the *context* in which this crown is mentioned. According to James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10, the Crown of Life will be awarded to those “who persevere under trial” and are “faithful until death.”

It does not take long for those who follow the Lord Jesus to learn that trials are a normal part of the Christian life.

*CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, **WHEN** (NOT “IF”) YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE. AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING. (JAMES 1:2-4, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*

Most certainly, these “various trials” include persecution, even unto death. Spiritual opposition from those who are under the blinding influence of an antichrist spirit is not an exception to the rule. It *is* the rule; and it is to be expected from a world that does not like their evil deeds being exposed by the words and deeds of the righteous.

IF YOU WERE OF THE WORLD, THE WORLD WOULD LOVE ITS OWN; BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, BUT I CHOSE YOU OUT OF THE WORLD, BECAUSE OF THIS THE WORLD HATES YOU. (JOHN 15:19)

THROUGH MANY TRIBULATIONS WE MUST ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD. (ACTS 14:22)

*FOR TO YOU IT HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, NOT ONLY TO BELIEVE IN HIM, BUT ALSO TO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE, EXPERIENCING THE SAME CONFLICT WHICH YOU SAW IN ME, AND NOW HEAR TO BE IN ME.
(PHILIPPIANS 1:29-30)*

But what does endurance while suffering have to do with a reward that is made of eternal life? According to the Bible, suffering for the sake of Christ is not only the *norm* for those upon whom “the Spirit of glory and of God rests”; it is also one of the *proofs* of their salvation.

THE SPIRIT HIMSELF TESTIFIES WITH OUR SPIRIT THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IF CHILDREN, HEIRS ALSO, HEIRS OF GOD AND FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST, IF INDEED WE SUFFER WITH HIM SO THAT WE MAY ALSO BE GLORIFIED WITH HIM. (ROMANS 8:16-17)

*(YOU) ARE PROTECTED BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH FOR A SALVATION READY TO BE REVEALED IN THE LAST TIME. IN THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE, EVEN THOUGH NOW FOR A LITTLE WHILE, IF NECESSARY, YOU HAVE BEEN DISTRESSED BY VARIOUS TRIALS, SO THAT **THE PROOF OF YOUR FAITH**, BEING MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD WHICH IS PERISHABLE, EVEN THOUGH TESTED BY FIRE, MAY BE FOUND TO RESULT IN PRAISE AND GLORY AND HONOR AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. (1ST PETER 1:5-7)*

To be sure, no one is saved because he remained faithful to Christ while suffering. Rather, he remains faithful to Christ while suffering because he already *is* saved. Remaining steadfast in one's faith while under the pressure of a trial is *not the cause* of salvation; it is one of the *proofs* of salvation. Perseverance is outward evidence of one's eternal life. Perhaps this helps us understand such passages as these:

IF WE ENDURE, WE WILL ALSO REIGN WITH HIM. IF WE DENY HIM, HE ALSO WILL DENY US. (2ND TIMOTHY 2:12)

THEREFORE, EVERYONE WHO CONFESSES ME BEFORE MEN, I WILL ALSO CONFESS HIM BEFORE MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. BUT WHOEVER DENIES ME BEFORE MEN, I WILL ALSO DENY HIM BEFORE MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. (MATTHEW 10:32-33)

... WHATEVER A MAN SOWS, THIS HE WILL ALSO REAP ... THE ONE WHO SOWS TO THE SPIRIT WILL FROM THE SPIRIT REAP ETERNAL LIFE. LET US NOT LOSE HEART IN DOING GOOD, FOR IN DUE TIME WE WILL REAP IF WE DO NOT GROW WEARY. (GALATIANS 6:7-9) ¹³

13 *"the one who sows to the Spirit will ... reap eternal life."* The context of Galatians 6:6-10 has to do with the believer's financial support of Christian workers. If he invests his finances to advance the Savior's Church, that investment will bear eternal rewards.

DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL; FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. (MATTHEW 6:19-21)

Though the context deals primarily with the believer's use of his financial resources to support Christian workers, this principle may also be applied more broadly as an investment in one's spiritual life. The believer who trusts the Spirit of God to motivate and empower him to obey the will of the Father (thus promoting his own spiritual growth) will experience the highest quality of living possible, both in this life and throughout eternity.

"Let us not lose heart in doing good ... do not grow weary." Though at times the believer will be tempted to give up because of the little fruit he *sees* from his labors, he is encouraged to persevere. The harvest is sure. His reward will eventually come. Perhaps he will receive a partial reward in this life; but most certainly, his reward will be given in full, awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Though tempted to give in to defeat and despair, a Spirit-empowered believer can, instead, respond with *composure*. This composure under pressure is displayed in two ways:

First, because Christ forewarned him to expect the world's hatred, *he is not taken off guard by the attack*.

DO NOT BE SURPRISED, BRETHREN, IF THE WORLD HATES YOU. (1ST JOHN 3:13)

IF THE WORLD HATES YOU, YOU KNOW THAT IT HAS HATED ME (JESUS) BEFORE IT HATED YOU. IF YOU WERE OF THE WORLD, THE WORLD WOULD LOVE ITS OWN; BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT OF THE WORLD, BUT I CHOSE YOU OUT OF THE WORLD, BECAUSE OF THIS THE WORLD HATES YOU. REMEMBER THE WORD THAT I SAID TO YOU, "A SLAVE IS NOT GREATER THAN HIS MASTER." IF THEY PERSECUTED ME, THEY WILL ALSO PERSECUTE YOU; IF THEY KEPT MY WORD, THEY WILL KEEP YOURS ALSO. (JOHN 15:18-20, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

(YOU ARE) IN NO WAY ALARMED BY YOUR OPPONENTS — WHICH IS A SIGN OF DESTRUCTION FOR THEM, BUT (A SIGN) OF SALVATION FOR YOU, AND THAT TOO, FROM GOD. (PHILIPPIANS 1:28, PARENTHESES ADDED)

Second, because of the glorious reward that awaits him, *he can be filled with joy rather than anguish*.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF ME. REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN IS GREAT; FOR IN THE SAME WAY THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU. (MATTHEW 5:10-12) ¹⁴

BELOVED, DO NOT BE SURPRISED AT THE FIERY ORDEAL AMONG YOU, WHICH COMES UPON YOU FOR YOUR TESTING, AS THOUGH SOME STRANGE THING WERE HAPPENING TO YOU; BUT TO THE DEGREE THAT YOU SHARE THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, KEEP ON REJOICING, SO THAT ALSO AT THE REVELATION OF HIS GLORY YOU MAY REJOICE WITH EXULTATION. IF YOU ARE REVILED FOR THE NAME OF CHRIST, YOU ARE BLESSED, BECAUSE THE SPIRIT OF GLORY AND OF GOD RESTS ON YOU. (1ST PETER 4:12-14)

THE CROWN OF LIFE WILL BE AWARDED TO BELIEVERS
FOR THEIR FAITHFUL PERSEVERANCE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

14

Promises: Believers who suffer loss because of their identification with and service for Christ will be received and honored by the Father. The context of the following two promises – eternal life and eternal glory – have to do with the sacrifices one endures as he identifies with and serves Christ Jesus.

HE WHO LOVES HIS LIFE LOSES IT, AND HE WHO HATES HIS LIFE IN THIS WORLD WILL KEEP IT TO LIFE ETERNAL. (JOHN 12:25)

“he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal (vs. 25).” Eternal life is not earned by sacrificial service. It is given to those who depend upon the death of Christ to serve as payment for their sins. If that faith is genuine, it will cause the true believer to gladly die to self-centered interests and to live, instead, for the interests of Christ. It is this kind of faith that results in eternal life.

IF ANYONE SERVES ME, HE MUST FOLLOW ME; AND WHERE I AM, THERE MY SERVANT WILL BE ALSO; IF ANYONE SERVES ME, THE FATHER WILL HONOR HIM. (JOHN 12:26)

“If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also (vs. 26).” Christ requires the one who “serves” Him to “follow” Him. To follow Jesus is to follow His example of dying to self (that is, saying “No” to one’s own self-centered interests) while submitting his will to the will of the Father, even to the point of humiliation, persecution, and death. *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).* This is what it means to be like a grain of wheat that “falls into the earth and dies” (vs. 24) ... to “hate one’s life in this world” (vs. 25).

“the Father will honor him (vs. 26).” This life of obedience will be *honored* later by the Father in glory.

THE CROWN OF EXULTATION

*A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE IN CHRIST'S NAME TO BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS
(ACCORDING TO ONE'S CALLING)*

FOR WHO IS OUR HOPE OR JOY OR CROWN OF EXULTATION? IS IT NOT EVEN YOU, IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS AT HIS COMING? FOR YOU ARE OUR GLORY AND JOY. (1ST THESSALONIANS 2:19-20)

The ministry to which Paul was called was that of an itinerant evangelist and church planter. He had been made a steward of the Gospel; and to that trust, he proved to be faithful. This apostle invested every ounce of his strength declaring the Gospel and establishing new churches, especially in regions where none existed (Romans 15:20).

FOR IF I PREACH THE GOSPEL, I HAVE NOTHING TO BOAST OF, FOR I AM UNDER COMPULSION; FOR WOE IS ME IF I DO NOT PREACH THE GOSPEL. FOR IF I DO THIS VOLUNTARILY, I HAVE A REWARD; BUT IF AGAINST MY WILL, I HAVE A STEWARDSHIP ENTRUSTED TO ME. (1ST CORINTHIANS 9:16-17)

We know from his letters that Paul's ministry bore lasting fruit in the town of Thessalonica. The infant church that he, Silas and Timothy established there continued to be steadfast, even as they endured persecution. As he reflected upon this church's faithfulness, he rejoiced, knowing that he had not labored there in vain. As a result, the Crown of Exultation (Rejoicing) awaited him.

Those who are awarded this golden wreath of rejoicing are not limited to itinerant evangelists and church planters. Indeed, every Christ-follower has been *called to minister in Christ's Name* to those within, and without, the Body of Christ.

AND HE GAVE SOME AS APOSTLES, AND SOME AS PROPHETS, AND SOME AS EVANGELISTS, AND SOME AS PASTORS AND TEACHERS, FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE, TO THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. (EPHESIANS 4:11-12)

To fulfill that God-given stewardship, every believer has been *equipped with a certain gift(s)*.

AS EACH ONE HAS RECEIVED A SPECIAL GIFT, EMPLOY IT IN SERVING ONE ANOTHER AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD. (1ST PETER 4:10)

This is the will of God for every believer: to serve others in Christ's Name. And He has supplied them with everything they need to do so. Those who faithfully employ these resources to exalt the Name of Christ before believers and unbelievers alike will receive this Crown of Exultation.

Scripture has given us some samples of ministry that, if faithfully performed, will result in this reward.

Hospitality to God's Servants

HE WHO RECEIVES YOU RECEIVES ME, AND HE WHO RECEIVES ME RECEIVES HIM WHO SENT ME. HE WHO RECEIVES A PROPHET IN THE NAME OF ("BECAUSE HE IS") A PROPHET SHALL RECEIVE A PROPHET'S REWARD; AND HE WHO RECEIVES A RIGHTEOUS MAN IN THE NAME OF ("BECAUSE HE IS") A RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL RECEIVE A RIGHTEOUS MAN'S REWARD. AND WHOEVER IN THE NAME OF A DISCIPLE GIVES TO ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES EVEN A CUP OF COLD WATER TO DRINK, TRULY I SAY TO YOU, HE SHALL NOT LOSE HIS REWARD. (MATTHEW 10:40-42, PARENTHESES ADDED)

Goodness to All People

LET US NOT LOSE HEART IN DOING GOOD, FOR IN DUE TIME WE WILL REAP IF WE DO NOT GROW WEARY. SO THEN, WHILE WE HAVE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD TO ALL PEOPLE, AND ESPECIALLY TO THOSE WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE FAITH. (GALATIANS 6:9-10)

Providing for the Needs of the Poor

BUT WHEN YOU GIVE TO THE POOR, DO NOT LET YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND IS DOING, SO THAT YOUR GIVING WILL BE IN SECRET; AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES WHAT IS DONE IN SECRET WILL REWARD YOU. (MATTHEW 6:3-4)

From these verses we should notice that a reward is promised to those who faithfully employ their God-entrusted gifts, passion, time, resources, opportunities and strength in their service to Christ. It is a calling to represent Him in character and service, both to those who are in the faith as well as to those outside the faith. This Crown of Exultation is believed to be that reward.

Perhaps when they are awarded this crown, its recipients will finally be shown *all the fruit of their labors* (something *no one sees in this life*). If so, the extraordinary substance from which it is constructed is remarkably fitting. This golden wreath of triumph is made of *pure joy*.

THE CROWN OF EXULTATION WILL BE AWARDED TO BELIEVERS
FOR THEIR FAITHFUL SERVICE TO CHRIST

THE CROWN OF GLORY

A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP OF CHRIST'S CHURCH (PASTORAL MINISTRIES)

The Crown of Glory is unique. Unlike the other crowns, it is reserved for a certain group of believers who are often dishonored by the world, but who hold a special place in the heart of God.

THEREFORE, I EXHORT THE ELDERS AMONG YOU, AS YOUR FELLOW ELDER AND WITNESS OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, AND A PARTAKER ALSO OF THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED, SHEPHERD THE FLOCK OF GOD AMONG YOU, EXERCISING OVERSIGHT NOT UNDER COMPULSION, BUT VOLUNTARILY, ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD; AND NOT FOR SORDID GAIN, BUT WITH EAGERNESS; NOR YET AS LORDING IT OVER THOSE ALLOTTED TO YOUR CHARGE, BUT PROVING TO BE EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK. (1ST PETER 5:1-3)

The recipients of this crown are those who are entrusted with the spiritual oversight of God's flock, faithfully serving His Church as pastors (also known as elders or shepherds). These who submit their wills to the will of God are motivated and empowered by the Spirit of God

- to instruct the Body of Christ with the Word of God
- to protect them from false doctrines
- to guide them by modeling the character of Christ
- to correct them by means of His compassion and discipline

It is by the ministry of a faithful pastor that a local body of believers can be victorious over Satan's subtle deceptions and lies and errors and confusion and impurity and insecurity and instability and weakness and tyranny and defeat and ruin and death ... and over the world's cold indifference toward the eternal souls of man. It is for this reason that they are the devil's principal targets in spiritual warfare, requiring much prayer to withstand his assaults.

As with the other crowns, the name of this crown reveals the "material" from which it is constructed. This is a crown made of *pure glory*. It is an "unfading" crown, forever shining with lightning radiance, as it recognizes the faithful labor of the Chief Shepherd's under-shepherds.

THE CROWN OF GLORY WILL BE AWARDED TO PASTORS
FOR THEIR FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

AND WHEN THE CHIEF SHEPHERD APPEARS, YOU WILL RECEIVE THE UNFADING CROWN OF GLORY. (1ST PETER 5:4) ¹⁵

15 “you.” According to 5:1, the “you” refers to “the elders among you.”

Promise: At their judgment, Jesus Christ – the Chief Shepherd – will evaluate the ministry of these church leaders (His under-shepherds). Often held in contempt and maligned on earth, those pastors who are faithful are promised to receive the crown of glory in heaven.

THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S WORD**
(FAITH AND OBEDIENCE)

THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE HAS COME. I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT; I HAVE FINISHED THE COURSE; I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH. IN THE FUTURE THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, WILL AWARD TO ME ON THAT DAY; AND NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LOVED HIS APPEARING. (2ND TIMOTHY 4:6-8) ¹⁶

The book of the Bible entitled 2nd Timothy is the Apostle Paul's last recorded letter. Sitting in a Roman jail, he knew that he would not walk away from this imprisonment. He knew that it would not be long before he heard the footsteps of his executioner.

As he looked back on his life, Paul was able to offer a remarkable testimony.

"I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT. I HAVE FINISHED THE COURSE. I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH."

Perhaps more than any other missionary, Paul was well-acquainted with the sacrifices a "fight for the faith" demanded. Now, awaiting his release from prison to enter Paradise, he could say with a clear conscience, "By the power of Christ's resurrection, I have run well the race to which I was called; and now I am about to cross my finish line."

Through it all, Paul never abandoned his belief in the integrity of the Scriptures. He had defended its authority, taught its doctrines, obeyed its commands and encouraged the Church to do the same. He had "kept the faith." As a result, he knew that a certain crown awaited him, one that was made of pure righteousness.

This same Crown of Righteousness is available to all who share Paul's *high view of Scripture*. ¹⁷ This attitude toward the written Word of God is generated by the indwelling Spirit of Truth and present within all whose faith is in the Living Word of God.

THE ONE WHO LISTENS TO YOU (THE APOSTLES) LISTENS TO ME (JESUS), AND THE ONE WHO REJECTS YOU (I.E. THEIR TEACHING AND THEIR WRITINGS) REJECTS ME; AND HE WHO REJECTS ME REJECTS THE ONE WHO SENT ME (GOD THE FATHER). (LUKE 10:16, PARENTHESES ADDED)

¹⁶ **Promise:** "to all who have loved His appearing." God promises this reward to those who long for the return of Christ for His Church at the Rapture (that is, all true believers who are not enamored with this world).

¹⁷ To have a high view of Scripture is to believe that the very words, letters, even parts of letters of the original manuscripts are inspired by God and, thus, carry the authority of God (Matthew 5:18, 24:35; Luke 16:17; 1st Thessalonians 2:13).

Furthermore, a longing *to be holy* is generated by the indwelling *Holy Spirit*, a desire that promotes faith and obedience.

BY THIS WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE COME TO KNOW HIM, IF WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. THE ONE WHO SAYS, "I HAVE COME TO KNOW HIM," AND DOES NOT KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS, IS A LIAR, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN HIM; BUT WHOEVER KEEPS HIS WORD, IN HIM THE LOVE OF GOD HAS TRULY BEEN PERFECTED.
(1ST JOHN 2:3-5)

Both a high view of Scripture (attitude) and a desire to apply its truths to one's life (attitude) give every believer the potential to triumph over the ravages of deception and sin. But what will be his *practice*? What will he *do* with these victories of salvation secured for him by Christ on the Cross? Will he pursue, by faith, the righteous will of the Father? Or will he pursue – in unbelief – the values of this world and the appetites of his flesh? The Crown of Righteousness is at stake.

Those who prove themselves faithful stewards of God's Truth – those who hold fast to the Word of God through faith and obedience – have every reason to eagerly long for the Return of their Savior ("*His appearing*").

But those who do not will respond to Him in a very different way at His Appearing.

NOW, LITTLE CHILDREN, ABIDE IN HIM, SO THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE MAY HAVE CONFIDENCE AND NOT SHRINK AWAY FROM HIM IN SHAME AT HIS COMING. (1ST JOHN 2:28)

THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL BE AWARDED TO BELIEVERS
FOR THEIR FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S WORD

CASTING OUR CROWNS BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD

Much of the New Testament's last letter, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, describes what will take place in heaven and on earth immediately preceding the Return of Christ (chapters 4-19). In this letter "to the seven churches that are in Asia," the Apostle John describes an event that will occur sometime after the Judgment Seat of Christ. The scene involves twenty-four elders, sitting upon twenty-four thrones, all of which encircle the throne of God.

AROUND THE THRONE WERE TWENTY-FOUR THRONES; AND UPON THE THRONES I SAW TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS SITTING, CLOTHED IN WHITE GARMENTS, AND GOLDEN CROWNS ON THEIR HEADS (REVELATION 4:4)

Based upon this description, it is the belief of many Bible students that these twenty-four elders represent Church Age believers. They are described as being "clothed in white garments" (they have been made spotless and pure by the blood of Christ). They are sitting upon thrones encircling the Throne of God (they are reigning with Christ). And they are adorned with "golden crowns upon their heads" (they have been rewarded for their faithful service to Christ).

As mentioned above, it is the belief of this writer that these are literal crowns. Whether that is true or not, it is *certain* that these wreaths of victory will not remain as permanent possessions of the redeemed. The Bible informs us that there is coming a day when these crowns will be cast before the throne of God.

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS WILL FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND WILL WORSHIP HIM WHO LIVES FOREVER AND EVER, AND WILL CAST THEIR CROWNS BEFORE THE THRONE. (REVELATION 4:10)

But why will they do this? Why will the saints – having been rewarded for their faithfulness – surrender their crowns to Christ?

"WHAT CHRIST ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH ME"

I WILL NOT PRESUME TO SPEAK OF ANYTHING EXCEPT WHAT CHRIST HAS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH ME, RESULTING IN THE OBEDIENCE OF THE GENTILES BY WORD AND DEED. (ROMANS 15:18)

An extraordinary worship service awaits those who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. At the beginning of that service, they will arrive in heaven's throne room wearing their various wreaths of triumph ... but they will leave without them. The Scriptures tell us that, having assembled before the throne of God, this rewarded assembly of believers

WILL FALL DOWN BEFORE HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE, AND WILL WORSHIP HIM WHO LIVES FOREVER AND EVER, AND WILL CAST THEIR CROWNS BEFORE THE THRONE, SAYING, "WORTHY ARE YOU, OUR LORD AND OUR GOD, TO RECEIVE GLORY AND HONOR AND POWER." (REVELATION 4:10-11)

What a local church *attempts* to do each time they assemble for corporate worship will be fully realized during this future worship service as twenty ⁽⁺⁾ centuries of Church Age saints come together to acknowledge the worth of their Redeemer. In surrendering the rewards that they earned during their lifetimes of faithful service, they are “giving credit where credit is due.”

“YOU, LORD JESUS — AND YOU ALONE — DESERVE TO WEAR THESE CROWNS!”

Relinquishing their crowns is the only appropriate response of Christ’s stewards. During their lives they had faithfully represented their Master to the world in both character and service. And yet the ability to do so had not been generated by their own will and power but, instead, by the will and power of God almighty. Only God has the power to represent God. These stewards were simply willing to be used to accomplish His holy purposes. As a result, God has the right to receive all glory and honor and praise.

WHAT THEN IS APOLLOS? AND WHAT IS PAUL? SERVANTS THROUGH WHOM YOU BELIEVED, EVEN AS THE LORD GAVE OPPORTUNITY TO EACH ONE. I PLANTED, APOLLOS WATERED, BUT GOD WAS CAUSING THE GROWTH. SO THEN NEITHER THE ONE WHO PLANTS NOR THE ONE WHO WATERS IS ANYTHING, BUT GOD WHO CAUSES THE GROWTH. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:5-7)

Therefore, these who labored so diligently in Christ’s Name will willingly ... joyfully ... gladly ... cast their rewards before the throne of God because they rightfully belong to Him: to the One Who *called them* into His service ... Who *equipped them* with everything they needed to fulfill that calling ... and Who *accomplished through them* what He gave them to do! With this one act of worship, the saints are declaring the worth of the One Who so generously shared with them His ministry of reconciling God to man.

WHEN WILL BELIEVERS CAST THEIR CROWNS BEFORE GOD’S THRONE?

This worship service will, of course, take place sometime after the Judgment Seat of Christ. Maybe it will take place immediately following the believers’ evaluation. Or perhaps the saints will wear their crowns while reigning with Christ throughout His 1,000-year reign on earth, casting them at His feet at *the close* of that era.

Because the passage presenting this event is positioned toward the beginning of John’s vision (Revelation 4) rather than after his presentation of Christ’s reign on earth (Revelation 20), it is likely that this worship service will *immediately* follow the believers’ evaluation.

THE EVERLASTING REWARDS WE WILL GRATEFULLY KEEP

We have seen that each saint will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ his own crown(s) (Life, Exultation, Glory, Righteousness), based upon the quality and motive of his service to the Lord. We have also seen that, sometime later, each believer will cast his crown(s) before the throne of God in worship. This gesture is meant to “give credit where credit is due.” It is an acknowledgment before Christ, “You deserve these crowns; for it was not by my own gifts and power but by Yours that these works were performed.” So, the *crowns* are a temporary possession of each believer.

There is, however, Biblical evidence that each saint will enjoy throughout “the ages to come” certain other rewards he has earned, ones that will remain in his possession throughout “the ages to come.” So now, let us begin with an understanding of these ages throughout which the redeemed will enjoy their rewards: Christ’s 1,000-year (millennial) reign over *this present* earth and His everlasting reign over a *new* earth.

THE MILLENNIAL YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST ON THIS EARTH¹⁸

THEN I SAW THRONES, AND THEY SAT ON THEM, AND JUDGMENT WAS GIVEN TO THEM. AND I SAW THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN BEHEADED BECAUSE OF THEIR TESTIMONY OF JESUS AND BECAUSE OF THE WORD OF GOD, AND THOSE WHO HAD NOT WORSHIPED THE BEAST OR HIS IMAGE AND HAD NOT RECEIVED THE MARK ON THEIR FOREHEAD AND ON THEIR HAND; AND THEY CAME TO LIFE AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST FOR A THOUSAND YEARS. (REVELATION 20:4)

When the Lord returns to earth at the Second Coming, He will establish a world-wide Empire, its capitol being Jerusalem, Israel. Commonly known as the Millennial Kingdom, the reign of Christ *on this earth* will last ten centuries.

Throughout His 1,000-year reign, Christ will rule with “a rod of iron,”¹⁹ subjecting all the nations on earth – and their rulers – to His authority. He will be the “King over all kings and Lord over all lords” (and President over all presidents).

*AND I SAW HEAVEN OPENED, AND BEHOLD, A WHITE HORSE, AND HE WHO SAT ON IT IS CALLED FAITHFUL AND TRUE, AND IN RIGHTEOUSNESS HE JUDGES AND WAGES WAR. HIS EYES ARE A FLAME OF FIRE, AND ON HIS HEAD ARE MANY DIADEMS; AND HE HAS A NAME WRITTEN ON HIM WHICH NO ONE KNOWS EXCEPT HIMSELF. HE IS CLOTHED WITH A ROBE DIPPED IN BLOOD, AND HIS NAME IS CALLED THE WORD OF GOD ... FROM HIS MOUTH COMES A SHARP SWORD, SO THAT WITH IT HE MAY STRIKE DOWN THE NATIONS, AND **HE WILL RULE THEM** (THE NATIONS) **WITH A ROD OF IRON**; AND HE TREADS THE WINE PRESS OF THE FIERCE WRATH OF GOD, THE ALMIGHTY. AND ON HIS ROBE AND ON HIS THIGH, HE HAS A NAME WRITTEN, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." (REVELATION 19:11-16, PARENTHESIS ADDED)*

WHY ARE THE NATIONS IN AN UPROAR AND THE PEOPLES DEVISING A VAIN THING? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TAKE THEIR STAND AND THE RULERS TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS ANOINTED, SAYING, "LET US TEAR THEIR FETTERS APART AND CAST AWAY THEIR CORDS FROM US!" HE WHO

SITS IN THE HEAVENS LAUGHS, THE LORD SCOFFS AT THEM. THEN HE WILL SPEAK TO THEM IN HIS ANGER AND TERRIFY THEM IN HIS FURY, SAYING, "BUT AS FOR ME, I HAVE INSTALLED MY KING UPON ZION, MY HOLY MOUNTAIN." "I WILL SURELY TELL OF THE DECREE OF THE LORD: HE SAID TO ME, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU. ASK OF ME, AND I WILL SURELY GIVE THE NATIONS AS YOUR INHERITANCE, AND THE VERY ENDS OF THE EARTH AS YOUR POSSESSION. YOU SHALL BREAK THEM (THE NATIONS) WITH A ROD OF IRON, YOU SHALL SHATTER THEM LIKE EARTHENWARE.'" NOW THEREFORE, O KINGS, SHOW DISCERNMENT; TAKE WARNING, O JUDGES OF THE EARTH. WORSHIP THE LORD WITH REVERENCE AND REJOICE WITH TREMBLING. DO HOMAGE TO THE SON, THAT HE NOT BECOME ANGRY, AND YOU PERISH IN THE WAY, FOR HIS WRATH MAY SOON BE KINDLED. HOW BLESSED ARE ALL WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM! (PSALM 2:1-12)

18

See Appendix C, "God's Prophetic Plan," "III The Millennial Kingdom," page 90.

Although this kingdom has a spiritual element to it, our understanding of it should not be "spiritualized." This is a literal (physical) empire, established upon *this* earth, with its own government, and lasting ten centuries. It is the beginning phase (the "threshold," so to speak) of Christ's eternal kingdom.

It Is Political in Nature

Jesus, the Messiah-King, will rule over Israel, His seat of government based in Jerusalem (Micah 5:2) ... Israel will be at peace in their land (Isaiah 60:18; Jeremiah 30:8-10) ... Jesus, the Son of David, will rule from the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32-33) ... Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, will rule over and judge all the nations (Micah 4:2-3; Zechariah 14:9) ... Jerusalem will be the world's capitol (Jeremiah 3:17; Joel 3:16-17; Zechariah 8:2-3) ... Israel will be the only super power, her beneficent influence spreading throughout the world (Micah 5:7) ... and universal peace will prevail over the earth, the nations' "swords" having been "beaten into plowshares." (Isaiah 2:4; Zechariah 9:10).

It Is Physical in Nature

Because of the presence of Jesus, the obedient Son of Man, the curse that presently engulfs the earth will be lifted. Carnivorous animals will become herbivores (Isaiah 11:6-9) ... deserts will blossom / crops will be abundant (Isaiah 27:6; Isaiah 35:1-2; Amos 9:13) ... and human age will be increased (Isaiah 65:20-23), returning to the lifespans present before the flood of Noah's day (Genesis 5:3-32, 9:28-29).

It Is Spiritual / Moral in Nature

Satan will be confined to the abyss (Revelation 20:1-3) ... the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt (Ezekiel 40:5 – 43:27) ... the nations will come to Jerusalem to worship (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:2; Zechariah 8:20-23) ... there will be worldwide knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:9; Jeremiah 31:34; Habakkuk 2:14) ... Israel will be filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:24-29) ... and there will be worldwide righteousness and justice (Isaiah 9:7; Isaiah 11:4; Isaiah 42:1-4; Jeremiah 23:5).

19

This "rule" does not refer to His *present* reign over the earth. According to the context, this rule *follows* the Second Coming of Christ ("He *will* rule them," Revelation 19:11-16). Furthermore, this rule does not refer to His reign over the saints in heaven. Christ will not need "a rod of iron" to rule in heaven. No, this rule is over the earth's population after He returns. And He will do so for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:2-5, 7).

***THE EVERLASTING REIGN OF CHRIST ON THE NEW EARTH*²⁰**

At the end of these ten centuries of Christ's rule over the nations, He will then turn His Kingdom over to the Father.

THEN COMES THE END, WHEN HE HANDS OVER THE KINGDOM TO THE GOD AND FATHER, WHEN HE HAS ABOLISHED ALL RULE AND ALL AUTHORITY AND POWER. FOR HE MUST REIGN UNTIL HE HAS PUT ALL HIS ENEMIES UNDER HIS FEET. THE LAST ENEMY THAT WILL BE ABOLISHED IS DEATH. (1ST CORINTHIANS 15:24-26)

Because the present heaven and earth have been corrupted by sin, they will then be incinerated ...

BUT THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME LIKE A THIEF, IN WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY WITH A ROAR AND THE ELEMENTS WILL BE DESTROYED WITH INTENSE HEAT, AND THE EARTH AND ITS WORKS WILL BE BURNED UP. (2ND PETER 3:10)

... and in their place, a new heaven and earth will be created.

THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH; FOR THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH PASSED AWAY, AND THERE IS NO LONGER ANY SEA. (REVELATION 21:1)

Thus, the Kingdom of Christ will carry forward onto a new and perfect earth and continue throughout eternity.

We have briefly considered where the redeemed can be found in the future, both on this earth and the new earth. We are now ready to turn our attention to the rewards that will remain in their permanent possession throughout the "ages to come."

THE EVERLASTING REWARDS

Although the crowns received by the saints at their evaluation will be joyfully surrendered at the throne of Christ, other rewards will remain in their possession throughout eternity.

(1) Christ's Praise for Faithful Stewardship

WHEN HE (THE NOBLEMAN) RETURNED, AFTER RECEIVING THE KINGDOM, HE ORDERED THAT THESE SLAVES, TO WHOM HE HAD GIVEN THE MONEY, BE CALLED TO HIM SO THAT HE MIGHT KNOW WHAT BUSINESS THEY HAD DONE. THE FIRST APPEARED, SAYING, "MASTER, YOUR MINA HAS MADE TEN MINAS MORE." AND HE SAID TO HIM, "WELL DONE, GOOD SLAVE. BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE THING, YOU ARE TO BE IN AUTHORITY OVER TEN CITIES."

²⁰

See Appendix C, "God's Prophetic Plan," "V. The New Heaven and New Earth," page 90.

THE SECOND CAME, SAYING, "YOUR MINA, MASTER, HAS MADE FIVE MINAS." AND HE SAID TO HIM ALSO, "AND YOU ARE TO BE OVER FIVE CITIES." (LUKE 19:15-19, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

We should once again take note from the above parable that these two slaves were given the same number of resources (one "mina") but turned in two different results: the first, "ten minas" ... the second, only "five minas."

To the slave who turned in ten minas, his master commends him with His smiling approval:

"WELL DONE, GOOD SLAVE."

But the master does not say this to the slave who turned in only five minas. Those words of praise are withheld from him. That is, not every believer will receive this commendation at their evaluation.

But for those who do, just to be able to hear these words will be worth every second ... every penny ... every effort invested in faithful service to their Master, words they will savor throughout eternity.

(2) A Position of Civil Authority

AND THEY SANG A NEW SONG, SAYING, "WORTHY ARE YOU TO TAKE THE BOOK AND TO BREAK ITS SEALS; FOR YOU WERE SLAIN, AND PURCHASED FOR GOD WITH YOUR BLOOD MEN FROM EVERY TRIBE AND TONGUE AND PEOPLE AND NATION. YOU HAVE MADE THEM TO BE A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS TO OUR GOD; AND THEY ("MEN FROM EVERY TRIBE AND TONGUE AND PEOPLE AND NATION") WILL REIGN UPON THE EARTH." (REVELATION 5:9-10)

To begin with, the saints of God are promised the privilege to "reign" with Christ on *this* earth during His 1,000-year rule over the nations.

... THEY WILL BE PRIESTS OF GOD AND OF CHRIST AND WILL REIGN WITH HIM FOR A THOUSAND YEARS. (REVELATION 20:6)

The *position* of civil authority assigned to each believer is determined by his level of faithful stewardship: how he used his God-given resources ... to strengthen God's people ... for the sake of God's glory. Consider, once again, the Parable of the Minas: the same number of resources is given to each believer (one "mina"). The dividends earned by one, however, were greater than that of the other ("ten minas" versus "five minas"), resulting in two different levels of authority awarded in Christ's Kingdom ("ten cities" versus "five cities").

THE FIRST APPEARED, SAYING, "MASTER, YOUR MINA HAS MADE TEN MINAS MORE." AND HE SAID TO HIM, "WELL DONE, GOOD SLAVE. BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE THING, YOU ARE TO BE IN AUTHORITY OVER TEN CITIES." THE SECOND CAME, SAYING, "YOUR MINA, MASTER, HAS MADE FIVE MINAS." AND HE SAID TO HIM ALSO, "AND YOU ARE TO BE OVER FIVE CITIES." (LUKE 19:16-19)

Apparently, all the saints will reign with Christ in some capacity, some being entrusted with authority over a larger realm than others.

Furthermore, notice what happens when the rule of Christ over the nations of this earth comes to an end. We are told that His reign will continue throughout the eternal state on the new earth.

THEN I SAW A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH; FOR THE FIRST HEAVEN AND THE FIRST EARTH PASSED AWAY, AND THERE IS NO LONGER ANY SEA ... AND HE WHO SITS ON THE THRONE SAID ... I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END. (REVELATION 21:1, 5-6)

Likewise, the saints' *rewards* of civil authority will continue throughout eternity on the new earth.

THERE WILL NO LONGER BE ANY CURSE; AND THE THRONE OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB WILL BE IN IT (THE NEW JERUSALEM), AND HIS BOND-SERVANTS WILL SERVE HIM; THEY WILL SEE HIS FACE, AND HIS NAME WILL BE ON THEIR FOREHEADS. AND THERE WILL NO LONGER BE ANY NIGHT; AND THEY WILL NOT HAVE NEED OF THE LIGHT OF A LAMP NOR THE LIGHT OF THE SUN, BECAUSE THE LORD GOD WILL ILLUMINE THEM; AND THEY WILL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER. (REVELATION 22:3-5, PARENTHESIS ADDED)

(3) A Capacity to Display the Radiant Glory of God

*"WHEN WE'VE BEEN THERE TEN THOUSAND YEARS, BRIGHT SHINING AS THE SUN,
WE'VE NO LESS DAYS TO SING GOD'S PRAISE THAN WHEN WE FIRST BEGUN."*

– "Amazing Grace"

The Bride of Christ, "holy and blameless," is urged – in fact, She is expected – to conduct Herself in such a way that the reputation of the God She professes to love would be honored and respected. These "holy ones" are called to publicly – and privately – display the character of God in thought and attitude, word and deed.

THEREFORE, I ... IMPORE YOU TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING WITH WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED (EPHESIANS 4:1)

This is, of course, the overall purpose of their lives during their brief sojourn on this earth ... to glorify God through a Christ-like life.

WHETHER, THEN, YOU EAT OR DRINK OR WHATEVER YOU DO, DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 10:31)

Those who do are likened to "lights" in a world surrounded by the darkness of sin.

... PROVE YOURSELVES TO BE BLAMELESS AND INNOCENT, CHILDREN OF GOD ABOVE REPROACH IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED AND PERVERSE GENERATION, AMONG WHOM YOU APPEAR AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD, HOLDING FAST THE WORD OF LIFE, SO THAT IN THE DAY OF CHRIST I WILL HAVE REASON TO GLORY BECAUSE I DID NOT RUN IN VAIN NOR TOIL IN VAIN. (PHILIPPIANS 2:15-16)

Believers who trust the Holy Spirit to radiate the character of Christ through their lives will be rewarded for doing so. In fact, *that* is one of the rewards they will receive:

AN INCREASED CAPACITY TO RADIATE THE BLAZING GLORY OF CHRIST JESUS

While serving the Son of God as citizens of His eternal Kingdom, the redeemed will be “clothed” with a brightness that rivals that of the sun and the stars.

THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER. (MATTHEW 13:43)

Indeed, the very nature of this reward does not allow it to be “contained.” To the contrary, the redeemed will exult as they radiate the dazzling brilliance of God’s glory.

Notice, too, the *duration* of this reward. Those who glorify God in this life will project the glory of God throughout the millennial reign of Christ *and* throughout the eternal ages to come. It is a reward that will remain with them “forever and ever.”

THOSE WHO HAVE INSIGHT WILL SHINE BRIGHTLY LIKE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE EXPANSE OF HEAVEN, AND THOSE WHO LEAD THE MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, LIKE THE STARS FOREVER AND EVER. (DANIEL 12:3)

What’s more, the Scriptures seem to imply *varying degrees of brightness*, based upon the varying degrees of faithful service.

THOSE WHO HAVE INSIGHT WILL SHINE BRIGHTLY LIKE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE EXPANSE OF HEAVEN, AND THOSE WHO LEAD THE MANY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS, LIKE THE STARS FOREVER AND EVER. (DANIEL 12:3)

Yet, it is likely that no one will sense a lack of fulfillment. According to Pentecost ([Things to Come](#), pages 225-226), “Capacities to radiate the glory (of God) will differ, but there will be no personal sense of lack in that *each believer will be filled to the limit of his capacity to*

PROCLAIM THE EXCELLENCIES OF HIM WHO HAS CALLED (HIM) OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT.” (1ST PETER 2:9, PARENTHESES ADDED)

This, then, is a third reward that remains in the possession of the faithful one. The more one displays the glory of Christ in this life, the greater his capacity to display the radiant glory of God throughout the eternal ages to come.

SUMMARY: OUR EVERLASTING REWARDS

Certain rewards will be distributed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Regarding all the various crowns, these will be cast – most joyfully – before the throne of God.

Other rewards will remain in the permanent possession of the recipients during the 1,000-year reign of Christ and throughout the ages to come.

- 1) First, based upon their differing degrees of devoted service to the Master, *some will receive verbal commendations from Christ Jesus Himself*, filling their hearts with great joy and gratitude.

*“WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!
ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER!”*

- 2) Furthermore, *differing positions of civil authority will be assigned within the government of Christ’s millennial kingdom and eternal kingdom.*
- 3) And third, based upon the differing degrees of submission to the Spirit of God’s control of their lives, *all the saints will be given various capacities to radiate the blazing glory of Christ Jesus.*

Most surely, the priceless and everlasting nature of these treasures causes all earthly investments to pale in comparison. But investments made with an eternal perspective cause the words of our Master to come alive:

DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL; FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO. (MATTHEW 6:19-21)

THE LOSS OF A REWARD

To receive a reward from the King of glory will be an extraordinary privilege, to say the least. Just think about that! The slave can share in the glory of his Master because of what *the Master did* through his willing heart! How magnanimous is the grace of God!

But there is another side to this evaluation that we must not ignore. And it is a sobering Truth indeed. The fact is it is possible to forfeit a reward we could have received. Scripture clearly warns us that these rewards can be lost.

WATCH YOURSELVES, THAT YOU DO NOT LOSE WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED, BUT THAT YOU MAY RECEIVE A FULL REWARD. (2ND JOHN 8)

I AM COMING QUICKLY; HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE, SO THAT NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR CROWN. (REVELATION 3:11)

IF ANY MAN'S WORK IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:15)

“Though salvation cannot be lost, a reward (crown) can.” (Ryrie Study Bible, Charles C. Ryrie, page 2018, footnote on Revelation 3:11)

WOOD, HAY, AND STRAW (A Poorly Invested Life)

We would do well to ponder our answer to this question:

WHAT IS MY ONE, ALL-CONSUMING PASSION?

The question is not, “What am I willing to do?” or even “What do I enjoy doing?” The question is, “What is the one thing I could not stop doing even if I tried?” To help you answer this question, you might ask two or three people who know you well:

“WHAT DO I OFTEN TALK ABOUT AT THE COFFEE SHOP OR IN THE BREAK ROOM OR AROUND THE PATIO?”

“When I am at work, I talk about work-related matters. When at school, school-related matters. When in a small Bible study group, I talk about the Bible. But when I do not have to talk about anything in particular, what do I usually talk about? What do you think ‘rings my bell’?”

If we hear the same answer repeatedly, this will give us insight into one of the most significant aspects of our life ...

THE OBJECT OF OUR PASSION

It is this object of our devotion – this one, all-consuming passion – that has a great influence over the decisions we make, choices that we and the Son of God will discuss at our evaluation. When we bow before our Master, the issue before us will be this:

TO WHAT DID I GIVE MY LIFE?

Or, perhaps, more to the point

FOR WHOM DID I LIVE?

Did I live for self? (Was my life given to fulfilling my own self-interests?) Or did I live for Christ? (Was my life given to fulfilling the interests of my Savior?) The value a believer places on Christ can be determined by the attention given to Him throughout the course of everyday life. He is either the Centerpiece of one's existence or He is a mere Appendage.

Paul likened the life devoted to *God* to a house built with gold, silver, and precious stones. But he likened the life devoted to *self* to a house built with wood, hay, and straw.

Wood, hay, and straw are building materials that represent a poorly invested life. These are the misplaced priorities of a believer whose heart was given to this world's empty promises and whose works were performed for the sake of self. If this is how a believer chooses to conduct his life, he will not lose his salvation; but he will suffer the loss of reward.

IF ANY MAN'S WORK IS BURNED UP, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS; BUT HE HIMSELF WILL BE SAVED, YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:15)

But what exactly does "wood, hay, and straw" look like?

(1) A World-Enamored Life

DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN AND STEAL. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE NEITHER MOTH NOR RUST DESTROYS, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN OR STEAL; FOR WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO ... NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS; FOR EITHER HE WILL HATE THE ONE AND LOVE THE OTHER, OR HE WILL BE DEVOTED TO ONE AND DESPISE THE OTHER. YOU CANNOT SERVE GOD AND WEALTH. (MATTHEW 6:19-21, 24)

The believer whose heart is enamored by this world and all it has to offer will use his God-given resources to pursue his own self-interests, things that tend to set God over to the side. Foolishly, he will ignore their intended purpose: to strengthen the Body of Christ for the glory of God.

AND HE TOLD THEM A PARABLE, SAYING, "THE LAND OF A RICH MAN WAS VERY PRODUCTIVE. AND HE BEGAN REASONING TO HIMSELF, SAYING, 'WHAT SHALL I DO, SINCE I HAVE NO PLACE TO STORE MY CROPS?'

THEN HE SAID, 'THIS IS WHAT I WILL DO: I WILL TEAR DOWN MY BARNs AND BUILD LARGER ONES, AND THERE I WILL STORE ALL MY GRAIN AND MY GOODS. AND I WILL SAY TO MY SOUL, "SOUL, YOU HAVE MANY GOODS LAID UP FOR MANY YEARS TO COME; TAKE YOUR EASE, EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY."'" BUT GOD SAID TO HIM, 'YOU FOOL, THIS VERY NIGHT YOUR SOUL IS REQUIRED OF YOU; AND NOW WHO WILL OWN WHAT YOU HAVE PREPARED!' SO IS THE MAN WHO STORES UP TREASURE FOR HIMSELF AND IS NOT RICH TOWARD GOD.'" (LUKE 12:16-21)

The red flag that should alert the believer that he is distracted by the world is *how he is using the resources God has entrusted into his care*: his material goods, yes; but also, his time and abilities and strength and opportunities. If the bulk of these assets are focused on one's self-interests – with only a token given in service to Christ – he is forfeiting a chest of diamonds to own a box of rocks. Therefore, let us examine ourselves:

**IN WHOSE INTERESTS ARE MY RESOURCES INVESTED ...
CHRIST'S OR MY OWN?**

A life constructed with wood, hay, and straw is guided by a world-enamored heart, distracted by the temporal riches of this world (its material goods, prestige and power) rather than preoccupied with the eternal riches of Christ.

(2) A Self-Exalting Life

NOW TO THE KING ETERNAL, IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, THE ONLY GOD, BE HONOR AND GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN. (1ST TIMOTHY 1:17)

Another way to distinguish between a life built with gold and one built with wood is to honestly ask ourselves,

“WHOM DO I WANT TO RECEIVE HONOR BY MY LIFE ... CHRIST JESUS OR SELF?”

The believer who seeks the admiration of man seeks the glory of self. Perhaps he is unaware of his craving for attention. Nevertheless, as he pursues the approval of man, he is forfeiting the approval of God.

FOR AM I NOW SEEKING THE FAVOR OF MEN OR OF GOD? OR AM I STRIVING TO PLEASE MEN? IF I WERE STILL TRYING TO PLEASE MEN, I WOULD NOT BE A BOND-SERVANT OF CHRIST. (GALATIANS 1:10)

It is Christ the King Whom we should seek to please and toward Whom we should direct the admiration of others. Jesus warns against the exaltation of self:

BEWARE OF PRACTICING YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE MEN TO BE NOTICED BY THEM; OTHERWISE, YOU HAVE NO REWARD WITH YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.

SO, WHEN YOU GIVE TO THE POOR, DO NOT SOUND A TRUMPET BEFORE YOU, AS THE HYPOCRITES DO IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND IN THE STREETS, SO THAT THEY MAY BE HONORED BY MEN. TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD IN FULL. BUT WHEN YOU GIVE TO THE POOR, DO NOT LET YOUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT YOUR RIGHT HAND IS DOING, SO THAT YOUR GIVING WILL BE IN SECRET; AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES WHAT IS DONE IN SECRET WILL REWARD YOU.

WHEN YOU PRAY, YOU ARE NOT TO BE LIKE THE HYPOCRITES; FOR THEY LOVE TO STAND AND PRAY IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND ON THE STREET CORNERS SO THAT THEY MAY BE SEEN BY MEN. TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD IN FULL. BUT YOU, WHEN YOU PRAY, GO INTO YOUR INNER ROOM, CLOSE YOUR DOOR AND PRAY TO YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN SECRET, AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES WHAT IS DONE IN SECRET WILL REWARD YOU.

WHENEVER YOU FAST, DO NOT PUT ON A GLOOMY FACE AS THE HYPOCRITES DO, FOR THEY NEGLECT THEIR APPEARANCE SO THAT THEY WILL BE NOTICED BY MEN WHEN THEY ARE FASTING. TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD IN FULL. BUT YOU, WHEN YOU FAST, ANOINT YOUR HEAD AND WASH YOUR FACE SO THAT YOUR FASTING WILL NOT BE NOTICED BY MEN, BUT BY YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN SECRET; AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES WHAT IS DONE IN SECRET WILL REWARD YOU. (MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-18)

The red flag that should alert the believer that he is seeking to exalt self is his *tendency to talk about himself*. He may even *look for opportunities to criticize* those who are receiving the attention he covets. Therefore, let us examine ourselves.

WHICH PERSON ARE YOU TRYING TO EXALT: GOD OR SELF?

(3) A Self-Dependent Life

Upon whom are we dependent to live the Christian life victoriously ... Christ Jesus or ourselves?

* When it comes to *understanding the Scriptures*, upon whom do we rely to grasp its meaning: the divine Author or the mind of man? Certainly, there are some good commentaries out there; and we should make good use of them. But the fact is, *one must depend upon the Spirit of God to understand the Word of God*. (The ability to read the Bible with understanding is a *miracle*.)

FOR WHO AMONG MEN KNOWS THE THOUGHTS OF A MAN EXCEPT THE SPIRIT OF THE MAN WHICH IS IN HIM? EVEN SO, THE THOUGHTS OF GOD NO ONE KNOWS EXCEPT THE SPIRIT OF GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 2:11)

DO WE PRAY FOR UNDERSTANDING BEFORE WE READ GOD'S WORD?

* And when it comes to our *character*, upon whom do we rely to be a faithful follower of Christ: by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit or by our own determination? Most assuredly, God's people have been commanded to obey the Father's will. But the fact is *only God has the power to obey God*. (The ability to live by faith and obedience is a *miracle*.)

I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST; AND IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME; AND THE LIFE WHICH I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR ME. (GALATIANS 2:20)

DO WE PRAY FOR GOD'S WISDOM, MOTIVATION, AND POWER TO LIVE A CHRIST-LIKE LIFE?

* And when it comes to our *ministry*, upon whom do we rely to impact the lives of others: the power of Christ or our own abilities? To be sure, we have been commanded to participate in the Great Commission. But the fact is, *only God can change the hearts of man*. (The ability to participate in the spiritual growth of another is a *miracle*.)

I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES; HE WHO ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE BEARS MUCH FRUIT, FOR APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING. (JOHN 15:5)

DO WE PRAY FOR GOD'S HELP BEFORE WE MINISTER TO OTHERS?

A life constructed with wood, hay, and straw is a self-dependent life.

IT IS A LIFE THAT VIEWS HARD WORK AS A *REPLACEMENT* FOR PRAYER

Truly, the red flag that should alert the believer that he is seeking to please God by his own efforts – rather than by the strength of God – is *a weak prayer life*. Beloved friends, no Christian is greater than his prayer life. When it comes to living the Christian life, we can't. Only God has the power to please God. That is why we must depend upon Him to give us everything we need to do so. Therefore, let us examine ourselves:

HOW IS MY PRAYER LIFE?

Summary

This, then, is a “wood, hay, and straw” kind of life:

The *pursuit* of his life is the fool's gold the world dangles in front of him. It is a world-enchanted life.

The *motivation* of his life is to gain the admiration of man. It is a self-exalting life.

The *power* of his life is man-generated. It is a self-dependent life.

A life built with these materials is a life given to the cause of self ... for the glory of self ... by the power of self ... versus one given to the cause of Christ ... for the glory of Christ ... by the power of Christ. As for its usefulness to the King of kings, it is a poorly invested life, one that will suffer loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

A HEALTHY FEAR

This is not something we hear a lot about: the possibility that a believer – after experiencing the awesome wonder of the Rapture of the Church – experiences shame at His Appearing. Yet, the Apostle John cautions us of that very possibility:

NOW, LITTLE CHILDREN, ABIDE IN HIM, SO THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE MAY HAVE CONFIDENCE AND NOT SHRINK AWAY FROM HIM IN SHAME AT HIS COMING. (1ST JOHN 2:28) ²¹

To avoid suffering a loss at his evaluation, each believer must conduct his life with an eternal perspective. The Apostle Paul likened the focus a believer should have to an athlete preparing for the games.

DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT THOSE WHO RUN IN A RACE ALL RUN, BUT ONLY ONE RECEIVES THE PRIZE? RUN IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU MAY WIN. EVERYONE WHO COMPETES IN THE GAMES EXERCISES SELF-CONTROL IN ALL THINGS. THEY THEN DO IT TO RECEIVE A PERISHABLE WREATH, BUT WE AN IMPERISHABLE. THEREFORE, I RUN IN SUCH A WAY, AS NOT WITHOUT AIM; I BOX IN SUCH A WAY, AS NOT BEATING THE AIR; BUT I DISCIPLINE MY BODY AND MAKE IT MY SLAVE, SO THAT, AFTER I HAVE PREACHED TO OTHERS, I MYSELF WILL NOT BE DISQUALIFIED. (1ST CORINTHIANS 9:24-27)

Did you notice that even the Apostle Paul expressed concern over the possibility of his own loss?

“The thought of having to present a life that has not been properly spent in the Lord’s service fills him with terror. It was this fear that drove him on in his service for the Lord ... The apostle fears that having preached to others to dedicate their lives to the Lord and serve Him, he himself may be a castaway or one who is disapproved or disqualified. It is a picture of an athlete who, by breaking the rules, is disqualified from winning the race. The figure makes plain that a Christian should bend all his efforts to living in such a way that he will not be ashamed when his life is reviewed at the judgment seat of Christ.” (The Church in Prophecy, Zondervan Publishing House, John F. Walvoord, pages 146, 149-150)

21

We can learn from this verse what we are to do to avoid this shame. We are to

“ABIDE IN HIM”

That is, we are to “remain in life-giving fellowship with Him.” How? By asking the Spirit of God to motivate and empower us to obey the will of God as found in the Word of God. By *trusting* the righteous One for this power, we are given everything we need to *obey* Him. And then we take responsible steps to do so. Rather than trying to live the Christian life in the power of the flesh, we are to trust the Holy Spirit to live His life through us.

The Apostle Peter *encourages* this same fear regarding the works of the believer:

IF YOU ADDRESS AS FATHER THE ONE WHO IMPARTIALLY JUDGES ACCORDING TO EACH ONE'S WORK, CONDUCT YOURSELVES IN FEAR DURING THE TIME OF YOUR STAY ON EARTH. (1ST PETER 1:17)

“Their right to call God ‘Father’ leads to their obeying Him in reverent fear. So, they are to live according to His absolute standards, as strangers to the world’s shifting, situational ethics. ‘Reverent fear’ is evidenced by a tender conscience, a watchfulness against temptation, and avoiding things that would displease God.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary, vol. 2, New Testament, 1st Peter, Roger M. Raymer, page 843)

WILL THE ONE WHO LIVED FOR SELF FACE AN ETERNITY OF SORROW?

What will it be like for a believer to face Christ at his judgment, aware that his life had been lived for self rather than for Christ?

First, every believer (“each man”) will receive some degree of *praise*:

THEREFORE, DO NOT GO ON PASSING JUDGMENT BEFORE THE TIME, BUT WAIT UNTIL THE LORD COMES WHO WILL BOTH BRING TO LIGHT THE THINGS HIDDEN IN THE DARKNESS AND DISCLOSE THE MOTIVES OF MEN'S HEARTS; AND THEN EACH MAN'S PRAISE WILL COME TO HIM FROM GOD. (1ST CORINTHIANS 4:5)

NOW HE WHO PLANTS AND HE WHO WATERS ARE ONE; BUT EACH WILL RECEIVE HIS OWN REWARD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN LABOR. (1ST CORINTHIANS 3:8)

“All believers will receive praise at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1st Corinthians 4:5), but some will receive more rewards than others (1st Corinthians 3:11-15).” (Ryrie Study Bible, Charles C. Ryrie, page 2000, footnote on 2nd John 8)

Second, it is likely that every believer will suffer some degree of *loss* since no one has lived out his life in perfection.

“It is obvious that with imperfections which beset every Christian, no one will be able to claim perfection in that day. All will have a measure of failure.” (Jesus Christ Our Lord, Moody Press, John F. Walvoord, page 270)

Concerning this loss, Hoyt warns us not to dwell on it to the point of despair or to dismiss the loss with indifference: “To overdo the sorrow aspect of the Judgment Seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.” (Samuel L. Hoyt, “The Negative Aspects of the Christian’s Judgment,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (April – June 1980): 131.)

Third, “after the review is made there will be no sorrow or tears because there are none in heaven.” (A Survey of Bible Doctrine, Charles C. Ryrie, page 179)

AND HE WILL WIPE AWAY EVERY TEAR FROM THEIR EYES ... THERE WILL NO LONGER BE ANY MOURNING, OR CRYING, OR PAIN; THE FIRST THINGS HAVE PASSED AWAY. (REVELATION 21:4)

SUMMARY

Stewardship of one's God-given resources will be the issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Did we faithfully use the resources God entrusted into our care; or did we squander them in our pursuit of a world that is passing away?

Were we motivated to strengthen His Church to the glory of His Name; or was our motivation to promote self?

Did we depend upon Him to provide us with the power to obey and serve Him; or did we depend upon our own strength?

Tragically, it seems that many in the Christian community are unaware of this event that follows the Rapture of the Church. We all long for the Return of Christ; yet many seem oblivious to the judgment that follows. To sacrifice one's “full reward” is a heavy price to pay simply to gain – for only a few years – the conveniences and pleasures of this life. Yet, this is exactly what is at stake.

God forbid that any of us meet Christ at His Bar of Judgment, only to “shrink away from Him in shame.” Let us all depend on God

to motivate us, as faithful stewards, to invest His resources to promote His interests

to flood us with a longing to strengthen His Church and live for *His* glory

to empower us to obey His Word and serve Him faithfully.

Beloved brothers and sisters,

ONLY GOD CAN PREPARE US TO FACE GOD

He alone can prepare us to hear the words:

**“WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!
ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER!”**

A FINAL APPEAL

IT IS APPOINTED FOR MEN TO DIE ONCE AND AFTER THIS COMES JUDGMENT. (HEBREWS 9:27)

SO, TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS THAT WE MAY PRESENT TO YOU A HEART OF WISDOM. (PSALMS 90:12)

If you would like to know what a person believes about the future (not what he *says* he believes but what he really does believe), observe how he lives in the present. How we live in the present is influenced largely by what we believe about the future.

BELOVED, NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IT HAS NOT APPEARED AS YET WHAT WE WILL BE. WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE WILL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE WILL SEE HIM JUST AS HE IS. AND EVERYONE WHO HAS THIS HOPE FIXED ON HIM PURIFIES HIMSELF, JUST AS HE IS PURE. (1ST JOHN 3:2-3)

As the brevity of life becomes increasingly apparent with each passing year, he who is wise will live more fervently, not for a world scheduled to be destroyed but for an eternity that is fast approaching.

LORD, MAKE ME TO KNOW MY END AND WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF MY DAYS. LET ME KNOW HOW TRANSIENT I AM. BEHOLD, YOU HAVE MADE MY DAYS AS HANDBREADTHS, AND MY LIFETIME AS NOTHING IN YOUR SIGHT. SURELY EVERY MAN AT HIS BEST IS A MERE BREATH.” (PSALM 39:4-5)

Today, you and I are one day closer to appearing before the Judgment Seat of Christ than we were yesterday. Whether we are removed from this earth by the Rapture or by death, we are that much closer to bowing before the Son of God. We are one day closer to giving an account of our stewardship.

IT IS ALREADY THE HOUR FOR YOU TO AWAKEN FROM SLEEP; FOR NOW, SALVATION IS NEARER TO US THAN WHEN WE BELIEVED ... BUT PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH IN REGARD TO ITS LUSTS.” (ROMANS 13:11, 14)

To be prepared for our approaching evaluation, we must be able to present a life of faithful character and service when Christ asks to hear our account of what we did with *His property*:

“What did you do with the *time* ... and the *resources* ... and the *abilities* ...
and the *strength* ... and the *opportunities* I entrusted into your care
to prepare yourself and others for eternity
to the glory of My Name?”

Beloved friends, neither you nor I have the luxury – or the right – to foolishly squander our fleeting lives upon the temporal affairs of a dead world. To do so is to shoot our arrows in a leaning bale of hay. To be sure, the race we have been called to run will prevent us from being “in sync” with most of the world’s population, including many in our own circles. But the reality of our situation is this: We each have only one heart. We do not have two. We can have,

therefore, only one devotion ... only one all-consuming passion. We cannot have two. It is impossible to pursue the sparkling tinsel that so enamors this spiritually dead world and be faithful to Christ at the same time.

Therefore, let us look down the track and set our gaze upon the finish line.

How immense the joy will be to find ourselves in the smiling Presence of our glorified Master!

How glorious it will be to receive from His hand our imperishable reward!

How satisfying it will be to hear that wonderful greeting,

*"WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!
ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER!"*

Just imagine what it will be like to cross our finish line! I have an idea that, at that moment, we will fall before Him, grab hold of His wound-scarred feet, and weep with gladness.

And so, with this eternal perspective, let us all

... LAY ASIDE EVERY ENCUMBRANCE AND THE SIN WHICH SO EASILY ENTANGLES US, AND LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF FAITH, WHO FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND HAS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD. (HEBREWS 12:1-2)

APPENDIX A**THE JUDGMENT SEAT**

The first local churches who read the New Testament letters were familiar with judgment seats. These were “raised, throne-like platforms on which rulers or judges sat when making speeches ... or hearing and deciding cases” (Basic Theology, Moody Press, Charles C. Ryrie, page 597)

ON AN APPOINTED DAY HEROD, HAVING PUT ON HIS ROYAL APPAREL, TOOK HIS SEAT ON THE ROSTRUM AND BEGAN DELIVERING AN ADDRESS TO THEM. (ACTS 12:21)

PILATE ... BROUGHT JESUS OUT, AND SAT DOWN ON THE JUDGMENT SEAT AT A PLACE CALLED THE PAVEMENT, BUT IN HEBREW, GABBATHA. NOW IT WAS THE DAY OF PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER; IT WAS ABOUT THE SIXTH HOUR. AND HE SAID TO THE JEWS, "BEHOLD, YOUR KING!" SO THEY CRIED OUT, "AWAY WITH HIM, AWAY WITH HIM, CRUCIFY HIM!" PILATE SAID TO THEM, "SHALL I CRUCIFY YOUR KING?" THE CHIEF PRIESTS ANSWERED, "WE HAVE NO KING BUT CAESAR." SO, HE THEN HANDED HIM OVER TO THEM TO BE CRUCIFIED. (JOHN 19:13-16)

BUT WHILE GALLIO WAS PROCONSUL OF ACHAIA, THE JEWS WITH ONE ACCORD ROSE UP AGAINST PAUL AND BROUGHT HIM BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT, SAYING, "THIS MAN PERSUADES MEN TO WORSHIP GOD CONTRARY TO THE LAW." BUT WHEN PAUL WAS ABOUT TO OPEN HIS MOUTH, GALLIO SAID TO THE JEWS, "IF IT WERE A MATTER OF WRONG OR OF VICIOUS CRIME, O JEWS, IT WOULD BE REASONABLE FOR ME TO PUT UP WITH YOU; BUT IF THERE ARE QUESTIONS ABOUT WORDS AND NAMES AND YOUR OWN LAW, LOOK AFTER IT YOURSELVES; I AM UNWILLING TO BE A JUDGE OF THESE MATTERS." AND HE DROVE THEM AWAY FROM THE JUDGMENT SEAT. (ACTS 18:12-16)

At the time the New Testament letters were being written, judgment seats were used for political and judicial matters.

APPENDIX B

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OUR APPROACHING EVALUATION

SERIES OBJECTIVES

This study is about God's evaluation of the Church Age believer, known in Scripture as the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our goals for this study are for each of us

to be sobered by the certainty of this scheduled, face-to-Face appraisal by our all-knowing Master

to become aware that we – who are saved by grace – will be judged according to the quality and motive of our works

to realize that this evaluation of our lives will result in varying degrees of rewards and losses

? What do you hope to get out of this series on the Judgment Seat of Christ? How do you want your life to be different once this course is over?

THE LEANING BALE OF HAY

? What is the point of this story?

? How does one cultivate an eternal perspective? What can he do to give his heart, increasingly, to Christ and His Kingdom?

WHO WILL STAND BEFORE THIS JUDGE?

WILL BELIEVERS ACTUALLY STAND BEFORE GOD IN JUDGMENT?

We learned from this section that Church Age believers will be evaluated at this Judgment.

- ? Why do you think the *judgment* of a *believer* might sound foreign to many in the Church of the 21st Century?

UNBELIEVERS WILL NOT BE EXAMINED AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

- ? This evaluation, the Judgment Seat of Christ, is for **Church Age** believers. Consulting 1st Corinthians 3:11-15, what are some details we can learn about this judgment from this key passage?

WILL THIS BE A JUDGMENT OF INDIVIDUALS OR A GROUP?

The spiritual condition of the Church is not going to be the issue discussed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. No, the focus of this judgment will be on the individual believer.

This Truth is, indeed, sobering. That the individual believer will “give an account of himself to God” in the future should influence the way he conducts his life in the present. Furthermore, it should also influence the way a local body of believers conducts its life.

- ? If every member of your church were made aware of their approaching evaluation, what effect do you think that would have on *the church’s* character and ministry?

WHO IS THE JUDGE?

Let’s try to imagine ourselves standing before Christ as He evaluates our stewardship.

- ? Can you think of any passages of Scripture that tell us *what He might look like*?
- ? Let’s try to put ourselves in this situation. What do you think your *emotions* will be at this time?

WHY THE JUDGMENT OF JESUS CHRIST IS RELIABLE

It was stated in your reading that the Lord Jesus Christ “will already know ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ about each person that bows before Him.” That fact tends to produce fear in our hearts ... and well it should.

But for our Judge to be all-knowing is also very good news for the exact same reason ... that He knows “the whole truth and nothing but the truth” about us.

? Why would that be good news?

WHEN IS THIS JUDGMENT?***THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH AND THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST***

***THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IS
SOMETIME AFTER THE CHURCH IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH***

***THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IS
SOMETIME BEFORE THE CHURCH RETURNS TO EARTH WITH CHRIST***

Believers long to be removed from this earth when Christ returns for His Bride. But what about this event that *follows* the Rapture of the Church?

? Do you think it is possible for someone to *look forward to* the Judgment Seat of Christ? If so, why would they? If not, why not?

WHERE IS THIS JUDGMENT?

Let's place ourselves in the Throne Room of Christ as He evaluates our stewardship.

? Can you think of any passages of Scripture that tell us what this Throne Room might look like?

? Can you think of any passages of Scripture that tell us what you might hear in the Throne Room of God?

WHAT IS NOT THE ISSUE AT THIS JUDGMENT

We said that neither our sins nor the assurance of our salvation would be the issues for the believer before the Judgment Seat of Christ. To support this, we considered some of God's promises that assure the believer that his sins have been fully and forever removed from him.

- ? If our sins *were* the issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ, what would that do to these promises of God?

WHAT IS THE ISSUE AT THIS JUDGMENT?

There must be a reason God will use our "deeds in the body" to evaluate our lives.

- ? What do the works of a believer reveal?

THE PROPERTIES MANAGED BY THE STEWARD

Concerning our *character*, we are *all* expected to display the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

But *no one* is expected to perform *every ministry*.

- ? *How* do you know what to say "Yes" to and what to say "No" to?
- ? *Why* is it important that you know when to say "Yes" and when to say "No"?

SAVED BY GRACE ... JUDGED BY WORKS

It was stated in your reading, "Perhaps we (believers) are hesitant to emphasize the role of works in the Christian life because we do not want to be branded as 'legalists.'" Most certainly, God does not want His people to be legalistic; but He does expect us to be obedient.

- ? How can it be that two individuals actively seek to be pure – to separate their lives from sinful practices – and one of them is legalistic ... but the other one is not?

THE CHARACTER OF OUR CHOICES

THE FOUNDATION

- ? Before the Apostle Paul describes the different building materials a believer can use in his labor for Christ (1st Corinthians 3:12-15), he first describes the Foundation upon which he builds (1st Corinthians 3:10-11). Why do you think he brought up salvation through faith in Christ, the Foundation, before he explained the importance of a believer's works?

THE BUILDING MATERIALS

Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones

(a God-Centered, Christ-Enamored, Holy Spirit-empowered Life)

Wood, Hay, and Straw

(a Self-Centered, World-Enamored, Flesh-empowered Life)

It was stated on page 29, "(The gold, silver, and precious stones) represent the believer's *faithful obedience and service to his Master* ... They are *His (God's)* works – accomplished through us – for which *we* will be rewarded." This can be seen in Paul's own testimony regarding the power behind his ministry.

- ? Why is it that the only works viewed by God as "*gold, silver, and precious stones*" are those that *He did* through you? Why are *His* works the only works He will accept?

THE APPLE FARMER'S STEWARD

(Cultivating Faithfulness)

- ? What is the point of this story?

OUR STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S PROPERTIES

A STEWARD OF GOD'S GIFTS

(Service)

Faithful Service

In this section it was stated that Christ Jesus will reward his servants for being *faithful to God*.

? What does it mean to be faithful to God?

Devoted Service

In this section it was stated that Christ Jesus will reward his servants for being *devoted to Him*. That is, they had a single-hearted passion for Christ which showed

? What does it mean to be devoted to God?

? What is the difference between being faithful to God and being devoted to God?

A STEWARD OF GOD'S WORD

(Faith and Obedience)

Some people get more from their Bible reading than others. They just seem to flourish in their understanding of the Scriptures. There is more than one reason for that.

? According to this section we just read, what is one of the reasons some seem to get more from their Bible reading than others?

A STEWARD OF GOD'S LOVE

(Motive)

Our Love for Others

In this section it was stated that Christ Jesus will reward those believers who served others because of *their love for them*. They did what they did because it was in the others' best interest, not because it was in their own best interest.

This kind of love is not a man-generated love but, rather, a Holy Spirit generated love.

? To love others, we must *draw upon* the love of God, made available to us by the indwelling Holy Spirit. But how do you do that?

Our Love for God

As with the preceding section, this love for God is not man-generated but, rather, Holy Spirit generated. Because of his sinful nature, man cannot love God. Only God can love God.

? It is easy to say, "I love God." According to your reading, how can I be sure that I do?

THE TEMPORARY REWARDS WE WILL JOYFULLY SURRENDER***THE GOLDEN DIADEMS OF VICTORY***

It was stated in your reading that "Believers ... will wear the crowns reserved for those who have overcome the world. This what every saint has conquered."

We are victors over the world, not by our own strength but by our faith in Christ Jesus. He is the One Who overcame the world. Because true believers are "in Christ," they share in His victory over the world.

But being victorious over the world does not mean being insulated from the world's attacks.

? How, then, does the believer experience victory over the world if tribulation *from* the world is still a part of his life?

We are told that these crowns are “laid up” for us. They are “safely kept” for us. And sometime “in the future” we will be awarded these crowns.

? What does the believer need for this promise of a *future* reward to help him *right now*?

THE CROWN OF LIFE

A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL PERSEVERANCE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING
(TRIALS, TEMPTATIONS, PERSECUTIONS, OPPRESSIONS, MARTYRDOM)

According to James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10, the Crown of Life will be awarded to those “who persevere under trial” and are “faithful until death.” Matthew 5:44 tells us one step we can take to be able to respond in this way toward those who attack us. We are to pray for those who persecute us.

? *How* are we to pray for our enemies? What *specifically* should we ask the Lord to do on their behalf ... and ours?

THE CROWN OF EXULTATION

A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE IN CHRIST’S NAME TO BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS
(ACCORDING TO ONE’S CALLING)

Every Christ-follower has been *called to strengthen Christ’s Church* in some way.

? How do you know what specific ministry(ies) you have been called to?

THE CROWN OF GLORY

A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL LEADERSHIP OF CHRIST’S CHURCH
(PASTORAL MINISTRIES)

If your pastor is faithful to his God-entrusted stewardship, you can be sure that he is being attacked from many sides.

? In what ways can you help your pastor be faithful to his calling?

THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A DIADEM OF VICTORY FOR FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S WORD ***(FAITH AND OBEDIENCE)***

To believe in “the integrity of the Scriptures” is to believe that the original manuscripts, penned by human authors, were inspired by God (“God-breathed”), down to the very letters ... that God, in His sovereign care, has preserved its trustworthiness in the copies of those manuscripts ... and that its authority over our lives remains intact today.

? How can you tell if someone believes in “the integrity of the Scriptures”?

CASTING OUR CROWNS BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD

? Why does God deserve **all** the credit for a fruitful ministry in which **you** have faithfully labored long hours and in which **you** have grown weary?

The crowns the saints will be given to wear are crowns they do not deserve to wear. Christ, and Christ alone, deserves to wear these crowns of gold. They represent the works *He* did in and through believers, but that *they* will wear.

? Can you think of a crown Jesus was given to wear that *He* did not deserve?

This crown Christ was given to wear was one He did not deserve to wear. But because of *our sinful works*, you and I do.

? What did this crown represent?

THE EVERLASTING REWARDS WE WILL GRATEFULLY KEEP***THE MILLENNIAL YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST ON THIS EARTH******THE EVERLASTING REIGN OF CHRIST ON THE NEW EARTH******THE EVERLASTING REWARDS*****Christ's Praise for Faithful Stewardship**

Imagine yourself meeting Christ Jesus for the first time face-to-Face; and with a joyful smile, He says to you, "Well done, good and faithful slave."

? What do you think you would say to Him (if anything)?

A Position of Civil Authority

Those who reign with Christ in these positions of civil authority will also serve as "priests." That is, this form of government does not recognize a "separation of Church and state." This is a theocracy.

? Would anyone be willing to define or describe a "theocracy"?

Notice, too, that Revelation 5:10 does not describe the government of one nation or a union of nations. The Kingdom of Christ stretches over all the earth. The saints are going to reign with Christ over a world-wide empire.

A Capacity to Display the Radiant Glory of God

The manner we live our lives now will determine the capacity we will be given to radiate the glory of God in His Kingdom.

? What do you think every believer needs to "walk in a manner worthy of the God Who calls him into His Own Kingdom and glory"?

SUMMARY: OUR EVERLASTING REWARDS

This section ended with the passage Matthew 6:19-21. The point is that we are not to live for this world.

? Why does it have to be “either ... or”? Why not “both ... and”?

[Read Matthew 6:24 and Proverbs 6:6-11.]

The emphasis of this passage is “Do not be lazy.” But in the process of this counsel, we are instructed to have a responsible savings program ... i.e., to gather our harvest in the summer to avoid hunger in the winter. Yet elsewhere (Matthew 6:19), we are told not to “store up treasures on earth.”

? How do you know when you have stepped over the line of doing what is responsible to doing what is indulgent?

THE LOSS OF A REWARD***WOOD, HAY, AND STRAW***

(A Poorly Invested Life)

? Why do you think that believers who live a “wood, hay and straw” life *allow* this kind of life to continue?

A World-Enamored Life

Some of you have (or had or would like to have) children. Concerning their *spiritual lives*

? What do you think Christ wants them to *know* before they leave home as young adults?

Concerning their *spiritual lives*

? What do you think Christ wants them to *be* before they leave home as young adults?

Concerning their *spiritual lives*

? What do you think Christ wants them to *know how to do* before they leave home as young adults?

? What will it take for *you* – as their parent – to *prepare them* to know and be and do what Christ wants them to know and be and do before they leave home as young adults? That is, what must *you* know and be and do for that to happen?

(Keep in mind: the role of discipling children is primarily in the hands of the parents, not the local church (Ephesians 6:4). The local church is to come alongside the parents to help them. But it is not the church's responsibility to disciple children *for* the parents.)

A Self-Exalting Life

[Read Philippians 2:4-8.]

? According to this passage what did Jesus do to humble Himself?

? Why would obedience result in humility?

? How, then, do *we* humble ourselves before God and man?

A Self-Dependent Life

? How does one grow in dependence on God?

A HEALTHY FEAR

Both believers and unbelievers are to fear the Lord.

Jesus warns the *unbeliever* to “fear Him Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Furthermore, the Apostle Peter warns the *believer* to “conduct yourselves in fear (of the Father) during the time of your stay on earth (1st Peter 1:17).

We would expect the unbeliever to be warned of God’s judgment. But we might be surprised that believers, too, should fear God. That seems to contradict the assurance we have from Romans 8:1:

[Read Romans 8:1.]

The idea of the word “condemnation” is punishment. Those who are in Christ Jesus are not facing the punishment of eternal death.

? So, if the believer has been delivered from death unto life, what exactly is he or she supposed to fear?

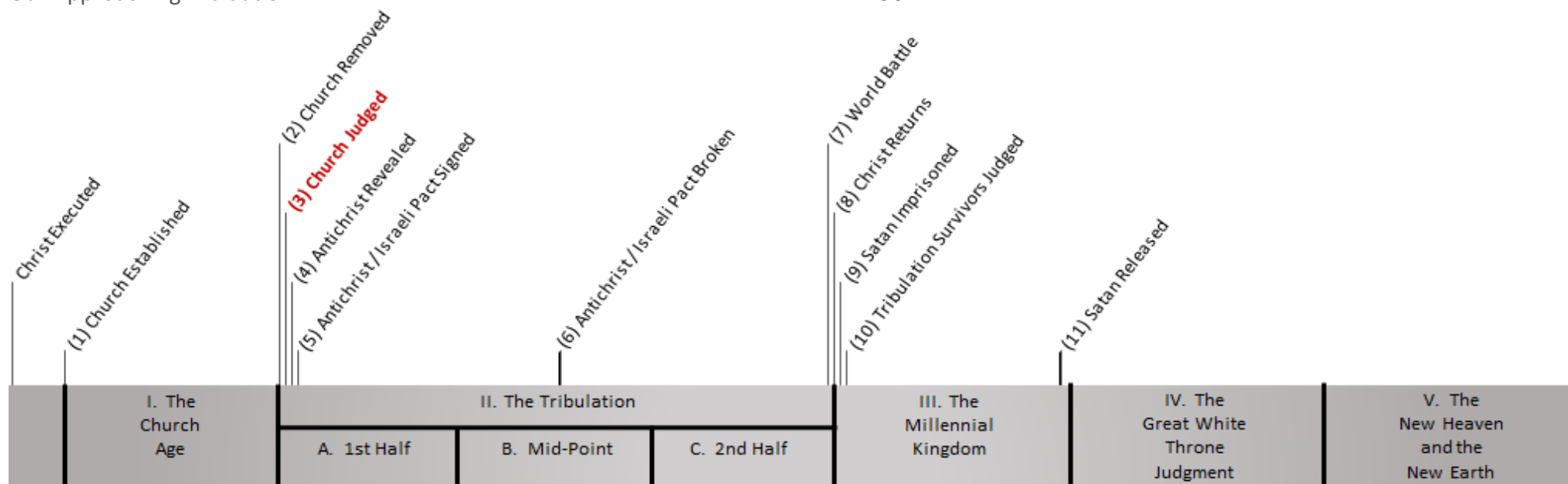
WILL THE ONE WHO LIVED FOR SELF FACE AN ETERNITY OF SORROW?

? What should a believer do who realizes that he or she has not been living properly for Christ? Now what?

A FINAL APPEAL

Many within the Christian community are seemingly unaware of the evaluation they face after the Rapture of the Church.

? What does the Church need to do to correct this problem?



Christ Is Executed (Crucifixion):

Isaiah 53:8; **Daniel 9:25-26**; Matthew 27:33-50; Mark 9:31

I. The Church Age

- Church Is Established (Day of Pentecost):
Acts 2; 1st Corinthians 12:13
- Church Is Removed (Rapture):
1st Corinthians 15:51-53; **1st Thessalonians 4:13-17**
- Church Is Judged (Judgment Seat of Christ):**
1st Corinthians 3:8, 13-15; **2nd Corinthians 5:9-10**; Revelation 22:12

II. The Tribulation: Revelation 6-19

A. The 1st Half of the Tribulation: Matthew 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13

- Antichrist Is Revealed:
Daniel 7:25, 8:25; **2nd Thessalonians 2:3-10**; Revelation 13:1-8
- Antichrist / Israeli Pact Is Signed:
Daniel 9:27

B. The Mid-Point of the Tribulation: Jeremiah 30:4-11; Matthew 24:15-28

- Antichrist / Israeli Pact Is Broken ("Abomination of Desolation"):
Daniel 9:27; **Matthew 24:15**; Mark 13:14; **2nd Thessalonians 2:4**

C. The 2nd Half of the Tribulation: Jeremiah 30:4-11; Matthew 24:16-28

- World Battle (Armageddon):
Joel 3:9-15; **Revelation 16:12-16**
- Christ Returns (Second Coming):
Zechariah 14:1-5; **Matthew 24:29-39**; **Revelation 19:11-21**
- Satan Is Imprisoned:
Revelation 20:1-3
- Tribulation Survivors Are Judged:
Matthew 25:31-46

III. The Millennial Kingdom: Psalm 2; Zechariah 14:16-18; Revelation 20:4-6

- Satan Is Released:
Revelation 20:7-10

IV. The Great White Throne Judgment: Revelation 20:11-15

V. The New Heaven and the New Earth: 2nd Peter 3:8-13; Revelation 21:1-22:5