

## CHAPTER 3

### **SOME OF THE CRITERIA BY WHICH ALL REAL CHRISTIANS WILL BE JUDGED**

*What then could I do when God arises?  
And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him?  
Job 31:14 (NASB)*

*“..... And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.”*

*Revelation 2:23(b) (RSV)*

*And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”*

*Revelation 14:13 (RSV)*

*“I the LORD search the mind  
and try the heart,  
to give every man according to his ways,  
according to the fruit of his doings.”  
Jeremiah 17:10 (RSV)*

*great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings;*

*Jeremiah 32:19 (RSV)*

*Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?*

*Romans 2:3 (RSV)*

*<sup>9</sup> There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.*

*Romans 2:9-11 (RSV)*

*And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.*

*1 Peter 1:17 (RSV)*

*For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.*

*Matthew 16:27 (RSV)*

*For he will render to every man according to his works:*

*Romans 2:6 (RSV)*

In this chapter I shall attempt to draw together as many as possible of the passages that I see in the Bible which touch upon the question of how we will be assessed. These seem to me to be at least

some of the main criteria by which Jesus will measure us. Therefore it surely makes sense for us to know what these criteria are and to ponder them carefully. We can also attempt to assess ourselves now, ahead of time, by these same criteria, and to get some idea as to how well, or badly, we are doing and how we need to change. That way we may be able to improve the level of our own service and obtain a better assessment, and a greater reward, when the time comes for the real Judgment, which Jesus will conduct.

**Criterion Number 1 - Jesus will judge us on the quality and quantity of the *fruit* our lives produced**

Jesus told His disciples that He had appointed them in order that they could bear fruit and of a kind that would last. In other words, *bearing fruit* is a major part of our very purpose for being here:

*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*

*John 15:16 (NASB)*

We will therefore be judged on the basis of how much fruit our lives have produced and its quality:

*O great and mighty God whose name is the LORD of hosts, <sup>19</sup> great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings;*

*Jeremiah 32:18(b)-19 (RSV)*

There are infinite types of fruit that we could produce for God. It depends on what He has called us to do and what interests, giftings and opportunities He gave us. However, the simplest, most obvious types of fruit are those listed by apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians. They are *character qualities* which we are meant to develop. Those are fruit which we can be quite sure we are all required to produce. However there are many other types of fruit too, besides these:

<sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*  
<sup>23</sup>*gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

*Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)*

'Fruit' does not just mean *output* or *productivity*, measured objectively, without regard to whether it's what Jesus *wanted* us to produce. It has to be the things that Jesus wanted us to do. Why should He give credit for anything else? If we race around doing things that He never asked us to do, then how can we expect Him to reward us?

Such things would not be fruit, but merely the *litter* or *debris* that our lives generated. Or you could say they are like cancer cells or weeds growing where they are not meant to grow. They would be purely the product of our own wilful ideas or even disobedience, and we cannot expect any reward for those things. What Jesus will look for is how much real, genuine fruit we produced, *in obedience to Him, and of the kind that He wanted.*

**Criterion Number 2 - We will also be judged on the basis of *the use we made of our talents* - i.e. what we did with what we were given**

This criterion shows the absolute fairness of the judgment. There is no competitive advantage given to those people who happen to have great talents, wealth, ability, possessions, education etc. All of those things may appear to be advantages, but Jesus will then apply suitable discounts or multipliers

which will cancel out any such privileges or advantages. By doing so He will get all of us, in the end, on a level playing field.

So, for example, if person A has 100 units of ability and produces 100 units of fruit, and person B has 10 units of ability and produces 10 units of fruit, then they have both achieved the same result. That's because the *proportions* are the same and they have the same *rate of return*. But if person B had produced 11 units of fruit then he would have done better than person A in *relative terms*, i.e. when the differences in their respective levels of talents are taken into account and allowed for. Jesus states part of this principle in the next passage from Luke:

***... Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."***

***Luke 12:48(a)(ESV)***

Jesus then expands on this theme in this next passage from Matthew:

***<sup>14</sup>For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. <sup>15</sup>To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup>So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup>But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'***

***<sup>22</sup>And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>24</sup>He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup>But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.'***

***Matthew 25:14-28 (ESV)***

The above passage from Matthew illustrates the principle of *proportionality*, i.e. that each person will be judged on the basis of what they did *with what they were given*. It is the *relative* proportions, or the percentage rate of return on God's investment in us that will count, not the amount we achieve in absolute terms. So the man who has been given five talents to begin with is expected to make five more. Therefore more is expected of him, in absolute terms, than of the man who only had two talents to begin with. But the same is expected of each of them in relative or proportional terms.

Thus, in the end, the man who began with five talents and used them to make five more is treated exactly the same as the man who only had two talents at the outset but produced two more with them. They both achieved a 100% return on their capital and so they were equally praised. Moreover, it would appear that they received the very same reward.

At any rate, both are told the exact same words: "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master*". Therefore it seems clear that God will be equally pleased with each of them.

It was the man who did nothing with his one talent who was rebuked. Less was expected of him in *absolute* terms, but he was still under a duty to try to achieve the same results as a *proportion* of what he had started with. If he, like the others, had doubled what he had been given, then it seems clear that he would have received exactly the same praise and reward as them.

This tendency to do nothing with their abilities and opportunities is frequently found among those who think they have not got much to begin with. They imagine that they do not have anything worthwhile to offer. So they choose to do nothing at all with their small or solitary talent.

That said, there are also lots of highly talented people with multiple gifts who don't use what they have, or who don't use their talents to produce the right kind of things that Jesus wants. They too are in danger of being rebuked at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In short, we are all in the same boat. We must all *fully use* whatever talents and opportunities we have, regardless of how big, or small, or few, these happen to be.

Therefore, none of us are in an advantaged or disadvantaged position in relation to anybody else when it comes to measuring our fruitfulness. So, whatever type or quantity or level of talent you have been given, God wants you to use *all of it* to serve Him and to serve other people.

It also needs to be said, for the avoidance of doubt, that nobody will be rewarded simply for *being* talented, clever or gifted. Such abilities, purely in themselves, are nothing to do with us. Therefore we cannot possibly hope to be able to claim any credit for them. It would be like expecting Jesus to reward you for having beautiful blonde hair, or for having perfect pitch, or for being tall.

Such features as those, if we have them, were simply given to us as a gift. They are not something that we have earned or made for ourselves. In themselves, therefore, they cannot be any basis for rewards. Neither can their absence be any basis for criticism. All that Jesus will reward or rebuke us for is the *use, misuse, or non-use* that we make of those gifts. When you come to think about it, how could it be otherwise? Look how apostle Paul expresses this point:

***.....What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?***

***1 Corinthians 4:7 (b) (ESV)***

**Criterion Number 3 - We will also be judged according to whether we studied God's Word and whether we obeyed the parts of God's Word that we knew.**

We will also be judged and rewarded on the basis of the extent to which we made the effort to study God's Word. We are repeatedly commanded to do this throughout the Bible, such as here:

***This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.***

***Joshua 1:8 (ESV)***

We are also told by Jesus Himself that His Word, which is now in written form within the Bible, will be our judge on the last day. In other words, we will be judged *according to* God's Word and by the *standards of* God's Word. We will also be judged by reference to the degree to which we have listened to and taken note of God's Word. Therefore, in a very real sense, God's Word will itself be our judge. Accordingly, by reading it now and taking it seriously, we can become aware of how we will be judged and by what standards and criteria:

<sup>44</sup> ***And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.***

<sup>45</sup> ***And he who sees me sees him who sent me. <sup>46</sup>I have come as light into the world, that whoever***

*believes in me may not remain in darkness. <sup>47</sup> If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. <sup>48</sup> He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. <sup>49</sup> For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. <sup>50</sup> And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me."*

*John 12:44-50 (RSV)*

In fact, the degree to which we love Jesus is clearly shown by the extent to which we obey what He says. Jesus Himself said that if we love Him we will keep His words and if we don't love Him then we won't:

*<sup>21</sup> He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." <sup>22</sup> Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup> He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.*

*John 14:21-24 (RSV)*

Therefore, there is no point in your claiming to love Jesus while ignoring or rejecting His written Word, the Bible. As I was writing this chapter I was in conversation with a person who made that very claim, i.e. that they love Jesus. Yet this person clearly has no regard for the Bible and refuses even to study it, let alone abide by what is said in it. They feel free to believe whatever they want to believe in place of what the Bible says.

The person in question is 'religious' and a 'churchgoer' but sees no reason why they should be bound by what the Bible says. They said: "*If we love God then he will accept us and forgive us.*" However, that approach is profoundly mistaken. There is no such thing as a love for God which exists apart from reverence for, and obedience to, His *written Word*. To imagine otherwise is self-delusion.

In this regard, consider also what Jesus Himself said in Matthew's gospel about how a wise man who hears Jesus' words and does them is them is like a man who builds his house on the rock:

*<sup>24</sup> "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; <sup>25</sup> and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; <sup>27</sup> and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it."*

*Matthew 7:24-27 (RSV)*

It would be difficult for Jesus to be any clearer in saying that He wants us to read and study the Bible carefully in order to:

- a) *know* what He said and what He caused His prophets and apostles to say on His behalf
- b) *understand* what was said

Given that He has been so plain in telling us all of this, we must expect to be judged according to the extent to which we have read, studied, listened to, understood and obeyed His Word.

Consider also this passage from Deuteronomy which sets out all the blessings which, under the Law of Moses, would come to the Jewish people if they would ...."*listen to the voice of the LORD....*". It also sets out all the curses that will come upon them if they do not listen and obey. The way this is

expressed in the original Hebrew is by the phrase "listen listening", i.e. "...if you will listen listening...". The Hebrew form of emphasis, is to say the same word twice. It means to *really* listen, or to *hearken diligently*, as the King James version puts it:

***<sup>1</sup>And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: <sup>2</sup>And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.***

*Deuteronomy 28:1-2 (KJV)*

***<sup>13</sup>And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: <sup>14</sup>And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. <sup>15</sup>But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:***

*Deuteronomy 28:13-15 (KJV)*

This passage is addressed to the Jewish people. It refers to the need for them to listen to and obey the Law of Moses which had just been given to them. However, although the Law of Moses is no longer in operation, it is reasonable for us to conclude that God equally requires us today to *listen to, read and study* His Word. That does not just mean the parts that Moses wrote, but all of it.

Given that God requires this of us, it also seems reasonable to conclude that rewards will be given at the judgment to those people who do really listen or '*listen listening*', to God's Word. The main way for us to really listen is to read God's Word with a diligent, dedicated desire to learn it. That is what the Psalmist did. Consider his devoted attitude to the Scriptures and the benefits they bring:

***<sup>9</sup>How can a young man keep his way pure?***

***By guarding it according to your word.***

***<sup>10</sup>With my whole heart I seek you;***

***let me not wander from your commandments!***

***<sup>11</sup>I have stored up your word in my heart,***

***that I might not sin against you.***

***<sup>12</sup>Blessed are you, O LORD;***

***teach me your statutes!***

***<sup>13</sup>With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.***

***<sup>14</sup>In the way of your testimonies***

***I delight as much as in all riches.***

***<sup>15</sup>I will meditate on your precepts***

***and fix my eyes on your ways.***

***<sup>16</sup>I will delight in your statutes;***

***I will not forget your word.***

*Psalm 119:9-16 (ESV)*

***<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the man who walks  
not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;***

***<sup>2</sup>but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.***

***<sup>3</sup>He is like a tree planted by streams  
of water that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.***

*In all that he does, he prospers.*

<sup>4</sup>*The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

<sup>5</sup>*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

<sup>6</sup>*for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

*Psalm 1:1-6 (ESV)*

Note also God's view of those who either *reject* or *despise* His Word, and what will happen to them. However, we must not complacently assume that this only applies to the people of Israel. The point being made here would apply to *any* person who despises God's Word. Moreover, that does not just mean those who reject it outright, or refuse to read it at all. It may also mean those of us, especially in the affluent West, who do not make full use of our freedom and of the virtually unlimited opportunities that we have to study God's Word.

Many of us in the West have access to all the best teaching materials, commentaries and CDs etc. But we cannot be bothered to use them. Our study of God's Word will surely be measured by reference to how much access we had to it and whether or not we used those opportunities fully. In this next passage Isaiah expresses how severely God intends to judge those Jewish people who rejected or despised His Word:

*for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts,  
and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*

<sup>25</sup>*Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people,  
and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them,*

*and the mountains quaked;  
and their corpses were as refuse  
in the midst of the streets.*

*For all this his anger has not turned away,  
and his hand is stretched out still.*

*Isaiah 5:24-25 (ESV)*

Another way in which we can believe in God and yet still *despise* His Word is when we read it or hear it read, or preached on, but then do not obey it or put it into practice. James tells us in his letter that we must be "*doers of the Word, and not hearers only*". He is referring to those whose beliefs are merely passive and intellectual. Therefore their beliefs do not produce anything tangible, or result in any action being taken:

<sup>22</sup>*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* <sup>23</sup>*For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.* <sup>24</sup>*For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* <sup>25</sup>*But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.* <sup>26</sup>*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.* <sup>27</sup>*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

*James 1:22-27 (ESV)*

<sup>14</sup>*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?* <sup>15</sup>*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,* <sup>16</sup>*and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?* <sup>17</sup>*So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* <sup>18</sup>*But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will*

*show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup>You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

*James 2:14-19 (ESV)*

It is also very common for us to put our own traditions, customs and familiar practices ahead of what God's Word says. Jesus confronted this approach when he saw the Pharisees of His day focusing on issues such as the niceties of hand washing and how to wash pots and cups, rather than listening attentively to what He was saying to them and obeying it. We may criticise the Pharisees for this, but we are prone to doing the same thing ourselves:

*Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; <sup>4</sup> and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) <sup>5</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,*

*'This people honors me with their lips,  
but their heart is far from me;*

*<sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'*

*<sup>8</sup> You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men."*

*<sup>9</sup> And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die'; <sup>11</sup> but you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God)— <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, <sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do."*

*Mark 7:1-13 (RSV)*

God wants us to respect His written Word and His commands and to take it all very seriously indeed. However, that would not be an accurate description of the way that most of us are, at least in the West. Compare our general apathy and indifference with the wholehearted attitude of the people referred to in this next passage.

Jeremiah is speaking about the descendants of a man called *Jonadab* who commanded his sons not to drink alcohol. They all obeyed him, as did his grandchildren. God contrasts this faithful obedience by that extended family group to the words of their ancestor, Jonadab, with the unfaithfulness of many Jewish people, who did not listen to the things He told them:

*<sup>12</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: <sup>13</sup>"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction and listen to my words? declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup>The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me. <sup>15</sup>I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, 'Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to you and your fathers.' But you did not incline your ear or listen to me.*

*<sup>16</sup>The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of*

***Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered." <sup>18</sup>But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, <sup>19</sup>therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me."***

***Jeremiah 35:12-19 (ESV)***

It would have been a major advantage to have lived at the same time as Jesus or the apostles or the prophets. To have met even one of them and to have sat and heard teaching coming directly from any of their mouths would have been a great privilege. However, it would also have created in us a greater level of responsibility too.

Consider what the prophet Jeremiah said to those who had lived during the years of his own public ministry. They had heard him speaking the truth about what God was saying to that generation. However, they did not listen to Jeremiah. He therefore makes clear in this next passage how God views their failure, or refusal, to listen:

***<sup>1</sup>The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), <sup>2</sup>which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: <sup>3</sup>"For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. <sup>4</sup>You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, <sup>5</sup>saying, "Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. <sup>6</sup>Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.'***

***<sup>7</sup>Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. <sup>8</sup>"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, <sup>9</sup>behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. <sup>10</sup>Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. <sup>11</sup>This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.***

***Jeremiah 25:1-11 (ESV)***

What is even clearer, and more alarming, is what Jesus said to the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, all of which were on the shores of Lake Galilee. The people of those towns had heard a lot of Jesus' teaching and had even seen His miracles. Yet many of them still rejected Him and would not repent or believe in Him.

He therefore warns them of the more severe judgment which lies ahead for them, in comparison with the people of other towns where He had not been. They will be judged more severely for their unbelief and lack of response to Him because they had the advantage of having seen and heard Him in person:

***<sup>20</sup>Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup>"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup>Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than***

*for you. <sup>23</sup>And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup>Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”*

*Matthew 11:20-24 (NASB)*

Obviously, that passage primarily relates to the unsaved, unbelieving people from those towns. Such people will go to the Great White Throne Judgment. However, it would be wise to assume that the same principle (though not the same outcome) also applies to those who will go to the Judgment Seat of Christ. We will each be judged on the extent to which we obeyed that proportion of God's Word which we personally knew and understood.

So, there are certainly advantages to be gained, and rewards to be obtained, from making the effort to study the Bible. However, once we have done so, and have acquired some knowledge, we will each then be judged on whether we obeyed and put into practice whatever we have learned. So there's no room for complacency, no matter how well we know the Bible. The more we know, the more strictly we will be judged:

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

*James 3:1 (ESV)*

**Criterion Number 4 - Jesus will also assess whether what we did was done in His Name, or in our own name. In other words, was it done in the Spirit or in the flesh?**

Many people give the impression of being successful, because they charge around, achieving lots of things wherever they go. However, they will only be rewarded if those things are what Jesus *asked* them to do. They will not be rewarded, or even praised, if they are just implementing their own ideas. If so, then what they do is just the product of their own imagination or preferences. All that will really count in the end is that which was done in obedience to what we were *told* to do. Anything else is *sin* because it means we have done our own thing. If we do that, then, by definition, we have fallen short of God's standards:

*“Ah, stubborn children,” declares the Lord,  
“who carry out a plan, but not mine,  
and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit,  
that they may add sin to sin;*

*Isaiah 30:1 (ESV)*

Another way to put it is to say that we must build on the right foundation, which is Jesus, rather than building impulsively on the foundation of our own ideas or opinions, or out of a desire for independence:

*<sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. <sup>11</sup> For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

*1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NASB)*

Therefore, if we lay any foundation other than Jesus, then whatever we build on it will not last and will not be rewarded. Everything must be done in Jesus' name, for His sake, and in response to His orders. Nothing must be done on our own authority, by our own initiative or in our own name. If we do, then it has no legitimacy. We must therefore find out what God wants, and how He wants it done. Then we must limit ourselves to doing just those things. Anything else is a work of the flesh and we know that those who are in the flesh *cannot please God*:

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

*Romans 8:5-8 (RSV)*

It may be that He will want us to focus on fewer things than we currently get involved in. It could be that although we are busy doing lots of things, we haven't even started yet to do the things *He* wants. Some of our current activities may therefore have to go in order to make time for what He does want. If so, then do it – cut out whatever things He did not tell you to do. Instead, focus solely on what He does want you to get involved in.

It is likely that many of the deeds that we consider good will gain us no reward because they were done presumptuously, independently, and of our own accord, rather than because God told us to do them. That has been true of me countless times. I have tried to "help" God by doing what looked like good things, but they were things that He had never asked me to do. So, even if they were good, they will probably count for nothing and gain me no reward.

Moreover, such things as those usually fizzle out and fail, whereas the things God asks us to do generally succeed and remain. That's because He blesses them, whereas if we do something that is just our own idea He probably won't bless it. It is like building a house without getting planning permission. It could be a good quality building, but it will still have to be knocked down by the council because they never authorised it in the first place.

Or imagine that you were a building contractor working on a large and complicated building site under the direction of an architect. Consider how the architect would react if he had specifically told you *what* to build and *when* and exactly *where* he wanted each thing to be, but you chose instead to make extra things, or larger things, or to put them in different places from where he had asked you to put them, or to build them in a different sequence from what he had specified.

He would not be pleased. Far from rewarding you, he would quite possibly have to tear down what you had made and start again, either through you or someone else. Likewise, God will, in the end, tear down everything that was not built on His orders and with His approval. All of this therefore begs the question *how* can we avoid doing things in our own strength and learn instead to hear God's voice and do what He wants? Please see chapter four below for a fuller discussion of these issues.

**Criterion Number 5 - Jesus will judge us by the same standards that we have used to judge other people. He will also forgive us to the same extent that we have forgiven other people and He will show grace and mercy to the same extent that we show grace and mercy**

Jesus will also weave into His already complicated judgment the general principle that He will use the same standards to judge us that we have used to judge other people. So, if we strictly condemn certain attitudes or behaviour in others, then He will strictly condemn those things in us. However, if we adopt a more lenient, generous, forgiving approach towards others, then He will do the same with us:

*<sup>1</sup>"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. <sup>2</sup>"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*

*Matthew 7:1-2 (NASB)*

*And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.*

*Mark 4:24 (ESV)*

But, if we show little or no mercy to other people now, in our daily dealings with them, then little or no mercy will be shown towards us at the Judgment Seat:

***For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.***  
***James 2:13 (ESV)***

***"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.***  
***Matthew 5:7 (RSV)***

So, if we are harsh, unyielding and unmerciful with others, demanding high standards from them and refusing to allow them any scope for error, or time to learn, then we can expect little or no mercy to be shown to us at the Judgment Seat. Therefore when you are dealing with other people now you should look for all possible ways to be gracious, show them mercy, give second (and third) chances, and allow some flexibility and leeway. If we do, we can expect the same to be done towards us by Jesus.

Obviously, it will not always be possible to be entirely accommodating, or to show mercy or grace to the fullest conceivable extent on every issue. Sometimes wisdom would require us to be more guarded and to refrain from showing grace or mercy on certain points, or to show them, but only to a certain extent. It depends on all the facts and circumstances.

Nevertheless, having said all that, it remains true that, as a general rule, by being gracious and merciful with others now, we can set ourselves up for a less strict, more merciful, Day of Judgment. Therefore, we would be wise to take every reasonable opportunity to treat others today with the same type, or level, of leniency, forbearance and patience that we want to be shown to us on Judgment Day:

***<sup>35</sup>"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. <sup>36</sup>"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. <sup>37</sup>"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. <sup>38</sup>"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."***  
***Luke 6:35-38 (NASB)***

What Paul has to say in his letter to the church in Rome is even more troubling. Remember that it is a letter written to people who are already Christians, or who claim to be. Yet it warns them against hypocrisy in judging others for doing things which they do themselves. It also warns them against being complacent or hard-hearted about the Judgment that is coming for themselves.

Furthermore, it indicates that people who adopt such hypocritical, self-righteous attitudes about the sins of other people, while ignoring or denying their own sins in the very same areas, are storing up God's *wrath* for themselves when the Day of Judgment comes. In saying all this Paul is also speaking to real Christians, not just to unbelievers or apostates. So none of us can say that he does not mean us:

***<sup>1</sup>Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. <sup>2</sup>We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>Do you suppose, O man--you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself--that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup>He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup>to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;***

***<sup>8</sup>but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.***

***Romans 2:1-8 (ESV)***

We therefore need to take time to consider carefully whether we are treating others hypocritically, unmercifully or ungraciously and, if so, how? Also, from now on we need to think carefully before making pronouncements about how other people ought to behave, or how wrong or sinful they are. Our own words about others and the wrong things which they say and do will be recorded and used *as part of the basis for judging us*. They will become part of the set of criteria by which we will be judged ourselves.

Jesus may choose not to make any allowances and not to take account of any mitigating factors that we, in this life, refused to apply to others who crossed us or disappointed us. Therefore we would be well advised to start to demand less of others and to tolerate more. If we do, we have a reasonable basis to expect Jesus to take an equally patient and tolerant approach with us.

The things spoken of above are generally actions and attitudes which go *beyond forgiveness*, i.e. by its narrowest definition. At its most basic level, to forgive another person for a wrong they have done to us simply means *stepping aside*, refraining from judging others or punishing them ourselves, and leaving it to Jesus to judge them.

We could call it *recusing ourselves*, as when a judge recuses himself and has a case transferred from his own list and onto the list of another judge. He would do that if he feels he is not the right person to try that defendant because, for example, he knows him or has a personal interest in the outcome of the case.

So, in speaking of our need to show clemency, grace or mercy or to be magnanimous, etc we are speaking of things which are distinct from, and go further than, our *basic* duty to forgive others in the narrow sense. By that I mean ‘recusing’ ourselves and handing them over to be judged by Jesus, instead of by us.

So, in this section I am speaking of more than just basic forgiveness, i.e. as it is narrowly defined. I am also addressing these other things, which are linked to forgiveness, but go further. The more we can show these qualities in our dealings with others, the more they will be shown to us by Jesus when we are judged. So, the further we can go beyond basic forgiveness and into showing grace and mercy in a host of different ways, the better it will be for us.

Now we come to an even more troubling part of this section. We need to look at what Jesus said about our specific duty to forgive other people and the fact that He will not forgive us if we do not forgive others:

***“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;***

***Luke 6:37 (RSV)***

***<sup>14</sup>“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup>But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.***

***Matthew 6:14-15 (NASB)***

Moreover, He said we are to go on forgiving others, even when they wrong us repeatedly:

***<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.***

***Matthew 18:21-22 (RSV)***

What is even more troubling is the parable that Jesus told them in response to Peter's question. It concerns an *unmerciful* servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant a small debt. Consequently his own master refused to forgive him a much larger debt. And the master then hands him over to the jailors until he pays the debt himself. Alarming, Jesus tells us that His Father will do the same with us if we do not forgive others:

<sup>23</sup> *“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents;<sup>25</sup> and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; <sup>33</sup> and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailors till he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

*Matthew 18:23-35 (RSV)*

For a much fuller discussion of what forgiveness is (and what it isn't), why it matters, and how to do it in practical terms, please refer to Book Two in this series. It contains a whole chapter on forgiveness and examines the various different levels of forgiveness and other associated concepts, such as grace, mercy, peace, trust, reconciliation etc. These are linked to forgiveness but are also distinct, separate things in themselves and may not necessarily be required in order for our forgiveness of others to be genuine and complete.

**Criterion Number 6 - We will also be judged on the basis of whether we have kept the vows we made - therefore be very careful about making any vows at all, or even giving promises.**

We need to be very careful about what we say, particularly about the vows we make, whether they are made to God or to other people. He will hold us to our word and expect us to comply fully with every statement we make. If we had not made any vows at all He would not have required us to comply with them. But if we do, then He will.

Therefore think long and hard before you speak. Otherwise you may say something which will later bring God's judgment upon yourself as a result of your failure to keep your word. God regards that as oath-breaking even if you don't view it that way and don't take it very seriously:

*When a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*

*Numbers 30:2 (RSV)*

<sup>2</sup>*Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.*

*Ecclesiastes 5:2 (ESV)*

<sup>4</sup>*When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. <sup>5</sup> It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Let not your*

*mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*

*Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 (ESV)*

*<sup>4</sup>They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.*

*Hosea 10:4 (ESV)*

So, for example, if we promise to pray for someone, but do not do so, then we have broken a promise. That might be viewed by God as a vow. But even if it isn't, it is still very important and God will expect you to abide by your promise. Therefore don't promise to pray. Just pray, without ever promising to do anything. But if you do have to say something, just keep it low-key and don't make any promises.

But if you have spoken, or have promised something, then it is a good idea to keep your word and do whatever it is *immediately, there and then*, while it is still fresh in your mind, and before you forget. That is what I now try to do. Likewise, if you agree to give a gift of money, then make sure you give it. Don't forget or fail to pay. Don't even delay paying. God will hold you accountable to pay in full and on time.

For that reason, I do not like to enter into any longstanding commitments to give monthly or on any other regular basis. I prefer to pay lump sums and get it all over with at the outset, so that there is no ongoing obligation or unpaid remainder that I need to remember about. In short, be very careful about what you say and what you promise.

Otherwise you may find that when you get to the Judgment, Jesus presents you with a long list of unpaid gifts, broken vows and unfulfilled promises of prayer or support. Therefore do all you can now to avoid your own words being quoted back at you and to become a basis for rebuking you.

Ideally *say* nothing at all; just *do* things, without saying or promising anything beforehand. If you must say something then keep it to a minimum and make sure you do what you agree to do. Otherwise, every idle word that you have spoken (since you were converted) will be a basis for judging you on Judgment Day:

*<sup>36</sup>I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter;  
<sup>37</sup>for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."*

*Matthew 12:36-37 (RSV)*

### **Criterion Number 7 - Jesus will also assess the extent of our faithfulness**

Jesus will assess how loyal, dependable, reliable, trustworthy, diligent, wholehearted and enthusiastic we were in following Him. He will gauge whether we were truly faithful to Him, or whether we compromised or let Him down when obedience and loyalty to Him were inconvenient or difficult. However, He is also on the lookout for any kind of faithfulness that He can reward:

*The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness....*

*1 Samuel 26:23 (NIV)*

*A faithful man will abound with blessings,  
but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.*

*Proverbs 28:20 (RSV)*

Real faithfulness is very unusual, even amongst mature Christians. Indeed, the Bible implies that it is one of the rarest personal qualities. That has certainly been my experience in business and as an

employer, but also in churches. People who can be fully relied upon, and whose word is their bond, are very few and far between. That is the case even within churches:

*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,  
but a faithful man who can find?*

*Proverbs 20:6 (RSV)*

*Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,  
look and take note!*

*Search her squares to see*

*if you can find a man,*

*one who does justice*

*and seeks truth;*

*that I may pardon her.*

<sup>2</sup> *Though they say, "As the LORD lives,"*

*yet they swear falsely.*

*Jeremiah 5:1-2 (RSV)*

Therefore, we all need to examine ourselves. Where we see any evidence of unfaithfulness in our lives, then we must admit it, repent of it and ask God to help us to change. (See Book Two which contains a full chapter on faithfulness). Jesus also wants us to be faithful to other people, not only to Him. For example, He wants us to be loyal to our friends when they need us, even when times are hard, or they are in trouble, such that to stay alongside them is costly, or inconvenient, or may make us unpopular:

*A friend loves at all times,  
and a brother is born for adversity.*

*Proverbs 17:17 (ESV)*

*A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

*Proverbs 18:24 (ESV)*

Jesus also wants us to have integrity with our customers, clients, patients and anybody else we deal with. We must never cheat anyone or take advantage of them:

<sup>13</sup>*"You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. <sup>14</sup>You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. <sup>15</sup>A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>16</sup>For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God.*

*Deuteronomy 25:13-16 (ESV)*

*A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,  
but a just weight is his delight.*

*Proverbs 11:1 (ESV)*

*Unequal weights and unequal measures  
are both alike an abomination to the LORD.*

*Proverbs 20:10 (ESV)*

We are also to be faithful to our employer. Most of us spend eight or more hours per day at work, i.e. half our waking hours. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the way we do our job and the way we treat our employer is something which God takes a close interest in. In some ways it is a kind of proxy for how you treat God. We are told by apostle Paul that we are to do all things as if we were

doing them for the LORD. Therefore, to be slack in our work or disrespectful or disloyal to our employer, is to let God down:

*<sup>22</sup> Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.*

*Colossians 3:22-24 (RSV)*

Above all, God wants us to be faithful to our husband or wife and to our children. For one thing, those of us who are married have made a solemn vows to each other in front of witnesses and in front of God. He wants us to keep those vows. God also views marriage as sacred.

Therefore it is up to us to work hard at marriage, and at times it does involve hard work. It also requires unselfishness, cooperation and an abundance of mutual forgiveness. Without those things anyone's faithfulness will be stretched beyond its limits. But with those things, and with God's help, marriage can be made to succeed and to last permanently. That is what God wants. He has told us plainly that He hates divorce:

*<sup>13</sup> And this again you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. <sup>14</sup> You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. <sup>15</sup> Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. <sup>16</sup> "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless."*

*Malachi 2:13-16 (RSV)*

God also feels very strongly about marital unfaithfulness and adultery and He will judge it:

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.*

*Hebrews 13:4(RSV)*

When we enter into marriage we become subject to a huge duty of care and also a duty to be faithful. It is of the utmost importance that we avoid any sexual unfaithfulness. However, we must also be faithful to each other in ordinary, everyday matters. We must be loyal in how we speak to and about each other and we must support each other in the careers and/or other ventures that either of us may be involved in.

That duty to give support to each other and to honour each other is a major part of what marital faithfulness is about. God is watching what we do in all of those day to day areas. He will hold us accountable for the choices we make and things we do or fail to do.

Apostle Paul gave instructions that a wife should conduct herself towards her husband with submissiveness, and respect. Note that Paul doesn't tell wives to *love* their husbands. Presumably that is because most women find it easy to give love. It comes naturally, whereas they tend to find it much harder to give *respect*. Yet that is what most men are looking for and what God wants wives to give:

*<sup>21</sup> Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.*

*Ephesians 5:21-24 (RSV)*

*however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

*Ephesians 5:33 (RSV)*

God regards a good wife as being very precious:

*A good wife who can find?*

*She is far more precious than jewels.*

*Proverbs 31:10 (RSV)*

Consider also this passage from Peter's first letter which sets out what God is looking for from every wife in terms of how they treat their husband and how they conduct themselves generally:

*Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. <sup>3</sup> Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing, <sup>4</sup> but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. <sup>5</sup> So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, <sup>6</sup> as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you*

*1Peter 3:1-6 (RSV)*

Note that Peter says that God regards it as "very precious" when any woman has a "gentle and quiet spirit". That is the very opposite of the strident, demanding, self-promoting attitude that is displayed and advocated by much of the feminist movement. In fairness, that is caused, at least in part, by the fact that such women have never encountered any man who behaves towards women as God intends. Many men behave in a selfish, thoughtless and even brutal way. Thus feminism is, in part, a misguided reaction to those wrongs, which women ought not to have to face in the first place. Instead, husbands should behave as follows:

*Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.*

*1Peter 3:7 (RSV)*

Apostle Paul sets the bar even higher, telling husbands that they must love their wives *as Christ loved the Church*. That is obviously an impossible standard to reach, but it is what a husband is to aim for. Note the contrast in terms of what is required from the husband as compared to the wife, as we saw above. The husband is told to love his wife. By that Paul means self-sacrificial 'agape' love. Paul said that because he knew that, all too often, husbands do not love their wives in that way, even if they are believers:

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup> Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup> For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,*

*Ephesians 5:25-29 (RSV)*

When God gives commands and instructions He expects us to obey them and He holds us accountable for the extent to which we do so. Therefore, every Christian husband and every Christian wife will be

judged at the Judgment Seat for the way in which they have each conducted themselves within their marriage. In particular, He will look at the way they have treated their spouse.

That duty to do as God instructs is applicable even if the other spouse is not reciprocating. So, a husband is to love his wife, and sacrifice his own needs and preferences in order to benefit her, *even if she is treating him badly*. Likewise, a wife should submit to her husband, support him and respect him even if he does not love her in the way that Christ loves the Church.

The duties are one way so far as each spouse is concerned. They do not only become operable after the other spouse has complied and done what they are meant to do. You therefore must brace yourself and resolve to treat your spouse as God intends, *regardless of how they are treating you*, even if their mistreatment continues.

Jesus will judge us for how we act, and also for how we react. We need to bear that in mind every time arguments or times of pressure arise. Jesus is always watching, listening and remembering. That thought can, and will, alter the way we behave if we dwell on it and remember it at such times

Quite apart from that, if we choose to do what is right, even where (in our highly biased view) our spouse is behaving badly, then it could eventually influence them. They may notice and the cycle of bad actions and bad reactions might eventually be stopped and then reversed. Moreover, we always need to bear in mind that our own perception of “*who started it*” is very subjective and therefore probably unreliable.

In other words, you may be starting things yourself even though you are fully convinced that you are only responding to what your spouse has said or done. In any case, whoever started it, you must take the responsibility for being the one to stop it and to react in the opposite spirit:

***Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.***  
***1 Peter 3:9 (RSV)***

That duty to react well to provocation and to be restrained always applies to you, whether you are the husband or the wife. But it applies especially to the husband. He must find the self-control to take the lead and be the first to change and the first to humble himself when difficulties or conflicts arise. Given how vitally important the marriage relationship is, we can be sure that it will feature prominently in Jesus’ judgment of us at the Judgment Seat.

Likewise, we owe a very important duty to our children. Many men in particular allow themselves to forget this duty and put their careers, or even their hobbies, ahead of the needs of their children. We must not do that and must regularly appraise ourselves, our priorities, and our use of time, to ensure that our children do not suffer because of our career ambitions or other interests.

God will hold the father particularly responsible for what happens within the home and for the way the children are brought up. It is not a matter that can be delegated to the mother or to anybody else. God’s instructions about the upbringing and spiritual welfare of children is mainly directed towards the father:

***Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.***  
***Ephesians 6:4 (RSV)***

**Criterion Number 8 - Jesus will also assess the extent of the sacrifices we made and the things we suffered or endured for His sake**

We need to give sympathy and support to all those who suffer for the sake of the gospel. However, it is also true to say that, in a certain sense, such people are in a privileged position. That’s because

Jesus will reward every person who suffers or gives up something for the sake of His Name. Jesus says in Luke's gospel they will receive "*many times more*"... (than whatever they gave up). There is evidently some kind of exponential multiplier involved in this. Moreover, given what we know about God's generosity, it is likely to be a high one:

***<sup>28</sup>And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." <sup>29</sup>And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."***

*Luke 18:28-30 (ESV)*

We hear all of this directly from Jesus, concerning those who have had to leave their homes or families because their allegiance to Jesus leads to persecution. On a separate occasion in Mark's gospel, Jesus preached a very similar, but not identical, message to another audience. He indicated that if they suffer or make sacrifices as a result of being His follower, then they will receive a hundredfold in return, even in this life.

Perhaps this is referring in part to the huge new family within the Church that becomes available to a persecuted believer? However, in the age to come He says that they will also receive eternal life. The implication is that these benefits will continue forever.

***<sup>28</sup>Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." <sup>29</sup>Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup>But many who are first will be last, and the last first."***

*Mark 10:28-31 (ESV)*

The other intriguing remark that Jesus makes above is that "*many who are first will be last and the last first*". The sacrifices made, and the suffering endured, by the persecuted Church will mean that the 'league table' as we now know it may be substantially reversed. So, some wealthy, well known Christian leaders may, perhaps, find themselves very far down the list when we enter into the Millennial Kingdom.

Conversely, many of those unknown, poor, suffering Christians who never received any recognition in this life may find themselves raised up to very high ranks and positions. Perhaps they will be given senior appointments within the governments of the Gentile nations or other equivalent posts? There will certainly be a shaking up of the pecking order as we currently know it. I have a distinct feeling that most of us from the modern day Western churches will find ourselves at or near the bottom of the hierarchy in the Kingdom of God when it fully begins.

Now look at this more detailed list of specific blessings or rewards, that will come to each of those groups who either live right or suffer persecution for Jesus' sake. Note also that at the end He says their "*reward is great in Heaven*".

***<sup>1</sup>Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.***

***<sup>2</sup>And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:***

***<sup>3</sup> "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***<sup>4</sup>"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.***

***<sup>5</sup>"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.***

***<sup>6</sup>"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.***

***<sup>7</sup>"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.***

***<sup>8</sup>"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.***

***<sup>9</sup>"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.***

<sup>10</sup> *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>11</sup> *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

*Matthew 5:1-12 (ESV)*

It would probably also be valid to take Jesus' words above about those who are poor, thirsty, hungry etc and apply them to another verse which we shall see below, i.e. Mark 9:41. In that verse He says that *"whoever gives you a cup of water because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward"*.

Clearly that verse does refer to giving literal water (and food etc) to the literal poor. However, it would not be going too far to say that it also refers metaphorically to those who give the gospel, or the Bible, or teaching, or training etc to any person who is hungering and thirsting for God's Word or for righteousness.

By contrast, note what Jesus says, on another occasion, to those who now have all the comforts and privileges and also to those whom *"all people speak well of....."*. That kind of popularity only arises because they compromise over the truth, or do not preach the truth at all, due to wanting to be accepted by the world:

<sup>24</sup> *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. <sup>25</sup> Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. <sup>26</sup> Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*

*Luke 6:24-26 (ESV)*

Jesus then reveals a radical agenda for how the Christian life should be lived in the face of this present world's opposition and hostility. He sets out what most of us would regard as some extremely difficult, or even impossible things to do. Yet He promises that the *"reward will be great"* if we live this way:

<sup>27</sup> *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. <sup>31</sup> And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*

<sup>32</sup> *If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

*Luke 6:27-36(ESV)*

Jesus' half-brother James concisely sums up what we have been discussing in this section when he says in his letter:

*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

*James 1:12 (ESV)*

## **Criterion Number 9 - Jesus will also judge our works - by testing them by fire**

Here we come back to a passage we looked at earlier, from 1 Corinthians. We saw above that we must build on Jesus as our only foundation. Now we are told that on top of that solid foundation we must also ensure that we only build with gold, silver and precious stones, not with wood, hay or stubble. Paul uses an analogy of a fire being applied to something that has been built, so as to see what remains afterwards, i.e. what survives when our works are tested by fire:

*<sup>10</sup>By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup>If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

*1 Corinthians 3: 10-15 (NIV)*

This has got nothing whatever to do with the fire of Hell or the Lake of Fire. It is about fire being applied *to our works, not to us*, to see whether they remain or are burnt up. It is as if each man's works or deeds, that he has made or done during his life, were put into a container and subjected to intense fire, as in a furnace. Anything that we have done or produced in our lives which is just worthless dross will be burnt up. But anything which is of eternal value will remain.

It is just as if you had a strong metal box filled with wood, hay and straw, but also with some diamonds, gold and silver in it. If you burned it then the precious items, which represent the things we do out of obedience and faith, and in accordance with God's will, would remain. They would not burn up. But the other materials would all burn up and evaporate or be blown away.

The wood, hay and stubble represent the time we wasted, the sins we committed, and the things that were done in disobedience, or perhaps with a wrong motive. They also represent deeds we have done which were good in themselves, but which God did not tell us to do, as per criterion number four above. We may have done them entirely by ourselves, unprompted, without God's consent, on the basis of our own headstrong wilfulness.

If so, they will burn up and not survive this judgment by fire. At best they will count for nothing. They may actually be the basis for rebuke, not least because the time we spent doing those things will have prevented us doing the things that God did want us to do.

## **Criterion Number 10 - Jesus will also judge how hard working we were, i.e. whether we were lazy or diligent.**

You might be surprised to hear it, but the Bible has much more to say against laziness than against drunkenness. God wants everyone to be a hard worker and to make a full effort to work enthusiastically, carefully, and with all their ability. That certainly does apply to the *great commission* i.e. the task of telling the whole world about the gospel and making disciples. God wants us to be good labourers for Him, to bring in the harvest and to see people saved and disciplined:

*<sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;*

*Matthew 9:36-37 (RSV)*

However, the commandment to work hard also applies to the work we do each day within the home or in our ordinary paid job that we do for our employer or on behalf of every client, customer, patient

or colleague. God is very opposed to laziness and highly critical of it. He will rebuke and punish laziness, but reward hard work:

***“Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness....”***

***Jeremiah 48:10 (a) (RSV)***

That cursing and rewarding will certainly happen here and now, in this life. However, one feels obliged to conclude that it will also be a basis for assessing us at the Judgment. In this next passage, from Colossians, Paul tells us that whatever type of work we do we are to regard it as being done for God Himself, not just for our employer or customer. Moreover, He says that if we do so, there will be *"an inheritance from the Lord as a reward"*:

***<sup>22</sup>Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. <sup>23</sup>Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, <sup>24</sup>since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.***

***Colossians 3:22-24 (NIV)***

Again, we are not told what exactly this *"inheritance"* is, but we are told that it is a *"reward"*. Therefore it must be something very good. Moreover, the clear implication is that this reward will be given out in differing quantities, to reflect the level and integrity of a person's work. And some people will presumably get no reward at all. It cannot be the case that the reward will be equal for us all. Otherwise the command to work hard and the offer of a reward would be meaningless if we were all going to get the same reward anyway and in the same quantity.

I shall set out some examples of how God expresses the strength of His views about laziness and what it leads to, even in this life. Moreover, the very fact that the Bible says so much about laziness means that God must regard some of us as being lazy. If He did not, then none of this would need to be said. We can fully expect therefore that idleness will also lead to rebuke at the Judgment Seat. Conversely, hard work leads to reward and honour in this life and we can safely expect that it will do so at the Judgment Seat too:

***<sup>9</sup>Whoever is slack in his work  
is a brother to him who destroys.  
Proverbs 18:9 (ESV)***

***<sup>9</sup>How long will you lie there, O sluggard?  
When will you arise from your sleep?  
<sup>10</sup>A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
<sup>11</sup>and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want like an armed man.  
Proverbs 6:9-11 (ESV)***

***<sup>4</sup>A slack hand causes poverty,  
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.  
<sup>5</sup>He who gathers in summer is a prudent son,  
but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.  
Proverbs 10:4-5 (ESV)***

***The hand of the diligent will rule,  
while the slothful will be put to forced labor.  
Proverbs 12:24 (RSV)***

*A slothful man will not catch his prey,  
but the diligent man will get precious wealth.  
Proverbs 12:27 (RSV)*

*The sluggard does not plow in the autumn;  
he will seek at harvest and have nothing.  
Proverbs 20:4 (RSV)*

*Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty;  
open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.  
Proverbs 20:13 (RSV)*

*Do you see a man skillful in his work?  
He will stand before kings;  
he will not stand before obscure men.  
Proverbs 22:29 (ESV)*

Like any other employer, Jesus wants servants who will work hard for Him. If you were working for an ordinary boss, wouldn't that be obvious to you every time that you go to work? Yet, we frequently forget it when we are working for God. However, working for God is, in fact, what we are always doing. At least it is what we are *meant* to be doing. That is because everything we do is actually being done for Him, as Paul stated above in his letter to the Colossians.

#### **Criterion Number 11 - Jesus will also judge our innermost motives and intentions, not only our achievements**

There is no point trying to deceive Jesus, or hoping that He will miss anything we have done, or not realise what our real motives were. Everything will be laid bare and exposed. That is likely to be one of the most difficult aspects of the judgment, i.e. when the real truth is revealed to others about what we have done in this life and what our real thoughts and motives were.

Moreover, the truth will be revealed to us too. Most of us see ourselves very favourably but are seen in a quite different way by those around us. We are blind to our own faults and wrong attitudes, seeing our own behaviour and ways as obviously right. But that is plainly wrong, as those around us can easily see. None of us see ourselves accurately, as we truly are.

We are overly generous to ourselves, even assuming that we are ever willing to question ourselves at all, which most of us aren't. At the Judgment Seat all of us will also be confronted with *the real truth about ourselves*, i.e. those facts which we could not see, or would never admit.

The question therefore is whether you or I are making these errors. Are we seeing ourselves and our motives as good when Jesus sees them very differently? If so, we may have done things for which we expect Him to praise us, but find that He actually says that those things were done out of pride or to build an empire for ourselves or to get the praise of men etc. He knows our hearts and what our innermost thoughts, motives and intentions really are:

*on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.  
Romans 2:16 (RSV)*

*If you say, "Behold, we did not know this,"  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,  
and will he not repay man according to his work?  
Proverbs 24:12 (ESV)*

<sup>20</sup>*If we had forgotten the name of our God,  
or spread forth our hands to a strange god,  
<sup>21</sup>would not God discover this?  
For he knows the secrets of the heart.  
Psalm 44:20-21 (RSV)*

*All a person's ways seem pure to them,  
but motives are weighed by the LORD.  
Proverbs 16:2 (NIV)*

<sup>9</sup> *The heart is deceitful above all things,  
and desperately corrupt;  
who can understand it?  
<sup>10</sup> "I the Lord search the mind  
and try the heart,  
to give every man according to his ways,  
according to the fruit of his doings."  
Jeremiah 17:9-10 (RSV)*

*"And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and  
with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every plan and thought. If  
you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off for ever.  
1 Chronicles 28:9 (RSV)*

<sup>14</sup>*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. <sup>15</sup>And  
he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For  
what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.  
Luke 16:14-15(ESV)*

In the passage from Luke above, Jesus was well aware that these particular Pharisees loved money and wanted to justify themselves before men, i.e. to impress people. Therefore Jesus was critical of them. However, there are also many times where good and sincere people attempt to do things in obedience to God but they fail. Or they may be obstructed by human or demonic opposition, or by adverse circumstances. In such cases there is every reason to believe that Jesus' judgment will be favourable. He will fully take into account, and make allowances for, the level of difficulties and obstacles that such people faced.

His heart is touched whenever we make a sincere attempt to be obedient and to serve Him, even if, in the end, we do not succeed. The *outcome*, in itself, is not of paramount importance, at least so far as the Judgment is concerned. It is our *heart attitude, motive and intention* that Jesus looks at most closely.

We can see an example of this in the way God responds to King David's desire to build a Temple for God. David never achieved it, because God actually wanted it to be built by his son, King Solomon. God arranged for the prophet Nathan to tell David that it was not His wish for him to build the Temple. David accepted that and, instead, he just gathered materials and provided money which Solomon later used.

David also donated a very large amount of his own personal wealth to help pay for the Temple, even though he never saw any of it being built. The point is that later, when King Solomon was dedicating the newly built Temple, he gives us this insight into how God had viewed King David's heartfelt desire to build it for Him, even though he never actually did it:

*<sup>17</sup>"Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>18</sup>"But the LORD said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. <sup>19</sup>'Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who will be born to you, he will build the house for My name.'*

*1 Kings 8:17-19 (NASB)*

God was pleased that David had *wanted* to build the Temple, even though He had in fact chosen Solomon to do it. He said "... *you did well that it was in your heart.*" It follows that the same principle will apply to us as we stand before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will certainly judge our actions and achievements, but He will also be very interested in judging our motives, attitudes, longings, desires, intentions and plans, even in areas of our lives where we did not achieve any visible success.

Those things reveal a great deal about us, whereas the single question of whether we ultimately succeed or fail, in objective terms, though important, doesn't necessarily tell the whole story. Those outcomes, either way, could be due to all sorts of factors outside of our own control. They depend on our abilities, circumstances and resources, and also the extent to which we received God's help and the support or, alternatively the opposition, of other people and/or demons.

Probably all of us have attempted to do something for God but failed. Or we have been prevented from doing so by people or events which were just too strong for us. However, we can be sure that Jesus will, nonetheless, recognise and reward our motive, and that heartfelt desire to obey Him. So, we need not lose heart or assume that we will necessarily go unrewarded or unrecognised, just because, in the end, so many of our attempts to serve God failed, or we did not achieve much visible success. Thus, there is every reason for us to persist in what others might regard as hopeless causes.

You might, for example, be a missionary working in an unreached nation and spend years with few, if any, converts. Or you could be trying faithfully to share the gospel with your neighbours and work colleagues but so far nobody has responded positively. Or perhaps you have been campaigning against the rising tide of our abortion culture, or divorce, or drug addiction, or pornography, and you are discouraged that it all just gets worse and worse, despite everything that you do.

If your position resembles any of the above, be encouraged and keep persisting. If these are things which Jesus has asked you to do, He will not overlook your efforts or your desire to do good, even where you seem to fail continually so far as other people can see. He will not necessarily regard you as a failure, even if nothing tangible is achieved in objective terms. He will look much deeper and still see you as a success if you:

- a) desired to serve Him
- b) were working hard for Him
- c) cared about the things He cared about
- d) were grieved at the things that grieved Him
- e) did what He asked you to do
- f) kept on going and did not give up

Whether your efforts eventually ended in the desired result is not the only point, or even the main point. It is like where a football manager might praise a player who puts all his heart and soul into a game but the match still ends in defeat. Wouldn't it be a strange and unjust manager, or even spectator, who refused to recognise or reward such commitment and effort from an individual player just because the overall game ended in defeat?

Likewise, if a player had three or four shots on goal but on every occasion the ball hit the post or crossbar, or was stopped by a superb goalkeeper, we would not condemn him. We would say he did very well, but was just unfortunate on that occasion. We would continue to view him as a good player. He might even be declared to have been the ‘man of the match’ even though he never scored and his team lost.

If an ordinary human being is capable of that level of subtlety and sophistication in assessing a footballer, can't we feel assured that Jesus will do even better? He will see and discern all of the real facts about everything. He will therefore recognise and reward all of the hidden things, which, perhaps, nobody else knew about.

However, it will also work in the opposite direction as well. God will also be able to see where our motives were not good, or where they were mixed. Therefore He will also point out the pride, insincerity, or falseness that He sees in things we have done which had good results and which we, and others, assumed to be successful. Jesus might well be less impressed than we were, or perhaps even critical of what was done, despite its apparently successful outcome.

Those who think they have done well, just because a project succeeded, may be very surprised to find themselves being rebuked at the Judgment because some or all of their motives were bad. Conversely, those who believe they failed, because they saw little or no visible success, may be amazed when they find themselves being praised and rewarded.

There will be many surprises, in both directions, because of the strong emphasis that Jesus will place on motives and effort and on what was *attempted*, rather than focusing solely on actual results and outcomes. In the same way that we have the Criminal Attempts Act, which makes a person liable for the *crimes* they attempt to do but fail, so there will be the equivalent at the Judgment, only in reverse. We shall therefore be praised for the good things which we attempted, not just what we achieved.

### **Criterion Number 12 - Jesus will also judge the extent to which we either humbled or exalted ourselves during this life**

Pride was the first sin ever committed, when Lucifer began to think that he ought to be equal to God. That was what led to his own rebellion, and then to the rebellion by many of the angels in Heaven who consequently became what we now call demons and were thrown out of Heaven. Therefore God detests pride and arrogance and will punish it wherever He sees it. He will also bless and reward humility and give grace and honour to the humble:

***Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord:  
be assured, he will not go unpunished.***

***Proverbs 16:5 (ESV)***

***But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”***

***James 4:6 (ESV)***

***A man's pride will bring him low,  
but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.***

***Proverbs 29:23 (RSV)***

***The reward for humility and fear of the Lord  
is riches and honor and life.***

***Proverbs 22:4 (RSV)***

For an example of how God judges and punishes pride, we can look at the life of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He had been a pagan but, through the influence of the prophet Daniel who was in exile in Babylon, working for the King, he became a believer. In fact he even wrote chapter four of the book of Daniel. However, at an earlier stage in his life he displayed pride at his own achievements and at his wealth, power and splendour,

As a result God judged him by reducing him to having the mind of a beast for seven years. He had been warned of this in a dream beforehand and was advised to repent by Daniel himself, but he did not listen or change. Therefore the day came when God's judgment finally fell on him:

*<sup>28</sup>All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>29</sup>At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, <sup>30</sup>and the king said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" <sup>31</sup>While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, <sup>32</sup>and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox; and seven times shall pass over you, until you have learned that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." <sup>33</sup>Immediately the word was fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men, and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.*

*Daniel 4:28-33 (RSV)*

At the end of the seven years God restored King Nebuchadnezzar's mind to him and even restored him to his position as King. However, he now had a very different attitude as a result of what he had been through. He recognised God's greatness and realised how wrong he had been about his own self-importance:

*<sup>34</sup>At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup>all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing; and he does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What doest thou?" <sup>36</sup>At the same time my reason returned to me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. <sup>37</sup>Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven; for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase.*

*Daniel 4:34-37 (RSV)*

I am not certain whether King Nebuchadnezzar had already become a believer and been saved before this judgment came upon him, or whether he became a believer afterwards as a result of this experience. Either could be the case. I personally think he was already a believer at the start, albeit a proud, carnal one, with a lot to learn. In other words, he was like most of us - proud and self-centered. He just had a lot more to be proud about than we do.

Either way, whenever it was exactly that Nebuchadnezzar got saved, the point is that his experiences illustrate how God will bring down any person who is proud. God always operates in this way, whether we are a believer or not. Therefore we can confidently expect Jesus to operate that way at the Judgment Seat as well.

Likewise, humility is a virtue which God values very highly and will always reward. This is so important that it has become a principle by which God operates. In fact, it is a law of the universe that whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. That is a fixed and absolute law, and it affects believers and unbelievers alike, just like the law of gravity or the law of sowing and reaping.

This law about humbling or exalting ourselves operates here and now in this life. However, there is every reason to believe that it will continue to operate at the Judgment Seat of Christ too. At any rate, there is no reason to assume that it will cease to operate. That being so, then it will surely be one of the factors which determines what position we receive in the Millennial Kingdom and what rewards or honours are given to us, or withheld from us:

*<sup>7</sup>Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, <sup>8</sup>'When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; <sup>9</sup>and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. <sup>11</sup>For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'*

*Luke 14:7-11 (RSV)*

This was such an important point that Jesus said it more than once. Here He is saying it again later, to a different audience:

*.....For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted''.*

*Luke 18:14 (b)(ESV)*

Jesus also told His disciples that in His Kingdom things will operate very differently from this world. He taught that the greatest people are those who *serve*, rather than those who *are served*. Therefore, the highest place is actually at the bottom. The greatest honour will be given to those who have humbled themselves the most. That is honour will be given in proportion to the extent to which they had the attitudes and the meekness of little children:

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" <sup>2</sup>And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, <sup>3</sup>and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

*Matthew 18:1-4 (RSV):*

*<sup>25</sup>But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup>It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup>and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; <sup>28</sup>even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

*Matthew 20:25-28 (RSV)*

*<sup>33</sup>And they came to Caper'na-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" <sup>34</sup>But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup>And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."*

*Mark 9:33-35 (RSV)*

Accordingly, it would appear that those Christians who have exalted themselves, in this life will be put lower down and will not be honoured. Conversely, those who have humbled themselves in this life will be lifted up when God's Kingdom begins. So, there is all the more reason to humble ourselves regularly and to carefully avoid exalting ourselves or seeking the praise of men.

Indeed, we ought really to go out of our way to avoid being recognised, praised or rewarded in this life, so as to preserve our reward, or keep a larger reward, at the Judgment Seat. It is enlightened self-interest, if nothing else.

**Criterion Number 13 - Jesus will also judge the level of our generosity and how sacrificially we gave our money away**

The Bible says a great deal about money, partly because money represents and embodies value. It is the perfect means of exchange and can be turned into all sorts of other things that we want. So when we give money away we are doing without all of the things that money can obtain and all the prestige it brings. We are therefore doing the opposite of what our flesh nature wants. That is one reason why God blesses and rewards those who are generous:

*A generous person will prosper;  
whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.  
Proverbs 11:25 (NIV)*

There is a very high correlation between meanness with money and general, all round wickedness. If you see a stingy person, they are highly likely also to have a wicked, harsh, selfish nature *in general*. Conversely, a generous person will probably also have a soft, tender heart overall and be the sort of person God can more easily work with. Apostle Paul also tells us that "*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*":

*<sup>6</sup>Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, <sup>7</sup>for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. <sup>8</sup>But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. <sup>9</sup>But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup>For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

*1 Timothy 6:6-10 (ESV)*

Jesus spoke about money so often because He wants us to develop a generous heart. The way we handle our money will have a major bearing on whether we succeed in developing such a heart. If we do, then it will also help us to deal with, or correct, many other faults that we have. Financial generosity is something which we know Jesus really values and looks for. Therefore we can safely assume that He will reward it at the Judgment, given how much He focused on it during His earthly ministry.

In this passage, Jesus tells a parable about a rich fool and then goes on to give teaching on the importance of avoiding covetousness and anxiety about food, clothes and possessions. He goes on to say that if instead of worrying about these things you seek His Kingdom, then "*these things will be added to you*"

Jesus clearly means that we will be given these things even during this present life. However, there is every reason to think that He also means that they will be "added" to us *in the next life too*, and in proportion to the extent to which we sought for His Kingdom in this present life:

*<sup>13</sup> Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." <sup>14</sup> But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions." <sup>16</sup> And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, <sup>17</sup> and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.' <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample*

*goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’<sup>20</sup> But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’<sup>21</sup> So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.”*

*<sup>22</sup> And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on.<sup>23</sup> For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.<sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!<sup>25</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?<sup>26</sup> If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?<sup>27</sup> Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.<sup>28</sup> But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!<sup>29</sup> And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.<sup>30</sup> For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.<sup>31</sup> Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*

*Luke 12:13-31 (ESV)*

In this next passage Jesus is perhaps even more explicit. We are reminded that we have the opportunity to enter God’s Kingdom and are told to sell our possessions and give to the poor. Moreover, Jesus clearly indicates that the giving away of our money and possessions will lead to us having treasure in Heaven. He even goes so far as to refer to that as “*money bags that do not grow old*”.

You may take the view that that phrase is purely symbolic and that the “money bags” that Jesus refers to are purely metaphorical. However, I am not so sure. He might very well mean literal treasure and literal money. At any rate, there is no reason why He shouldn’t mean it literally:

*<sup>32</sup> “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.<sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

*Luke 12:32-34 (ESV)*

We are meant to give generously as a proportion of what we have. So, the more we have, the more we ought to give, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of our income. Conversely, from those who have very little, much less is expected. Ironically, it is often amongst poorer people that one sees the greatest generosity, at least in relative terms. For example, I am told that in poorer areas more food is donated to charitable food banks than in wealthy areas. We also see this in the case of the poor widow whom Jesus saw putting all that she had into the offering box:

*<sup>41</sup>And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums.<sup>42</sup>And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.<sup>43</sup>And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.<sup>44</sup>For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

*Mark 12:41-44 (ESV)*

We need therefore to examine this issue of money closely in our own lives and find out whether or not it has a hold over us. Some people are strongly in its power. Therefore, for them, it may be that the only effective cure for the love of money is to give it *all* away. That is not true of everyone. Most of us just need to learn how to be generous to begin with, and then how to be *more* generous. But, if our heart is consumed with the love of money, we may need to get rid of *all* of it, at least for a while. Jesus tackled a rich young ruler on this very point:

<sup>18</sup>And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>19</sup>And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. <sup>20</sup>You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" <sup>21</sup>And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." <sup>22</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." <sup>23</sup>But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. <sup>24</sup>Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

*Luke 18:18-24 (ESV)*

Note again how Jesus refers to the importance of the concept of having *treasure in Heaven* instead of seeking to accumulate treasure *in this life*. That treasure, whatever it consists of, will be given to those who deserve it at the Judgment. It would seem that one group to whom it will be given are those who gave away their money and possessions generously during this life. We should all seek to be included within that group and to be classified by Jesus as generous, i.e. having "*a good eye*", as we saw in Book Three.

So, Jesus is not opposed to treasure *in itself*. He is not even opposed to us *pursuing or wanting* treasure. He is just opposed to us pursuing, wanting or worrying about treasure *in this life*. It is meant to be *an objective or goal for the next life not this present life*. If we seek to have it now we won't have it then. If we give it away now we shall receive it then

Apostle Paul also referred to this concept of giving away our money so as to "*store up treasure*" for ourselves (in Heaven). Again, I would not be too quick to treat that phrase as being symbolic or metaphorical. He could well mean it absolutely literally:

<sup>17</sup> As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

*1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)*

#### **Criterion Number 14 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the depth of our love for and devotion to God.**

This is a similar criterion to faithfulness, which we saw earlier, but it's not quite the same. Jesus' heart is touched when He sees a disciple who is so genuinely devoted to God, and who loves Him so passionately, that he would do anything to please Him. When Jesus was questioned by a scribe in Mark's gospel. He identified the greatest commandment for him by saying we must love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourself:

<sup>28</sup>And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup>and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup>The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

*Mark 12:28-31 (RSV)*

That is the sort of devotion God wants, so that *every part of us is involved in loving Him* and to the maximum extent. However, the reality is that most of us do not feel as much personal devotion to Him as we ought to have. Therefore, when Jesus saw genuine, wholehearted devotion in a person He

commented on it. We can therefore safely assume that it will be one of the criteria that He will take into account at the Judgment. Here is an example of someone who displayed this type of devotion at an extremely high level. Note how Jesus' heart is touched by it:

*<sup>3</sup>And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. <sup>4</sup>There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? <sup>5</sup>For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. <sup>6</sup>But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>7</sup>For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. <sup>8</sup>She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. <sup>9</sup>And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.*

*Mark 14:3-9 (ESV)*

**Criterion Number 15 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of whether we were *overcomers*, i.e. were we persistent enough to overcome or conquer the obstacles we had to face?**

Once you start looking in the Bible for the words *overcome*, *conquer* and *overcomers* you will see that they are all over the place. Being an overcomer is a major theme. Yet, as with so many other important issues, it is rarely ever spoken about in churches. Let's define what it means. Jesus wants all of His followers to become effective and to learn how to overcome three main opponents, or to win three main battles:

- a) the battle against our own *flesh*, i.e. our sin nature
- b) the battle against the pull and influence of the *world* system and all it stands for
- c) the battle against the *Devil* and all his demons

For more detail on each of these battles please see Books Seven and Nine.

Jesus wants a Church which is made up of people who have learned how to win these three battles against the flesh, the world and the Devil. He also wants people who have moved up the spectrum from being ignorant and naïve to being knowledgeable, understanding and wise, so that we are useful and effective in God's Kingdom. Jesus wants His people to carry out His orders successfully, even in the face of ongoing opposition and obstacles. It makes Him proud to see His followers learning how to overcome the problems they face.

Being an overcomer, or learning how to conquer, does *not* mean that Christians are meant to dominate anybody or take over the institutions or governments of this world. Moreover, it certainly does not mean that God is asking us to use force or violence to seize power, territory or influence for the Church. I need to labour that point because in the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church it was felt, and still is felt to some extent, that God has called them to rule this world.

Therefore many of them have believed that the Roman Catholic church is entitled to rule over people, institutions and governments and to use manipulation or force where it needs to. On that basis the Roman Catholic Church has put multitudes of genuine Bible-believing Christians to death over the centuries in order to force them to be silent. It has also controlled and manipulated governments.

But they are not the only ones who think or act in these ways. Some of the Protestant Reformers did the same, in particular John Calvin, albeit on a much smaller scale. They persecuted genuine Christians who courageously pointed out the errors or deficiencies of the Reformation.

Some of the reformers got to the stage where, like the Popes, they believed that they were authorised by God to stamp out and persecute anybody who opposed what they believed. They took this concept of conquering and being an overcomer and perverted it. Therefore they sometimes did the very opposite of what Jesus wanted and thus they behaved as tyrants rather than gentle shepherds and servants.

So, let's be clear. Conquering and overcoming does not mean dominating or persecuting other people. Neither does it mean seizing power, land or nations on behalf of Jesus. The type of conquering we are meant to do is primarily about achieving victory over our own flesh, separating ourselves from the world, and overcoming the demons in our lives.

The oppressive things that the Roman Catholic church did, (and still does) are profoundly wrong. John Calvin did similar things at Geneva, though on a smaller scale. He sought to impose Christianity on a whole city. He even executed people for not going to church, or for holding what he thought were wrong beliefs.

Things such as those are absolutely *not* what we are called to do. Therefore they are not what we are discussing here. We are not called to conquer or rule over *other people*. We are to seek for victory over our own flesh, the values of this world and the schemes of the Devil. Let's consider a number of passages where this key concept of overcoming or conquering is addressed and let's try to work out exactly what it does and does not mean:

***I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."***

***John 16:33 (ESV)***

Jesus is the ultimate model of what an overcomer should be. He overcame the world and the Devil in countless situations where people and the Devil or demons opposed or obstructed Him. He also did it all without sinning and without imitating the world or its ways. In particular, He did not use force. He wants us to be overcomers as He was when He came *the first time*.

But He does not want us to do so in the same way as He will operate when He returns *the second time*. Jesus will then use force to destroy His enemies, but *we are not authorised to do that here and now, in this life*. In this next passage, from Revelation, we see that Jesus will use His power in the future to overcome the forces working for the antichrist:

***<sup>12</sup>And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. <sup>13</sup>These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. <sup>14</sup>They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."***

***Revelation 17:12-14 (ESV)***

So, we are to imitate Jesus and to seek to overcome, but we are not told to do so by force, or by seeking to gain power or control over others. Instead we are to overcome our own flesh, plus the world and the Devil, by our endurance, goodness, wisdom, persistence etc. This is shown clearly in this passage from Revelation:

***<sup>10</sup>And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup>And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."***

***Revelation 12:10-11 (RSV)***

In the above passage we see that the believers during the Great Tribulation are going to conquer by using God's Word effectively and by never giving in to pressure, even if it means their own death by persecution. However, they will not be killing, or even controlling, anybody else.

Paul enlarges on that point in his letter to the Romans. We are to make sure that we are not overcome by evil, but we are not authorised to use evil methods in order to resist evil people. We must overcome their evil by our goodness, (and shrewdness) not by being evil in return:

***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***  
***Romans 12:21 (ESV)***

Let's now look at one of apostle John's letters for more detail of what he means when he refers to overcoming. In this next passage he focuses on overcoming *the evil one*, i.e. the Devil and all he stands for:

***<sup>13</sup> I am writing to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I am writing to you, young men,  
because you have overcome the evil one.  
I write to you, children,  
because you know the Father.***

***<sup>14</sup> I write to you, fathers,  
because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I write to you, young men,  
because you are strong,  
and the word of God abides in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one.***

***1 John 2:13-14 (ESV)***

We are, likewise, also meant to resist and overcome the demons that we encounter, just as Jesus did. When He returns He will overcome the ultimate, final antichrist. That is a human being whose body Satan will enter into and work through. For now we are to aim to overcome the general spirit of antichrist wherever and whenever we encounter it. But we are to do so by discernment, by knowing God and by knowing and trusting in His Word, not by manipulation, control or domination, or by any of the other schemes or techniques that the people of this world use:

***<sup>1</sup>Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. <sup>4</sup>Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. <sup>5</sup>They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup>We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.***

***1 John 4:1-6 (ESV)***

For the avoidance of doubt, when the Bible refers to *the antichrist* it is referring to the individual man into whom Satan will enter. He is the man who will rule the whole world during the time called *the Tribulation*. During that time, especially the second half of it, he will persecute Christians and Jews on a scale far worse than anything that has ever been known before in world history.

However, when the Bible refers to *the spirit of antichrist* it means something much broader. It is the general attitude and approach which exalts itself, denies Jesus Christ, opposes the gospel and hates God's people. We see that spirit very clearly in every age throughout history, including our own. It

is what one sees when a person, enticed and influenced by demons, acts in a worldly way and does what his own flesh nature wants.

That whole triangle, the flesh, the world and the Devil, resist everything that God stands for. However, one day, probably not far off now, the individual antichrist will come. He will be a man who is guided and empowered by Satan himself. That man will become *the* antichrist and he will then embody and demonstrate everything that the generic spirit of antichrist has always represented. He will also oppose real believers like they have never been opposed before.

However, if we are real Christians and are walking faithfully as disciples, then nothing can separate us from Jesus. No matter what opposition or suffering we have to face, it is still possible for us to be victorious, to endure whatever persecution is thrown at us, and to *conquer*. We can do so simply by remaining faithful and true and by refusing to give in under pressure, even if it means death:

***<sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.***

*Romans 8:35-37 (ESV)*

Even during the Great Tribulation, when *the* antichrist is at the height of his powers and is persecuting multitudes of believers, those who really know God will still be able to remain strong and to resist the antichrist. But even so, for many of them, it will cost them their lives:

***<sup>32</sup>He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant; but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. <sup>33</sup>And those among the people who are wise shall make many understand, though they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder, for some days.***

*Daniel 11:32-33 (RSV)*

If we can learn to be overcomers in the various battles we face then we will be rewarded for it in a number of ways. Look at this next series of verses which set out just some of the rewards which will be given to those who *overcome* or *conquer*, i.e. in the ways described above, not in worldly ways:

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.'***

*Revelation 2:7 (NASB)*

***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'***

*Revelation 2:17 (NASB)*

***<sup>25</sup>Only hold fast what you have until I come. <sup>26</sup>The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup>and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; <sup>28</sup>and I will give him the morning star.***

*Revelation 2:25-28 (RSV)*

***<sup>4</sup>But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup>He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.***

*Revelation 3:4-5 (NASB)*

<sup>11</sup>*I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. <sup>12</sup>The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

*Revelation 3:11-12 (ESV)*

*The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

*Revelation 3:21 (ESV)*

<sup>1</sup>*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, <sup>4</sup>and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”*

<sup>5</sup>*And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” <sup>6</sup>Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. <sup>7</sup>He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.*

*Revelation 21:1-7 (NASB)*

Let’s recap briefly on what rewards were referred to in the verses above for those who can overcome life’s obstacles and difficulties. We are told that overcomers will receive or be granted the following:

- a) to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God
- b) a ‘white stone’ and the ‘hidden manna’
- c) authority over the nations
- d) ‘the morning star’
- e) hearing Jesus confess (speak out) their name before God and His angels
- f) to be made a pillar in the temple of God
- g) to sit with Jesus on His throne
- h) to inherit the new Heaven, the new Earth and the new Jerusalem.

Even those few verses show that we potentially have an extraordinary amount coming to us, *if* we can learn to be *overcomers*. Knowing that helps to make sense of why God allows us to face so much difficulty and hostility in this life, from both people and demons. Moreover, that opposition is potentially for our good, if we can bring ourselves to respond to it in the right ways.

It also helps to explain why apostle Paul tells us to “*give thanks in all circumstances*”. One very obvious reason why we should give thanks, even when we face difficulties, is that the trial or difficulty that we are currently having to overcome may be the very thing we need if we are to learn how to be an overcomer. Victory in the particular battle that we face at any given moment may cause us to become eligible for many extra rewards at the Judgment Seat.

Some of these rewards will be received and come into operation when Jesus begins to rule over the whole earth during His 1000 year millennial reign. Some rewards may not come until after the Millennium, when the eternal Kingdom begins.

### **Criterion number 16 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of how much courage we displayed**

It surprises many people to discover that courage is important to God. Yet He commands us to be courageous and says that He will reward courage and rebuke and punish cowardice. As with so many of the other crucially important issues and themes in the Bible, courage is barely ever spoken about or preached on in most churches. Let's therefore look at some of what the Bible actually says about courage:

***‘Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.’<sup>7</sup> Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. <sup>8</sup>It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.’***

*Deuteronomy 31:6-8 (ESV)*

***‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.***

*Joshua 1:6-7 (ESV)*

***Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.’***

*Joshua 1:9 (ESV)*

***Therefore be ye very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left;***

*Joshua 23:6 (ASV)*

***Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the rules that the LORD commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Fear not; do not be dismayed.***

*1 Chronicles 22:13 (ESV)*

Looking at courage from the other direction, note how in the book of Revelation cowardice is placed first in the list of characteristics which will cause a person to end up in the Lake of Fire. Few people would specify the *cowardly* as a group which particularly deserves to be criticised or condemned. But the Bible does, because cowardice is really just an aspect of selfishness. It will cause a person to put themselves first, to compromise, to let Jesus down, and to hold back from obeying Him whenever doing so would be costly, painful or dangerous:

***But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death. ”***

*Revelation 21:8 (ESV)*

Courage is not only displayed when your life is in danger. Those extreme crisis situations are very rare in the Western world, though not elsewhere. For Christians in the West the main reasons why we would be tempted to deny Christ are little things like the fear of other people's disapproval, or of getting into trouble at work.

Therefore many Christians, including leaders, operate a form of self-censorship. They make sure that they never say or do anything which might cause them to become unpopular, arouse antagonism, or put their job or their finances in any danger. However, few, if any, of them would ever explicitly say: “*My policy is going to be keep my head down, avoid any controversy and deny Christ, whenever it is necessary in order to keep myself popular and avoid trouble*”.

Nevertheless, unconscious thoughts along those lines will probably go through that Christian’s mind. We can regularly deny Christ without ever saying any words to the effect of “*I hereby deny Jesus Christ*.” Very few of us, at least in the West, are currently put in situations where we are called upon to say anything like that. However, that may well change in the future, as the persecution of Christians becomes more intense. Instead, our cowardice and our denials of Christ are more subtle and occur in much less obvious ways.

We can deny Christ without even consciously realising we are doing it, for example by simply failing to speak up for Him to defend His reputation when he is being mocked. We can deny Him by failing to let our friends, colleagues and neighbours know that we are His disciples, i.e. by keeping quiet about it. We might easily persuade ourselves that we are doing so because we want to be *sensitive* or to *wait for the right moment*. It’s true that there can sometimes be some validity in such motives. There can be a right and a wrong time for everything.

However, much of the time, if we really interrogated ourselves closely, we would have to admit that our real motives for remaining silent about Jesus are that we simply don’t want to be criticized, mocked or disliked by others because of our faith. If so, then we have already denied Christ by our silence, without ever doing so explicitly or in words.

There are also leaders and preachers who regularly deny Christ, *even while teaching and preaching about Him*. Many of them may be unaware that they are doing it, though I expect that some of them are well aware. They can deny Christ not only by what they say but by what they *don’t say*, and not only by what they teach but what they *don’t teach*.

For example, have you ever noticed themes, issues, topics and doctrines that are clearly in the Bible, but which are rarely, if ever, preached on? I have come to the view that, in many churches, the list of things that the preachers *avoid mentioning* is much longer than the list of things they do cover.

The usual reason for such dodging of issues is that the preacher doesn’t want to antagonise anybody. He wants to be liked and to avoid people leaving the church. So he will limit himself to talking about bland, inoffensive, uncontroversial topics. He will take great care to avoid anything that he thinks might cause any disagreement or debate. For example, there will be no mention of Bible prophecy, even though it amounts to 30% of the entire Bible, because it tends to be controversial. Even if other people raise those issues, or ask questions, the conversations will be swiftly terminated and the questions left unanswered.

Likewise, such a preacher will avoid any mention of subjects such as demons, spiritual gifts, the roles of men and women, homosexuality, promiscuity, worldliness, false religions, Hell, the Lake of Fire, the flesh, worldliness, sin, judgment, repentance, baptism, the Holy Spirit, Israel, abortion and so on and so on. Yet these are all crucial issues and we all need to know what the Bible has to say about them, even if it might be upsetting to ourselves or others.

Another example is the vital issue of whether the biblical account of creation is true or whether we and everything else in the universe evolved, as the secular world insists. The Bible is very clear on this. Moreover, the created world itself speaks plainly to us. It demonstrates by its infinite complexity, order and beauty that it was designed and made by a Creator. That is entirely obvious to any child.

For example, I was recently walking in the countryside and I came across the remains of an old path. There was a line of white stones which had, in the past, been the edge of a path. It was now overgrown. As I looked at those two lines of white stones I knew immediately that somebody, years ago, had deliberately placed them in a line, intending them to be the edges of a path. It was entirely obvious that they had not got there by random chance, “*over millions of years*”, as they say.

The thought then came to me, “*Even these two simple lines of white stones are too precise and orderly to have got there by random chance, and must be the work of some gardener. Therefore, how much more obvious is it that a human eye, heart, digestive system, or adrenal gland cannot have got there by random chance, without a designer or Creator?*”

Even those few things prove the truth of creation, not to mention all the other created things, like stars, planets, moons, birds, insects, animals, fish, bacteria, etc etc.” Surely, such facts about the created world are equally obvious to everybody, not just to a select few. They must be, because Paul tells us in Romans that God regards it as obvious that He is our Creator. On that basis, we have no excuse for not knowing, or for pretending that we don’t know, that He created everything:

***<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;***

***Romans 1:18-20 (RSV)***

In other words, nobody has any excuse for not believing in God or for not accepting Him as their Creator. That is how God sees it, which ought to settle the matter. But I have lost count of how many preachers I have heard who have compromised on this issue of creation v evolution. They choose to adopt a pro-evolution stance, or at least to be seen as neutral on the issue, because they want to fit in and be accepted. Or it’s because they don’t want to be sneered at for being ‘*old fashioned*’ or ‘*unsophisticated*’.

I have heard some act in this way and it seemed to me that they were doing it because they did not want to be looked down upon, or considered ‘*unacademic*’, by the many doctors and scientists in the congregation. The church I am thinking of was in a university city with a major teaching hospital and the leaders allowed factors such as that to intimidate them.

Those men wanted to fit in and to be accepted. They wanted the approval of their audience and that seemed to matter more to them than what God thought of their message. But what is the position of a preacher who compromises on the content of his teaching because of his personal fear of unpopularity or controversy? How will he be spoken to at the Judgment Seat? Would his decisions as to what to say, and what not to say, be regarded as having *denied* Christ?

It seems clear that they would be seen in that way by Jesus. If so, then many of us, whether we are leaders or not, may well be surprised to discover that Jesus’ assessment of us is that we denied Him, because we compromised over His Word and stayed silent on issues about which we should have spoken up. Therefore, we would all be wise to ask God to point out to us now any areas where we are denying Him or compromising on the truth of His Word. For example, we could pray along these lines:

*“LORD, please show me any ways in which I have been, or still am, denying you or compromising my faith in the things I do, or don’t do, and the things I say, or don’t say. Help me to see myself as you see me and please help me to have the courage to be faithful to you, and your Word, and not to fear men or seek for their approval”*

**Criterion Number 17 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of how truthful we were and whether we had "the love of the truth"**

God wants us to be truthful in every way, all the way through to our inward being:

***Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
Psalm 51:6 (a) (ESV)***

However, Jesus doesn't just want us to be truthful. He wants us to have a very rare quality in our character which the Bible calls "*the love of the truth*". That means to love the truth *in itself, for its own sake*. People who have this characteristic are committed to living and speaking the truth in every way, all the time. Unless we have that level of intensity about the truth we will inevitably go astray.

In this next passage Paul tells us of a future generation which will fall for the deceptions of the antichrist (the very man himself) because they do not have the love of the truth. Therefore they are vulnerable to his deceptive speech and will choose to follow him:

***<sup>8</sup>And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. <sup>9</sup>The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup>Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, <sup>12</sup>in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. <sup>13</sup> But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.***

***2 Thessalonians 2: 8-13 (ESV)***

If you want an example of what it means *not* to have the love of the truth and how the lack of this manifests itself in practice, consider this passage from Luke about the Chief Priests and Scribes. They refused to give a straight answer to a question from Jesus and deliberately dodged it because they had no love for the truth. All they were interested in was protecting their own image and prestige:

***One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up <sup>2</sup> and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority." <sup>3</sup> He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, <sup>4</sup> was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" <sup>5</sup> And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven', he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' <sup>6</sup> But if we say, 'From man', all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." <sup>7</sup> So they answered that they did not know where it came from. <sup>8</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."***

***Luke 20:1-8 (ESV)***

Jesus refers to these men again and to the way they parade themselves around seeking honour and prestige and making long prayers which were not sincere:

***<sup>45</sup> And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, <sup>46</sup> "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the market-places and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts, <sup>47</sup> who devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."***

***Luke 20:45-47 (ESV)***

But if we are complacently assuming that Jesus was only referring to these men and that He does not mean us, we need to think again. He means *anybody who is not genuinely sincere* in their beliefs, questions, prayers, actions and so on. In short, He means anyone who does not have the love of the truth. As far as I can see, that is the vast majority of the population, even within the Church.

Truth is our defence against a host of different problems. That is why it is spoken of as part of the armour of God in Ephesians 6. Each of the pieces of armour to which Paul refers represent particular character qualities which will protect us, such as righteousness, hope, faith, etc. However all of these are themselves held in place by the character quality of truth.

That is why Paul refers to truth as the *belt*. It keeps all the other character qualities in place and functioning. Without truth, none of the rest of our armour will work. At least they will not continue to stay in place for long:

*<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup>Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

*<sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup>Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup>and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup>In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup>and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*

*Ephesians 6:10-17 (ESV)*

The importance which Jesus placed on truthfulness, and also its rarity, even within the churches, are shown in this next passage from John's gospel. Jesus meets a man called Nathanael who is extremely honest, sincere, transparent and *guileless*. Jesus is so impressed, and even surprised, to meet such an unusually truthful person that it comes across in the way He responds to Nathanael. It is evident also in the ease and speed with which Nathanael believes in Jesus:

*<sup>43</sup>The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup>Now Philip was from Beth-sa'ida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup>Philip found Nathan'a-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." <sup>46</sup>Nathan'a-el said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."*

*<sup>47</sup>Jesus saw Nathan'a-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" <sup>48</sup>Nathan'a-el said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." <sup>49</sup>Nathan'a-el answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" <sup>50</sup>Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these."*

*John 1:43-50 (RSV)*

So, we will certainly be judged on the extent of our own personal truthfulness in itself. However, in addition to that, the extent of our honesty and whether we have the love of the truth will largely determine how well we do in every other part of life too. That is because truth is the *belt* which holds all the other character qualities in place. Thus, the level of our truthfulness will indirectly affect the extent to which we qualify for all the other rewards, right across the board.

**Criterion Number 18 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of whether we exercised self-control and self-discipline.**

The only form of control which is acceptable for us to have is self-control. God does not want us to control or manipulate any other people, or even to desire to do so. But He does very much want us to control ourselves. Self-control will bring all sorts of benefits as we learn to deny ourselves, to crucify our flesh nature, to stamp out bad habits and to create better ones. That's because self-control is essential in order to do all of these other things. Therefore it is actually listed as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

*<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

*Galatians 5:22-24 (RSV)*

Let's consider some more verses which speak of the need for self-control, and the rewards and benefits that come from it:

*A man without self-control is like a city  
broken into and left without walls.*

*Proverbs 25:28 (RSV)*

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,  
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.*

*Proverbs 14:29 (RSV)*

*Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty,  
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*

*Proverbs 16:32 (ESV)*

*Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,  
and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.*

*Proverbs 17:27 (ESV)*

*Good sense makes a man slow to anger,  
and it is his glory to overlook an offense.*

*Proverbs 19:11 (RSV)*

*A fool gives full vent to his anger,  
but a wise man quietly holds it back.*

*Proverbs 29:11 (RSV)*

**Criterion Number 19 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of what good deeds we did for the poor, the needy and the weak**

Our treatment of the poor is a hugely important topic in the Bible and is clearly going to be a major criterion by which we will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Before we begin to look at verses in both the Old and New Testaments which speak of the need for us to care for the poor and give to them, we firstly need to deal with an area of confusion that has built up in the minds of many people about this subject. The problem with speaking about doing good works or helping the poor is that it tends to confuse two different groups of people in opposite ways. Two alternative misunderstandings arise:

### a) the error made by those who think we are saved by good works

There are many people who wrongly think that we can be saved, (i.e. justified/forgiven) on the basis of doing good works. This first group is confused by the purpose of good works and giving to the poor etc. They wrongly imagine that what we do for the poor and others is the *basis*, or at least part of the basis, for deciding whether we can be saved and go to Heaven when we die.

So, this group basically thinks in terms of *salvation by works*, which is plainly wrong. We can never be justified or forgiven on the basis of our good works, no matter how good they are or how many we do. To speak in those terms is to create a *social gospel* in place of the real gospel. So, that's *not* what I mean here.

In speaking of our being judged on the basis (amongst other things) of what we did for the poor, I mean the things we do and give *after* we have already been saved (i.e. justified). We achieve that justification, and have all Jesus' righteousness imputed or transferred to us, solely by repenting, being baptised and putting our faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is repenting and believing in Jesus that saves us and brings forgiveness and eternal life, not the good works that we do from then on.

Nevertheless, the Judgment Seat of Christ will still be concerned with what we did for the poor. But that is only in order for Jesus to reward us (or *not* reward us) for what we did *after we were saved*, (justified). It has nothing to do with qualifying us *to be saved* in the first place.

A good passage which explains this distinction very well is in Paul's letter to Titus. Paul makes it clear that we are saved by God's mercy, not by our own good deeds. However, he goes on to say that, having been saved, God then wants each believer to do good deeds from then on:

*<sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> The saying is sure.*

*I desire you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men.*

*Titus 3:5-8 (RSV)*

*And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.*

*Titus 3:14 (RSV)*

### b) The opposite error made by those who are uneasy if good works are even mentioned

The second group who get confused are those who are so determined to defend the truth about salvation being by faith alone that they are suspicious of, and alarmed by, any talk of good works being *judged* at all. They fear that it could be taken to mean that we are hoping to be saved (justified) on the basis of our good works, whether in caring for the poor, or any other kind of good works.

Thus people who have that concern sometimes play down, or ignore, what the Bible teaches about how we will be judged for what we did *after* we were saved (justified). Therefore let me be clear. It is only the good works that we do *after* we are saved that we are discussing here.

So, having hopefully made that sufficiently clear, let's examine a number of passages which speak of what God wants us to do for the poor and needy. We shall also consider why it matters, and what results such good works will have, both in this life and at the Judgment Seat. We shall begin with some Old Testament verses, and I shall include quite a large number in order to demonstrate how important this theme is:

<sup>25</sup>"If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. <sup>26</sup> If ever you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; <sup>27</sup> for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

*Exodus 22:25-27 (RSV)*

<sup>9</sup>"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. <sup>10</sup> And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

*Leviticus 19:9-10 (RSV)*

<sup>7</sup> "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; <sup>8</sup> but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

*Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (NASB)*

<sup>14</sup> The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people:  
"It is you who have devoured the vineyard,  
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.  
<sup>15</sup> What do you mean by crushing my people,  
by grinding the face of the poor?"  
declares the Lord God of hosts.

*Isaiah 3:14-15 (ESV)*

<sup>8</sup> Open your mouth for the dumb,  
for the rights of all who are left desolate.  
<sup>9</sup> Open your mouth, judge righteously,  
maintain the rights of the poor and needy.

*Proverbs 31:8-9 (RSV)*

Whoever gives to the poor will not want,  
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.

*Proverbs 28:27 (ESV)*

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord,  
and he will repay him for his deed.

*Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)*

If a king faithfully judges the poor,  
his throne will be established forever.

*Proverbs 29:14 (ESV)*

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor  
will himself call out and not be answered.

*Proverbs 21:13 (ESV)*

Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit  
gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.

*Proverbs 28:8 (ESV)*

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the one who considers the poor!  
In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;  
<sup>2</sup> the LORD protects him and keeps him alive;  
he is called blessed in the land;  
you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.  
<sup>3</sup> The LORD sustains him on his sickbed;  
in his illness you restore him to full health.*

*Psalm 41:1-3 (ESV)*

*He who is generous will be blessed,  
For he gives some of his food to the poor.  
Proverbs 22:9 (NASB)*

*He has distributed freely;  
he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever;  
his horn is exalted in honour.  
Psalm 112:9 (ESV)*

Now let's consider some New Testament passages which speak in the same way of our duties to the poor. Here is a very clear statement, made by Jesus Himself, as to what He wants us to do for the poor. Moreover, He specifically states that if we do these things we will be “repaid” for it when we are resurrected, i.e. at the Judgment Seat. In the light of what Jesus says, nobody can validly argue that caring for the poor is just an Old Testament concept, or that it is not part of the duty of a Christian:

*<sup>12</sup>He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup>and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

*Luke 14:12-14 (RSV)*

Apostle Paul also spoke approvingly of the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia who had given generously to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem during a famine:

*<sup>25</sup>but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. <sup>26</sup>For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup>Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.*

*Romans 15:25-27 (NASB)*

Paul goes further when writing to the Corinthians and specifically urges them to give generously. He also confirms that if they do then God will, in response, *make all grace abound to them* and give them an *abundance*. That clearly includes material/financial abundance in this life, but it must surely also mean receiving an abundance of some kind at the Judgment Seat, as per what Jesus said in Luke 14 above:

*<sup>1</sup>For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; <sup>2</sup>for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. <sup>3</sup>But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; <sup>4</sup>otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. <sup>5</sup>So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised*

*bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. <sup>6</sup>Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup>Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; <sup>9</sup>as it is written, “He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup>Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; <sup>11</sup>you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.*

*2 Corinthians 9:1-11 (NASB)*

Also, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of the time when he went to Jerusalem to check whether the apostles agreed with what he was teaching. Giving to the poor was even referred to then:

*<sup>9</sup>and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup>They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.*

*Galatians 2:9-10 (NASB)*

Lastly, look at what James says about what importance God places on caring for the needy:

*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

*James 1:27 (RSV)*

*<sup>14</sup> What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, <sup>23</sup> and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.*

*James 2:14-26 (RSV)*

So, our conclusion must surely be that giving to, and caring for, the poor, the needy, the homeless, the old the sick, etc is a major part of what a Christian's life should consist of. It is part of what it means to be ‘salt’. However, let's remember again that we are to do those good works *not in order to become saved, but because we already have been.*

## **Criterion Number 20 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we did acts of righteousness, kindness and goodness**

Similar considerations arise here as with the question of caring for the poor. Remember, we are not advocating a *social gospel* or *salvation by works*. We are just speaking of another of the factors upon which those of us who have already been saved (justified) will be judged on what we did from

conversion onwards. So, let us look at some verses which make clear how important it is to do righteous acts and what rewards flow from doing so, both now and at the Judgment:

*Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.*

*Hosea 10:12 (ESV)*

*Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honour.*

*Proverbs 21:21 (ESV)*

*The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.*

*Proverbs 11:18 (ESV)*

*“...the work of a man’s hand comes back to him:*

*Proverbs 11:14(b) (RSV)*

*He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

*Micah 6:8 (RSV)*

*Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.*

*Proverbs 28:10 (ESV)*

*Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.*

*Proverbs 11:21 (ESV)*

*Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.*

*Proverbs 11:28 (ESV)*

*Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.*

*Proverbs 20:28 (ESV)*

Consider also this powerful passage in which the prophet Jeremiah directly criticises Shallum and Jehoiakim, the Kings of Judah, who reigned in place of their godly father, King Josiah. Jeremiah contrasts the righteousness of Josiah with the self-serving, self-promoting, self-indulgent reigns of his sons, King Shallum and King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah therefore pronounces God's judgments on them and others. Note in particular the emphasis that God clearly places on how we live our lives and whether or not the things that we do and build are done with righteousness:

<sup>11</sup>*For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, and who went away from this place: “He shall return here no more,*  
<sup>12</sup>*but in the place where they have carried him captive, there shall he die, and he shall never see this land again.”*

<sup>13</sup>*“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing*

*and does not give him his wages,  
14 who says, 'I will build myself a great house  
with spacious upper rooms,'  
who cuts out windows for it,  
paneling it with cedar  
and painting it with vermilion.*

*15 Do you think you are a king  
because you compete in cedar?  
Did not your father eat and drink  
and do justice and righteousness?  
Then it was well with him.*

*16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy;  
then it was well.*

*Is not this to know me?  
declares the LORD.*

*17 But you have eyes and heart  
only for your dishonest gain,  
for shedding innocent blood,  
and for practicing oppression and violence."*

*18 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:*

*"They shall not lament for him, saying,  
'Ah, my brother!' or 'Ah, sister!'*

*They shall not lament for him, saying,  
'Ah, lord!' or 'Ah, his majesty!'*

*19 With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried,  
dragged and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem."*

*Jeremiah 22:11-19 (ESV)*

In conclusion, one of the clearest statements of how God wants us to serve Him and how we are to relate to one another is in Micah chapter 6:

*"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? <sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" <sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

*Micah 6:6-8 (ESV)*

**Criterion Number 22 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we loved one another and what we did to help and care for our fellow Christians**

Jesus specifically commanded us to love one another. He also said that it would be one of the key things which prove to others that we are His disciples:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

*John 13:34-35 (RSV)*

*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

*John 15:13 (RSV)*

Apostle Paul also instructs us to do good to others, but especially to our fellow Christians:

<sup>9</sup> *And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.*  
<sup>10</sup> *So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

*Galatians 6:9-10 (RSV)*

Apostle John also confirms that we are to provide for the material needs of fellow believers if we have the means to do so:

<sup>16</sup> *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* <sup>17</sup> *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* <sup>18</sup> *Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.* <sup>19</sup> *By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him*

*1 John 3:16-19 (RSV)*

The writer to the Hebrews also tells us to remember those fellow Christians who are ill-treated or even imprisoned for their faith. The clear implication is that we are meant to help them and care for them:

*Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body.*

*Hebrews 13:3 (RSV)*

He also tells us to do good and to share what we have:

*Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

*Hebrews 13:16 (RSV)*

The reward for doing all of this isn't defined, or even described. What we can say is that it goes to those who give to, or care for, those who belong to Christ, i.e. those who are part of the real Church:

*For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.*

*Mark 9:41 (ESV)*

This reward, whatever it is, can evidently be gained even by those who do the smallest acts of kindness or generosity towards their fellow Christians. Presumably this reward must come in different grades or quantities, so as to match precisely the level of our service. If you take it seriously the prospect of this reward will motivate you to help others. That is one of the very reasons why the reward is given, and spoken about, by Jesus.

Therefore we ought to be on the lookout for people to whom we can show such kindness and help. Why not? This reward is deliberately intended to be an incentive, as with all the other things that God says He will reward. As long as what we do is done sincerely and provides genuine help to others, then we would, on the face of it, become eligible for this reward.

### **Criterion Number 23 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of whether we did the work of the ministry and also what we did to help other workers**

We know from apostle Paul that every believer is called "*to do the work of the ministry*", as opposed to us having such work done on our behalf by paid church workers. The primary role of church leaders, or elders, is to train the people and to equip *them* so that *they* can do the work of the ministry. God does not want leaders to do all the ministry work themselves:

*<sup>11</sup>And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; <sup>14</sup>so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.*

*Ephesians 4:11-14 (RSV)*

In this next passage Jesus tells us of a specific reward that goes to those who:

- a) receive a prophet, i.e. help and accommodate them
- b) receive a righteous person
- c) provide help or provision, however small, to a fellow Christian.

If we do things such as these, which any of us can easily do every day, then we add further to our stockpile of rewards. This is the kind of investing we all ought to be doing, i.e. investing in the ministries of other people, as well as doing our own work for the sake of the gospel:

*<sup>40</sup>"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. <sup>41</sup>The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup>And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

*Matthew 10:40-42 (ESV)*

Apostle Paul also makes a very interesting comment in his letter to the Philippians. He is thanking and acknowledging them for the fact that when he was in financial need they were the only church which entered into partnership with him and gave him financial and material support. He then implies that when their gift bears fruit it will do so "to your credit":

*<sup>14</sup>Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. <sup>15</sup>And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. <sup>16</sup> Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. <sup>18</sup>I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4:14-19 (ESV)*

The point is that the financial and logistical support they gave to Paul's ministry bore fruit in the sense of people being saved and becoming disciples. However Paul suggests that the *credit* for that fruit will, in some way, also accrue to those people who supported Paul's ministry. He doesn't say *what* that credit will be, or *how* it will manifest itself later. But whatever it may be, Paul obviously believes that it is real and will be good for them.

## **Criterion Number 24 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of whether we had the fear of the LORD**

To have the *fear of God*, or the *fear of the LORD*, means that a person has a reverent awe for God and for His power and majesty. It involves deep respect, but it goes beyond that and includes literally fearing God. We are meant to fear Him for what He can and will do about our sin, and for the fact

that He is going to judge us. If we do fear Him, then that fact alone will bring about many changes in our lives.

Our fear of the LORD will cause us to live very different, and much better, lives than we would otherwise have lived. Therefore having the fear of the LORD is a good characteristic which will be directly rewarded in itself. However it will also lead indirectly to other rewards because of the changes it produces in you. Again, we are entitled to assume that those rewards will also be received after death, as well as in this life:

***The reward for humility and fear of the Lord  
is riches and honour and life.***

***Proverbs 22:4 (ESV)***

***Oh, how abundant is your goodness,  
which you have stored up for those who fear you  
and worked for those who take refuge in you.....***

***Psalm 31:19 (a) (ESV)***

***The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,  
and delivers them.***

***Psalm 34:7 (ESV)***

***Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack!***

***Psalm 34:9 (ESV)***

### **Criterion Number 25 – Jesus will also judge us on the basis of what we did to care for and provide for our own families, in particular our own parents and children**

We have already seen that we have a general duty to care for and give to others, and especially to our fellow Christians. However, that duty to care for others is even greater when it comes to our own blood relatives in general, and our immediate families in particular. We have a very clear and strong duty to provide for our own elderly parents and also for our children.

Please refer to chapter seven of Book One which contains quite a detailed section on our duties towards the elderly in general and our own parents in particular. God takes all those duties very seriously. Consider also this next verse. It is undeniably addressed to Christians, not unbelievers, because how can a man “*disown the faith*” if he has no faith? Likewise, how can he be “*worse than an unbeliever*” if he is an unbeliever?

***If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.***

***1 Timothy 5:8 (RSV)***

Sadly, in the modern Western world there has been an alarming decline in respect for the elderly. Increasing numbers of people are expecting the State to care for their elderly parents instead of them doing it themselves. That is partly why we see such neglect, and even abuse, of the elderly in hospitals and care homes.

Many elderly people have too few relatives, or even none at all, who can “police” the care that they receive and speak up for them. In part it is also caused by the hardness of heart of an increasing number of medical staff and care home workers for whom neglect has come to be seen as normal. For many of them neglect, or even abuse, is no longer viewed as wrong. It is just a part of the job.

Obviously, not everybody is in a position to care for their elderly parents. Some of us may be too sick or poor to be able to help. But for those of us who *are* capable, the duty to care for our own parents when they grow old, and to honour them throughout their whole lives, even when they are not old, is very clear. Indeed, the commandment to honour our father and mother is the only one which carries a promise with it:

***“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.***

*Exodus 20:12 (RSV)*

***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*** <sup>2</sup> ***“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise),*** <sup>3</sup> ***“that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.”***

*Ephesians 6:1-3 (RSV)*

Jesus Himself referred to this commandment and condemned the way that some people allow other activities or preoccupations, and even religious duties, to take the place of their duty to care for their parents:

<sup>9</sup> ***And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!”*** <sup>10</sup> ***For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die’;*** <sup>11</sup> ***but you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)—*** <sup>12</sup> ***then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,*** <sup>13</sup> ***thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do.”***

*Mark 7:9-13 (RSV)*

**Criterion Number 26 - Jesus will also acknowledge and reward us on the basis of the extent to which we acknowledged Him before men in this life**

Here is an interesting passage from Jesus’ own mouth:

***“And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,***

*Luke 12:8 (ESV)*

Jesus will not merely acknowledge us in the sense of saying that He knows us. One gets the impression that it means much more. Those who have paid the price of acknowledging their allegiance to Jesus in the midst of a hostile and unbelieving world will, one day, be openly honoured by Jesus in front of the angels in Heaven. Imagine how that would feel!

But many of us do not always openly acknowledge Jesus in front of the people we know or work with. We might fear their reactions, in case they disapprove of us or even persecute us. However, we need to make a clear choice as to whether to seek the praise of men or the praise of God, because we cannot expect to receive both:

<sup>42</sup> ***Nevertheless many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:*** <sup>43</sup> ***for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.***

*John 12:42-43 (RSV).*

We need to take care to ensure that we openly identify ourselves with Jesus in this life and that we are not ashamed of Him. Consider these sobering words which Jesus Himself said. They are generally assumed to refer only to unbelievers who are not saved. However, I am not so sure. I feel this

statement may well also refer to believers, i.e. those who were simply afraid or embarrassed about being publicly identified with Jesus:

*For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

*Mark 8:38 (RSV)*

Clearly, the above verse applies primarily to those who reject Jesus entirely, because they do not want to be associated with Him, or His Name, at all. However, I can see no reason to say that the same principle does not apply to Christians as well. It may be that even a saved person could find that Jesus expresses Himself to be ashamed of them at the Judgment Seat. Even the possibility of His rebuke, and of the look in His face as he raises this with us, should be enough to persuade us never to be ashamed of Him, and if we are, then to acknowledge it and repent of it.

### **Criterion Number 27 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we were ready and waiting for His return**

This is a rather controversial area, especially when you try to define the details of how this will operate and who exactly is being referred to. What we can confidently say is that Jesus wants all of us to be actively engaged in waiting for His return to the Earth. We are not to be passive about it but are meant to *prepare and wait actively*. Jesus explains this by way of a parable about a group of servants waiting for their Master to return home. He equates Himself with that Master and urges all of us to make sure that while He is away, pending His return, we are:

- a) dressed for immediate action
- b) with lamps burning, so that no time need be lost in finding or lighting these
- c) awake and waiting for His return.
- d) ready to take whatever action is needed on His return:

<sup>35</sup> *“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,* <sup>36</sup> *and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.* <sup>37</sup> *Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.* <sup>38</sup> *If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!* <sup>39</sup> *But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into.* <sup>40</sup> *You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”*

*Luke 12:35-40 (ESV)*

The theme of the parable is that the servants, who represent all believers, are commanded to be ready and actively waiting for Jesus' return. However, the reality is that, at least in Great Britain, most of us are not doing any of this. Indeed, many of us are not even aware that He is going to return to the Earth at all, let alone actively anticipating that momentous event.

His return scarcely features nowadays in the teaching and preaching of most British churches. But it needs to because a lot depends upon our state of readiness and whether He comes back to find us alert and waiting for Him, distracted with other things, or even asleep. The Master in the parable reacts angrily and punishes those staff who were not ready. The clear implication is that Jesus will do likewise:

<sup>41</sup> Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” <sup>42</sup> And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? <sup>43</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. <sup>44</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. <sup>45</sup> But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming’, and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, <sup>46</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. <sup>47</sup> And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. <sup>48</sup> But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

Luke 12:41-48 (ESV)

One question we need to ask is why it should make any difference whether we are ready and waiting or fast asleep when Jesus returns. Why does it matter so much to Him? We need to point out firstly that this parable is referring to Jesus’ return for His Church, i.e. “*the rapture*”. That is the moment when Jesus will return:

- a) suddenly and without any warning, such that the timing of it cannot be calculated or predicted
- b) in such a way that only His followers will see Him, plus the believing dead who will all be resurrected to meet Him
- c) to meet all His followers in the air and to take all believers, from all ages of Church history, back to Heaven with Him.

The *rapture* must not be confused with the “*Second Coming*” of Jesus. That is also known as His “*glorious appearing*”. Unlike the rapture, it will be visible to everyone, including unbelievers. After His Second Coming Jesus will *not* go back to Heaven. He will stay on the Earth and will rule it for 1000 years. Moreover, the approximate timing of the Second Coming can be fairly easily calculated in advance, i.e. by the people who are on the Earth at that time. However, the timing of the rapture, which comes earlier, cannot be known in advance.

Once we realise that it is the rapture of the Church that is being referred to by Jesus, not the Second Coming, it makes sense why it matters so much for us to be ready and waiting at all times. A person who is actively waiting for the rapture is also, in effect, waiting for the Judgment Seat of Christ, which will follow very shortly after the rapture. Such a person is much more likely to be focused upon, and attending to, all those things which Jesus has commanded us to do.

Conversely, a person who has no expectation of imminent rapture or Judgment may well be distracted with worldly matters, or just absent-mindedly drifting along. Our state of preparedness for meeting Jesus at the Judgment Seat is therefore strongly correlated with the degree to which we believe that Jesus is about to return at any moment i.e. at the rapture.

One sees therefore why it matters so much to be ready and waiting for the rapture. Those who are alert and expecting Jesus to return at any moment are much more likely to be doing God’s will than those who are not expecting anything, or at least who are not expecting Him to return *imminently*.

Accordingly, we would all do well to study very closely what the Bible has to say about Jesus’ sudden return to the Earth and to think carefully about its implications for us. The degree to which we take His return seriously will be a major determining factor in how well we do at the Judgment Seat, which follows after it.

That brings us to a second vital question. That is to ask what Jesus means by His references within the above parable to the Master becoming *angry* with the servants who were not ready and awaiting his return. We are told that the Master will:

- a) *cut in pieces* the servant who was found drunk and who was beating his fellow servants when the Master returned
- b) give a *severe beating* to the servant who know his Master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will
- c) give a *light beating* to those servants who did not know the Master's will but, nonetheless, did things which deserve a beating

These are perplexing and worrying statements and they have caused much controversy. Therefore they are rarely ever preached on. Even when they are, the more disturbing parts of the parable are usually glossed over. Let us attempt therefore to face each of these points head on and to come to a view as to what they mean.

The reason the latter part of the parable is so controversial is that it appears to be suggesting that the Master, who represents Jesus, will *punish* his servants with varying degrees of severity, depending on *how prepared they were for His return* and *what He found them doing* when He returned.

Many people do not believe that Jesus could ever be *angry* with a Christian, or that He would ever punish or '*beat*' us, under any circumstances. The most common response, therefore, is to argue that the parable must be referring to unbelievers, i.e. unsaved people, who do not even believe in Jesus, let alone repent, and are not His disciples at all.

It might be good if that really was what these passages are referring to. It would mean that we who are Jesus' disciples would be in the clear and need have no concern about being punished. However, that approach immediately runs into some very serious difficulties, so much so that the passage cannot make sense if unbelievers are being referred to. I will set out some reasons why I say that:

- a) Unbelievers/non-disciples would not be *waiting for* or *preparing for* the return of Jesus at all. Why would they be? Therefore Jesus would have no expectation of them being *ready* or *alert* or of having obeyed His instructions during His absence.
- b) Jesus would have far bigger issues to raise with unbelievers than their state of preparedness for His return. He would be far more concerned with their sinfulness in general and, above all, with the fact that they did not repent of their sins, or even believe in Him.
- c) The event being described here is *the rapture of the Church*, i.e. when Jesus returns for His Church. When that occurs He will only be seen by His own followers who are alive on the Earth and by those who have previously died, who are all resurrected at the rapture. Thus unbelievers, whether alive or dead, will play no part in the rapture. It does not concern them. Indeed, they will not even be aware of it when it is happening.
- d) The point at which Jesus will concern Himself with unbelievers is not until *after His Second Coming*, which is when He will return to the Earth visibly, to destroy the wicked and to set up His Millennial Kingdom. At the end of that 1000 year Kingdom there will be the Great White Throne Judgment. That is when unbelievers will be judged and when all of them, without exception, will be punished. None of them will be called "blessed" because none of them will be doing Jesus' will in any way when He returns at His Second Coming.
- e) The timing of the Second Coming, unlike the rapture, will be relatively easy to calculate in advance, at least approximately. The Bible tells us the length of the Great Tribulation. Therefore

*those who live through it* will know that in so many days Jesus will return to depose the antichrist. So there will not be any element of surprise and nobody need be caught out by His return. Beyond doubt, it will be spoken of and written about by the believers *at that time* and even unbelievers will hear of it. They may ignore it, or refuse to believe that it is coming, but they are likely to hear of it.

Thus it is inappropriate to speak of the Second Coming in terms of surprise and being caught unprepared etc. It would be like someone being caught out and surprised by the surrender of Nazi Germany on 7 May 1945. It was spoken of and anticipated for months beforehand. The progress of the Allied armies could be tracked on the map as they steadily approached Berlin from both East and West.

- f) It would also be a misnomer to refer to Jesus as being the “*Master*” of the *unbelieving* world. Neither could any unbeliever be described as His “*servant*”. They are not His servants. Most do not even believe in Him at all, let alone serve Him. Therefore neither they nor Jesus would refer to Jesus as being their Master or call themselves His servants. It would be more accurate to describe the Devil as their Master, i.e. the god of this world. He is the one who blinds their eyes and whom they all follow.

Thus the people in the parable who have a Master who has gone away cannot be taken as representing unbelievers. Their Master is Satan and he has not gone anywhere. He is prowling around actively getting on with his wicked work in the time he has left. That is because he too is awaiting Jesus’ return, albeit with dread rather than hope.

**Criterion Number 28 - It would seem likely that Jesus will give some credit for partial achievements, or for specific things which we did well, even if in other areas we were disobedient or unfaithful**

Every Christian is a mixture of good and bad, strengths and weaknesses and obedience and disobedience. We might listen to God, and obey Him in certain areas of our life, but be deaf, blind and disobedient in other areas. It is unrealistic to think of any Christian as being 100% faithful, obedient and diligent all the time. Nobody is that consistent. The flesh, or sinful nature, is still very active, even in the most mature of believers, and even in apostle Paul.

Conversely, even in a worldly, fleshly, Christian who has let God down in many ways, there will probably be specific things, perhaps things they did in the past, which may still gain them some praise, and perhaps even rewards, at the Judgment Seat. It is hard to see how it could be otherwise, such that there could be a Christian somewhere about whom Jesus would have nothing at all to praise and nothing at all to rebuke.

The only exception to that might be in the case of a deathbed conversion, where the person's time on this Earth as a born again believer might only have lasted minutes or even seconds. But for most of us, if we have walked as disciples of Jesus for many years, we are likely to have done many things which will cause us to receive praise or rebuke. So, we are likely to get both. Therefore the real question is *in what proportions* will these be, and *what specific things* will be raised with us?

An example of this kind of mixed judgment, i.e. some rebuke, but also some praise, might be the assessment that God made of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. This was expressed through a prophet, after Jehoshaphat had displeased God by forming an alliance with the wicked King Ahab of Israel. What he did was contrary to God's will:

*<sup>1</sup> Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> But Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from*

*the LORD.* <sup>3</sup> *Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God.”*

*2 Chronicles 19:1-3 (ESV)*

Jehoshaphat had survived the battle in which King Ahab had been killed, but his involvement in that battle still displeased God. So he was rebuked for it. Yet the prophet was still careful to point out that Jehoshaphat had done some good things too. God had clearly not forgotten about those things, despite this particular act of disobedience and folly.

**Criterion Number 29 - Jesus will also take note of the extent to which we have already been recognized, praised and rewarded *in this life*. In particular, He will withhold rewards from those who were seeking prestige and honour in this life**

It is clearly right and proper for us to seek for praise, recognition and rewards. However, we are only meant to seek them in the *next* life, not in *this* life. Many of us do the exact opposite. We seek for recognition and honoured positions *now* and give little or no thought to receiving those things after we die.

The problem is that Jesus has made it plain that rewards will *not* be given to those who do their good works with the motive that they want to be seen and admired by other people *in this life*. Such recognition, fame and admiration will be the only reward that those people ever get. Their actions will receive no *further* reward at the Judgment Seat. Therefore they are making a very poor bargain and minimising their own reward:

*“Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

<sup>2</sup> *“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*Concerning Prayer*

<sup>5</sup> *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*Matthew 6:1-6 (RSV)*

<sup>16</sup> *“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*Matthew 6:16-18 (RSV)*

This is a very clear warning to us. We must not seek for honour or glory in this life. Those things must never be our goals for this present life. The only glory we should seek is the glory that comes from being recognised, praised and honoured *at the Judgment Seat*. To seek to receive such things *then* is good. Indeed, we are commanded to seek them.

But to seek for those things *here and now*, from other people in this life, is bad and we are warned not to do so. If we do seek for glory in this life we will disqualify ourselves from obtaining the rewards that we would otherwise have been given in the next life, i.e. if our ambitions and motives had been righteous ones.

**Criterion Number 30 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we told other people about the gospel so that they could turn from their sins, be saved, and avoid His wrath**

The task of spreading the gospel and making disciples has been entrusted to us in the Church. It is the duty of every one of us to tell others. Then, collectively, the Church as a whole can take the message of salvation to every nation on Earth:

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”*

*Matthew 28:18-20 (RSV)*

In part, the task of sharing the good news of the gospel involves warning people about sin and its consequences and about God’s judgment which is coming on the whole world. *We are each accountable for whether we tell others* and thereby make it possible for them to believe and repent. God addressed this issue with the prophet Ezekiel, making clear that if Ezekiel did not warn people of the danger of their position, then *He would hold him accountable for their blood*:

*<sup>17</sup> “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. <sup>18</sup> When I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. <sup>19</sup> But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself.*

*<sup>20</sup> “Again, when a righteous person turns from their righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before them, they will die. Since you did not warn them, they will die for their sin. The righteous things that person did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. <sup>21</sup> But if you do warn the righteous person not to sin and they do not sin, they will surely live because they took warning, and you will have saved yourself.”*

*Ezekiel 3:17-21 (NIV)*

We need to reflect carefully on this heavy and serious responsibility which has been placed on us. If we shrink from warning others or from telling them the good news, either because we can’t be bothered, or because we are afraid, then we will have to explain that disobedience to Jesus at the Judgment Seat.