

The Judgment Seat of Christ

2 Corinthians 5:10-11

Before studying the verses of 2 Corinthians 5, I want to direct your attention to other passages which throw some light on tonight's study. Romans 14:10-13 says, "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 says, "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work, which he has built on, it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

Now, look again at our text in 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences." **The scripture passages that we have looked at tonight are scriptures that both *comfort* and *challenge* us as believers.** There is great *comfort* in knowing that there will indeed come a day when we will stand in His blessed presence to receive rewards based on what we have done for His glory. But there is also the *challenge* of knowing that seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, our life is somehow related to the fact that each of us "must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Of course, it is well that we should understand (and I am sure that most of you do) that the judgment seat of Christ referred to in 2 Corinthians 5 and in the other passages that we have read has to do with believers. The judgment that awaits the unbeliever (which, for example, is dealt with in Revelation 20) is something very, very different. Here the issue at stake is our *response* to the love of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ; in the judgment of the unbelievers, the issue is the ultimate *rejection* of that love. In the judgment of the *believers*, God is dealing with people who have established a relationship with Christ; *unbelievers* have never established that relationship.

For example, the word that is used in connection with the judgment seat of Christ is different from that used for the judgment of the unbeliever. In the case of the unbeliever (Revelation 20) it has to do with *punishment* and *penalty*; in the case of the believer the primary meaning has to do with *rewards*, or the loss of them, in heaven. But at the same time, having said that, let me also say that any understanding of the judgment seat of Christ which gives us the idea that it is going to be – what shall I say? – a happy prize-day for the Christian when everything else about his life is completely overlooked and forgotten is far from the truth.

For example, Romans 14 says, “...every one of us shall give an account of himself to God.” 1 Corinthians 3 says, “...the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” 2 Corinthians 5 says, “...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body...” Notice the words: “himself,” “a man’s work,” and “body.” This is an all-inclusive truth that involves the whole redeemed *personality* of the believer who is indwelt by the Spirit of God as we stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The Scriptural emphasis on this subject presents it to us as a solemn, indeed, and yet one (if rightly understood) which puts passion into our prayers, sacrifice into our service, and a real

dedication into our daily living. It seems to me that these qualities: *passion, sacrifice, and dedication*, are conspicuous by their absence today. And because of their absence there seems to be the absence of the church's impact on the world around us.

Therefore, my question to you tonight is – Why are they lacking? The Bible gives us the insight into the answer, as seen in 1 John 2:28, “And now, little children, abide in him, that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” 1 John 3:2-3 says, “Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure.” The Bible has made it very plain, when we have lost our expectancy of Christ's return, we move further and further away from passion, sacrifice, and dedication in our Christ living. Notice that Paul uses the word “must” in his teaching of the judgment, when he says, “We must all appear.” The indication here is that the judgment seat of Christ is not just a possibility, but also a certainty; not even a probability, but a definite appointment on the calendar of God.

But why is Paul so sure that there is coming a Judgment Day? The absolute injustices of life on earth *demand* that there shall be a day when right is vindicated and wrong is condemned. Many believers, and maybe you are among them, have suffered because of motives that were misjudged and actions that were completely misconstrued. **Many believers have lived a whole life of suffering simply because of the damage that has been done to them by somebody else.** Many have gone through life with a wound in the soul from which there seems to be no deliverance, no recovery, and no forgetfulness. Many have served faithfully and yet have had no recognition, but rather a great deal of abuse. **Yes, there is a wonderful comfort in knowing that we “must” appear before the judgment seat of Christ.** And many who have spent a lifetime with a sore heart and

a sense of utter frustration may find some measure of comfort in the fact that, among the great things that will happen on that day is that *right* will be vindicated and *wrong* condemned.

But there is also a warning about passing judgment on somebody else when we have very little knowledge of the facts. Paul issues this challenge to us in Romans 14:10 & 12-13 when he says, “...why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore...” One of the great problems of any day is when people become critical of one another within the body of Christ, saying things about which they have only heard partial truth. Listen very carefully – if you are not part of the *problem*, or if you are not part of the *solution* – keep your mouth shut!!!

Notice also the *universality* of the day. Paul says this in Romans 14:11, “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” The strong Christian *and* the weak Christian will stand, for no imagined progress in spirituality or holiness will *exempt* us from this personal interview at the judgment seat of Christ, and no weakness will *excuse* us from it.

The man who has been entrusted with only one talent will appear before the judgment seat of Christ along with the man who has been entrusted with ten. And the leaders, the teachers, the ministers, the elders, the deacons, as well as the more obscure church members must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their stewardship. Not one shall escape, not will there ever be the possibility of the omission of one from this date on the calendar. We must “**all**” appear, without exemption or excuse.

You will also notice the *authority* of this day. It is the judgment seat of “*Christ*.” He will make no mistake, because He discerns the heart. He will impute no wrong where it is not due, and He will give no

credit for something that appears to be right while the motive has been sinful. He will search to the very core of every matter, and there will be a standard of perfect justice as the Lord examines the motives of every action of every one of us on that day. Ecclesiastes 12:14 reminds us, “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good; or whether it be evil.”

Think of the absolute authority of that judgment from which there is no court of appeal, a judgment that is final and just, and absolutely true; a judgment based not upon appearances, but upon the infinite knowledge of our God and Savior. Oh, the dreadful, awful, solemn authority of the judgment seat of Christ.

Further see the individuality of it. The bible says, “...that everyone may receive the things done in his body...whether it be good or bad.” There is nothing indiscriminate about this. It is not a question of God calling people before Him in terms of a church fellowship or even a Christian family. It is a man and a woman being separated even from the context of their family and standing alone to give an account of himself and herself before God. This is husband and wife, parent and child, separated from each other.

The account is not to be given to a group, but of an individual. When Romans 14:12 says “each of us shall give an account of himself to God,” it simply means that the individual’s innermost being (his thoughts, his motives, and intentions) will be brought into play. In other words, the issue on that day is not the amount of work I have done or the quantity of service I have rendered, but what kind of person I have been as a believer and a Christian. The whole matter can be summed up with the words “faithfulness” and “attitude.”

We sum up, therefore, what the Bible teaches concerning the judgment seat of Christ, which every Christian must face. On that day, the Lord will go over the Christian’s life from the moment when His grace met him and saved him from the bondage of sin into

salvation in Christ. And the whole of his Christian life will be brought before him as one great panoramic picture. Furthermore, the character of Christ's judgment will be based, in some measure, on our attitude toward others, as seen in Matthew 7:1-3, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?" Have you ever thought that the very attitude that you exhibit towards others is the very same attitude that Christ will use when He deals with you at the judgment seat of Christ? Have you been merciful? Have you been forgiving? Have you been compassionate? What will be Christ's attitude when He confronts you with your failures in your Christian walk?

Everything that has been done in dependence on the Holy Spirit and for the glory of God will be met with the words, "Well, done, good and faithful servant, receive your reward." But everything that has been done in the energy of the flesh and for the glory of self will be burned up and destroyed to one's eternal loss.

As the Apostle John thinks to that day, he gives us this challenge in 1 John 2:28, "Little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we have may confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

As you look back on your Christian life, what do you see?