

CHAPTER 6

SOME OF THE CRITERIA BY WHICH ALL REAL CHRISTIANS WILL BE JUDGED – PART TWO

“..... 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)

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

Proverbs 22:4 (RSV)

¹¹ *For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Luke 14:11 (RSV)

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

Luke 12:32-34 (ESV)

²² *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.”*

Luke 18:22 (ESV)

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 it was that 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 very high one:

²⁸*And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." ²⁹And 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,³⁰ 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.

²⁸*Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."* ²⁹*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, ³⁰who 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. ³¹But 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 radical shaking up of the pecking order as we currently know it.

It would seem likely that many of us in the West, for whom life has been easy, with very little persecution, will be at or near the bottom in the Kingdom of God

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"*.

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

²*And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

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

⁴*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

⁵*"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

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

⁷*"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

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

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

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

¹¹*"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² 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 either compromise over the truth, or do not preach the truth at all, due to wanting to be liked and accepted by the world:

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.²⁵ "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.²⁶ "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:

²⁷ "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

³² If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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. ³⁶ 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:

¹⁰By 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. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his 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. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If 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.

However, 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 willfulness. 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 wasted on doing those things will have prevented us from 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*, which is 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 discipled:

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers 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":

²²Slaves, 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. ²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴since 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.

Furthermore, 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:

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

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

*⁴A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
⁵He 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 labour.
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 plough 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 skilful 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 we are usually 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. However, that is plainly wrong, as those around us can so 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, including all 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 actually 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)*

*²⁰If we had forgotten the name of our God,
or spread forth our hands to a strange god,
²¹would 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)*

⁹ *The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately corrupt;
who can understand it?*
¹⁰ *"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 forever.
1 Chronicles 28:9 (RSV)*

¹⁴*The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. ¹⁵And 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, and whether we ultimately succeeded or failed in the things we attempted, is much less important than our motives and heart attitudes

The *outcome*, in itself, is not of paramount importance, at least as 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:

¹⁷*"Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁸"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. ¹⁹'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. They also depend on the extent to which we received God's help and the support or, alternatively the opposition, of other people and/or demons.

Some of us who tried hard, but failed, so far as we could tell, may be surprised by how warmly Jesus praises and rewards our efforts and intentions

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) worked 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. Jesus will also be able to see situations in which we succeeded, but where our motives were not good, or 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. Accordingly, 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 had good attitudes, but 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, in the UK, the Criminal Attempts Act. This makes a person liable for the *crimes* they attempt to do but fail. There will be something very similar at the Judgment, only in reverse. We shall therefore be praised for the good things which we unsuccessfully 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. They consequently became what we now call demons and were thrown out of Heaven.

Therefore we know that 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 honour.***
Proverbs 29:23 (RSV)

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord

is riches and honour 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 splendor. 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:

²⁸All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰and 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?" ³¹While 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,

³²and 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." ³³Immediately 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:

³⁴At 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; ³⁵all 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?"

³⁶At 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. ³⁷Now 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.

It is a fixed law of the Universe that whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and vice versa, and we can fully expect that to apply at the Judgment Seat

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:

⁷Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he marked how they chose the places of honour, saying to them, ⁸"When you are invited by anyone to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; ⁹and 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. ¹⁰But 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 honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹For 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?" ²And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, ³and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:1-4 (RSV)

²⁵But 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. ²⁶It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸even 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)

³³And they came to Caper'na-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If anyone 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*":

⁶Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹But 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. ¹⁰For 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:

¹³ *Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”*
¹⁴ *But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”*¹⁵ *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.”*¹⁶ *And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,*¹⁷ *and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’*¹⁸ *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.’*¹⁹ *And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’*

²⁰ *But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’*²¹ *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.”*²² *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.”*²³ *For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.*²⁴ *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!*²⁵ *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?*

²⁶ *If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?*²⁷ *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.*²⁸ *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!*²⁹ *And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried.*³⁰ *For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.*³¹ *Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*

Luke 12:13-31 (ESV)

The Bible even says that if we give our money away we shall be given “money bags that do not grow old”

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 grown 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:

³² *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*³³ *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.*³⁴ *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:

⁴¹And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³And 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. ⁴⁴For 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 to break any hold that money has over us by learning how to give it away and to seek for treasure in Heaven, rather than in this life

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. However, if our heart is consumed with the love of money, then 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:

¹⁸And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.'" ²¹And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." ²²When 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." ²³But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴Jesus, 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 3. 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 grab it, and seek to hold on to it all now, we won't have it then. However, 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:

¹⁷ *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. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ 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 each love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbour as ourself:

²⁸*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?" ²⁹Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰and 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.' ³¹The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour 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:

³*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. ⁴There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her.*

⁶*But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹And 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 therefore 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 7 and 9.

Jesus wants to build 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. However, 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.

However, 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 behaved as tyrants, rather than as gentle shepherds and servants.

'Overcoming' does not mean dominating other people, ruling over the secular world, or seizing any land or power for Jesus

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.

Accordingly, the oppressive things that the Roman Catholic church did, (and still does) are profoundly wrong. That said, 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*.

However, 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:

¹²And 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. ¹³These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They 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:

¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And 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)

Other areas in which we are meant to overcome are our battles against the demons, and the spirit of antichrist

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:

*¹³ 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.*

*¹⁴ 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:

¹Beloved, 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. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and 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. ⁴Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We 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.

The main way in which we can conquer or overcome is by simply remaining faithful and refusing to compromise or give in

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:

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, 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:

³²He shall seduce with flattery those who violate the covenant; but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action. ³³And 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)

²⁵Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷and 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; ²⁸and I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 2:25-28 (RSV)

⁴But 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. ⁵He 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)

¹¹I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹²The 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)

¹Then 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. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And 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, ⁴and 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.”

⁵And 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.” ⁶Then 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. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Revelation 21:1-7 (NASB)

A recap of some of the rewards which will be given to overcomers

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:

⁶Be 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." ⁷Then 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. ⁸It 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)

⁶Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷Only 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.

However, 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.

Most of the time, at least in the West, courage is not about facing physical danger, but about being willing to risk our money, career, reputation or even popularity

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 criticised, 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.

We can deny Christ, not only by what we do or say, but by what we don’t do or don’t say

We can deny Christ not only by what we say, but by what we *don’t say*, and not only by what we teach, but what we *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 actually 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 little or 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 possibly have got there by random chance, without any 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:

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ 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 may be 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”