

## Grace in the Third Tense

### A Study of the Believer and Future Judgment

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With certainty, all believers of this present dispensation of Grace will exit this world via the Rapture and will undergo the judgment Seat of Christ prior to our arrival in Heaven. Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment Seat of Christ," (2 Cor. 5:10a). If you are a grace believer you will appear there. What takes place at the Judgment Seat? In the light of eternity, what purpose does it serve? On the mind of many; is the Judgment Seat of Christ an event that we can anticipate with eagerness or dread? Finally, how does grace relate to this future judgment? These are the larger questions that we need to consider, because the greater opinion in fundamental circles is not in the favor of most Christians, nor does it honor God.

#### Introduction:

The growing trend is to make the Judgment Seat of Christ a Protestant Purgatory. This has been common for years; but it is growing in voice among popular Bible teachers. Many of these men are addressing the issue of eternal security but amending a conditional eternity for disobedient believers. In his book titled *Eternal Security*, Charles Stanley writes, "Does our behavior matter once we are assured of our salvation? You bet it does. Are there any eternal consequences when a believer sins? Absolutely. Will eternity be the same for those who follow Christ faithfully and those who live for themselves? **Not a chance.**"<sup>1</sup> [emphasis mine] Floyd Barackman of Practical Bible Schools adds, "If during this lifetime we are developing a capacity for our future experience with Christ (cp. II Cor. 4:17), will not the believer who now often abides in Him have a greater capacity and desire for the Lord's fellowship in the future than he who seldom does? A person with a small capacity will not be able to appreciate fully or enjoy completely all that the Lord will offer."<sup>2</sup> These are not unique. Numbers of well-known Bible teachers have taught various positions along this line. Some such as Theodore Epp are more traditional and mild, "There may even be tears connected with our present labors, for we are told in Philippians 2:12 that we should work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."<sup>3</sup> On the stricter side, which is growing in intensity and popularity, it is common to interpret the parable of the three slaves in Matthew 25 as referring to the judgment Seat of Christ.

"While the parable seems to say that the servant was disowned and banished [lit. "and the useless slave, you cast out into the outer darkness. There, the weeping and the gnashing of teeth will exist."], it does not necessarily mean this (Mt. 25:50). In a similar parable, the Lord Jesus will slay His enemies (Lk. 19:27). I **prefer** the view that the servant was not allowed to attend the festive celebration, honoring his master's return. This portrays the denial of intimate fellowship with

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1 Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1990) p. 118.

2 Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology* (Old Tappan, NJ.: Fleming H. Revel, 1984) p. 345.

3 Theodore Epp, *Present Labor and Future Rewards*, (Lincoln, NB.: Back to the Bible, 1960) p.78.

Christ, which the more faithful will enjoy. Again, our evil works will limit our capacity for this fellowship (cp. Rev. 2:17; 2 Cor. 4:17; Jn. 12:26)."<sup>4</sup> [clarification and emphasis mine]

Is this truly our prospect for the future? I might be able to find someone that is performing the Christian life worse than I and therefore cause myself to feel better in my consideration of this event; but I can find many Christians who abide in Christ with a greater consistency, which causes me to dread this event. God's Word teaches me that I am a believer in the dispensation of Grace. God's Word teaches me that I am saved by grace. Does that grace stop at the Rapture?

### **Why some teach conditional blessings**

What justification do these Bible teachers use for such teaching? They claim the authority of scripture for their position, but they also turn to the need to motivate believers. Barackman cites the need "To Stimulate Christian Faithfulness."<sup>5</sup> Another adds, "Every sinful deed will be examined. On the other side of the coin, we can rest assured that none of our good deeds will go unnoticed, either."<sup>6</sup> "If, however, you are one of those believers who has been content just to know you are on your way to heaven, this information should be disturbing. It is my prayer that you will renew your commitment to Christ and begin living for Him."<sup>7</sup> Joseph Dillow, in an attempt to bridge the gap between Calvinism and Arminianism, [a waste of time] has attempted to teach eternal security-not perseverance-and yet hold to something conditional in the future experience of the believer.

"I accept the Reformed position that those who are truly born again can never lose their salvation. But I also accept the Arminian position that the warning passages of the New Testament (e.g., Heb. 6) are directed to true Christians, not merely professing Christians. There is a real danger here. However, contrary to the Arminian, the danger is not loss of heaven but loss of our reward there and severe divine discipline in time."<sup>8</sup>

We would give two main objectives: To encourage growth; to encourage good behavior. Both of these sound good, but in the end they are better described as such: To encourage conformity to one's determination of God's will. Simply, the Judgment Seat functions as an effective threat to scare Christians into conforming to an individual's will under the guise of "God's will". We know that not all Bible teachers agree as to every aspect of God's will. Many within fundamental Bible teaching Churches have very contradictory beliefs concerning God's will for the saint, One pastor may teach that I am to do certain things. A second pastor does not agree. From the second pastor's point of view, I could experience suffering at the Judgment Seat of

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4 Barackman, op cit p. 346.

5 ibid pp. 75-78.

6 Stanley, op cit. p. 128.

7 ibid, p. 129.

8 Joseph Dillow, *Reign of the Servant Kings*, (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992 ) p. xvi from preface.

Christ because I was doing the wrong thing, even though I was taught it was right. What about the Bible teacher that taught me this truth? Will he have to suffer because he misled me?

A good example would be the issue of Lordship salvation. If one believes that a person must make Christ Lord in order to be saved, then all those who teach simple faith in the finished work of Christ are misleading people. In fact they are teaching heresy, and should grieve and suffer loss at the judgment Seat. The provincial, hyper-conservative Bible Baptists have taught such a consistent future with their circles of fellowship. If you were part of one of their Churches and lived right, you would be in the inner circle. If you belonged to a General Association of Regular Baptists Church (just as an example), then you would be in one of the outer circles. Where does such ludicrous teaching end? I personally knew a believer who after having stood up to a pastor was told that God would avenge him [the pastor] at the Judgment Seat. If God's Word does not sufficiently motivate the believer, our attempts to do so- will fall drastically short, and improperly affect a person's motive. As each year goes by, I am more amazed by the grace of our great God. I truly anticipate a day

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."<sup>9</sup>

Any view of the believer's future following the rapture that involves tears, gnashing of teeth, or outer darkness is severely warped concerning God's grace. This has become all too common in many areas of theology. Advocates of Lordship theology cannot believe that God's grace would tolerate uncommitted Christians. Reformers have been notorious for teaching that grace gives us the ability to keep God's Law. Among all these misunderstandings or perversions of grace another has been added which is equally detrimental to the believers' growth and understanding of the work of God. At the root these teachers do not understand the grace of God.

### **The problem of limiting grace to past tense salvation.**

This is all too common. God's grace comes to the believer in three tenses. In the past tense, I was saved by grace. I was declared righteous because I did not work but believed (Rom. 4:5). "Being declared righteous freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24).

Grace did not stop at that point. Grace began at that point. We read in Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace you are having been saved." Paul employs a perfect periphrastic which is composed of a present tense form of the verb "to be" [εἰμι] and the perfect tense form of the participle."<sup>10</sup> This periphrastic dramatically emphasizes the continuous work of this grace. We might paraphrase the verse, "For by grace you were saved and are saved." Every letter Paul wrote begins, "Grace to you" (e.g. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3). Grace continues to be present, Paul isn't requesting for grace to be given to these believers. Paul is telling them that God's grace is ever

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<sup>9</sup> John Newton, Amazing Grace

<sup>10</sup> H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955) p. 232.

present to them. As a believer, I am now under grace (Rom. 6:14). I stand in a sphere of grace (Rom. 5:2). This sphere is unchanging because it is Christ (2 Tim. 2:1; Eph. 1:6). This grace is active for it teaches me to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live reflectively and righteously and godly in this present age and to eagerly expect the appearing of our Great God even Savior - Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:11-13).

God's grace was involved in my initial salvation; in my present salvation; and it will also be active in my future tense of salvation. We are to "hope endedly upon the grace which is being borne to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:13). The phrase "hope endedly" is the main thrust of this verse. "Endedly" is variously translated "to the end", "fully", and "perfectly". The word is an adverbial form of "end", In verse nine, Peter has given the end point on which a believer is to focus. This end point is the completion of our salvation at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:7b). With that in mind Peter instructed his readers to hope endedly, or have a hope that is wrapped up in the end and is directed at the grace that is going to be brought by Jesus Christ when He is unveiled before us. We don't enter eternity and the presence of our Lord on the basis of our works but grace. There is grace for us in the future, and the very Person who will be the Judge of the Judgment Seat of Christ will bear this grace to us.

**The problem of limiting the work of God in our salvation.**

Not only do these teachers limit God's grace, but they also limit God's overall work in our salvation. We might call this grace in the second or present tense. What we have said concerning Ephesians 2:8 is also true here. But there is much that God is doing in the present tense that assures our salvation. We might say that Christ is saving now those who were saved. Christ continues to apply the benefits of His work to believers.

Christ returned to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit, Who now acts in our lives according to the direction from Christ. John recorded Jesus' words, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear yet. But whenever the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the Truth, for He will not speak from Himself but as many things as He hears He will speak and He will announce to you the things coming." (Jn. 16:12-14). The believer can have an experiential knowledge that Christ abides in Him. This knowledge comes from the Holy Spirit whom Christ gave us (1 Jn. 3:24). It is significant to our present and future that the Holy Spirit seals us until the day of complete redemption (Eph. 4:30). This will be the day I am completely freed by a work of God from all the effects of sin (Rom. 8:19-23),

Christ is the head of the Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). As the head, He channels growth through the body from member to member (Eph. 4:15-16). Christ gave Himself on behalf of the Church, that He might sanctify her (Eph. 5:25-26). While "gave" is in the aorist tense, "sanctify" is present. He gave in the past, not to then sit inactively on the side lines, but that He might actively

sanctify His Church in the present time. The final outcome being a bride without spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless (v.27)

Christ indwells each believer (Jn. 14:20). This indwelling results in our possession of eternal life (1 Jn. 5:11, 12). The union of Christ's spirit essence with our spirits, provides us with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16; 6:17). This indwelling also results in the potential for glory (Col. 1:27). His indwelling has practical present tense benefits.

Dealing with the security of our salvation, Paul asked, "Who shall bring a charge down on God's elect? God, the one justifying?" (Rom. 8:35) Paul points the question to a ridiculous answer, "The God who declared you righteous is going to turn around and charge you with unrighteousness!" How absurd! He would be Working against Himself, if after declaring us righteous, He then declared us guilty. Paul again asks, "Who is the one condemning? Christ the one having died, now rather having been raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes on behalf of us?" (Rom. 8:34) Christ would likewise be working against Himself if He were to condemn us after He died for us and then rose again to intercede for us. Such a function would be counterproductive. Why intercede if only to condemn in the end?

### **Galatianism or Grace?**

In the same way, to limit God's grace to the past and not anticipate it in the future leads one to believe that God can save a people and then continue to judge and punish them for their misbehavior and shortcomings. It leads one to believe, "Yes I was saved by grace, but I am being saved and I will be saved by my works." Fundamentalists have been notorious for hammering home the salvation-by-grace-alone-gospel (which is true) but immediately following initial salvation, they slip the new believer the rule book of do's and don'ts. This is nothing but Galatianism, or an attempt to mature individuals by means of law in what ever form may be appropriate to the individual Church (cf. Gal. 3:2-3). In Hebrews 7:18-19, Paul wrote, "For on the one hand, there has come to be a setting aside of the preceding commandment on account of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing mature [ΤΕΛΕΙΩ-*teleioō*]." The verb "mature" ["perfect" in many versions] means to complete or bring to its designed end. When a parent brings a child into the world the designed end is to grow and become an adult one day - to be mature. For believers today, the law is not the means for arriving at maturity. It never was. It did not cause a single Old Testament saint to mature. It showed them how sinful they were. Therefore, to provide Christians with such lists, fosters immaturity, and often despair as they only come to see their sin. In relation to our topic a judgment Seat which threatens, does not produce maturity but fear and immaturity. It produces immature believers who outwardly conform out of fear but have not grown to know inwardly the gracious work of God.

Maturity is brought about by a better hope, "by which we draw near to God" (v.19). That hope involves, in part, Jesus Christ as our High priest. It is a better hope, because it no longer

depends on our persistent obedience but on a priest who continues into the age.<sup>11</sup> As that priest, Christ intercedes on our behalf (v.25). This intercession guarantees that those of us who have come to God will be saved entirely. The word "uttermost" sees the object of salvation as being brought to completion. If a believer fails to be conformed to the image of the Son, who is at fault? If there are believers at the Judgment Seat who will weep because they didn't turn out like others, who is to blame? If a saint is cast into "outer darkness", who failed? Since it is Christ who will present His Church without spot and wrinkle, holy and blameless; since it is Christ who intercedes, to save us completely, then Christ is to blame for any that arrive at the Judgment Seat marred or failures.

### **Temporal Comfort or Eternal?**

Having explained to the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord and who will suffer in that Day, Paul turned to the Thessalonians' salvation (2 Thess. 2:13-17). Paul expressed his constant need to thank God concerning the Thessalonians and their salvation (v.13). Paul stated that they were chosen by God for this salvation. Since it was God's choice to bring them to salvation, it is consistent to believe that God will complete the work. Thus Paul wrote, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God even our Father, the One having loved us and having given us eternal comfort and a good hope by grace, may He comfort your hearts and establish you in every word and good work." (vv. 16-17). The importance of these verses lies in the tenses of the participles and the mood of the main verb. The main verbs are "comfort" and "strengthen" in verse 17. Both are in the Optative mood, which expresses a strong wish but also the strong possibility that it will not be fulfilled.<sup>12</sup> Paul wasn't certain what the experience of the Thessalonians would turn out to be as they continued their Christian lives. However, the two participles in verse 16: "having loved" and "having given" are both in the aorist tense, and communicate action which has preceded the main verb. Therefore, while Paul was not certain as to whether the Thessalonians would stand firm and hold fast (v.15) He was certain that God had already given an eternal comfort and that by grace. It is not a temporary comfort that may be lost at the judgment Seat, it is eternal. The comfort was not conditioned upon their behavior. It was not the object of Paul's wish or request. Rather, it was the basis upon which Paul wished for further comfort [or encouragement] and strength. Because God had already loved and given, Paul did not hesitate to request that God would establish them at that time. Paul was asking that God would give the Thessalonians a little fore-taste of what is yet to come. Such a taste would go a long way in encouraging Christians to have a proper view of the future and specifically regarding the Rapture of the Church and the coming Day of the Lord. If we arrive at the Judgment Seat to mourn over failures and sin; if we may be separated from the celebration of God's completed salvation of His Church, then that eternal comfort was not real. God lied and God did not indeed save all His Church.

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<sup>11</sup> In the context, Christ is the priest. We will only need Him as priest into the age. Following this age, we will be like Him and will no longer need one to intercede on our behalf

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, pp. 172-173.

### **Total Security**

What guarantees does God give the believer regarding his future? The Philippians were a Church divided. Some were failing to be of one spirit and one soul (1:27). Some were failing to reflectively think the same thing and as a result, some were selfishly looking out for themselves (2:2-5). They had a need to become blameless in their conduct (2:12-15). Some appeared to be following the Judaizers while others were following the lawless (3:1-3, 18-19). The whole of their division may have centered around two women who were framing their minds with the same thing in the Lord (4:2). Yet to these saints, Paul confidently said, "The one having begun a good work in you will fully complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (v.6). Paul was confident that while we need to "work out our own salvation" (for our present experience and testimony)<sup>13</sup> salvation is still primarily God's work. God began our salvation, continues, and will complete it.

Certainly the Corinthian Church was racked with strife. No Church addressed in the New Testament had so many evident problems. When Paul revealed the mystery of the Rapture, he did not say that good believers would be glorified, and the unfaithful would be transferred to heaven but not glorified. Paul wrote, "but we all shall be changed" (15:51). Some have attempted to equate the various types of glory in verses 40-41 with different degrees of rewarded glory for saints. This misses the point of Paul's discussion in verses 35-49. Paul was explaining how flesh and blood creatures will inherit this future aspect of the Kingdom of God (v. 50). We will be changed! What we see now is not what we will be then. And just as different creations have different qualities of glory, so our resurrection body will be significantly different (42-45). The difference is between what we are now and what we will all be then. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul said that they would all be presented together (4:13-14). In verse 15, Paul attributes this future standing to God's grace, "For the all things are for you, in order that the grace which is increasing through means of the many thanksgivings [recognitions of God's good grace] may abound to the glory of God." Remember, this was addressed unconditionally to the same saints who were hyper-enforcing discipline on a repentant brother (2:5-11). The statement, "lest Satan should take advantage" (v.11) implies that since they had not yet been gracious with this brother, Satan was getting a foot hold in their lives. However, God's grace was still abounding and would do so to the completion of their salvation.

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13 The instruction of verse 14, "do all things without murmurings and arguing" is a specific aspect of their salvation that they needed to work out. They needed to learn to reflect the same thing so that they could get along and have a positive testimony. The result of this is found in Verse 15, that they would be blameless, shining as lights and this would be done, holding forth or paying attention to the Word of Life. The best way to hold the Word up before the world is not by mere preaching but preaching accompanied by the power of God in one's life (cp 1 Thess. 1:5-10). It should also be pointed out that "work out your own salvation" may simply mean that you need to work on what God has given to you, and stop worrying about how everyone else is doing. It appears from elsewhere in the letter that the Philippians were paying more attention to other's works and salvation than their own, however, one can only work out his or her own salvation. You cannot work out anyone else's salvation.

Will we all be able to stand before God? Will we stand before the Father marred and dirty? Paul wrote the Thessalonians, "Now may the Lord make you to increase and abound in love toward one another and toward all people as indeed we also toward you, to establish your hearts blameless in holiness before God even our Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." (1 Thess. 3:12-13). The use of the two optatives [see previous explanation] "increase and abound" stress a wish on Paul's part. The wish was for the Thessalonians' experience at that time. The result is in the future. Does this teach that if they failed to abound in love, that they would stand blamable and unholy before God? This seems rather foolish in view of God's work in salvation. While Paul used an optative in his wish for their present growth, his confidence remained in God, and this he expressed with Aorist Infinitive "establish" (v. 13). Paul knew that the end result would be a God-produced standing. It would not be one earned by obedience, else we would stand blameless on the basis of our works.

Paul knew that God is able to carry out this work of presenting us faultless (Rom. 14:5). Jude closed, "Now to the one being able to guard us without stumbling, and to make us to stand before the face of His glory, blameless with exultation." (v. 24). Now God is able to make us stand, but will He? If He withholds the application of this work to any saint due to unfaithfulness, then this future standing is by our works not God's. It would strongly imply that we are earning the right to stand.

God's purpose was not to chose us so that we might save our selves. We were chosen to be holy and blameless (Eph. 1:4).<sup>14</sup> When Christ gave Himself for us, it was not to help us. It was not to just to give us an example. It was not just to pay for our past sins. It wasn't just to get us to heaven. He gave Himself so that He might sanctify and cleanse His Church. That work of sanctification and cleansing is not always a pleasant experience at present. The end result of His giving, sanctifying and cleansing will be Christ presenting the corporate Church to Himself as His bride. As His bride, we will be "a glorious Church not having spot or wrinkle or any of such things" but will be holy and blameless (Eph. 5:25-27). The point is made concerning this passage, just as with the one in 2 Thessalonians 3, that Paul does not write this in the indicative mood which is the mood of reality. He uses the subjunctive, the mood of possibility, removed one step from reality. Dana & Mantey note that the Aorist Subjunctive (which is used here) is closely related to the Future Indicative.<sup>15</sup> But the subjunctive as it is used in relation to God's activity is seldom a question of whether it will happen. The question is in the time frame. God will do His will on His schedule. Since we do not know God's schedule, there is some uncertainty. John wrote, "If He should happen to appear..." (1 Jn. 2:28). John knew the Lord would appear, but the question is when.<sup>16</sup> Paul had no question that Christ would eventually

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14 Note, that while much is said on this verse regarding election, Paul's point is God's intention that in Christ we are holy and without blame.

15 Dana & Mantey, op cit., p. 170.

16 It is likely, that for this reason, that the Majority Text changed the "if" to a "whenever".



present His Church to Himself in this manner. Paul didn't believe in perfectionism during this earthly life, but he also knew that it was possible for us be moving toward a relative maturity (Php. 3:12, 15). With this in mind, Paul's statements in the subjunctive and requests in the optative are uncertain only as to how much these believers would attain during this life and how much would be accomplished at Christ's return for His Church.

Colossians 1:22-23 also teaches certainty but appears to teach uncertainty, "... to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable down before Him, if you also continue in the previous faith, having been founded . . ." The "if" in our English Bibles translates the Greek  $\epsilon\iota$ . The main verb is "continue" and is in the indicative mood which is the mood of reality. The  $\epsilon\iota$  combines with the indicative mood to form a first class condition "(determined as fulfilled)."<sup>17</sup> Paul is not questioning whether they will continue. A genuine believer will never give up the faith they have. They may not practice it or live consistently by it, but that faith never ceases to be real to him or her. A believer's knowledge that he will be presented blameless and irreproachable before God is founded on the fact that he always believes that Christ died for his sins and rose again. His confidence lies in the saving work of Christ. Christ provided for our redemption and forgiveness (v.14). He made peace through the blood of His cross (v. 20). He had reconciled us by the body of His flesh through death (v.22). That work of Christ gives us confidence for the future.

**The problem of mixing truth for Israel with truth concerning the Church's future.**

Since the Church is distinct from Israel (1 Cor. 10:32; Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:9-11), to apply a truth or a threat directed to Israel is misleading and is not an accurate contextual interpretation or application. Several of the passages used to prove that, the judgment Seat of Christ will be painful for some believers are from the gospels. Joseph Dillow finds much support for his view of a conditional blessing in the gospels, "Jesus warns His disciples that they can become "saltless," a type of carnal Christian whose testimony and preservation impact or influence on society is completely lost (Mt. 5:13)." Commenting on the throwing out and trampling of the salt, he says, "If this aspect of the metaphor is to be pressed, it would refer not to loss of salvation but to divine discipline and loss of reward at the judgment Seat of Christ -- a common theme in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:12)."<sup>18</sup> Yet Christ is speaking to Israel of His Kingdom. Following John the Baptist's imprisonment, Christ began to preach concerning the Kingdom of the Heavens (Mt. 4:17). Matthew gives the account of the King choosing His aides, presenting Himself to the masses, and then in chapter 5-7, giving a summary constitution of His Kingdom. Since the Kingdom would be established on the earth, it was necessary for the Jews to be light and salt towards the world around them. They were to pray for the coming of that Kingdom (Mt. 6:10). Were those Christ addressing believers? Not entirely. It was likely that most of them were not. In an often misused verse, Christ told His audience to seek first the Kingdom of God (6:33). Christ told Nicodemus that one entered the Kingdom of God by the

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17 Archibald T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931) p. 483.

18 Dillow, op cit, pp. 383-384.

birth from above (Jn. 3:5). If they were told to seek a sphere of authority that involved salvation, they certainly were not saved. That is the punch of Matthew 6:33. Most of Christ's audience were unsaved Jews that wanted the political Kingdom with its guarantees of food and clothing, when their primary need was spiritual-salvation. It is not the object of this paper to give a detailed analysis of why this sermon is inapplicable to the Church, yet it clearly was not speaking about the judgment of believers but the need of those unsaved Jews.

### **The unrighteous steward**

The most commonly used passage is Matthew 25:14-30.<sup>19</sup> "Consistency requires that the unfaithful householder, the evil servant, the foolish virgins, and the wicked servant all refer to the same class of individual. There is nothing in the context which requires us to interpret these four individuals as any other than carnal Christians."<sup>20</sup> Matthew 24 and 25 encompass Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse. This discourse was initiated by the disciples' question, "Tell us, when will these things be and what is the sign of you coming and the completion of the age?" The discourse answered these questions. But, the Rapture of the Church was yet a mystery (1 Cor. 15:55). The topic was the second coming of Christ to the earth. This was directed to those who would be a part of the time immediately proceeding His second coming. They will see the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15). While space does not allow for a discussion of the Pre-tribulation rapture of the Church, it is clear that the Rapture being a mystery is not the second coming which is clearly revealed both in the Old Testament and during the earthly ministry of Christ. The Church will depart to be with the Lord before the day of the Lord and the man of lawlessness is revealed (2 Thess. 2:3,4). Therefore, those to whom this was addressed were not part of the Church. Certainly Christ answered His disciples, and they became part of the Church, so this did not come to apply to them directly. At the time this discourse was spoken it applied to them, because they were still part of the people of Israel. Christ spoke, "Truly, I say to you, by no means will this race pass away until all these things come to be." (Matt. 24:34) The race, Christ was addressing was that of the Jews. The three illustrations: The faithful servant (Mt. 24:45-51); the Ten Virgins (25:1-13); the Talents (25:14~30), refer to the judgment of the King over His slaves for whom the Kingdom was intended. Believing Jews will be rewarded with authority and unbelieving Jews will be consigned to Hell. There are no carnal Christians here. From this judgment of the Jewish slaves, the King turned to the judgment of the Gentiles who will survive the Tribulation.

The first analogy occurs in 24:45-51. The happy slave is the Jew that is waiting for the return of his Messiah (v.46). He will receive authority in the kingdom (v.47). The evil slave says the Lord is delaying his arrival. His response is to beat the other slaves and to eat and drink (v.49). This had been the behavior of the Jews. They had beaten and killed God's prophets and would eventually put the Christ on the cross. The fate of this slave is to be cut in two and then the

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19 Compare Stanley, op cit., pp.120-129; Barackman, op cit. pp, 344-346.

20 Dillow op cit, p. 385.

master appoints the slave to a part with the hypocrites (v.51). The description "Hypocrite" is used primarily of the Scribes and Pharisees by Christ. It is never used in the gospels of believers. This slave does not have a part with believers but with unbelievers. Likewise, the wedding guest who is unrobed is bound and cast out in Matthew 22:11-13, is an unbeliever, a called one but not a chosen one (v.14).

### **The Ten Virgins**

When we come to chapter 25, Christ likened the Kingdom, which He had been promising to Israel, to ten virgins. These virgins are waiting for the Bridegroom (v.1). Of significance, the Bride [the Church], who is yet a mystery (Eph. 5:30-32), is absent and nothing is said of her. These virgins are not the Church for they go to wait for the Bridegroom, as witnesses to the marriage consummation. In simple terms, the virgins are Israel at the end of the Tribulation when Christ will come. They are waiting to meet Him with His bride. The foolish virgins are not disobedient or lazy Church saints. The Church saints make up the Bride that Israel will meet. The Church can not be both the Bride Christ will marry and the virgins which will witness the consummation. The word "watch"(v.13) is necessary for Tribulation saints. They will have a clear visible sign (24:30) of Christ's coming, while there are no signs that precede the Rapture. When that sign appears, then Israel must begin literally watching for Him.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, the second analogy (25:14-30) of the master and his stewards speaks to Israel as they await Christ's coming. Those who apply this to the Church, interpret the word "servant" to mean a believer."<sup>22</sup> Both the Greek **δουλος** [*doulos*] and the Hebrew **עַבְד** [*abved*] are used of those who are "slaves". **עַבְד** was used in the Old Testament of believers who were used of the Lord such as Jacob (Gen. 32:4), Moses (Ex. 14:31), Caleb (Nu. 14:24) and many others. It was used of Israel as a nation (Lev. 25: 39--42, 55; Ps. 136:2--21; Isa. 41:8-9; 44:1 (Jacob used of the nation)). But it was also used of unbelievers. Israel in their blind and deaf disobedience were called slaves (Isa. 42:18-25). Jehovah said He would cause His servants to grieve because of their disobedience (Ps. 135:14). Nebuchadnezzar was called a slave of God prior to his salvation, because God used him to chasten Israel (Jer. 25:9; 27:6). We can conclude that the Hebrew **עַבְד** is used of those God uses to accomplish something whether they are believers or unbelievers. In the gospels, **δουλος** is used similarly but exclusively of Israel whether saved or unsaved. In Matthew 22:3,4,6,8 Israel is God's servants and the Gentiles are the guests which they invite.

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21 If you had endured seven years of the Tribulation and then saw the sign of His coming you would eagerly watch for your righteous Lord's return.

22 Dillow, op cit, p. 347. "The basis for believing this man is saved is that (1) he responded to the invitation to salvation (22:10), and (2) he was apparently not only in the kingdom but actually at the wedding banquet itself. According to Jesus one cannot enter the kingdom unless one is born again (Jn. 3:3). Since this man has entered the kingdom and even the wedding feast, it seems justifiable to conclude he is regenerate. In addition, (3) the man is addressed as a "friend" by the Lord." just as Mr. Dillow accuses some of reading more into metaphors than are there, he likewise reads an offer of salvation into this invitation to feast. In the Revelation, the invitation is also given to the birds of the air (19:17-18). Are we to infer that they are saved?

The servants of Matthew 21:34, 35, 36 were those unbelieving Israelites that killed God's prophets and were also going to kill God's Son (v.42). It is of interest that Mark, who demonstrates Christ as God's perfect servant, does not use the word servant in any negative illustrations. It is also important, that in the Upper Room, as Christ began to prepare His disciples for the beginning of the Church, He called them friends and said they were not slaves (Jn. 15:15; cp. 8:35).

### **When literal is not literal**

When Christ gives the analogy of the unjust servant, He is speaking of Israel. He is speaking of those who really do not believe He will return. They do not use what is given them. They do not watch. Therefore, they will be bound and cast out (v.30). It is astounding that any believer could ever interpret verse 30 as the experience of any saint following glorification and following the bringing of grace. How do they apply the ideas of *bound*, *darkness*, and *weeping* to the experience of saints? Charles Stanley explains, "The final verse of this parable is so severe that many commentators assume it is a description of hell. It is not. Keep in minds that this is a parable. A parable is used to make one central point. The point of this parable is that in God's future kingdom, those who were faithful in this life will be rewarded and those who were not will lose any potential reward."<sup>23</sup> On the next page he explains, "Before we can understand the full impact of the parable, we must first determine what the "outer darkness" refers to in the context of the parable. It certainly does not mean hell in the parable, How could a master throw a slave into hell? This phrase appears in a similar parable in chapter 22. In that parable an unwanted guest is bound and thrown out of a banquet hall into the "outer darkness" (see Matt. 22:13); it clearly refers to being thrown outside a building into the dark."<sup>24</sup> "But what actual place was Jesus referring to in the parable? He gave us only one hint: "In that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." There is no mention of punishment as in the parable following this one (see Matt. 25:46) There is no mention of pain or fire or worms. This place is clearly not hell. Well, then, where is it?"<sup>25</sup>

In the following pages, Stanley explains that outer darkness is not an actual place, but rather a description of believers that have low rank and status in the Kingdom. Dillow likewise refers it simply to "darkness outside the relative light of the banquet hall."<sup>26</sup> Their sphere of authority is either limited or non-existent. Stanley describes the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" not with pain but with frustration at their wasted life. He claims that it is similar to the response of those who stoned Stephen, upon hearing of the resurrected and glorified Lord.<sup>27</sup> He also draws on several passages from the gospels which teach that believers earn future responsibilities by

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<sup>23</sup> Stanley, op cit., p. 124.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p. 125.

<sup>26</sup> Dillow, op cit., p. 548.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley, op cit., pp. 126-127.

their present faithfulness. Joseph Dillow speaks more emphatically, "There is no **literal** 'wailing.' Rather, these Oriental symbols evoke ideas of a severe rebuke followed by profound regret."<sup>28</sup> [Emphasis mine]

How do the scriptures normally use the word "darkness"? In the epistles, it is used as a contrast between our former conduct and that light which is fitting for a saint to live now (Rom. 15:12; 1 Jn. 1:5-7; Eph. 5:8-13). The grace believer has been delivered out from the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13). In warning of false teachers, who deny the Lord who redeemed them (2 Pet. 2:11), Peter says that their final destiny is "the gloom of the darkness" (v.17 cp. Jude 13). Christ told the Centurion that many would come into the Kingdom but the sons, those who were to be heirs of that kingdom, would be cast into the outer darkness (Matt. 8:11,12). The Jews were to be the heirs of the Kingdom, but by their rejection of the King, they forfeited their right as a nation [at that time] to the Kingdom. Their destiny is therefore to be cast into outer darkness (cp. Matt. 12:13, 14).

When the Son came into the world, His life was the light of men (Jn. 1:4). A quality of that life is now the possession of every grace believer (1 Jn. 5:11-12). God is light and in Him is no darkness (1 Jn. 1:5). Therefore, to be cast out into outer darkness involves a separation from God who is light. It would also involve a separation from that life in which we share. Such a separation is the experience of the unsaved (Eph. 2:12).

"Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord, that you walk no longer even as also the rest - the Gentiles - walk in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being separated from the life of God on account of the ignorance which exists in them, on account of the hardening of their heart."  
Ephesians 4:17-18.

Darkness, can not be the experience of any saint in the future. To make it such an experience demands the separation of believers from God, which thought is contrary to God's work of salvation. Such would certainly not be an eternal comfort!

The slave is also said to be "cast out". This word [εκβαλλω] is used of the ruler of this world (Satan) being cast out (Jn. 12:51). It is the experience of those who fail to enter by the narrow gate (Lk. 13:23-30). As they make claims of service before Christ, He responds, "I do not know you, from where you are, depart from me all the workers of unrighteousness" (v.27). The weeping and gnashing are due to their being cast out while many others enter the Kingdom of God (v.29). It is especially significant that the Kingdom of God is the realm of salvation (Jn. 3:13, 5; Matt. 19:24-26). Dillow sees a contrast between Luke 13 and Matthew 8, "Unlike the parable in Mt. 8:12, we are not at the wedding feast, and there is no darkness outside the banquet

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<sup>28</sup> Dillow, op cit., p. 350.

hall."<sup>29</sup> But there is no banquets hall in Matthew 8. There are those who are cast outside the Kingdom.

Not only does the misapplication of gospel truth ruin the Christian life, but it also confuses the future of the grace believer. Hopefully it has been seen once again, that we must look carefully at the context when interpreting and applying scripture. Damage is done to our future when we do not accept the meaning of the text in its location. It also removes scriptures from their natural meaning, confusing, in this instance, the truth bearing on the future of others.

### **The Bema Seat**

Of some help in this discussion is the meaning of the word Greek noun βημα [*bema*], which is translated "Judgment Seat" in most translations. The word *bema* refers to a space of ground (Acts 7:5) or a raised platform from which speeches were made (Acts 12:21) and judgments were passed down (Matt. 27:19)<sup>30</sup> It additionally referred to the seat Herod built to view the games.<sup>31</sup>

The gospels and Acts use βημα primarily of a seat from which a judge rendered a verdict, such as Pilate at Christ's trial (Jn. 19:13). It is used twice in the Epistles; once each in Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10. The nature of these passages have led most expositors to accept the idea of a legal tribunal. However, we read, "Truly, truly, I say to you that the one hearing my word and believing in the one having sent Me, he has eternal life and He does not come into judgment but he has passed out of the death (as a sphere of existence) into the life" (Jn. 5:24). Paul said that my pre-salvation existence was an alienation from God and His life (Eph. 2:12; 4:18). But by faith in Christ and the Father, I have eternal life. I will never again experience separation from God. Even in physical death, I am at home before the Lord (2 Cor. 5:18). God does deal with disobedient believers (Heb. 12:5-11). Since God loves His sons He disciplines them (Heb. 12:6). In describing this divine discipline Paul carefully states, "But, being *judged* by the Lord, we are *disciplined*, in order that we will not be *judged guilty* closely with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). Paul makes a quick switch from *judged* to *disciplined*. This agrees with the family illustration in Hebrews 12; God doesn't actually judge us, judgment is reserved for the world. But God does discipline us as a loving Father. Additionally we are reminded that there is no *judgment* to those in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Therefore, when I stand before this *bema*, it can not be to render any judicial or punitive verdicts against me. It must serve another purpose.

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29 *ibid* 349

30 Joseph Henry Thayer, *New Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Lafayette, IN: Christian Copyrights, 1979) p. 101.

31 *ibid* p. 101 βημα in the non-literary papyri as used by Moulton and Milligan to illustrate the New Testament vocabulary is of little value because they were primarily "official documents, such as Imperial rescripts, accounts of judicial proceedings, tax and census papers, contracts of marriage and divorce, notices of birth and death, and so forth, along with a number of private letters touching upon all sides of family and everyday life." (pp. X-XI) Therefore, the legal nature of these documents will place most of them in the category of a tribunal. '

### **What is the Purpose of the Bema Seat?**

Reward? This would accord with the use of *bema* as a reference to the seat from which rewards were handed down to contestants in Grecian games. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul draws the analogy between the Christian service and a race (vv. 24-27). While all in a race run to win, only one takes the prize. All exercise self-control. In the Christian life, we are to be controlled so that we are able to do whatever is necessary to serve. The people in an earthly race win wreaths of laurel leaves that will fade and fall apart. We, however, run to win an imperishable crown. Since, Paul was one who heralded a message to others, he was especially careful to practice his own message unless he should fail to win a crown. The word "castaway" [A.V.] translates **αδοκιμος** [*adokimos*] a word meaning to fail a test or be unapproved. In the context of a race, the disapproval is that of not winning. We can not press Paul's illustration too far. There are crowns available for all believers (Jas. 1:1-4; 2 Tim. 4:8 et al). Therefore, there is not only one crown per area of service and consideration, but one available to each believer who engages in such. My works are the object of this judgment and the question is, "Are they rewardable or un-rewardable?" The question is not a judicial one but whether the runner ran the race and won. Disapproval is a failure to win the crown. You don't award crowns in a judicial setting but at the "Grand Stand" from which the judge viewed the race. With this background, the **Δι' αὐτῆς** would better refer to the place from which Jesus Christ will reward believers with crowns. No other rewards are spoken of in scripture.

### **Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10**

Does the idea of a *reward seat* square with the context of Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10? In Romans 14:10, the issue to which Paul is addressing himself, is the premature judgment of motives (v.4). He instructs believers not to receive others into disputes and dialogues over the gray areas of the Christian life. You do not know Why another saint may eat or drink or abstain. You do not know why a believer honors one day above another or all alike.<sup>32</sup> Only God can judge the motive. So, wait until the reward seat when Christ will know for certain whether we were looking out for others in Christian love, or looking out for ourselves. We have a command to love as He loved us (Jn. 13:34). This command naturally involves laying down our lives for other believers (1 Jn. 3:16-17). A believer who truly loves others will bear temptation (reward-the crown of life; Jas. 1:12), use self control so as not to offend others (reward-crown of joy; 1 Cor. 9:25), and live His life in a real anticipation for the Lord's appearing (reward-crown of righteousness; 2 Tim. 4:8). If a believer is an elder, in love he will minister his spiritual gift of pastor-teacher for the benefit of others (reward-unfading crown; 1 Pet. 5:4).

But how can we judge motives in the practice of these areas? Paul stated that we will each give a word concerning ourselves (v.12). We will be completely transformed into the image of the

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<sup>32</sup> The New Testament does not demand that we observe a particular day. In a modern setting, the issue is whether a saint neglects the gathering of the saints on a Sunday because it frees him to go out and play or because all days are a day to truly celebrate God's work. Only the individual can truly know the motive.

Son and therefore, it is safe to conclude that we will each give an honest word [appraisal~?] generally concerning ourselves. Paul uses περι with the genitive case which "implies general relationship"<sup>33</sup> Therefore, this "word" is not a blow by blow accounting of our lives, rather it is a general summary. In view of the great salvation which we all have, it is very possible that the word we will give, will be the same for each - GRACE!

God does chasten believers. God chastens them out of love (Heb. 12:6). Since believers are sons of God, our Heavenly Father desires that we act like His sons and that we grow. When we fail or even refuse to mature (Heb. 12:12-17) God may discipline us. This discipline is not to vent God's displeasure. It is not purposeless discipline. God disciplines in love that it might yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (v.11). Shame, fear, gnashing of teeth, being bound and excluded do not have a positive goal. We are made like Christ when we see Him (1 Jn. 3:2). What further need is there for punishment? The need lies in the un-glorified minds of men who still are works oriented; who want God to reward all their great and righteous deeds but punish those who didn't fall in line. They want the glory of a reward and the pleasure of a reward withheld from those who didn't pull their own weight. But that is not grace. That is not God's way!

The second place in which *bema* occurs with reference to the judgment Seat of Christ is 2 Corinthians 5:10. The context of this verse is the walk of the believer by faith in contrast to sight (v. 7). In chapter four Paul wrote that our present experience consisting of tribulations which we endure are working an eternal weight of glory (4:17-18). Indeed, what seemed good to Paul was to be absent from the body and to be at home facing the Lord (v. 8). This logically caused Paul to be ambitious to be well pleasing to Him whether in or out of the body (v.9). The word "well pleasing" [ευαρεστος *euarestos*] uniquely is applied throughout the New Testament to activities done by the New Testament believer who is resting in Christ. Most of its occurrences are used of spiritual sacrifices which the New Testament believer offers to God. This word should not be confused with grace. The translation "accepted" in the Authorized Version is not accurate. The issue is not over a good work versus a sin. The issue is a work done by the power of God as a sacrifice expecting nothing in return and a work done with a faulty motive. Therefore, again it is clear that this judgment Seat has nothing to do with sins but with the works of the believers. It is a time to reveal what works were done for the eternal glory of God and what works were done out of selfish motives.

When we all are made plain [A.V. "appear"] before the *bema* it is to receive the things done through means of the body. It is interesting that one of the sacrifices of the believer is his body (Rom. 12:1) and such sacrifice is called well pleasing. Again this is not sin versus good works but motives behind works. Sins were dealt with at the cross and the believer will never come into judgment with respect to them, neither will he come into judgment at all. Remember the

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<sup>33</sup> Dana & Mantey, op cit. p.109.



*bema* is the judgment of the believers works. Paul writes that the believers receives [κομιζῶ [komidzō] - to carry away as a possession] the things practiced through means of the body whether those things are good [ἀγαθος [agathos] -makes for contentedness and happiness] or bad [κακος [kakos] -frequently translated evil, and what lacks in character]. If the believer did those works God had laid out for him (cp Eph. 2:10) and practiced those things through the power of the Holy Spirit while abiding in his position in Christ, it would be a well pleasing work. If the believer practiced them through his own fleshly efforts for his own purposes, those works would lack in character - they would not be what God expected of them and thus they would not be well pleasing, The former would carry away as a possession a crown. The later would carry away nothing.

The thought of this short time before the *bema* moved Paul to fear [φοβος [phobos]]. This can not be fear of punishment for that would involve a judgment against Paul, which judgment would be contrary to God's promise that the believer will not come into judgment. This fear is similar to that expressed by Paul in the relationship of a wife to her husband (Eph. 5:33). Does she fear that her husband might punish her or beat her or cast her out? No! She fears that she might do something that is not well pleasing to her husband is to be loving her. Similarly, Paul feared that after all God had done for him, he might stand at the Bema having done nothing in response to God's work [not a repayment] Paul feared that after the love and grace that had been showered upon him, he should fail to do anything by God's power that would be pleasing to God. This moved Paul to persuade men. Paul refers here to his God-given work of heralding the gospel as an Apostle of God and the Gentiles. His apostolic work would be a major part of the good works which God had previously prepared for him to do as a member of the New Creation - The Christ (5:17; Eph. 2:10). If Paul failed to use his spiritual gift of apostle because of the tribulations he suffered, he would not be walking by faith [also a sacrifice - Php. 2:17] and would not be doing a good practice. It is quite likely that Paul's main focus of "things practiced whether good or bad" refers mainly to believers ministering their spiritual gift regardless of circumstances (cp 3:6). This is what leads Paul to address his ministry of reconciliation (v. 18-20). No where in this passage is Paul speaking of sins versus good works.

### **1 Corinthians 3 & 4**

The Corinthians struggled with each other. They questioned the work and motives of one another. They were following men and glorying in their own accomplishments. Paul mentions the judgment Seat of Christ in 1 Corinthians 3 to answer the question of motives (1 Cor. 4:3-5). Each believer is building on the foundation which is Christ Jesus (v. 11). The question concerning these works is not one of sin and disobedience versus righteousness and obedience. it is a question of why a work was done. Why did a Bible teacher study and teach; for academic status; praise of men, or that God might impart truth so people could grow and glorify God? Why was the gospel shared; to have one's Church listed as a growing Church, recognition; to earn points with God and man, or because the Holy Spirit lead to bring some one to salvation? The exact situation may have been different but this is the problem with which the

Corinthians were confronted. The gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble are works done in the name of Christian service. The quality of the work is determined by motives, God's will and reliance upon God (v. 12). But the Day will make it plain [δηλω [dāloō]] (v. 13). Our works may have looked good. We may have made great claims for ourselves but the Day will make the works plain. All works will be seen for what they are. The test [δοκιμασει] applied is one of fire. Whether a work survives is evidence of its true nature and motive. Those done with proper motives are rewarded. Those which were not works done for God are burned (vv. 14-15). But each believer will receive praise (4:5). Even the most unfaithful saint will have done something for which the Lord will praise him and is still saved even though his works are gone.

The "loss" is often held over saints' heads as a threat. Even more so, the AV translated this "suffer loss" as though suffering were involved. Yet "suffer" is both interpretation as well as Old English for "experience." Rather than this being a "suffering" it can also be looked upon as a comfort. Few (if any) believers (including pastors) can claim that they've always done good works for the glory of God. What a blessing to know that when the Son present us to Himself (Eph. 5:24- 25) and the Father (1 Thess. 3:13) that all our worthless, unprofitable, selfish works are burned up and gone. We will stand there with a word of praise and free of all negative traces of the past. We will stand blameless.

### **The casting of crowns**

What is the reward of the Judgment Seat? Paul said it is a crown or crowns. This Greek word translated "crown" referred to a wreath of laurel leaves, given as victor's wreathes. The victor's wreathes given at the Judgment Seat do not decay but are undecayable (1 Cor. 9:25). This is not the diadem or jewel covered crown with points which Jesus Christ will wear (Rev. 19:12). Our crowns are victors' wreathes. They are awarded for winning a race. There are five potential crowns the believer may win. But do we wear these crowns for all eternity? Do we keep these crowns as testimonies to our "faithfulness" etc.? In Revelation, having completed God's dealings with the Church on earth, we find twenty-four elders in heaven (4:10; 5: 8). These elders represent a group which is comprised of redeemed ones out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (5:9). This is an apt description of the Church (Col. 3:10-11; Tit. 2:14; Acts 28:28).<sup>34</sup> They also identify themselves as being kings and priests (Rev. 5:10). This again aligns with New Testament revelation of the Church (2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 2:9). In chapter four we see these elders sitting on thrones, clothed in white and wearing victor's wreathes (4:4). But the elders do not keep their crowns, they cast their crowns before the throne in recognition of God's power (4:11). We can not be exact as to the time frame, but evidently sometime shortly after the Church's removal from the earth, we will cast our crowns back to the One who just awarded the crowns to us. In keeping with the character of the dispensation out of which the Church will have just come, the crowns are awarded because they were won

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<sup>34</sup> The description of being redeemed excludes angels or any spirit beings and the description of their nationalities would exclude these elders from being representatives of the Nation Israel.

through the means of God's gracious work in us. The elders recognize this grace and the One truly responsible for them. Therefore, they are cast before the throne.

### **Overcomer**

Much is made of the term "overcomer" as a description of the saints of the Churches of Revelation 2 and 3. John defines the term in 1 John 5:4-5. It refers to a person who has overcome the world by believing that Jesus is the Son of God. John writes this letter after writing the Revelation.<sup>35</sup> John had the proper background for understanding this term. Joseph Dillow recognizes John's usage in his first letter, but states that its usage in Revelation 2 and 3 is that of a believer that does what the Lord instructs each Church to do. Such a change is arbitrary and has no basis in the exegesis of John's writings. It is better to see John using this term with consistency. The overcomer is one who has overcome the world, the state of unbelief by believing in Jesus Christ.

### **1 John 2:27 & 4:17**

Is there any fear or shame? In 1 John, we find two references that appear to deal with the Judgment Seat of Christ. The first is found in 2:28, "And now little children abide in Him in order that whenever He should appear, We may have boldness and not be ashamed away from Him in the sphere of His coming." Two subjunctives are employed in this verse "should appear" and "should be ashamed". The subjunctive is the mood of possibility. He will appear but we are not certain when He will appear. All believers have security of salvation, but not all believers have assurance. Even the best educated and most thoroughly versed in the Word may question their salvation at times, especially if they have fallen under the influence of false teachers, which John specified as anti-christs. John stated that the means of assurance is "abiding". The best Way to be certain of where you stand is by putting into practice what you know. This is what John told his readers in 2:28, "and just as it [He - the Holy Spirit] taught you, you abide in Him." John was not suggesting that believers will be ashamed long-term, but for these young believers that lack assurance of the future, nothing will provide better assurance than to abide in Christ. In just a few sentences, he will provide them the doctrinal assurance, "Now, beloved, We are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we will be. But, we know that whenever He should appear, we will be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is!" John doesn't tell them they will be like Christ if they are faithful or if they are a mature. He plainly states that they will be like Christ. At the worst, the believer who is not abiding in Christ might experience a brief moment of shame, but once those worthless works are gone, no cause of shame will exist. The believer then being like Christ will have no reason for shame.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, since the Judgment Seat of Christ must take place between the time we

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<sup>35</sup> Early Church fathers seem to indicate that John wrote John and his epistles after returning to Ephesus from exile on Patmos. This is mentioned by George the Sinner of Papias, See *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, ed. Michael W. Holmes, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991) p. 318.

<sup>36</sup> In the 20 years since I originally wrote this paper, I have concluded that this verse allows for the possibility of a moment of shame, however brief.

leave earth and the time we arrive before the Father, and since we will be holy and without blame before the Father, any shame that might exist is gone by the time we reach heaven.

Similarly, in 4:17 we read, "by this, love has been perfected with us in order that we might have confidence in the day of judgment". Does John state that anyone will lack confidence at that time? It appears to be implied except that in the next verse, John states that the root of their problem is immaturity. But God's love is perfected in the one who abides (v. 16). Not all Christians abide. Not all mature Christians abide. But only by abiding do Christians have such assurance. John makes it clear that real love casts out fear. As a Christian grows, he abides in God's love, grasping how full and complete that love is. As He more fully understands God's love He comes to understand that God has removed completely from the threaten of any kind of judgment. Fear has punishment (v.18). There is no punishment in the day of judgment for the believer for we are not of the world (v.17). In fact we will stand at the day of judgment with Christ judging the world (1 Cor. 5:2) our relationship to this day of judgment is not as objects of the judgment but as judges. The immature, often because of an inadequate understanding of God's full forgiveness succumbs to the idea that judgment may actually be turned on us. The world will be punished but not the believer. The existence of fear with reference to God's work and the future is an indication that a believer is not maturing and not abiding.

These verses actually demonstrate the danger of teaching any form of a conditional eternity for believers. It instills fear in them and conforms them to New Testament moral standards by means of fearing the future. Therefore, contrary to the common understanding of these two passages, John is not threatening a future that may involve shame or judgment but is encouraging growth in love as a means of being free from such immature attitudes towards the future.

### **Demonstration of God's grace and kindness?**

The Church is a group of people, saved, matured, and finally perfected all by God's grace. Corporately, the Church will stand as a demonstration of the excelling riches of God's grace seen by His kindness (Eph. 2:17). This will be for a period of time "into the ages" so, it goes beyond the Kingdom into Eternity. Kindness is a characteristic of God's goodness, whereby He does an act which is pleasant. If in heaven the Church is comprised of those rewarded for their great faithfulness and those weeping and gnashing their teeth, excluded from the festivities due to a lack of faithfulness, God has little grace shown by kindness. If we accept the seven Churches of Revelation as providing a relative history of the Church's progressive decline (Rev. 26), most of those who have been true believers in the history of the Church have failed and God doesn't have much to demonstrate with in the ages to come. But the Church is a corporate entity that speaks together and demonstrates together God's work of grace, mercy and kindness. We will all stand as a testimony to God's excelling grace.

In view of eternity, what is the purpose of this judgment? Why examine our works done for God? When we stand in glory, completely transformed into the likeness of Christ, it will be clear that all our sins, trespasses and unrighteous activities are gone by God's grace. We will stand with Christ by God's grace. But, many (if not all) will have some righteous deeds. Are those deeds of merit to our future? Absolutely not!! We have seen in some of the quotes at the beginning of this paper, many Christians believe their works will affect their status, fellowship, and service in the future. But the Judgment Seat will lay all that aside. We will receive crowns and cast them at Christ's feet. We cast them in the recognition, that He is to credit for those Works. The proving of our works will bring this to light. It is likely that we will be surprised for what works the Lord will reward us. No one will enter eternity believing they have earned anything.

**Dispensationally.**

All dispensations have ended in divine judgment of those under the rule. Adam and Eve began to die physically and died spiritually and were removed from the garden in the dispensation of Innocence. Almost all breathing creatures were destroyed by the Noahic Flood in Conscience. All men had their language confused and were scattered in human government. Abraham's descendants became slaves in Egypt in Promise. Israel will be harshly cleansed in Daniel's 70th Week in Law. Fire will devour the rebels in the Fullness of Times. What judgment ends the dispensation of grace? The Rapture! It physically removes the Church from the earth. According to the letters to the 7 Churches of Revelation, the Church is progressively failing. Only a small number are remaining faithful. But in keeping with the character of this dispensation, the judgment is even gracious.

The reason each dispensation ends in judgment is because each dispensation teaches man something about man. Each ends in failure to teach man that apart from God, no matter what situation he may live under, man will fail. In this present dispensation of grace we are learning that with everything for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:4) we are failing. We choose to love things, life, and ourselves rather than the brethren and God (1 Jn. 2:17) even though we have been given God's kind of love. We choose to walk by sight even though the Spirit produces the Fruit which includes faith (Gal. 5:22). We choose to live under law rather than grace (Gal. 3:1-3). We are failing and therefore we will be raptured.

The Judgment Seat of Christ cleanses us from all the worthless activities in which the Church engaged herself for the sake of Christ. Churches have built great structure for glory of God and yet have neglected God and His people. Churches have followed the bottom line due to the instruction of financial Gurus as opposed to walking by faith. Churches have pragmatically restructured the gathering of saints to draw greater crowds, rather than holding forth the true fellowship and the instruction of God's Word. These are just a few examples, and many Christians see nothing wrong with this direction of the Church. At the judgment Seat, as each gives a word, as each has his own works proved, we will realize that generally the Church has

failed. We will recognize God's gracious judgment. We will be moving into the future, not rewarded or punished but with our eyes opened to God's greatness and believers' absolute need for God. God's people will have learned a valuable lesson, as God's plan has been unfolded. In spite of us, God will manifest His kindness, goodness, and grace into the ages. In light of eternity this is an important function of the Judgment Seat.

### **The Marriage of the Lamb**

Now we come to Revelation 19 and the Marriage of the Lamb. The word "marriage" can refer to either the act of marriage or the feast following. It is evident that John 19 is a view of the marriage feast. Those who teach a conditional eternity make much of this marriage feast by turning to the gospels as has already been considered. It is important to note that these teachers confuse the bride with the guests invited to the wedding. This wedding feast will not be the type celebration mentioned in the gospels. Those invited to the wedding come from two groups. The gospels demonstrate the invitation of men (Matt. 22:1-3, 9). In the Revelation the guests are the birds of the air. The marriage feast then is the feasting of the birds on the flesh of the men who make war against God. From the perspective of the gospels these men are those who have come without a garment for the feast. This marriage feast is actually the return of Christ to conquer the earth. It is not a celebration of the Church around the banquet table. The word "blessed" in verse nine demonstrate that there will be a happiness. Think of those tribulation believer who have endure the end and see the demise of those who blasphemed their God and Savior, they will be happy.

The primary concern of those who teach a conditional eternity is found in verse eight. The Groom - Christ and His Bride - the Church have consummated their marriage and now the Lamb is about to bring His Bride out of the bridal chamber to present her to the world. "Let us joy and exult and give the glory to Him, because the wedding *feast* of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself and it was given her that she should be dressed in fine linen bright and clean for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Earl Radmacher speaking to a group of Campus Crusade leaders said, "The clean white linen garments are the righteousnesses of the saints. In others words God is not short on memory. He knows everything I've done as a believer. And all of that shall come into His evaluation. We shall stand before Him to receive that which is done in our bodies, whether it be worthy or worthless. So I would suggest, that another way of picturing it, is that we are today sewing our wardrobe so to speak that we will wear for all eternity. And I've often threatened to preach a message on bikini believers at the *bema*."<sup>37</sup> But John does not write, that the Birds are robed fine linens. John wrote of a single Bride. This again agrees with the corporate character of the Church. The Church is one. The Bride is one. The Bride is made of many, but She is one! In keeping with this idea, John wrote that She is robed in fine linen. There is one garment not garments. Additionally John used a singular verb "is" The result is that the garment is

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<sup>37</sup> From a tape entitled How Does Sin Affect Salvation and Eternal Life?

comprised of the righteousnesses of the saints. One garment sewn corporately by all the saints. If this is not the case then we have a bride that has some beautiful aspects and some unsightly points also. There is no indication that the garment has any flaws. God the Son has taken all the righteousnesses of the saints and robed His Bride in this beautiful linen.

The bride has also made herself read (v. 7). In keeping with the judgment seat which has taken place and the presentation to the Father, it is safe to say that the readying was not done here on earth prior to the Rapture but after the Rapture. The Bride has been united to her Groom and is now presented to the World. In keeping with the grace the Bride is credited with making herself ready when in reality is the work of God.<sup>38</sup>

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a place for evaluation, removal, praise and reward. Those saints whose lives have not been the full measure on earth will still receive a word of praise and there will be no tears, little or no shame, no fear. God has graciously designed our salvation from beginning to end. Any hint of punishment as a judicial measure mars the grace of God and brings our works into consideration. The casting of believers' crowns back to the feet of the Lamb indicates that we Church saints will recognize that we only earned them because of Him and we do not deserve them. If we do not deserve them, they are things of grace. The grace which brought our salvation is saving us and will be brought to us even in the final tense of our salvation (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:8-13).

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<sup>38</sup> A similar situation is found in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "And certain of you were these things, but you washed yourselves."