

Judgment of the Believer's Works

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The sermon discusses the distinction between the judgment of believers and the unsaved, focusing on the evaluation of works and the rewards in Heaven.

Scripture: John 3:18, John 17:23, Romans 5:1, Romans 14:10, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 1 Corinthians 11:32, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Ephesians 1:6, Ephesians 6:8, Colossians 2:10, Colossians 2:13, 2 Timothy 4:8, Hebrews 10:14, Revelation 20:11, Revelation 22:12

Topics: "Eternal Security", "Judgment Seat"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the biblical teachings on judgment and rewards for believers. He emphasizes that the child of God, under grace, is assured not to come into judgment for their sins, as Christ has already borne the penalty for all sin past, present, and future. While believers are beyond condemnation and accepted in Christ's perfection, they will still give an account of their daily life and service before the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ evaluates the believer's works for rewards or loss of rewards, separate from their eternal salvation, which is secure through Christ's finished work.

Transcript

With reference to sin, the Scriptures teach that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (Joh 3:18; Joh 5:24; Joh 6:37; Rom 5:1; Rom 8:1, R.V.; 1Co 11:32); for, as to his standing before God, and on the ground that the penalty for all sin -- past, present, and future (Col 2:13) -- has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed beyond condemnation, but, being in Christ, is accepted in the perfection of Christ (1Co 1:30; Eph 1:6; Col 2:10; Heb 10:14), and loved of God as Christ is loved (Joh 17:23). But with reference to his daily life and service for God, the Christian must give an account before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom 14:10; 2Co 5:10; Eph 6:8), which judgment will occur at the coming of Christ to receive His own (1Co 4:5; 2Ti 4:8; Rev 22:12. Note also Mat 16:27; Luk 14:14).

When standing before the Great White Throne for their final judgment, the unsaved are to be judged "according to their works" (Rev 20:11-15). It is not the purpose of this judgment to determine whether those standing there are saved or lost; it rather determines the degree of penalty which, because of their evil works, shall rest upon those who are lost. Likewise, the saved, when standing before the judgment seat of Christ at His coming, are judged according to their works, and this judgment does not determine whether they are saved or lost; it rather determines the reward or loss of reward for service which will be due each individual believer. Those who shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ will not only be

saved and safe, but will already have been taken into Heaven; not on the ground of their merit or works, but on the ground of divine grace made possible through the saviourhood of Christ. Since, under grace, the character of the believer's life and service does not, and cannot, in any way condition his eternal salvation, by so much, the life and service of the believer becomes a separate and unrelated issue to be judged by Christ -- whose we are and whom we serve.

When gathered before "the throne of his glory," there is also to be a reckoning of reward on the basis of merit both for Israel and the nations, but apart from the issues of personal salvation (Mat 25:31. Note Mat 6:2-6; Mat 24:45, Mat 24:46; Mat 25:1-46).

There are two central passages on the subject of the believer's rewards which are conclusive:

First. 1Co 3:9-15.

In determining the force of this passage, it should be observed (1) that only those who are saved are in view. The personal pronouns we and ye include all who are saved and exclude all who are not saved, and likewise, the word man refers only to the one who is building on the Rock Christ Jesus. (2) Having presented to the Corinthians the Gospel by which they were saved -- which salvation provides the Rock on which the saved one stands -- the Apostle Paul likens himself to a wise master-builder who has laid the foundation; but in strong contrast to this, he indicates that each believer for himself is building the superstructure upon the one foundation which is provided through the grace of God. The appeal, therefore, is to each one to take heed how he builds thereon. This is not a reference to so-called "character building," which theme finds no basis in those Scriptures which are addressed to the saints of this dispensation; their character is said to be "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23) and is realized not by fleshly effort, but when walking by means of the Spirit (Gal 5:16). The believer is represented as building a superstructure of service, or works, which is to be tested by fire -- possibly by the eyes of fire of the Lord before whom he will stand (Rev 1:14). (3) The "work" which the Christian is building upon Christ Jesus may be of wood, hay, or stubble which fire destroys; or it may be of gold, silver, and precious stone which fire does not destroy, and which, as in the case of gold and silver, is purified by it. (4) To the one whose "work" shall abide which he hath built on Christ, a reward shall be given; but the one whose "work" shall be burned shall suffer loss: not his salvation which is secured through the finished work of Christ, but his reward. Even when passing through the fire which is to test every Christian's work and though suffering the loss of his reward, he himself shall be saved.

Second. 1Co 9:16-27.

Having reference to his own service in preaching the Gospel, the Apostle inquires, "What is my reward then?" The true answer to this question most naturally depends upon the nature and quality of the service he has rendered to God. The Apostle therefore proceeds to recount his own faithfulness in works (18-23). No one will deny the truthfulness of his report. He then likens Christian service to a race in which all believers are running, and, as in a foot race, but one receiveth the prize -- and that through a superior effort. Similarly, in Christian service the believer should exert all his strength that he may obtain his full reward -- run, as it were, to surpass all others. Again, as the athlete is temperate in all things that he may obtain a corruptible crown, so the Christian should be temperate in all things that he may obtain an incorruptible crown. The Apostle's temperateness is seen in the fact that he kept his own body under and brought it into subjection lest that in some unworthy and half-hearted service for others he himself should be disapproved. The word here translated "castaway" is *adokimos*, which is the negative form of *dokimos*,

and as dokimos is translated "approved" (Rom 14:18; Rom 16:10; 1Co 11:19; 2Co 10:18; 2Ti 2:15), so adokimos should be translated "disapproved." Since the Apostle's salvation is in no way in question, he was not fearing lest he would be dismissed from God forever; but he did fear being disapproved in the sphere of his service.

The Christian's reward is sometimes mentioned as a "prize" (1Co 9:24), and sometimes as a "crown" (1Co 9:25; Phi 4:1; 1Th 2:19; 2Ti 4:8; Jam 1:12; 1Pe 5:4; Rev 2:10; Rev 3:11). These crowns may be classified under five divisions representing five distinct forms of Christian service and suffering, and the child of God is also warned lest he lose his reward (Col 2:18; 2Jo 1:8; Rev 3:11).

The doctrine of rewards is the necessary counterpart of the doctrine of salvation by grace. Since God does not, and cannot, reckon the believer's merit or works to the account of his salvation, it is required that the believer's good works shall be divinely acknowledged. The saved one owes nothing to God in payment for salvation which is bestowed as a gift; but he does owe God a life of undivided devotion, and for this life of devotion there is promised a reward in Heaven.

QUESTIONS

1. On what ground is it stated in the Bible that the believer shall not come into judgment?
2. Concerning what must the believer give an account before the Judgment Seat of Christ?
3. What comparison may be drawn between the judgment of the unsaved at the Great White Throne and that of the believer at the Judgment Seat of Christ?
4. Why is the question of the Christian's life and service a separate issue from his salvation?
5. To whom is the Apostle writing in 1Co 3:9-15?
6. Why is this passage not related to so-called "character building"?
7. What is the believer building on the Rock?
8. What is the loss which the believer may suffer?
9. What subject is in view in 1Co 9:16-27?
10. Was the Apostle Paul faithful?
11. In what sense is the Christian running in a race?
12. a. What is temperance and why should the Christian be temperate?
b. What is his judgment if he is not temperate?
c. What did the Apostle Paul fear for himself?
13. Give Scriptures on the promise of crowns and a prize.
14. What is the relation between the doctrine of rewards and the doctrine of grace?

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