

CHAPTER 2

THE PURPOSE OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST AND HOW IT IS LIKELY TO OPERATE

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

James 2:12 (ESV)

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)

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

Revelation 2:23(b) (ESV)

*If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?*

Does not he who guards your life know it?

Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

Proverbs 24:12 (NIV)

⁴⁸ 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. ⁴⁹ 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. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.”

John 12:48-50 (RSV)

*thrones were placed
and one that was ancient of days took his seat;
his raiment was white as snow,
and the hair of his head like pure wool;
his throne was fiery flames,
its wheels were burning fire.*

*¹⁰ A stream of fire issued
and came forth from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.*

Daniel 7:9-10 (RSV)

“But who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears?.....”

Malachi 3:2(a) (RSV)

We need to fear the Judgment Seat of Christ

Consider how overawed you will feel standing before Jesus Himself, the King of kings, having a one to one conversation about how you lived while on this Earth. He will give you His verdict on the things you did, and the things you failed to do. Imagine receiving His frank assessment of what you

actually achieved alongside His explanation of what you were *meant* to achieve and *could have* achieved.

I fear that day because I know that although I have done some things quite well, there are many other situations which I did not handle well, and where I know I let Jesus down. Moreover there have been many opportunities to do good which I never took. And there are talents which I have not fully used or developed for Him. I know I have also wasted a lot of the time that He gave me, which He wanted me to use constructively.

I am not the only believer to fear God's judgment. Even the Psalmist feared it, and that was not because he thought he was heading to the Great White Throne. He knew perfectly well that he wasn't going to be condemned or go to Hell or the Lake of Fire. Nevertheless, he still feared being judged and he was right to do so:

*¹²⁰ My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments.
Psalm 119:120 (NASB)*

Indeed, merely to stand in the physical presence of Jesus, in itself, will be indescribably daunting, even if we weren't being judged. We will see Him as He really is, in all His glory. King David felt fear when he was in the presence of the LORD.

The phrase "*the angel of the LORD*" occurs many times in the Bible. It is usually, though not always, a reference to God Himself. More precisely, it refers to Jesus, the Son of God, in a pre-appearance in bodily form during the centuries before His incarnation. So, when David saw the angel of the LORD, i.e. Jesus Himself, he was afraid and he had good reason to be:

And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

1 Chronicles 21:16 (RSV)

²⁹ For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon; ³⁰ but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord.

1 Chronicles 21:29-30 (RSV)

Moses and apostle John were both over awed when they met Jesus face to face, in His glory, and so will we be when we meet Him

Moses had a similar experience when he met the Angel of the LORD, face to face at the burning bush. Likewise, this was Jesus Himself in a pre-appearance. Remember, Moses was not an unbeliever who was about to be judged and condemned. He was not an enemy of God, and God was not his enemy either. Nevertheless, Moses was afraid, so much so that he hid his face and did not want to look at God.

Moses' reverent response to this encounter gives us a very good indication of what it will be like to face Jesus at the judgment, even as a genuine believer and a faithful disciple. It is extremely unlikely that you are a better, more faithful person than Moses was. Accordingly, if he was awed, and frightened, by the experience of seeing God face to face, there is every reason to believe that we will be too:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Mid'ian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of

the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:1-6 (RSV)

Likewise, as an old man on the island of Patmos, apostle John saw Jesus as He really is, in His glorified form. When he saw Him he fell on his face, terrified. John did so even though he knew Jesus well and had been his best friend during the years of His public ministry:

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; ¹⁴ his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Revelation 1:12-18 (RSV)

Whichever judgment we go to, everything will come out, including what we kept hidden or thought had not been noticed or remembered

Whichever judgment we eventually go to, either as a believer or an unbeliever, the real condition of our lives and characters will be revealed and dealt with. There will be a reckoning and even genuine and mature Christians will have to face up to the reality of what they were and how they lived in the years after their conversion. Everything will come out, even the things they had kept hidden or which they thought God had not noticed:

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (NIV)

¹⁵ They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Romans 2:15-16 (RSV)

*..... and be sure your sin will find you out
Numbers 32:23 (RSV)*

"..... 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)

Every real Christian will be required to give Jesus an exhaustive account of his life from conversion onwards. Nobody can avoid or escape this appraisal except, of course, by going to the Great White Throne Judgment instead. But that will be infinitely more terrifying.

Therefore we ought to be thinking seriously about this now and trying to get ready for it. Instead, few Christians ever give any thought to the Judgment at all. Doesn't that complacency seem peculiar to you?

It would appear that the Judgment Seat of Christ will be conducted publicly, not in private

If you knew that the British Prime Minister, or the President of the United States was going to call you in to his office for an appraisal, wouldn't it concern you? Wouldn't you want to thoroughly prepare yourself? The obvious answer is that you would.

Yet, very few Christians are concerned, or even aware, that this utterly awesome face to face appraisal with Jesus is coming. When we appear before Him He will openly reveal and assess many secret things, including the innermost motives of our hearts.

Moreover, if that was not alarming enough, the clear implication is that this exposing process will actually be done *publicly*, not in private. Everything will, of course, be revealed to Jesus and also to ourselves. However, it seems clear that others will hear as well. Indeed, perhaps everybody will hear. Consider these passages:

So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

Matthew 10:26 (ESV)

For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.

Luke 8:17 (RSV)

¹In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

Luke 12:1-3 (ESV)

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV)

Some might argue that these passages are referring only to the judgment of the *unsaved* at the Great White Throne. However, that argument cannot stand up. The final verse in the above series of verses makes that clear. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:5 that after this judgment, at which the secret motives and hidden events are exposed, each person will receive his *praise* from God.

That point alone shows that Paul is also referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ, since nobody is going to be praised or rewarded at all at the Great White Throne Judgment. Every person who goes to that judgment will be eternally condemned. Therefore Paul cannot possibly be referring to the Great White Throne judgment.

Accordingly, it seems clear that this element of public exposure will be a part of our own judgment, even if we are believers. We would obviously all strongly prefer that those secret deeds and motives will not be exposed to other people and that they will be kept private, between ourselves and Jesus.

However the verses we have just seen appear to make it quite clear that it will be public. At the very least, there is no biblical basis for saying that Jesus will keep the interview entirely private between you and Him. The Bible does not say that it will be private.

Further indications that the Judgment Seat, and the Great White Throne, judgments will be conducted publicly

On the contrary, what the Bible does say on this subject clearly suggests that it will be public. Moreover, it contains a large number of precedents in which we see Jesus saying things publicly, even when criticising people. For example, Jesus' comments, even His rebukes, were not kept on a private, one to one, basis when He dictated His seven letters to the churches in Turkey in the Book of Revelation.

What He had to say to each of them was also made known to each of the other churches. Moreover, all seven letters were then put in the Bible for all of us to see over the last 2000 years. Likewise, the sins and foolish remarks or mistakes of the apostles were recorded in the Bible for the whole world to see.

Note also this next passage from Matthew, from which we see that the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba) and also the people of Nineveh, will be able to witness the judgment of the people who lived in Israel in the first century, i.e. those who did not accept Jesus. But they lived about 1000 years after the Queen of Sheba's lifetime and many centuries after the Ninevites were around:

⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 12:41-42 (NASB)

Jesus is implying that the Day of Judgment for those unbelieving Jews from the first century will be sufficiently public to enable the people of Nineveh and the Queen Sheba to be aware of what is said and done to them at the Great White Throne. The men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba repented and believed, whereas many of those who heard Jesus in person did not.

So, the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites will be in a position to express a view as to the faults and failings of those first century Jewish people. In that case, they must be made aware of sufficient information to enable them to form a view about the lives of those people. If so, that must imply that at least the Great White Throne Judgment is conducted in public.

Otherwise, how could they acquire such information? But what about the Judgment Seat of Christ? Can we be sure that that too will be conducted in public? By way of analogy, we can point to a passage from the Old Testament where God reveals, through the prophet Nathan, how He will deal publicly with the sins committed privately by King David.

This refers to David's adultery with Bathsheba and how he subsequently tried to cover up his sin. He even had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed. Nathan sets out the various punishments that God will bring on David and he ends by stating that, whereas the sins were done in private, what God will do in response to those sins will be done in *public*:

⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uri'ah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uri'ah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹

Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun.'¹² For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'"

2 Samuel 12:9-12 (RSV)

Perhaps the clearest, and most troubling passage of all is the one from Luke 12 which we saw above, where Jesus Himself is speaking. Note also that He is not speaking to, or about, unbelievers. He is speaking to His own disciples and He is talking about what will happen to them, not just to others. If so, He must be referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ, not the Great White Throne.

We shall examine the passage again, together with verse one which sets the context and which makes it clear that Jesus was speaking to His own disciples as well as to the crowd. Having said that, many of them in that crowd, and perhaps most of them, believed in Him. So they too were going to the Judgment Seat, not the Great White Throne. Even so, Jesus makes it plain that their judgment will still be conducted in public:

¹In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ²Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Luke 12:1-3 (RSV)

If God is willing to reveal the faults and sins of Samson, David, Solomon, Peter, Mark and many others, why assume that ours will be kept confidential?

Some people recoil from the idea of there being any kind of public judgment at which other people will get to know what Jesus says about us and hear His rebukes and criticisms. They feel that God would never operate in that way and that it is even contrary to His nature to do anything which might embarrass us. But what evidence or authority can anybody bring forward in support of that assertion? I don't know of any.

In fact, if anything, the Bible itself suggests the very opposite. I am not referring to any express quotation on this point. I mean the general way that people are written about in the Bible, and how their sins and motives are revealed, not as an exception, but as a matter of course. Have you not noticed how brutally frank it is on so many occasions?

The Bible regularly tells us about mistakes, sins, bad attitudes and wrong motives of numerous people. It does so even with the great spiritual heroes of the Old and New Testaments. For example, the life story of King David is told very frankly, warts and all. There is no apparent concern for how David might feel to have all believers worldwide for over 3000 years reading all about his sins and failings.

The same is true of apostle Peter, Samson, Solomon, King Saul and most of the other Kings of both Israel and Judah. Even with the best of them, their dirty linen is washed in public within the pages of the Bible. God was evidently willing to take that approach with them, such that for centuries afterwards people would know highly sensitive personal information about them.

Therefore why should we assume that what Jesus has to say to us will be given in private where nobody else will ever hear? Surely the burden of proof is on those who do *not* believe that the judgments will be in public to prove their case. So far, I have never even heard any persuasive evidence for that, let alone proof.

Looking at this from another direction, if the judgments are not going to be conducted in public then how could there be any meaningful recognition or vindication for those whom God wants to honour? We know that Jesus will vindicate all those who have been victims of lies, false accusations, misjudgments and miscarriages of justice. It is His nature to do so, but He has also promised expressly that He will:

***For the Lord will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.
Psalm 135:14 (ESV)***

Surely, therefore, the good things that are said and the praise and vindication etc will have to be said in public. Otherwise, nobody would be able to hear any of it, in which case, it wouldn't be much of a vindication. However, if we can find it easy enough to believe that our vindication, rewards and congratulations will be given out publicly, then why do so many of us refuse to believe that the rebukes will be equally public?

If our sins have been forgotten and washed clean, how can they be raised with us, even indirectly, at the Judgment Seat?

Having said that, what about the fact, as we saw earlier, that God forgives our sins, forgets them and removes them from us as far as the East is from the West? If He does all of that, how can Jesus rebuke or even criticise any of us for anything? Wouldn't anything that warrants rebuke or criticism have been a sin? If so, wouldn't it be treated as being off limits, because it has already been paid for by His atoning death and then washed away and forgotten by God?

We need to meet this objection head on because it creates a great deal of confusion. The point is that what is removed from us and forgotten about is the *guilt* of our sin and the *penalty* it brings. All of that is certainly paid for by Jesus' death and taken away from us. So, Jesus will not raise with us our sins as such.

That is He will not concern Himself with our sins, transgressions or iniquities in their capacity as *sins*. Neither will He attribute any guilt to us or seek to impose any penalty on us for those sins. In that sense they will be forgotten, because they will not count against us for either guilt or punishment and we are not subject to God's wrath as we would, otherwise, have been.

However, the purpose and rationale of the Judgment Seat of Christ has nothing to do with any of that. So, if Jesus raises with us some character fault, or something that we did, or failed to do, which displeased Him, then there would be no inconsistency. He would be raising such matters not because they were to *sins* as such, but because they are the *factual back drop* to His assessment of us.

They would need to be spoken about in order to make it possible for Him to explain the conclusions He has reached about the fruit we produced, the faithfulness we showed and so on. How could Jesus meaningfully discuss our performance, faithfulness, productivity, courage, loyalty, obedience, etc if He could not mention any of the ways in which we had failed Him, disobeyed Him or ignored Him?

Admittedly, all of those things may also have been sins, transgressions or iniquity. However, they would also have a direct and material bearing on His assessment of our characters and of the way we used the time and gifts which He gave us. Thus they would inevitably have to be raised with us, so that Jesus can tell us *why* He chose not to give us some particular reward, role or position and why He gave us lesser rewards, or no rewards, instead.

Despite His awesome power, Jesus will conduct the judgment in His capacity as a man, and as one who understands our frailty and the various difficulties we faced. Therefore nobody will have any basis to question the fairness or objective accuracy of the judgments Jesus makes.

Neither can anyone say that he is not able to understand the difficulties we faced or how hard it is to deal with peer pressure, temptation, fear and so on. Whatever we may have had to deal with in our lives, He will be able to point to something very similar, and probably something much harder, that He had to face Himself when He was in His earthly ministry.

Some people are casual and unconcerned about the prospect of facing Jesus at the Judgment Seat and we have seen how wrong that attitude is. However, a smaller number make the opposite error and cannot see any scope for Jesus to praise or reward them. They may imagine Him as a harsh, intolerant and overly demanding Judge who expects perfection from everyone and who has no understanding of our weakness, or of the pressures we faced.

However, that is not how He is. As we saw, He has been a human being Himself. More to the point, He *still is* one, and He has also faced all the same pressures we face. He therefore knows, from first-hand experience, what it is to be weak, lonely, isolated, tempted, afraid, hungry, poor, homeless, abused and so on. He even knows what it is to feel weakness:

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.

Hebrews 5:2 (RSV)

Strictly speaking, the verse quoted above, and the one set out below, have to do with how Jesus operates now in His role as *High Priest*. In that capacity He intercedes for us to God, prays for us, and acts as our advocate to God when Satan accuses us. In all of that He bears in mind what He has learned from His own experiences living among us as one of us and knowing what it is to be weak and to suffer.

However, these verses will surely also have a bearing on how Jesus will operate in His capacity as our *Judge*. When He performs that role we can be equally confident that He will bear in mind all those same points and mitigating factors:

⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

Hebrews 5:7-8 (RSV)

Therefore that minority of people who worry about the Judgment Seat and who can only see their own inadequacies and faults, and how they have failed, may be in for a surprise. They will discover just how understanding Jesus is of the pressures and difficulties we faced and of how hard it is to be a disciple in this sinful, hostile world.

You also need to realise that your whole life is being recorded, as if it was on video. Let that affect how you live now.

Imagine that you knew that you were being filmed by a CCTV camera during a football match or public demonstration and that it will pick up everything you do and say. You would not be likely to steal or break a window or assault someone. You would hold back from doing anything wrong, even if you had intended to.

Only a fool would break the law while being filmed, because they would inevitably be seen and then punished later. Even if you could get away with it for a while, the police would be knocking on your

door in the next few days. You would then have your actions replayed on screen in front of a judge or magistrates.

The only thing that might tempt you to go ahead and commit the crime is the hope that perhaps the CCTV isn't working, or that it is only a dummy camera, or that maybe nobody will ever bother to look at it. However, what if there was no doubt about it whatsoever? What if it was a complete certainty that nothing would go unrecorded or unwatched? Then surely you would behave differently?

However, that is exactly the position that we are all in. God sees and hears everything and He misses nothing at all, even if it may seem that He is not reacting to our sin at the moment. Whether we are a Christian or a non-Christian, we will all have to answer one day for absolutely everything that we say, do and think. Therefore we need to live every moment of our lives in the certain knowledge that from the moment of our conversion onwards:

- a) It is all being watched and recorded by God.
- b) It is going to be replayed and commented on at the Judgment.
- c) Very probably that Judgment will be done publicly, such that many other people, and perhaps everyone, will see it.
- d) If we are a *non*-Christian then what has been recorded about us will be the basis for our condemnation and eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. But if we are a real Christian then the record of what we have done will lead to public recognition and praise and the receiving of rewards. Alternatively, it will lead to an equally public rebuke and loss of rewards.
- e) Moreover, any such rebuke, demotion, loss of rewards, or loss of status, could quite properly be classified as *punishment*. That is the case even though none of those things involve *condemnation*. Indeed, how could such sanctions *not* be classified as punishments? To refuse to use that word to refer to the sanctions that will be applied to us would be an argument over little more than semantics. By any reasonable definition those things are punishments. (See chapter 11 below for a fuller discussion of this question of whether there will be any kind of ‘punishment’ for real Christians.)

God’s judgment of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, illustrates how God judges, and even punishes, Christians

We see a small illustration of this principle of the judgment (and punishment) of a believer in the life of a man called Gehazi. He was the servant of the prophet Elisha. Moreover he continued to work for Elisha, after the incident described below, and even after God punished him for it. He did something dishonest because he mistakenly thought that he could get away with it.

The incident began when Elisha healed a Syrian General called Naaman who had leprosy. Naaman wanted to give Elisha a financial reward for what he had done, but he refused to accept anything. However his servant, Gehazi, saw his chance and was tempted to get that money for himself. He therefore ran after Naaman and lied to him, saying that Elisha had changed his mind and would accept a gift after all:

¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. ¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant.” ¹⁶ But he said, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

2 Kings 5:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁹ He said to him, “Go in peace.” But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, “See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.” ²¹ So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, “Is all well?” ²² And he said, “All is well. My master has sent me to say, ‘There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.’” ²³ And Naaman said, “Be pleased to accept two talents.” And he urged him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants. And they carried them before Gehazi. ²⁴ And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house, and he sent the men away, and they departed.

2 Kings 5:19-24 (ESV)

But Gehazi didn't actually get away with anything. The whole incident had been revealed to the prophet Elisha and, of course, God had seen it all too. Therefore, when Gehazi got back to the house, he had Elisha waiting for him and there was then a confrontation:

²⁵ When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, “Where have you been, Gehazi?” “Your servant didn't go anywhere,” Gehazi answered. ²⁶ But Elisha said to him, “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes—or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves? ²⁷ Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.” Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.

2 Kings 5:25-27 (NIV)

On this occasion God moved immediately to judge and punish Gehazi, by giving him leprosy. Perhaps God chose to be particularly swift and severe with Gehazi because he was in a very privileged position. He knew Elisha personally and therefore must also have had a very good knowledge of the Scriptures. Presumably that made him more accountable than most of us are. I don't know. The reasons are not stated.

God doesn't usually judge people so quickly. Normally His judgment comes later in our lives, or else after death. But whenever it may be, we can be sure that judgment of one kind or another will inevitably come at some point. The Judgment Seat of Christ will take place in Heaven. It will happen after the rapture of the Church, but before all real believers return to the Earth, in their resurrection bodies, to take up the roles and positions assigned to them.

Surely it would be strange for Jesus to allocate very different roles to each of us and to give us particular ranks, positions, and job titles, without ever explaining *why* He has made those decisions and assessments. He will want to tell us what factors, good or bad, caused Him to select for us the role/position/title etc that we are given. So He will need to speak to explain His decisions.

That is surely what will take up a large part of the time spent with each of us at our judgment. But it would surely be a strange appraisal if it did not contain anything negative or critical? How could He even announce, let alone explain, His widely differing assessments and choices about each of us if He limited Himself only to praising and rewarding us and was not willing to say anything critical?

The sins and transgressions which have been confessed in this life will not be brought up or rebuked at the Judgment Seat. However, they will not be any basis for rewards either.

If we have confessed a sin or transgression in this life then we can be sure that we will receive God's forgiveness for it. He has promised to do so. Therefore it will not be held against us in terms of guilt. He will take away the penalty of our sin and also remove the unrighteousness from us:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9 (ESV)

Not only does God cleanse us from that sin, He even goes so far as to *forget* it completely. That is He no longer holds it against us:

"I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 43:25 (RSV)

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

Hebrews 8:12 (RSV)

The writer to the Hebrews also confirms this:

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Hebrews 10:17 (ESV)

If God forgets our sins, washes them away and removes them from us then, logically, it surely follows that Jesus will not raise those sins with us again at the Judgment Seat, or rebuke us for them. If He did, then what the Bible says about God forgiving and forgetting our sins would make no sense.

That is a powerful argument for us keeping short accounts with God. It would seem that we can get things dealt with now, and put out of the way, such that there is then no need for Jesus to rebuke us at the Judgment Seat, or even to mention those things at all, because we have already raised them with Him voluntarily.

Imagine a situation at school or work where you have caused a problem or damage of some kind. What if you were to write a letter of apology to the Headmaster or to your Managing Director owning up to the mistake, taking full responsibility, apologising for it and perhaps asking for further guidance or training to help you avoid any recurrence of that misconduct in future.

Let's also imagine that the Headmaster/Managing Director had already been planning to call you in for a meeting at which he would have questioned, rebuked, and even disciplined you. But then he gets your letter of apology, which was sent to him on your *own initiative*, without him having to raise it with you first.

Would you agree that the arrival of that letter would completely change the atmosphere, tone and content of that meeting when it later takes place? The Headmaster/Managing Director might have been intending to give you a rough time in order to wake you up and get you to realise how much harm you had caused and how foolishly/recklessly/selfishly you behaved.

However, when he sees your letter, demonstrating sincere self-examination, an awareness of your faults, and a real determination to take advice and to change, he will entirely alter his plans. The whole agenda for that meeting is likely to be rearranged. Instead of needing to tell you off, he can simply offer you advice on how to improve.

Moreover, instead of having to convince you of your blameworthiness by presenting you with evidence of your wrongdoing, he can dispense with all of that, because you have already freely admitted it. The meeting could even end up as an encouraging pep-talk rather than a robust cross-examination or a disciplinary hearing.

That is a reasonably accurate analogy for how our voluntary confessing of our sins to God here and now, can alter the tone and content of our meeting with Jesus at the Judgment Seat. Why would He want, or need, to rebuke you for something which you have already admitted and apologised for? Indeed, it was you who 'reported' it to Him of your own free will.

You may even have gone further and asked for His help to change your future conduct, not just His forgiveness for your past behaviour. Jesus can therefore afford to handle you very differently. He might well leave rebuke and correction off the agenda entirely, on the basis that that your confession, or 'letter of apology', has said it all, such that He can consider the matter closed.

The confession of sin, and the forgiveness, which are spoken of in 1 John 1:9 apply to those who are already Christians, as well as to the as yet unsaved

We should therefore go to God daily to confess, and repent of, every sin that we know about. However, this ongoing, daily confession and cleansing by God must not be confused with the total, once and for all, across the board, forgiveness that we receive, all in one go, when we are born again, i.e. when we are *justified*.

That overall forgiveness which happens at our conversion applies to *all* our sins, past, present and future. Please refer to Book One for a full explanation of justification. However, the confession spoken of in 1 John 1:9, is aimed at people who are *already saved* (i.e. justified). Thus they have already been forgiven in that general sense.

Nevertheless, John is still urging them to confess their sins, day by day, in order to maintain close fellowship with one another and with God. That is another reason why confessing our sins regularly is so important. It restores and maintains intimacy between us and God and also between us and other people.

However, as we have just seen, the confession described in 1 John 1: 9 also has relevance beyond the immediate daily context. It is not solely about maintaining personal intimacy with God day by day, by regular, ongoing repentance. It seems clear that the extent to which we have voluntarily confessed our sins now, during this life, even after we become believers, will *also* have a major bearing on how Jesus deals with us at the Judgment Seat.

In particular it will affect the degree to which He will find it necessary to raise matters with us, or even to rebuke us. So, if our sins are confessed and dealt with now, because we voluntarily raise them ourselves, then there is good reason to think that they need not feature in His future assessment of us.

At least, any critical comments that He does make to us on that Day would not be about those things which we have *already confessed* to God and which He has therefore dealt with. In relation to such things as those, we will be shown mercy. A major part of that mercy is that it seems very probable that Jesus will see no need to raise those matters with us Himself, whereas He would have needed to do so if we had not freely confessed them beforehand:

***Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.
Proverbs 28:13 (ESV)***

King David was already saved, but he still confessed his sins to God, even after he had been saved

Here is an example of King David engaging in confession of the type we are speaking of. Note that he is doing this after he has already been saved, not in order to become saved. Indeed, he is actually saying these things while He is reigning as God's anointed King of Israel, writing large portions of the Bible, and being described as “*a man after [God's] own heart*”.

Thus there is no possibility of David being classified at that time as an unsaved person who is only in the process of being converted. Yet, despite all that, look at how David speaks of his own sin and how important confession is to him:

³*For when I kept silent,
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Psalm 32:3-5 (ESV)

Although matters which have been sincerely confessed to God and repented of will not be criticised at Jesus' future judgment of us, we cannot expect them to be any basis for praise or reward either. Jesus will only reward those actions, words, thoughts, attitudes, etc which pleased Him and which were done, thought or said in obedience to Him. Nothing else can be a proper basis for any reward, least of all our sins, which have been forgiven and forgotten.

So far as those forgiven sins are concerned, all we can ask for is that they will not count against us, or not even be mentioned at all. They certainly cannot be used in our favour. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not something that we can just assume will automatically and inevitably go well. Many of us will do badly because the fact is that some of the things we do are bad, even after we are converted:

“For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad”.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)

Therefore, instead of being complacent about this Day of Judgment, we need to prepare for it diligently. We should do so in much the same way as we might if we were an MP and we knew that the Prime Minister wanted to see us at the end of this parliamentary term to assess our performance and decide what, if any, Government role should be assigned to us after the next election.

Most of us, if facing such an assessment in 3-4 years' time, would find it hard to forget about it. Our minds would regularly be focused on it, perhaps even every day. But surely, such an interview as that would be of minimal importance compared to the prospect of a face to face encounter with The Lord Jesus Christ?

He is all of the following things and more besides: *Messiah, King of Israel, King of kings, Lord of lords, Lord of Hosts, Creator, High Priest, and Name above all names*. He is also the One who is deemed worthy to sit at the right hand of God the Father. Those are just a few of His many titles and roles. Therefore when we speak of a one to one meeting with Him on that Day of Judgment, we need to remind ourselves of who and what He really is. Moreover, doing so ought to make us tremble.