

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you work for a large company such as Toyota, General Motors or Rolls Royce. The Chairman has gone away on a foreign business trip without saying when he will come back, but he has assured all staff that he will return at some point. It could be tomorrow but it could be years away. He also said, before setting off, that on his return he will arrange a series of one to one meetings with all staff, whether they are senior or junior. Then he will appraise their individual performance in the company during his absence.

Moreover, he has said that this appraisal process will be extremely thorough and searching. No detail of your contribution to the company, or to its customers, or to your colleagues, will be overlooked. All files, texts and emails will be read, and all your work done for the company is being carefully noted and will be reviewed and assessed by the Chairman personally.

Therefore you know for sure, ahead of time, that he will check everything you have done and everything you are going to do in future. He will also listen to all the phone calls you have ever made and all your workplace conversations. Indeed he has access to them all, even now, and is already monitoring them continuously, while he is away.

Furthermore, he has said that when he gets back the whole company, from top to bottom, is going to be radically restructured. There will be dramatic promotions and demotions. Those now at board level may find themselves put down to the shop floor. Likewise, some staff currently working on cleaning, manual or security jobs will be elevated to the main board and given director level responsibilities.

As well as reorganising all roles and job titles, the Chairman has said that he will be thanking and congratulating those who have given faithful service. He will also be giving out a wide range of different rewards, prizes, bonuses and assorted honours and medals etc. These will be handed out by him personally at the appraisal to those who deserve them, but not to those who don't.

He has also said, rather worryingly, that those whose faithfulness, loyalty, performance, contribution, effort or output has been lacking will be criticised and rebuked. Indeed, they may even be punished, if nothing else, by way of demotion, pay cuts and loss of status or role. What is more, it would even seem that some or all of this appraisal process will be conducted *in public*. Therefore each member of staff will see and hear what is said to other staff, or at least those whom they know.

How would you react to that scenario? Would it generate ongoing interest and discussion in the canteen, on the shop floor and also at home? Would you think about it every day and discuss with your husband or wife your hopes and concerns as to how your own appraisal might go? Would you find that situation motivating and feel incentivised to do your very best every day, knowing that today could be the day when the Chairman suddenly walks through the door and begins the appraisal process?

You would want him, on his return, to find you working hard and doing well, not chatting, messing about on facebook or sitting down being lazy. You would also want your desk/workbench to be tidy, your files or tools in good order, your do-list up to date and your personnel file to contain no customer complaints or disciplinary action being taken against you.

Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus has promised pretty much all the same things that our imaginary Chairman said before setting off on his foreign trip? When Jesus returns there will be a judgment or appraisal at which all the real Christians, not unbelievers or false believers, will be thoroughly assessed. Some will then be praised, rewarded, congratulated, promoted etc. Alternatively, others will be rebuked, criticised, demoted and so on.

This is at a judgment known as the *bema* judgment or the *Judgment Seat of Christ*. However, it is not a judgment of our *sins*. We are assured that those are all forgiven and removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Therefore Christians will not be *condemned*. However, they will still be *judged*. It will be done on the basis of their performance, contribution and faithfulness as Jesus' disciples.

It is not the same thing as the judgment for unbelievers, which is known as the Great White Throne Judgment. That comes later and will result in them being judged for their sins and sent to the Lake of Fire for eternity. That is a judgment at which only unsaved people will be present. They will be condemned and will incur God's wrath. No rewards, crowns, prizes or honours of any kind will be given out, but only punishment and vengeance.

You might imagine therefore that the Judgment Seat of Christ, to which all genuine Christians must go, would be a regular subject of conversation and would be frequently on our minds. Instead, my own experience has been that in over 30 years as a believer I do not recall hearing a single sermon on this topic in any church. In fact I have never even heard anybody discuss it in my presence unless I have first raised it with them.

When I have brought the subject up, even in evangelical churches, it has usually produced puzzled looks. Most people don't know what I am referring to. One man recently tried to reassure me that neither he nor I will ever have to face *any* kind of judgment because "*.... there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

He had absolutely no idea what I was talking about and thought that I was expecting to be condemned (at the Great White Throne) as an unbeliever will be. He had never heard of any other kind of judgment and certainly not a judgment for Christians. He was actually equating the concepts of condemnation and judgment as if they were the same thing, which they aren't. We will all be judged, but only non-Christians will be condemned. So, judgment is a much broader word. It includes those who will be condemned for their sins but also those whose sins are forgiven but who are still to be assessed for their faithfulness and fruit.

Doesn't it strike you as odd that there is such widespread ignorance, silence and lack of interest concerning this hugely important theme? Have you ever seen a book specifically about this, or at least one that has been written in recent years? There is one good book that I know of. It is by Chuck Missler of the Koinonia Institute and is entitled '*The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory*'. But, apart from that, I can only think of a few others and they are quite old now. Moreover, I have gone out of my way to search for them. They are not on display in the bookshops. Therefore I have written this book in an attempt to tackle this subject in modern English and as frankly and fully as possible.

Even after writing this book, there are still many things that I don't know about the Judgment Seat of Christ because the Bible doesn't tell us everything that we might like to know. Nevertheless, it does tell us a great deal if you are willing to search the whole Bible for information. So there is plenty to be getting on with.

For starters, though, why not consider these words which come directly from the mouth of Jesus Himself? He spoke them to apostle John within one of His letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. These are very plain words and they concisely sum up how Jesus will judge Christians. Remember, His words are *spoken to Christians, not to unbelievers*:

".....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)

I hope that this book will give you a better understanding of this vitally important subject and help you to prepare yourself for the most awesome interview of your life.

Sean Kehoe

8 May 2014