

Chapter 6

THE SECRET OF THE JUDGMENT OF CHRISTIANS' SINS AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

A pastor who was face to face with terrible cases of open sin among his congregation went to one of America's greatest Bible Conferences to see if he could find help. He sat through message after message on such themes as "The Perfect Position of All Believers"; "The Eternal Security of Every Born-Again Believer"; "The Crowns Christians Will Receive at the Bema-Seat."

Near the end of the Conference, there was a panel discussion of the prophetic scriptures by a group of America's finest Bible teachers. When opportunity was given for questions, this pastor arose and said,

"Gentlemen, I have enjoyed your presentation of the great doctrinal and prophetic portions of God's Holy Word. But they have not answered my questions and they have not shown me how to minister to the spiritual need of my people. I am desperate. So many of my people, supposedly born-again Christians, are living in open sin. They have the idea that they are eternally secure in their sins! Frankly, what I have heard at this Conference would have encouraged them in this belief.

Sirs, what I want to know is this: Will there be judgment for believers' unconfessed, unforsaken sins at the Judgment Seat of Christ? What does it mean for a Christian to *suffer loss* and to be saved *so as by fire*? Will the rebellious, sinful child of God, who does not repent of his sins, be *beaten with many stripes*? Will the sinning Christian have to witness the social consequences of his sins in the lives of fellow-Christians at the Judgment Seat of Christ and in the lives of unsaved friends at the Great White Throne? If you men would answer these questions, from the Scripture, in the affirmative, I would have something to present to my people in their time of need."

Silence fell in the auditorium and the pastor's questions were never answered. He went back to his people a disappointed and discouraged man.

Nineteen hundred years ago, the Apostle Paul, under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, answered this man's questions. Today, these areas of Paul's peerless presentation of "all the counsel of God" are neglected and almost forgotten. Stark tragedy in the churches is the result. Christians are living in sin while the unsaved world mocks. Some believers are actually defending their sin with miss-applied verses of Scripture. (Even the devil quotes or misquotes Scripture for his fiendish purposes.) This is the reason the great Apostle warned, "Let your spiritual balance ["moderation" or "sweet reasonableness"] be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (Phil. 4:5).

Paul's "spiritual balance" is revealed in such seemingly contradictory statements as these: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"; and "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure" (Rom. 4:5 and Phil. 2:12, 13). "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" and "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons" (Rom. 8:1; Col. 3:25).

It is only natural for sinful human beings, even if they are saved, to emphasize those aspects of Bible truth that do not condemn their sin. It is so much easier and nicer for the fundamental preacher to proclaim Romans 8:1 than Colossians 3:25 or II Corinthians 5:10, 11. But Paul proclaimed both and he was not contradicting himself when he did it.

What is the explanation? How could he dare to say in one epistle, "no condemnation," and in another, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord [for Christians] we persuade men"? (Rom. 8:1 and II Cor. 5:11).

The answer lies in a full comprehension of what the Apostle (and the Lord Jesus, Himself) taught about the distinction between *The Judgment Seat of Christ* and *The Great White Throne*. It also involves a proper understanding of the justice and holiness of Almighty God.

A JUST GOD'S "DRAMA OF HISTORY"

The whole Bible teaches that God is a God of absolute justice and holiness, Who will bring every word and deed of human beings into judgment. He has a video-tape of every human life, with all the lines of human influence that have gone from that life into other human lives, and He will play back all of these video-tapes of all humanity. This will be "God's Drama of History."

Consider these declarations from the Word of God:

The Lord, for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world and the people with equity (Ps. 89:14). "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret things, whether it be good or whether it be evil": (Eccles. 12:14). "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccles. 11:9). But after they hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:5, 6). "It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). "The mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall

be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: but the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness" (Isa. 5:15).

What a day that will be! When the Almighty Creator of billions of worlds calls all the inhabitants of this little planet before Him for judgment, His absolute justice will be vindicated. The human imagination reels at the thought of that day when "*God's Drama of History*" will be played out on a stage of His own making, before myriads of angels. The Prophet Daniel described that day in these words, "I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:9, 10).

This tremendous drama of the ages will be played out in two final acts separated by a thousand years. The first will be "The Judgment Seat of Christ" just before the Millennium when all the Christians on earth and all "the dead in Christ" shall be "caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). This will be God's "Family Judgment Seat," because there will not be a single unsaved person there. Paul describes it in much detail in his epistles, as we shall see.

The second act in God's Drama of History will be "The Great White Throne" described in detail by the Apostle John in Revelation 20:11-15. This will be the final judgment of all the unsaved of all the ages of human history. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that no Christian will be at this throne to be judged. Rather, he says that they will be judges, there, along with their Lord:

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church" (1 Cor. 6:2-4).

How many Christians today know the meaning of that little phrase which Paul wrote concerning the saints being caught up "in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: And so shall we ever be *with the Lord!*" (1 Thess. 4:17)?

When the Lord Jesus is in His "Parousia," in a tabernacle of clouds, in the atmospheric heavens above the earth, all the Christians will be with Him there, for the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When he comes down to this earth to reign for a thousand years, the Christians will be with Him (Rev. 20:4). When the Lord Jesus is on the Great White Throne, to judge the unsaved of all the ages and determine the degree of their eternal punishment in "the lake which burns with fire

and brimstone,” the Christians will be “with the Lord” upon that throne. All this is but the fulfillment of the words of Jesus, Himself, in a literal translation of John 14:2, 3:

“I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; so *that you may always be right where I am!*”

Paul lived his life in the light of all these eternal varieties. No wonder he could say that he was the “*Pattern Christian*” and challenge Christians of this day to be “followers of me, even as I also am a follower of Jesus Christ!” Where are the Christians today who have ever faced the fact that they will have a part in judging the unsaved at the Great White Throne and watch their unsaved loved ones, friends and neighbors, to whom they have never witnessed, go off into an eternal lake of fire? Did not the Prophet Isaiah have a glimpse of that awful day when he wrote,

“And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh” (Isa. 66:24).

Is not this the reason the Beloved Apostle John declares that the tears will not be wiped away from the eyes of God’s people until after the Great White Throne? Christians will shed more tears when they stand on the Great White Throne with the Lord Jesus than they have ever shed in this life. John says, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev. 21:4) after the final judgment of the unsaved is past and believers are living on the new planet which will be their eternal home. The Lord Jesus, Himself, Who gave John this revelation, had said,

“Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep!” (Luke 6:21-25).

In light of the Judgment Seat of Christ and The Great White Throne, now is the time for Christians to weep over their own sins and the souls of the lost. It is all for a Christian to weep over a soap-box drama or over the hero or heroine of some novel, but when a Christian is genuinely concerned over souls, he is “really going a bit too far!” Or is he?

WILL THERE BE JUDGMENT AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

Some Bible teachers have taught for years that “the judgment seat of Christ” (Greek “Bema”), will simply be a “reward seat.” They constantly emphasize the perfect position every Christian has in Christ. They quote every verse they can find in the New Testament (and there are many) to prove that by faith every Christian has a perfect

“standing” before a holy God. Over and over again they quote Dr. Harry Ironside’s favorite little verses:

Near, so very near to God,
Nearer I cannot be,
For in the person of God’s Son,
I’m just as near as He.

Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I cannot be,
For in the person of God’s Son,
I’m just as dear as He!

These statements are absolutely true, and every born-again Christian ought to be reveling in them every day. It was with regard to the believer’s perfect standing before God in Christ, that the Apostle wrote,

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the men, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom. 4:6-8).

All this is glorious because it is true. Since the Lord Jesus Christ “was made to be sin for us, him who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21); since He “bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24), no Christian will ever appear at the Great White Throne to be judged for his sins and cast into a lake of fire. Eternal salvation in Christ is so wonderful because it is all of grace. The saved sinner, who could not do a single meritorious work to be saved, after he is saved, cannot do anything to be lost. So, as far as the Great White Throne is concerned, all of the Christian’s sins, past, present and future are “under the blood of Christ” forever.

Some teachers simply refuse to acknowledge that this is only one aspect of the truth. The believer’s perfect “standing” before God is one thing. The “state” of his daily life before men is another thing. In a positional sense, every true believer is “seated in heavenly places in Christ,” “far above all principality and power” (Eph. 1:19-21; 2:6), including Satan and his demons, but how many believers are “possessing their position”? In a positional sense, every believer is an “overcomer” (1 John 5:4, 5), but how many Christians today are living victoriously and actually “pulling down Satan’s strongholds” (II Cor. 10:3-5)?

These men often quote Paul's statement of God's New Covenant with the nation of Israel, in which He said, "Their sin and their iniquities will I remember no more!" (Heb. 10:17). But they never mention that in the same chapter the great Apostle wrote to Hebrew Christians, "For if we [Christians] sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:26, 27, 30, 31). While every believer has a perfect "standing" in Christ and will never be condemned with the world at the Great White Throne, he will have to tell the whole story of his daily life to his Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

WHY A "JUDGMENT SEAT"?

There are two reasons why every Christian will have to "give account of himself to God at the Judgment Seat of Christ:

1. The absolute justice of God demands a review of the lives of all God's children. A Holy God, who is "no respecter of persons," must be as just in dealing with His own spiritual children as He is in determining and decreeing the degrees of punishment for the unsaved in hell. So, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, every thought, word and deed of every Christian will be seen, from the day he was saved until the day he died or was "caught up" to be with the Lord. His life before he was "born again" will not be seen because the "new birth" means a new start. In the words of Paul, "For if any man be in Christ, he is a *new creature*; old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). When the Christian, by the aid of God's records, "tells the story of his life to God" (free translation of Rom. 14:12) every thought, word or deed, "whether it be good or bad" will be seen. The only exception will be those sins which have been sincerely and sorrowfully confessed to God in this life (1 John 1:9). Since the narrative of a life will include accounting for every hour of time, even though the sin has been confessed, forsaken and forgotten, there will be a blank in the record for the time during which it was committed—a blank which could have been filled with an activity useful in the light of eternity. Because every Christian is simply a "steward," entrusted by the Lord with a certain amount of time and a certain amount of money, the believer will also have to give account of every dollar of money God gave him. God's standard is not "10 per cent" stewardship, but 100 per cent stewardship. (See Luke 19:12-26).

Since God is just, such an accounting is absolutely necessary. There is no other way in which the differences in the quality of Christians' lives can be adjudicated. Certainly the "carnal" Christian, whose life since being saved has been full of "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21) is not going to receive the same reward as a martyr Christian like Paul, who could say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!" If so, where is justice? Surely God is not going to give the same reward to American Christians who have lived in material luxury as He will give to the missionaries who have left their all to live in poverty and filth on foreign mission fields.

So, the Just and Holy Creator is going to have a Family Judgment where He will evaluate the thoughts, words and deeds of all His spiritual children on earth, in order to determine their future positions in the heavenly realms of eternity. What a day that will be!

2. Justice toward His children demands that God reward them for both “good works” and “bad works” at the “Judgment Seat of Christ.” There will be crowns and rewards for “good works.” There will be chastisement and “stripes” for “bad works.” More about the “crowns” in a later chapter. But what about “much sorer punishment,” and the “many stripes”? Will there really be judgment for believers’ *sins* at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Or will it be just a review of their *works* for proper rewards? The Apostle Paul’s answer to these questions is explicit and terrific. It is little wonder that whole that whole areas of the Pauline epistles have been left out of the teaching of the Bible teachers. What Bible teacher wants to make himself unpopular by teaching what some have dared to call falsely “a Protestant purgatory”? It is too disturbing to the equilibrium of Christians vacationing at the famous Bible Conference grounds. They do not want to hear Paul’s burning words about the chastisement and judgment of believers because of sin in their lives. They delight to listen to those portions of his epistles which call them “saints,” and “members of the Bride of Christ” who will reign with their Heavenly Bridegroom forever and ever. They forget that the same Paul who gave them these wonderful truths lived his life consciously one heartbeat from the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Paul made it clear that Christians’ unconfessed sins will be judged at the Judgment Seat. It was a broken-hearted “spiritual father” who penned two letters to the gifted but “carnal” Christians in the cesspool of moral iniquity known as Corinth. In his first letter, he told them to deliver a sinning Christian to Satan “for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved, in the day of the Lord Jesus!” (1 Cor. 5:1-5). Then, reminding them that “many” of their number had already died under the judgment of God, he said, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:30, 31).

“If we would judge *ourselves*.” This parallels the Apostle John’s statement in 1 John 1:9 in which confession of believers’ sins is made the requirement for their forgiveness. “If we confess our sins [individual acts of sin], he is faithful and *just* [on the basis of Jesus’ shed blood] to forgive us our sins [individual acts of sin] and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” There has to be honest self-judgment. There is no forgiveness promised for believers’ sins unless there is real, heart-felt confession of the specific sins.

One conscientious Christian lady was terribly upset by this revelation. She had been taught that all her sins, past, present and future were “under the blood.” So, she was reveling in the fact that “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in

Christ Jesus,” and neglecting completely the necessity for self-judgment to avoid divine judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. She came to her pastor and said,

“Oh, pastor, what am I going to do? I have not daily judged my sins. I have not confessed my individual acts of sin. I just kneel down each evening and say, ‘Lord, you know all the dirty, mean things I have said and done today. Please forgive them.’ And sometimes I do not even do that. Pastor, how can I confess my individual acts of sin, when I do not even remember what they are?”

Her pastor reminded her that the Holy Spirit would reveal her sins to her if she was willing to spend time in His presence and search the Word of God. He also reminded her that “it takes time to be holy,” and that moments spent with the Lord now determine ages hereafter.

WHAT FORMS WILL BELIEVERS' JUDGMENT TAKE?

Obviously, there would be no point in the Holy Spirit requiring self-judgment and the confession of individual sins, if there were no judgment of sins at the bema-seat. But there will be judgment there and the terrific question is, “What forms will this judgment take?”

Paul is the one who answers this question. One of the greatest motives of his life was “the terror of the Lord,” in connection with the judgment seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10, 11). So, it is he who reveals at least four forms that this judgment will take:

1. The judgment will be “sorer punishment than physical death.” To the Hebrews Paul wrote, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses [by stoning]; of how *much sorer punishment*, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:28, 29).

The stoning to death of an Israelite must have been a terrible scene. At the command of a Holy God, the nearest relatives had to be the ones who cast the first stone. Consider well this fearful description in the Lord Jesus’ favorite book of the Old Testament:

“If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying Let us go and serve other gods . . . thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to

put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he die . . . wickedness as this among you" (Deut. 13:6-11).

But Paul knew that there would be "sorer punishment" than this at the judgment seat of Christ. The Israelite's stoning was to be at "the hand of all the people." God's video-tape of the Christian's unconfessed, unforsaken sins will be played out before all the assembled saints of all the ages. All the Christian's saved relatives and friends will be there.

Many a Christian today would "rather die" than to have every thought, word and deed of his life revealed, even to his closest friends. What will it be when the pitiless searchlight of God penetrates the facades and the hypocritical motives and the whole Christian life is "naked and open" for all to see? Then every child of God will know "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," about every other child of God. There will be no place to hide. Can anyone blame Paul for using the term, "the terror of the Lord"?

2. The judgment may mean the loss of eternal rewards. To the Corinthian Christians Paul wrote, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall *suffer loss*; but he himself shall be *saved*; yet so as *by fire*" (1 Cor. 3:13-15).

What do these words mean, "suffer loss" and "saved, yet so as by fire"? At the judgment seat of Christ, every Christian's deeds since the day he was saved will be "tried by fire" of God judgment. If, in the light of the searching of motives, they are adjudged to be "gold, silver and precious stones" "he shall receive a reward," because the "gold, silver and precious stones," would be purified by the fire. But if they are adjudged to be "wood, hay or stubble" they will be consumed by the fire. Thousands of Christians will "shrink in shame before the Lord at His coming" (literal translation of 1 John 2:28b) as they watch the fire of His judgment consume all the supposed "good works" as well as the sins of their Christian lives. They, themselves, will be "saved," but will "suffer loss" and be saved "so as [or through] fire." How will a Christian feel when he sees the work of a whole lifetime go up in smoke?

The words, "suffer loss" have a far greater significance than many believers realize. Both the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul point out that the greatest reward for the victorious, overcoming child of God will be the privilege of sitting upon the throne with the Lord Jesus and reigning with Him over this earth for a thousand years. The Lord Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Rev. 3:21a). (See also Rev. 20:4). Paul said, "If we suffer, we shall also reign as kings together with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us [the privilege of reigning with him]" (II Tim. 2:12—literal Greek).

Actually, for the Christian, the judgment seat of Christ is God's gateway into the Millennial Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is there that every Christian's position in the thousand year reign will be determined on the basis of God's just evaluation of the Christian's life in this sinful world. According to Paul's peerless philosophy of life expressed in Romans 8:28, 29, everything in the Christian's daily life is designed of God to make the Christian worthy of reigning with the Lord Jesus, so that "He may be the first-born among many brethren," in His glorious kingdom. Did not the Lord Jesus, Himself, say that some would reign with Him over ten cities and some would be "unprofitable servants," stripped of every reward? (Luke 19:11-26).

So, the Christian who is not willing to take his stand for Christ "in this wicked and adulterous generation, and accept the persecution which is bound to come (II Tim. 3:12), will really "suffer loss" for a thousand years. He will see some other Christian who was willing to be either a "living martyr" (Rom. 12:1, 2) or a "dying martyr" (Rev. 20:4) sitting with the Lord Jesus in the place of honor which might have been his. He will see what a fool he was for spending his time and energy for the gadgets and material baubles of a twentieth century civilization instead of "seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). He will not lose his salvation, but he will have a "so-as-by-fire entrance" instead of an "abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:11).

Since the "kings" of the millennial earth bring their "honor and glory" into the heavenly city on "the earth" (Rev. 21:24) the Christian's foolish preoccupation with "the things which are seen" may cost him the loss of the greatest possible reward for all eternity—cost him the loss of the greatest possible reward for all eternity—the privilege of reigning with the Lord Jesus Christ over "the principalities and powers" of all interstellar space "unto the ages of the ages." How many of God's born-again children are living realistically in the light of the eternal consequences of every thought, word and deed of their lives?

3. Paul makes it very clear that there will be real judgment of Christians' unconfessed, unforsaken sins at the judgment seat of Christ. To the Colossian Christians he wrote, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. *But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no respect of persons*" (Col. 3:23-25). To the Corinthians, he wrote, "For we walk by faith and not by sight. We are confident, I say, and willing to be away from home in the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore, we are ambitious, that whither at home or away from home, we may be well pleasing to Him. For we must all be exposed to view before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor. 5:7-11, in a literal translation of the Greek).

One very well-read Bible teacher in a large church was very much disturbed at the thought of a Christian facing actual judgment for sins at the judgment seat. She was quite sure that the passage in Colossians must refer to the judgment of Christians' unconfessed sins in this life, until she was asked where and when the victorious Christian will "receive the reward of the inheritance." This she had to admit would be received at the "judgment seat of Christ," so whatever he receives "for the wrong which he hath done," must also be at the bema-seat: Then, with regard to the passage in Corinthians, she said that the judgment was to be for "bad works" and not sins. When she was asked to give a Scriptural definition between "bad works" and "sins," she could not do so. Christians are constantly searching for some method of explaining away Paul's teaching concerning the judgment seat of Christ, but it cannot be done. "For we must all be exposed to view before the judgment seat," and "there is no respect of persons."

When Paul spoke about a "sorer punishment" than physical death and "the terror of the Lord" for Christians, he was simply taking his stand on the words of the Lord Jesus in the synoptic Gospels. Every possible attempt has been made to dodge the personal, practical application of these burning words of the Lord Jesus with regard to His second coming:

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;
And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he shall return from the wedding; ...
Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.. verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them....
Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.
Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us or even unto all?
And the Lord said; Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?
Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.
Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.
But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens and to eat and drink to be drunken;
The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers (the unfaithful).¹

¹ Dr. Thayer gives this primary meaning of the Greek word, "1. unfaithful, faithless (not to be trusted, perfidious): Luke 12:46" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*), p. 57.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not him-self, neither did according to his will, shall be *beaten with many stripes*.

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required. - Luke 12:3548.

In the light of these words of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will dare to say that Paul's warnings of judgment at the Lord's second advent are overdrawn? The Lord Jesus said that the "unfaithful servant" (Greek, "slave") will be "appointed his portion with the unfaithful," and will be beaten with "many stripes." He also stated the principle which will determine the degree of punishment, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." No Christian will be able to complain that he has been unjustly treated at the judgment seat of Christ.

NOT PUNITIVE JUDGMENT BUT FATHERLY CHASTENING

The Apostle Paul is careful to make it clear that God's judgment of His children is not punitive, like his judgment of the unsaved, at the Great White Throne. Paul said, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged: But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should *not be condemned with the world*" (I Cor. 11:31, 32).

The very purpose of God's judgment is "child-discipline" (meaning of the Greek word for "chasten") in order that His "should not be condemned with the world" at the Great White Throne. This chastening of God begins in this life, extending even to the "sin unto [physical] death" (John 5:16) which takes the Christian into eternity to face his unconfessed, unforsaken sins and "sorer punishment" than physical death, at the judgment seat of Christ.

In all of Paul's teaching, as well as that of the Lord Jesus, there is no room for the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of purgatory. Though some of its writers have attempted to use some of these Scriptures to teach a sort of "intermediate hell," into which all Catholics must go to be "purged" from their "venial sins," before they can go into heaven, neither the Lord Jesus nor Paul taught any such thing. Since the Catholic Church denies the Millennial Kingdom, and says that "the Church is The Kingdom," its doctrine of "last things" is a tragic twisting of the Scriptures. Its doctrine of purgatory, with its masses and prayers for the dead, is based not on a clear-cut New Testament statement, but on a passage in an Old Testament apocryphal book, II Maccabees 12:43~46.²

² See note on purgatory in Appendix B.

4 The last form of judgment at the judgment seat of Christ, is mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Roman Christians:

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself...
But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?
for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
So, then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God.
Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no
man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way (Romans 14:7, 10,
13).

In this passage, the Apostle warns Christians of the social consequences of their sins in the lives of fellow Christians. He earnestly urges them to consider these in the light of the judgment seat of Christ, where all of the interplay of words and deeds in the lives of Christians will be fully revealed. The lines of human influence that have gone out from the life of each Christian into the lives of other Christians will be unraveled. "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge rather that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

Even though God has made gracious provision, through the Lord Jesus' shed blood (1 John 1:7), by self-judgment (1 Cor. 11:31) and confession of sins (1 John 1:9) for the forgiveness of believers' sins, this does not automatically take care of the social consequences of those sins in the lives of others. Paul is warning the Roman Christians that the social effect of every word and deed in the lives of fellow Christians will have to be faced at the judgment seat of Christ. No Christian can erase the social effects of an evil word he has spoken, even though he may have been cleansed from its guilt by the blood of Christ. He will still have to witness the effects of his evil words (and his good words) in the lives of Christians who heard them. Perhaps this is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "But I say to you, that every idle word men shall speak, they shall render an account of it in the day of judgment" (Lit. trans. of Matt. 12:36).

Ideally, God has made provision so that all the social consequences in the lives of Christians could be taken care of. If the Christian who is guilty of an evil word or deed and every Christian who was affected by it would all judge themselves and confess all, then it would not appear at the judgment seat at all. But, if ten Christians listened to an hour of malicious gossip from the lips of a backslidden Christian, what guarantee would there be that every one of them would confess every evil response in the thought, word and deed which came out of that hour of gossip? The judgment seat of Christ is going to bring some amazing revelations of the social consequences for good or evil of a single word or deed.

The most powerful illustration of the social consequences of a single sin in all the Bible is the sin of Adam and Eve. Until God gave the law, He never limited the social consequences of sin. Therefore, the social consequences of Adam's one sin are still cursing the whole human race. When God gave the law to Moses, He mercifully limited the social consequences of sin to "the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy to a thousand generations of them that love me and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:5, 6, literal translation).

In his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul used this illustration with tremendous effect:

Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:.... Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men unto condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One [the Lord Jesus] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:12, 18, 19).

The Christian today may not have to face as many social consequences of his sin in the lives of others as Adam will, but he will have to face too many. A Negro minister from Africa who had been in the midst of the great revival in Uganda-Rwanda put it all into words when he said, "We Christians in that part of Africa decided that we had better have a *little judgment now* so that we will not be afraid of the *big judgment hereafter*."

THE PRIZE OF THE UP-CALLING

Chapter 6: The Secret of the Judgment of Christians' Sins at the Judgment Seat of Christ

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