

The Judgment Seat of Christ.

BOOK 4 IN THE REAL CHRISTIANITY SERIES.

SEAN KEHOE

realchristianity.com

PUBLISHING DETAILS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO BIBLE PUBLISHERS

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The Judgment Seat of Christ – Book 4 in the Real Christianity series

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Published by realchristianity.com of Box Number 5262, 6 Slington House, Rankine Road, Basingstoke, RG24 8PH, United Kingdom

ISBN 978-1-910968-03-1

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the people who have looked quizzically, and even disapprovingly, at me when I have raised the question of the Judgment Seat of Christ or when I have asked questions about why it is virtually never spoken about or preached on. I found their reactions discouraging at the time. However, instead of stopping me, it gradually had the effect of motivating me to study this subject more closely.

I also came to realise that it wasn't just one or two people, here and there, who were unaware of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Those who don't understand it, or who have never even heard of it, appear to be the majority of the Christian population, at least in the United Kingdom. That may explain why so many Christians did not appreciate my raising this subject.

It possibly made them feel uncomfortable and made some of them lash out to avoid being challenged about it. Others probably felt that because I was speaking about something which they had never heard of, I must be mistaken and confused. So they dismissed the subject out of hand.

All in all, the responses that I got convinced me that this is a grossly neglected subject and that I ought to write a book about it. So, the adverse reactions of those to whom I spoke became the grit in the oyster that provoked me to research this subject more fully and to make many discoveries. Accordingly, I gratefully dedicate it to them all.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

BOOK 4 IN THE REAL CHRISTIANITY SERIES

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine you work for a large company such as Toyota, General Motors or Rolls Royce. The Chairman has gone away on a foreign business trip without saying when he will come back, but he has assured all staff that he will return at some point. It could be tomorrow but it could be years away.

He also said, before setting off, that on his return he will arrange a series of one to one meetings with all staff, whether they are senior or junior. Then he will appraise their individual performance in the company during his absence.

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

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

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

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

He has also said, rather worryingly, that those whose faithfulness, loyalty, performance, contribution, effort or output has been lacking will be criticized and rebuked. Indeed, they may even be punished, if nothing else, by way of demotion, pay cuts and loss of status or role. What is more, it would even seem that some or all of this appraisal process will be conducted *in public*.

Therefore each member of staff will see and hear what is said to other staff, or at least those whom they know. How would you react to that scenario? Would it generate ongoing interest and discussion in the canteen, on the shop floor and also at home? Would you think about it every day and discuss with your husband or wife your hopes and concerns as to how your own appraisal might go?

Would you find that situation motivating and feel incentivized to do your very best every day, knowing that today could be the day when the Chairman suddenly walks through the door and begins the appraisal process?

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

Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus has promised pretty much all the same things that our imaginary Chairman said before setting off on his foreign trip? When Jesus returns there will be a judgment or appraisal at which all the real Christians, not unbelievers or false believers, will be thoroughly assessed.

Some will then be praised, rewarded, congratulated, promoted etc. Alternatively, others will be rebuked, criticised, demoted and so on. This is at a judgment known as the *bema* judgment or the *Judgment Seat of Christ*.

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

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

You might imagine therefore that the Judgment Seat of Christ, to which all genuine Christians must go, would be a regular subject of conversation and would be frequently on our minds. Instead, my own experience has been that in over 30 years as a believer I do not recall hearing a single sermon on this topic in any church.

In fact I have never even heard anybody discuss it in my presence unless I have first raised it with them. When I have brought the subject up, even in evangelical churches, it has usually produced puzzled looks. Most people don't know what I am referring to. One man recently tried to reassure me that neither he nor I will ever have to face *any* kind of judgment because "*.... there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

He had absolutely no idea what I was talking about and thought that I was expecting to be condemned (at the Great White Throne) as an unbeliever will be. He had never heard of any other kind of judgment and certainly not a judgment for Christians. He was equating the concepts of condemnation and judgment as if they were the same thing, which they aren't.

Actually, we will all be judged, but only non-Christians will be condemned. So, judgment is a much broader word. It includes those who will be condemned for their sins but also those whose sins are forgiven but who are still to be assessed for their faithfulness and fruit.

Doesn't it strike you as odd that there is such widespread ignorance, silence and lack of interest concerning this hugely important theme? Have you ever seen a book specifically about this, or at least one that has been written in recent years? There is one book that I know of. It is by Chuck Missler of the Koinonia Institute and is entitled '*The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory*'.

However, apart from that, I can only think of a few others and they are quite old now. Moreover, I have gone out of my way to search for them. They are not on display in the bookshops. Therefore I have written this book in an attempt to tackle this subject in modern English and as frankly and fully as possible.

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

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

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

Revelation 2:23(b) (RSV)

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

Sean Kehoe
28 September 2015

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

Acts 10:42 (RSV)

because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.

Acts 17:31 (RSV)

¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹ For it is written:

*“As I live, says the Lord,
Every knee shall bow to Me,
And every tongue shall confess to God.”*

¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

·Romans 14:10-12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)

*Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.*

Isaiah 40:10 (RSV)

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.

Revelation 22:12 (ESV)

³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:36 (NIV)

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26 (NIV)

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin

Ezekiel 18:30 (RSV)

....for you will render to a man according to his work

Psalms 62:12 (b) (ESV)

And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead.

Acts 10:42 (RSV)

⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (RSV)

For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.
2 Corinthians 10:18 (ESV)

The Judgment Seat of Christ is the judgment for Christians, at which their works or fruit will be assessed. It is not for the purpose of condemnation. Nobody will be sent from it to the Lake of Fire.

In this chapter we shall discuss the judgment facing every genuine Christian at which the fruitfulness or otherwise of their lives will be assessed, face to face, by Jesus Christ Himself. There is very little awareness of this judgment, and a lot of confusion about it, even amongst the minority who have heard anything about it at all.

It is often mistaken for the judgment that awaits unbelievers. Therefore we need to make clear at the outset that nobody who appears before Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ will ever be *condemned*. Nobody will be sent from it to the Lake of Fire, because it is not a judgment of our *sins*. That's because, for a Christian, those sins have already been forgiven.

Therefore, the purpose of this judgment is not to condemn people or to find them guilty. It is not a place where God's wrath will be poured out, because those who go to the Judgment Seat of Christ are guiltless and are not condemned:

⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 (ESV)

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Romans 5:9 (NASB)

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 3:16-18 (RSV)

So, let's get this straight. What if Jesus was to conclude that a person's life had produced no fruit at all? For example, what if they were converted on their deathbed and had no time to produce any fruit? The answer is they would still be saved. They would still have eternal life.

They would, however, probably receive little or no reward. This judgment is for the purpose of deciding what reward, if any, a person should receive. It is a judgment of the person's *works or fruit*, not of the person themselves and, in particular, not of their sins.

However, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not solely a place for congratulations and rewards to be given out. There will also be criticism, rebuke and even punishment.

Most Christians don't speak or think about the Judgment Seat of Christ at all. Of the small minority who do ever speak of it, they tend to take the view that it is a place where nothing other than rewards,

congratulations and prizes will be given out. The *Bema* judgment or Judgment Seat of Christ gets its name from the '*Bema Seat*'.

This was an official, formal position of authority from which to exercise judgment. It was also a place where cases were tried and judgments given in disputes. Apostle Paul was brought before such a *Bema* or judgment seat in Corinth where he was examined by Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. It was, quite clearly, what we would call a court:

¹² But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,¹³ saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you;¹⁵ but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters."¹⁶ And he drove them away from the judgment seat.¹⁷ And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

Acts 18:12-17 (NASB)

Some people take the view that a *bema* seat was not a court, but only a place from which garlands and prizes were given out to winners in athletics competitions. They imply therefore that it only has positive connotations and cannot involve any negative element, such as rebuke or criticism. However, that is not the case.

The word *bema* may also have been used in the context of a prize giving for athletics, but its primary meaning is as a court or seat of authority, as we saw above with Gallio. A further example is Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor:

¹ Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death;² and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

Matthew 27:1-2 (NASB)

The venue for Jesus' trial is referred to in Matthew's gospel as a '*judgment seat*', i.e. a *bema*. However, in any case anybody thinks it was not a proper court, or that no negative decisions could be reached at it, remember that it resulted in Pilate issuing a *death* sentence against Jesus:

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the people any one prisoner whom they wanted.¹⁶ At that time they were holding a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.¹⁷ So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"¹⁸ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over.¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death.²¹ But the governor said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."

*²² Pilate *said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all *said, "Crucify Him!"²³ And he said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."²⁵ And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!"²⁶ Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.*

Matthew 27:15-26 (NASB)

Another example of a judgment seat is found in Acts chapter 12 when King Herod sat on his throne and made an address to the people. He did it from a place of authority and power. It was certainly not an athletics award ceremony. At any rate, the *throne* on which Herod sat was a ‘bema’:

²⁰ He had been quarrelling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply.²¹ On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.²² They shouted, 'This is the voice of a god, not of a man.'

Acts 12:20-22 (NIV)

The fact is that the Judgment which we face before Jesus may also involve elements of rebuke or criticism and the loss of rewards, just as any court hearing might. We must not assume that all Jesus will do is to give out rewards, prizes and congratulations to all of us and that He will do and say nothing else.

In other words, we cannot assume that it will be a wholly pleasant experience with no rebuke, criticism, punishment, demotion or loss. It would be comforting if we could validly say all of that, but I don't believe we can. The truth is that the Judgment Seat of Christ will be wide-ranging in its scope.

It seems inevitable that Jesus will find it necessary to say negative things to many of us. So it won't be congratulations and rewards all round. Many people certainly will be congratulated and praised, but we cannot assume that *all* of us will be. It is going to be an intensive process of appraisal which will result in many of us being criticized, rebuked, demoted and perhaps even punished.

It is essential that we try to understand the purpose and scope of this judgment, and also the various principles by which it will operate, so as to be best able to prepare for it. Therefore, as well as being a place at which the most amazing rewards will be given out, it seems very clear that it will also involve an element of what we would classify as punishment, or at least rebuke.

However, we need to clearly distinguish each of those things from the far more dreadful prospect of being eternally condemned. That is what awaits those who attend the Great White Throne Judgment. Condemnation is entirely different in both nature and degree from the rebuke, or even the punishment or chastisement, that Jesus will give to some of His followers at the Judgment Seat.

The difference between the Judgment Seat of Christ (bema) and the Great White Throne Judgment (thronos)

The only people who will attend the Judgment Seat of Christ are real, genuine Christians. Therefore, the very fact that a person goes to it at all demonstrates that they are already saved and have eternal life. It must not be confused with the Great White Throne judgment, which is for the sentencing of non-Christians (and false Christians) to eternal condemnation.

Everyone who goes to the Great White Throne Judgment will then go on from there to the Lake of Fire. However, none of those who go to the Judgment Seat of Christ will end up in the Lake of Fire. They already have eternal life. That was decided before they ever went to the Judgment Seat:

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

John 5:24 (NIV)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1 (RSV)

¹¹And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

1 John 5:11-13 (ESV)

So, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not for the purpose of deciding *whether* a person has eternal life or not. It is the place where believers' fruit is assessed after it has already been decided that they have eternal life.

Nevertheless, it is not only the wicked who are going to be judged. All of us will be judged, including the righteous. The only question is where, i.e. at which judgment?

There is a widespread assumption that because genuine Christians are not going to be condemned, and will not go to the Lake of Fire, that means they will never face any kind of judgment at all. As we have seen, that is to make the major error of equating the words judgment and condemnation, as if they were the same thing. They are not. All people are going to be judged, whether they are Christians or not.

However, they are not all going to be condemned. Therefore the real question is which judgment will we attend, and for what purpose? Consider these verses which make clear that we all have to be judged at one or other of these very different judgments. That is the case whether we are righteous or wicked, wise or foolish, believer or unbeliever:

¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

1 Peter 4:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁶Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. ¹⁷I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.

Ecclesiastes 3:16-17 (RSV)

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 (RSV)

¹³The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (RSV)

The Judgment Seat of Christ is for all genuine Christians who are alive now and also for all those who have died in the past. It is for the purpose of assessing their faithfulness and the quality and quantity of fruit produced by their lives and then for giving rewards where they are due.

Moreover, it is only concerned with the way we lived *after* the point when our sins were forgiven, i.e. from the point when we became Christians. It is not a judgment of our lives in the years *before* we become a Christian. All of what we did in those years is washed away when we are forgiven. At that precise moment, when we are justified, God instantly removes all our guilt from us completely:

*As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
Psalm 103:12 (NASB)*

No matter how bad our sins may have been, if we are a genuine Christian, then we have had all our sins transferred to Jesus and all the righteousness of Jesus Christ transferred to us. That remains true, despite the fact that we all continue to sin, even after becoming a Christian.

Therefore, from the moment of our conversion onwards, i.e. from the point when we are justified, God considers us to be as white as snow, with no guilt remaining at all:

"Come now, and let us reason together,"

Says the LORD,

"Though your sins are as scarlet,

They will be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They will be like wool.

Isaiah 1:18 (NASB)

If God regards us as spotlessly clean, then you might ask what the point is of Jesus judging us at all. However, you would only ask that question if you have still got the idea fixed in your mind that judgment is solely about condemning people for their sin and sending them to the Lake of Fire, which it isn't.

That is certainly what the *Great White Throne* Judgment is about. However, it is not what the Judgment Seat of Christ is about. The main purpose of the Judgment Seat is to enable Jesus to evaluate our lives, the extent of our faithfulness, the quality and quantity of the fruit we produce and the calibre of our discipleship from the moment when we first became a Christian.

It is not concerned with the lives we lived and sins we committed in the years that we lived as non-Christians, before we were converted/justified. Therefore any events prior to our conversion will not count at all, either for us or against us. That is because, for a real Christian, any sins or transgressions have already been wiped away.

Accordingly, there is nothing left which could cause us to be found guilty or be condemned. However it also follows that there won't be anything from those years to reward either. That is because before being saved (justified) we were operating entirely in our flesh nature.

Therefore nothing that we did before our conversion was ever righteous. During those years, when we were unsaved, we were incapable of doing anything righteous. All our flesh knows how to do is to sin. Consequently, anything done in, or through, our flesh can never please God:

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-

Ephesians 2:1-5 (ESV)

.....and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:8 (RSV)

Even after we become a Christian we still continue to have a sinful flesh nature. That nature remains incapable of doing anything other than sin. That is why it is an ongoing problem for us, as it was even for the apostle Paul. However, the difference is that from the point when we are born again we also have a new nature.

This operates within us, alongside our flesh nature. (See Book 7). So, Jesus will assess the extent to which we lived in accordance with our new nature, thereby bearing good fruit, as opposed to living through our old flesh nature, and therefore sinning:

¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Romans 7:18-20 (ESV)

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)

¹*In 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.*

⁴*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

⁵*I 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.

CHAPTER 3

WILL WE ALL BE EQUAL IN THE NEXT LIFE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ‘REIGN’ AND TO WHOM WILL THAT APPLY?

¹¹The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (ESV)

It seems clear that we will not all be equal in Heaven or on the new Earth. We will each be appointed to different levels of authority and honour and we will all have different roles.

This is yet another controversial topic. People tend to get quite touchy if you suggest that we will not all be equal in Heaven. But the Bible makes it clear that we won't be. Neither will we be equal when we return to the Earth for the Millennium and for the eternal state on the new Earth and in the new Jerusalem. The stance taken by most of us is not to think about this question at all.

However, if you do raise it then most people seem to assume that we will all be equal in every way after we die. But that is a huge assumption to make, and an odd one. At any rate, the Bible never says anything to support it. In fact it says quite a lot to the contrary. For example, let's begin by looking at this verse:

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

Luke 14:11 (RSV)

This is a statement made by Jesus which has important implications for the question we are now examining. We know that some people are going to be exalted and some will be humbled. But how can that mean anything unless those two groups of people are going to have different levels of honour, status, role, position, rank etc?

It surely follows therefore that there are going to be distinctions and differentials between us after we die. Perhaps you might argue that the exalting or humbling that Jesus was referring to is all to occur during this present life, not in the future. Certainly it does also apply here and now, but I can see no valid basis for limiting its application *only* to this present life.

If that was the case, then many other passages would make no sense. Let's look at some. Consider first this passage from Matthew 19 where Jesus responds to a comment from Peter about what the apostles had given up for Him and what they might be entitled to expect from Him in return:

²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?"

²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many that are first will be last, and the last first.

Matthew 19:27-30 (RSV)

Even from this short passage, a number of points emerge:

- a) the apostles are going to sit on 12 thrones

- b) they will judge the 12 tribes of Israel
- c) those who have made great sacrifices will receive a hundredfold more in the life to come
- d) many that are first now will be last
- e) many that are last now will be first

How can any of these five things happen in the future if we are all going to be equal? If we were, then the last two passages quoted above would be particularly meaningless. How can there be people in *first* and *last* positions if we are all going to be the same?

Moreover how can it make any sense for the 12 apostles to sit on “*thrones*” and to “*judge*” the 12 tribes of Israel if they will not have any power, authority, status, jurisdiction etc? At least in those terms, and perhaps in other ways too, the apostles will be different from, and higher than, the rest of us.

Likewise, if some people are going to “*receive a hundredfold more in the life to come*” then surely it must follow that they will have some kind of assets, property or wealth of some description which the rest of us, who did not make so many sacrifices, will not have. So, at the very least, we will not all be equal in terms of what we *possess*.

If there is this proportionality to the rewards given, i.e. that some people will receive a hundredfold, then those who gave up 10 units in this life will end up with 1000 units in the next life. On the same basis, those who gave up 50 units will be given 5000.

So, even *within* the category of those people who receive this hundredfold rate of return, there is still going to be inequality because some of them will have sacrificed more or less than others to begin with. Thus that multiplier will apply to very different numbers in terms of the scale or magnitude of what we gave up for Jesus.

If some of us are going to be ‘first’ and others ‘last’, then there has to be some kind of hierarchy in the Kingdom of God

If some of us are going to be *first* and others will be *last* then there clearly must be a hierarchy of some kind. If not, those words would mean nothing. Obviously, the factors which place a person at the top or the bottom will be different from the worldly criteria which we use in this life. Nevertheless, there will still have to be a hierarchy of some kind. That is the point. Consider this passage from Mark chapter ten:

³⁵ *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”*

³⁶ *“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.*

³⁷ *They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”*

³⁸ *“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”*

³⁹ *“We can,” they answered.*

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,”⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

⁴¹ *When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.* ⁴² *Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.* ⁴³ *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to*

become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:35-45 (NIV)

From this passage we learn that:

- a) there will literally be two very special people who will be chosen for the ultimate honour, namely to sit at Jesus' left and right hand side when He reigns as King.
- b) There will also be some people who will be “*first*”, by which Jesus surely means that they will be higher, more senior, more honoured, more authoritative etc than others.
- c) Those people who are elevated to these higher positions, which He calls being ‘first’, will be selected on the basis of the degree to which they were servants, i.e. how well they served.

Of course, the factors, characteristics and actions which lead to a person's promotion in the Kingdom of God are very different from those which apply in this world. But the operative point is that it is confirmed that there is such a thing as *promotion*. That fact alone shows that there will be people in higher and lower positions.

They will also have differing levels of honour, status, possessions and wealth. Jesus Himself is an example of this. He was promoted by God the Father to the very highest place and it was done entirely on the basis of merit. It follows that the same principle of promotion on merit will determine our future position in the Kingdom.

Jesus Himself is the ultimate example of a person being promoted by God on the basis of merit

The ultimate example of a man being promoted on the basis of His self-sacrifice and flawless service is Jesus Himself. We saw in the earlier passage in Matthew 19 that Jesus is going to “*sit on His glorious throne.*” We also know from Philippians that He is going to be elevated by God to have the very highest place, such that He will be the “*Name which is above every name*”:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11 (RSV)

The above passage contains a really important insight into how God will promote and reward us. We are told of how Jesus: “*emptied Himself,.....took the form of a servant,.....humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*”

What few people seem to notice is the very next phrase which says: “*Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.....*” In other words, He was promoted *as a result* of His own actions and attitude. The point is that God promoted Jesus in these ways *because* He had humbled Himself etc.

There is cause and effect at work here. God the Father did not automatically promote Jesus to be the Name above all names simply because He was the Son of God. It had nothing to do with His existing

divine status and identity. He was promoted in these ways, and appointed to these roles, because of what He had done and how He had lived.

To a large degree that was due to the fact that he was the first and only man ever to perfectly obey the Law of Moses. He achieved all that even before He went to cross. My argument is that it is reasonable for us to infer from the way in which Jesus was promoted that the very same principle applies to us and will operate at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

That is we will be promoted, or not promoted, based on how we lived, what we did and what attitudes we had. Many Christians tend to shy away from using the word *merit* at all. It is a word that most evangelical Christians don't like. It has a ring about it that suggests being saved by our own good works rather than by grace through faith.

However, as we have seen, we are not talking here about how we are saved in the sense of being *justified*. Our present discussion is only about the basis on which Jesus will reward us for our actions and attitudes *after* we have already been justified.

Jesus is also going to inherit the whole world, because He has been appointed by God the Father to be the “heir of all things”

In addition to all the exalted titles that He has been given, Jesus has also been made the “*heir of all things*”. In other words, Jesus is going to inherit the whole world, indeed the whole universe. It will all be given to Him and He will rule over all of it:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (RSV)

The entire Creation is going to be placed in subjection to Jesus. He will then reign over everybody and everything in the whole Universe and His reign will also be eternal:

²⁰ which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; ²² and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:20-23 (RSV)

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

*“What is man that thou art mindful of him,
or the son of man, that thou carest for him?”*

*⁷ Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels,
thou hast crowned him with glory and honor,*

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

Hebrews 2:5-8 (RSV)

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Revelation 11:15 (RSV)

So, it is clear that everything is going to be given to Jesus. He is the heir and everything will be His. Therefore it will all be His to administer, divide out, or give away, as He sees fit. He will distribute power, positions and possessions to those who are going to rule and reign under Him in His Kingdom. However, who will these people be? Does it mean *all* genuine believers, or only *some* of them?

The Bible also says that there are going to be some people who will be fellow heirs with Jesus of the Kingdom which has been promised to Him

Jesus is *the* heir. He inherits everything, with absolute title. However, we also know that at least some of His followers are going to be “heirs” alongside Him:

Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

James 2:5 (RSV)

James does not make clear whether this status of being “*heirs of the Kingdom*” applies to *all* genuine Christians or only to *some*. However, the implication is that it is more limited and selective, because James says that God has chosen “*those who are poor in the world*”. That would not seem to apply to every believer, nor even to every genuine and faithful believer.

It seems to be referring to those who have given up much and avoided worldliness in this life. There would seem to be at least an element of *merit* involved in the selection. Indeed, in this regard, as we saw, we have God the Father’s promotion of Jesus Himself as a direct precedent. Jesus is going to be promoted to the highest place not because of *who He is* but because of *what He did*.

He has *earned* the highest place on the basis of merit. My point is that the very same principle will apply to all of us. Accordingly, we will be promoted or demoted according to what we did in this life and how we served. Likewise, this status of being an heir of the Kingdom alongside Jesus would seem to fit in with that overall pattern, or principle, of the Kingdom being a meritocracy.

If we were to divide up the whole Church into groups, at least in the West, then the majority probably does not know much, if anything, about the ‘inheritance’ that is available to Christians or about being an ‘heir’ alongside Christ. Even those who do know something about it tend not to give it much thought. At any rate, it is rarely emphasised, or even spoken about at all. Clearly, that is the wrong approach.

There is a smaller group which does think about the prospect of being an heir but they make a different mistake. That is to assume that every one of us will inherit *automatically*, simply because we are Christians. That would not seem to be the case, as far as I can see. Consider this next passage from Romans:

¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:15-17 (RSV)

This passage speaks of us being “*children of God*” and “*fellow heirs with Christ*”. However, there is an important condition within verse 17 above that few people seem to notice. Or, even if they do, they don’t speak about it much. That is where it says “*...provided we suffer with Him.....*” However, what does that mean?

Is this status of being a “*fellow heir with Christ*” only available to those who have suffered with Christ in some way? It would seem to be so. The next question we need to ask is what exactly is meant by

the word ‘*suffer*’? Moreover, what kind of suffering and how intense or prolonged does it need to be in order to satisfy the condition? I don’t see any clear answer to that in the Bible.

Nevertheless, it does seem clear that in order to become a “fellow heir with Christ” we need to have become sufficiently identified with Christ as to arouse the opposition of this world system and the worldly people in it, such that we suffer at their hands in some way.

Presumably it does not require that we become martyrs, because the passage makes no mention of that. It refers only to our needing to “*suffer with Him*”. That can, and does, occur regularly for many believers, without them having to go so far as to have to die for their faith.

I do not feel able to be more specific than that. It may be that Jesus will give a very broad definition to the word ‘*suffer*’ and include those who have only experienced persecution and opposition in small or occasional ways. Or it may be that He will define it more narrowly, setting the bar at a much higher level. We shall have to wait and see.

What we can say is that suffering with and for Christ, by reason of our close allegiance to Him, should not be seen as a wholly negative thing. At the very least, such suffering is not unproductive and may well be the key to our making real progress in our walk as disciples, especially if it is our aim to be heirs alongside Christ.

At least some of us are going to “*reign*” with Jesus at various levels of authority

In addition to being heirs, some of us are going to reign with Jesus. It is not only the 12 apostles who are going to do so. There will be others too who will also reign, presumably at many different levels of seniority, provided we meet His conditions, and He is pleased with our service for Him:

***and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”***

Revelation 5:10 (ESV)

Here again, in 2 Timothy, apostle Paul appears to link reigning with Christ in His future Kingdom with our having previously endured, or even died, with Him in this life:

¹¹ The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we shall also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (RSV)

What exactly does it mean to “*die with Him*”? Is it to be taken literally, or does it refer to our dying metaphorically, such as where we die to self and crucify our flesh nature? It would seem to have a broad definition because the very use of the word ‘*endure*’ in verse 12 above implies that we can become qualified to reign with Jesus even if we only endure rather than die for Him.

That point is supported by this next passage, in which Jesus Himself says, in the book of Revelation, that certain believers, i.e. those who are “*victorious*” and who “*do my will to the end*” will be given “*authority over nations*”:

***To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—
²⁷ that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I
have received authority from my Father.***

Revelation 2:26-27 (NIV)

Those who are chosen to reign in these ways will begin by reigning during the 1000 year Millennium, which will begin when Jesus returns to the Earth:

The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹²*if we endure, we will also reign with him;*

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (ESV)

⁴*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* ⁵*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.* ⁶*Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Revelation 20:4-6 (ESV)

However it would seem that this arrangement, by which at least some people will rule and reign, will also continue on, beyond the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom. That is it will last into the eternal state, when a new Heaven and a new Earth are created. At any rate, the Bible says nothing to suggest that the status of being an heir and of reigning with Jesus is only for the Millennium.

One assumes therefore that it will continue for eternity. If so, then that underlines even more emphatically the immense importance of doing well at the Judgment Seat of Christ, because so much depends on it, not only for the duration of the Millennium, but presumably also for eternity thereafter.

What does it mean to ‘reign’?

The Bible tells us very little about what is actually involved in reigning and what exactly it will mean. One therefore has to fall back to some extent, on our understanding of what it means to reign in this life. On that basis, it will presumably involve similar concepts of having authority, the right to judge and the power to make executive decisions.

Of course, those who reign in God’s Kingdom will not do so in the same proud, worldly, sinful way that so many people rule and reign in this life. It will be operated in a godly way and will involve servant leadership. Those who reign will have a deep and genuine pastoral concern for those whom they lead.

Nevertheless, having emphasised all of that, reigning will still involve the exercise of real authority and power. Given that Jesus Himself will be reigning as an absolute monarch, not as an elected politician, He will choose to delegate to His subordinates in much the same way as any absolute monarch would.

That is He will pass on delegated authority which will be effectively absolute. The crucial difference is that those who reign under Him will be careful to do *His* will, not their own. They will be people of real power with the ability to judge and to make real decisions. Yet they will be careful to exercise that power as Jesus would have done, and in accordance with what they know His will to be.

Where, how, and over whom would we potentially be able to reign?

There is very good reason to expect that in the Millennium, and even in the eternal state thereafter, the world will be organised along national lines, as it is now. At any rate, we know that there will be

Gentile nations, because we are told that they will come up to Jerusalem to worship. We learn of this in Zechariah:

¹⁶ Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. ¹⁷ And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. ¹⁸ If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the Lord smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zechariah 14:16-19 (NASB)

Jeremiah also speaks in the same way:

At that time they will call Jerusalem 'The Throne of the Lord,' and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

Jeremiah 3:17 (NASB)

Accordingly, there are going to be distinct nations, with identifiable national boundaries, just as we have now. Therefore, it would appear that we will each live within particular countries and also within villages, towns and cities. Those places, large or small, will all need to be governed in some way and one assumes that it will involve similar kinds of power as we see being exercised by those who govern us now.

The Earth will be populated by those saved believers, in their resurrection bodies, who survive the Great Tribulation. They will live on into the Millennium and they will have children and steadily repopulate the Earth. By the end of the 1000 years, the world's population is likely to be very large indeed, probably larger than it is now. In the early part of the Millennium those people, who will be living in their mortal bodies, will all be believers.

Therefore, every person on Earth at the start of the Millennium will be saved. However, as time goes by, more and more of them will refuse to repent or to follow Jesus, even though He is physically present on the Earth. We know that, because, at the end of the Millennium, a proportion of them will be incited by Satan to rebel against Jesus, until He crushes their rebellion:

⁷ When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. ⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (NASB)

At least some of us will be appointed to reign over the people who are in their mortal bodies during the Millennium

At any rate, the point is that during the Millennium one group of people over whom the Church, or at least parts of it, could reign, would be these believers who are still in their mortal bodies. They will be saved believers, at least at the start of the Millennium. However, they will not be part of that privileged group which we call '*the Church*'.

Resurrected Christians, in their eternal, indestructible resurrection bodies, will also be living on the Earth, alongside those believers who are still be in their mortal bodies. They will all live alongside each other, the resurrected and the mortal, in each of the nations.

Some of those who have been resurrected will be appointed by Jesus to govern some specified area, or to exercise some particular function. However, the implication is that they cannot *all* reign, because if that was so, then over whom would anybody reign? Just as at present, there will have to be rulers and also those who are ruled over.

Therefore those reigning, even if they are numerous in absolute terms, would still be a minority, just as they are now. How could it be otherwise? However, authority will not only be exercised over geographical areas, with people appointed to lead villages, towns, countries and nations. There will also be a need for people to lead and have authority over particular functions or offices, just as we have today.

So, somebody will have to be appointed by Jesus to be in charge of transport, education, agriculture and so on. There will need to be similar functions at local or regional levels too. Thus there will be scope for vast numbers of people to at least be put in charge of something, at some level. That's because there will be so many different things to do, just as there are now.

Accordingly, the definition of the words 'rule' or 'reign' will need to be understood broadly. We can't assume that it only applies to kings and Prime Ministers, any more than it does now. For example, there are probably tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of people who rule or reign in some kind of way in the United Kingdom today.

It can't be said that only the Queen and the Government do so. I feel sure that the same will apply in the Kingdom of God. The leadership will be wide and varied and will be spread amongst a great many people, at local, regional and national levels.

Nonetheless, it would also seem inevitable that some of us will not reign at all, in any capacity, or that we will only reign at some very local, junior or subordinate level. That is some of us may exert a small amount of authority but only under others who have been appointed to higher, or even much higher, levels.

The Bible tells us specifically about the future role of King David. He will serve as Jesus' deputy, ruling over Israel.

At the very top, as the leading nation on Earth, will be Israel. That is where Jesus will reign, as King of Israel and of the whole Earth and universe. However, the resurrected King David will serve as Jesus' deputy. In addition, as we saw earlier in the passage from Matthew 19:27-30, the 12 apostles will also serve as rulers of the 12 tribes of Israel. They will presumably be serving under King David, i.e. my understanding is that they will be junior to him.

Let's look briefly at what the Bible says about the future roles of the resurrected King David. He will reign in Jerusalem with the title of '*prince*' and will perform a number of important functions. For example, he will serve in the new Temple that will be built in the Millennium. However, the LORD Himself, i.e. Jesus, will be in overall command:

²² therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken.

²⁵ *“I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.*

²⁸ They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. ³⁰ Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord God.

Ezekiel 34:22-30 (NASB)

Jeremiah also addresses this issue about David:

⁸ *“And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more make servants of them. ⁹ But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.*

Jeremiah 30:8-9 (RSV)

From the book of Isaiah we also learn that:

“....the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory.”

Isaiah 24:23(b) (RSV)

The passage above from Isaiah is a clear reference to Jesus Himself. It is He who will be the King in Israel. It does not mean David. Next, in Ezekiel, we are told that David will serve as a prince over the people of Israel forever:

²² *and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.*

²³ *They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.*

²⁴ *“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. ²⁵ They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. ²⁷ My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. ²⁸ And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.””*

Ezekiel 37:22-28 (NASB)

The person, referred to by Ezekiel as ‘the prince’ is King David, not Jesus

Some people think that the person referred to as David, or as the prince, is actually Jesus Himself, i.e. reigning in His capacity as the Son of David. However, that cannot be right. The book of Ezekiel says many things about this person which make it quite clear that it is not referring to Jesus, but to David himself. For one thing, we are told of the various functions that David will perform in the Temple. These are clearly not suitable for Jesus to perform:

It shall be the prince's part to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel."

Ezekiel 45:17 (NASB)

The person referred to as the prince is not Jesus. We know that because we are told that he also provides an offering *for himself*, which Jesus would have no need, or reason, to do. Moreover, it says that the offering is made *to* the LORD, not *by* the LORD:

²¹ *"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. ²² On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering. ²³ During the seven days of the feast he shall provide as a burnt offering to the Lord seven bulls and seven rams without blemish on every day of the seven days, and a male goat daily for a sin offering. ²⁴ He shall provide as a grain offering an ephah with a bull, an ephah with a ram and a hin of oil with an ephah. ²⁵ In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the oil."*

Ezekiel 45:21-25 (NASB)

Moreover, we are told that the prince will *worship*. That would be entirely appropriate for David to do, but not really for Jesus:

The prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate. Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening.

Ezekiel 46:2 (NASB)

The position is made even clearer by this next passage which refers to the prince's *inheritance* and to the fact that he has *sons* who share that inheritance with him. Therefore it must mean the resurrected David and his resurrected sons, because Jesus has no sons to share anything with:

¹⁶ *'Thus says the Lord God, "If the prince gives a gift out of his inheritance to any of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. ¹⁷ But if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince. His inheritance shall be only his sons'; it shall belong to them. ¹⁸ The prince shall not take from the people's inheritance, thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give his sons inheritance from his own possession so that My people will not be scattered, anyone from his possession."*

Ezekiel 46:16-18 (NASB)

We can be quite certain that 'the prince' is the literal King David and that Ezekiel is not referring to Jesus

The strongest argument of all is that throughout chapter 48, we are told of areas of land which will be allocated to David the prince and also of various other parcels of land that will be given to others. This clearly means David, not Jesus, since He inherits the whole universe, not just particular parcels of land, however large they might be:

²¹ *"The remainder shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy allotment and of the property of the city; in front of the 25,000 cubits of the allotment toward the east border and westward in front of the 25,000 toward the west border, alongside the portions, it shall be for the prince. And the holy allotment and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the middle of it. ²² Exclusive of the property of the Levites and the property of the city, which are in the middle of that which*

belongs to the prince, everything between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin shall be for the prince.

Ezekiel 48:21-22 (NASB)

We see therefore that the resurrected David will have a very major role to play, ruling and reigning over the Jewish people. He will do so as the Deputy to Jesus, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. David's duties and privileges will clearly be extensive.

The position will be similar, for those resurrected Christians who will be appointed to rule and reign in various ways, and in various places, throughout the Gentile world. So, David's appointment to this role illustrates how we too have the opportunity to be given positions of power and authority, albeit at a lower level than David.

It will be fascinating to watch all of that take shape and to see these great figures from the history of the Church who will be resurrected and given leading roles in the Gentiles nations. One assumes that men like John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, William Carey, James Hudson Taylor and many others are likely to be in high positions.

That said, we can't be absolutely sure, even for them, and will need to find out when the time comes. There will also be many other believers whose lives impressed Jesus, even though we have never heard of them. We may therefore be in for some real surprises when we find out who our new leaders are going to be. There will also be some big surprises about those who are *not* going to be in senior positions in the Kingdom of God, even though they were very famous Christians in this life.

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT OF REWARDS AND COMMENDATIONS

*Behold, the LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:
Say to the daughter of Zion,
“Behold, your salvation comes;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.”
Isaiah 62:11 (RSV)*

*⁷ But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.”
2 Chronicles 15:7 (NASB)*

*⁶ But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is,
and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)*

**Commendations and rewards of various levels and types will be given to those who please Jesus,
by their obedience, faithfulness and fruit**

We know that some people are going to be rewarded and commended, by Jesus:

*The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”
Revelation 11:18 (ESV)*

*For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends.
2 Corinthians 10:18 (RSV)*

It is self-evident that some people will be commended more than others. At any rate, there is no reason to suppose that the commendation will be the same for everyone. The Bible never says so. Indeed, it would be extraordinary if it did, because we have obviously all done different things and have served with differing levels of faithfulness and fruitfulness. For example, consider what Jesus says about those who are reviled and persecuted on account of Him:

*¹¹ “Blessed are you when men 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 men
persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Matthew 5:11-12 (RSV)

Surely, nobody will argue that in this life all Christians are equally reviled and persecuted. Indeed, such things are not experienced at all by some of us. Some Christians face terrible persecution, and even martyrdom, whereas others face much less or even none.

For Jesus' words to be meaningful it must follow that differing levels of reward and authority will be given to each of us, dependent on the nature, intensity and duration of the persecution we have endured on His behalf.

As with the many other types of reward, this one, which is referred to in Matthew chapter five above, must be given out at different levels. Moreover, given that the reward itself is described as “*great*”, there is evidently going to be a major difference between those who receive it in full and those who receive none of it at all. Otherwise, why say that it is great?

We need to take a balanced approach to the Judgment Seat, and focus on both the negative and the positive aspects of it

So far I have focused mainly on those aspects of the Judgment that ought to cause us to be apprehensive. I have done so partly to redress the balance, because most churches do not even mention, let alone emphasise, any of this. In so far as they do ever mention judgment, they generally only promote complacency about it, rather than any reverence or concern.

However, we do need to have an element of fear about the prospect of being judged. We are *meant* to be apprehensive to some degree. Nevertheless, as well as fearing the judgment, we also need to emphasise the fact that rewards of many different types and levels will be awarded to those who are deemed to deserve them.

We must try to look at it from both directions, considering both the negative and the positive aspects. If not we will become unbalanced. So, let's consider several more verses where we are assured that rewards are going to be given to some of us.

Note how often this issue of rewards comes up in the Scriptures. Even this brief selection of verses in the pages that follow is enough to justify regarding it as a major theme.

*A wicked man earns deceptive wages,
but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward
Proverbs 11:18 (RSV)*

*But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.
2 Chronicles 15:7 (NASB)*

This positive dimension to the Judgment Seat of Christ, i.e. the prospect of receiving rewards, ought also to interest and motivate us. It is an essential part of God's generous character, as well as being an aspect of His justice, that He wants to reward people where rewards are due.

He does not do it reluctantly, but willingly, because it is His nature to do so. We even see it early in the book of Genesis in His dealings with Abraham (then called Abram):

*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."
Genesis 15:1 (RSV)*

So, Abraham was told the same as Jesus told the disciples, i.e. that the reward will be ‘great’. This point is repeated again by King David in the Psalms:

*Oh, how great is Your goodness,
Which You have laid up for those who fear You,
Which You have prepared for those who trust in You
In the presence of the sons of men!*

Psalm 31:19 (NKJV)

***The prophet Isaiah also speaks of there being rewards:
Behold, the Lord God will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.***

Isaiah 40:10 (NASB)

We are also told about how God rewards people in the letter to the Hebrews:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

Jesus Himself also tells us from His own mouth of how He will recompense or repay *every man*, both good and bad, for their deeds in this life:

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.

Matthew 16:27 (NASB)

Jesus tells us that this will apply to every man. He does not limit it only to the wicked. Therefore, every single one of us, without exception, will have to face Him as a Judge. He is going to repay both the good and the bad for what they have done.

See also what Jesus said concerning the question of being “repaid” for our good deeds. He says this will happen at the “*resurrection of the just*”, so He plainly isn’t referring to the Great White Throne judgment:

¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Luke 14:12-14 (ESV)

The relevance of the parable of the householder in Matthew 20 to the way in which the Judgment Seat will operate

If it is true that we are going to be unequal in the next life, with different levels of rewards and treasure, then what are we to make of the parable of the householder in Matthew chapter 20? He paid each of his servants the same, irrespective of whether they worked a full day or only one hour. Does that therefore contradict the idea of there being unequal levels of reward at the Judgment? Let’s examine the passage:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴ and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. ⁵ Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and

pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder,¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?’¹⁴ Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you.¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Matthew 20:1-16 (RSV)

To understand this parable properly we also need to focus on what comes before it, i.e. in the last verse of Chapter 19, which reads as follows:

*But many that are first will be last, and the last first.
Matthew 19:30 (RSV)*

To prevent us from overlooking this statement, the same point is repeated again at the end of the parable:

*So the last will be first, and the first last.
Matthew 20:16 (RSV)*

As I understand it, the main point of the parable is that the mere *length* of our service to Jesus is not the decisive factor in determining the level of our reward. So, someone who is granted a long life of 90 years cannot assume that he will necessarily receive a greater reward than another believer whose life as a believer only lasted 90 days or 90 hours or 90 seconds. The length of the service, in itself, is not the issue.

Instead it is the nature, quality, effect and fruitfulness of that service that really counts, however long or short it may have been. Therefore, many who began to serve Jesus earlier, and served for longer, may find themselves, in the end, being equal to, or even lower than, those who began later and served Him for a shorter time. Indeed, their positions might easily be reversed.

That may sound like bad news to those who have served Jesus for decades. However, it is good news for those who only discover the Gospel late in life, or who are not granted a long life and are called upon to die young or even to be martyrs.

A classic example of this point would be to look at the contributions made by two very remarkable men who were close friends in their youth and who were both greatly used by God. They were Jim Elliot and Dave Hunt, who were students together.

However, Jim Elliot died as a martyr at the age of 28 trying to bring the Gospel to the Auca Indians in South America. Conversely, Dave Hunt lived to be 86 and had a long and faithful ministry. Obviously, neither you nor I are qualified to judge either of these men. Only Jesus can do that, but the point is that the mere fact that they each served Jesus for different lengths of time will not be what determines their respective rewards. They will be judged on the basis of what they did *in the time they were given*.

Therefore it is perfectly possible that the one who served for a shorter time could receive the same, or even a greater, reward if his service, though short, was equally faithful or more faithful than the one who served for seven decades. So, this parable does not contradict what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 19 and elsewhere. How could it? It actually complements it and clarifies it and is completely consistent with the fact of there being differing levels of rewards.

The rewards that Jesus will give out will be real and tangible – the Bible calls them treasures. They are not just metaphors or poetic language.

Very few people talk about the ‘rewards’ or ‘treasures’ that await us, both in Heaven and on the Earth, when we are resurrected. Even fewer people ever preach on this theme. However, whenever the subject is mentioned it is generally treated as something vague, nebulous and ‘airy fairy’.

That is the rewards are usually spoken of as if they weren’t real or physical, but only some kind of metaphor, expressed in poetic language. I feel unable to go along with that. As I see it, we are meant to take these things literally and to see them as real, tangible, physical things.

In fact, we are meant to take the prospect of treasures just as literally as we take, or should take, the prospect of our being resurrected. I don’t want a metaphorical resurrection body. I want a real one. Likewise, I want, and expect, to receive, real treasures too. They are spoken of here in Proverbs:

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

Proverbs 22:4 (RSV)

We would all find it easier to take the rewards seriously, and to give them the emphasis and attention which they deserve, if we began to see them as real and literal things. If you aren’t currently doing that, and are struggling to come to terms with the idea, why not simply ask God to help you to see them as real and to take them literally?

It will be a big step forward and will transform the way you respond to the promises of rewards and the way you see the whole Judgment Seat of Christ. The Bible does not spell out in any detail what all the various rewards will be or even how many levels or types of reward there are.

In fact, we are given surprisingly little information and certainly less than we would like. That said, we are given enough information to enable us at least to reach the following conclusions:

- a) that the rewards are real and tangible
- b) that they are very good
- c) that we are meant to desire them and to pursue them eagerly
- d) that they are intended to be incentives and are supposed to motivate us

King David speaks in Psalm 31 of the ‘goodness’ which God has ‘laid up’ or stored away, for those who fear Him. I believe that that is clearly a future reward. At least it includes an element of reward:

***O how abundant is thy goodness,
which thou hast laid up for those who fear thee,
and wrought for those who take refuge in thee,
in the sight of the sons of men!***

Psalm 31:19 (RSV)

One of the most tangible rewards is the Jewish believers’ right to dwell in the Land of Israel, but also the land which will be allocated to Gentile Christians elsewhere

One very tangible reward that is clearly spoken of is the right to possess the Land of Israel and to dwell upon it forever. We know that the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were promised

the Land that we now call Israel. However, God said that although their ownership of that Land was eternal and unconditional, their actual enjoyment of it and the right to live in it was conditional.

That is why they were exiled from it at various times, because they were not faithful. However, we are told in Psalms that the 'righteous' shall do more than merely own the Land. They shall possess it and *dwell upon* it forever:

*²⁸ For the LORD loves justice;
he will not forsake his saints.
The righteous shall be preserved for ever,
but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.
²⁹ The righteous shall possess the land,
and dwell upon it for ever.*

Psalms 37:28-29 (RSV)

Thus those Israelites or Jews who have been faithful will be able to dwell in the Land of Israel forever. What else can that mean other than that they will be resurrected? How else could they be enabled to live in the Land of Israel eternally, without ever being exiled from it again and without any fear of invasion or expulsion? That prospect alone is an enormous reward for the Jewish people.

Moreover, it is real and literal. It is not a mere metaphor or figure of speech. However, what about those of us who are Gentiles? Will we have any land in our own countries outside of Israel? Will we have a physical, tangible reward of that kind? I believe that we will.

For one thing, those of us who are saved are going to be given resurrection bodies. We will then be able to live eternally on the Earth. So, we will have to be allocated some land somewhere. To begin with that will be during the 1000 year period we call the Millennium. However, after that, God will create a new Earth and we will be able to live on that eternally.

Consider these famous passages but, as you do, reflect on the fact that each of these requires there to be a literal, physical Earth for us to live upon with real land, cities, rivers, trees and gates. It is speaking of real places and we need to see them as real:

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6 (ESV)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the

water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Revelation 21:1-7 (ESV)

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:22-27 (ESV)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servant will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-5 (ESV)

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Revelation 22:14-15 (ESV)

Is it wrong to desire rewards and to seek for them?

Some people have told me that we should not actually *seek* for rewards. They suggest that there is something grasping, or even worldly, about *wanting* to be rewarded. They therefore maintain that we should do good things for their own sake, with no thought of any rewards that we might get in return.

A phrase often used about this, and also about spiritual gifts, is that we should “*Seek the Giver, not the gift.*” On the face of it, that is an impressive soundbite and has a religious ring to it. However it is not biblical. In fact it is rather silly.

It could even be said to be an implicit criticism of God Himself for the way He has decided to operate and the way He has chosen to incentivise and reward us. If He had not wanted us to be motivated by the desire for rewards, He would not have told us to be. Indeed, He would not have set up such a system in the first place.

Consider this intriguing passage from 1 Timothy in which apostle Paul speaks of people doing good deeds and being generous etc and thereby “*storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future....*” The clear implication is that there will be rewards and Paul evidently intends for us to seek to lay up these treasures and to seek to acquire them for ourselves:

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)

Note also the way that apostle Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of how he is seeking to receive an imperishable wreath, i.e. a garland, like an athlete receives. I don’t know whether or not Jesus will

actually place literal wreaths around our necks. They could be either literal or metaphorical. That said, my own personal view is that they will be literal.

However, the operative point is that they indicate Jesus' public recognition and approval of our lives as disciples. Apostle Paul clearly has no qualms about saying that he *wants* such a wreath or garland to be placed around his neck. He is neither shy, nor embarrassed, about saying so openly:

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; ²⁷but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (RSV)

The blunt, straightforward attitude that apostle Peter had to the rewards he hoped to receive

It is helpful also to look at the attitude that apostle Peter had towards rewards. More importantly, we need to look at how Jesus responded when Peter expressed his desire for those rewards and treasures.

Consider again this important passage from Matthew chapter 19. Jesus has just met the rich young ruler and has told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor and then he will have treasures in Heaven. This first section sets the scene:

¹⁶And behold, one came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" ¹⁷And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ²⁰The young man said to him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" ²¹Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

²²When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. ²³And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:16-26 (RSV)

The important point, for our present purposes, is what apostle Peter says next. He has just heard Jesus saying that those who sell their possessions and give to the poor will have treasures in Heaven. Peter is not the slightest bit coy or subtle about this. He asks Jesus directly about what he and the other apostles are therefore going to get, because they had given up everything to follow Jesus:

Then Peter said in reply, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?"
Matthew 19:27 (RSV)

Note Jesus' reaction when Peter speaks so bluntly and gets straight to the point about what he and the other apostles are going to receive. Jesus is not shocked and He does not rebuke Peter or tell him that he is being vulgar or selfish. He is not critical of, or censorious towards, Peter in any way. Jesus just answers his question in a straightforward manner.

He does not imply that Peter has done anything wrong by asking that question, or by desiring rewards. On the contrary, Jesus' reply firstly underlines the fact that rewards and treasure will be given out at the Judgment. Secondly, He makes it plain that He expects and wants us to *desire* those things and to *seek* for them:

²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many that are first will be last, and the last first.

Matthew 19:28-30 (RSV)

Therefore, we need to reject any suggestion that there is something grasping or 'unchristian' about seeking for future rewards. Jesus obviously didn't hold that view, so why should we? Consider this next passage from Luke, where Jesus Himself instructs us to provide for ourselves a 'purse' or stockpile of treasure in Heaven.

He plainly wants us to focus on amassing such a store of *treasure in Heaven*, as opposed to here on Earth, in this life. That is because, wherever our treasure is, that is where our heart will be also. We can clearly take it that during this life, Jesus wants us to have our hearts focused on Heaven. Moreover, He also considers it to be right and proper for us to *want* to store up treasure for ourselves there:

²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. ³² "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses 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 12:29-34 (RSV)

Even if it is alright to seek for rewards, is it appropriate for us to desire senior roles or positions in the Kingdom of God?

We might by now be persuaded to believe that it is alright to seek for rewards, but what about seeking for *senior roles or positions* in the Kingdom of God? Is it right or wrong for us to do that? Let's look again at the passage we saw earlier in this chapter from Mark chapter ten.

That is where James and his brother John caused some indignation among the other apostles by asking to be given two very senior positions in the Kingdom of God. They wanted to be appointed to be the ones who will sit at Jesus' left and right hand side when He sits on His future throne.

This time let's focus on the later part of that account, i.e. on what Jesus Himself said in reply to the other apostles when they got angry at James and John for making what they evidently thought was an inappropriate request:

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:41-45 (NIV)

Note that Jesus says something very significant in verses 43 and 44. I have made the font bold in order to emphasise some of His words which are often overlooked. He says:

“...whoever **wants to become great** among you shall be your servant....”

He then goes on to say:

“...and whoever **wants to be first** must be slave of all...”

I have often heard people focus on the second half of what Jesus says, i.e. about being a servant/slave but most seem to ignore the first half. People can see immediately that a Christian must aim to be a *servant*. However, very few notice that Jesus was also saying that it is an acceptable *motive* for being such a servant that we wish to be:

- a) ‘*great*’, i.e. that we hope to be promoted into an important role in His Kingdom, and/or
- b) ‘*first*’ i.e. in the sense of being senior, powerful or influential.

Jesus did not say, or even imply, that it is wrong to seek for seniority and for an important role in His future Kingdom. There is no basis whatsoever for drawing any such inference from Jesus’ words. On the contrary, what we can validly deduce from His words is surely as follows:

- a) Some people will aim to be appointed to high positions and to be great, first, senior, powerful etc in Jesus’ future kingdom.
- b) There is nothing wrong with wanting such positions or roles or seniority in the future, i.e. *in His Kingdom*.
- c) Indeed, far from seeing it as wrong, Jesus is plainly endorsing such ambition. He wants us to aim to be in a high position in His Kingdom, i.e. *in the next life*.
- d) However, there is potentially something wrong with seeking for such power or seniority *in this life*.
- e) Such seniority *in the next life* is obtained by humbling oneself *in this life* and by being willing to be the servant or slave of all. In other words, we obtain the highest places in the *next* life by being prepared to serve in the lowest places in *this* life and by being obedient to do what Jesus calls us to do for Him.

Therefore Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to seek seniority in the next life. On the contrary, He is assuming that we will want that. He is simply telling us *how* such seniority can be acquired or earned. Therefore it is clear that we are *meant* to seek to receive it, albeit only in the next life, not in this life.

Accordingly, Jesus’ words cannot be used as any authority for the idea that we *shall* all be equal, or even that we should all *want* to be equal, in the next life. He is actually saying the very opposite and instructing us as to where our emphasis should be, i.e. on the next life, not on this.

Therefore we must not be super-spiritual or pretentious. We must not feel obliged to speak as though we want nothing and expect nothing in the next life. At any rate, we must not suggest that the Bible advocates such an approach, because it doesn’t. It actually says the very opposite.

The letter to the Hebrews puts it entirely beyond doubt that God wants us to desire, and seek for, rewards

Perhaps the most powerful evidence for the fact that God *wants* us to seek for rewards is found in the letter to the Hebrews:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

This verse makes a surprising and even remarkable statement, which few people seem to notice. We are told that *in order to come to God* we must believe:

- a) that He *is*, i.e. that He exists, and
- b) that He is a *rewarder* of those who diligently seek Him

The first requirement is hardly surprising, i.e. that we need to believe that God exists. However, the second one may come as a surprise to some of us if we pause to think about it. Have you ever noticed before that the Bible says that we are *required* to believe that God rewards people?

Indeed, believing that is even presented here as a pre-condition to being allowed to come to God? That is a very heavy statement to make. Yet, as with so many other things in the Bible, it is rarely ever preached on. At the very least, we can draw the following conclusions from this unusual verse:

- a) God *does* reward certain people.
- b) There is *nothing wrong* with Him doing so. This should not even need to be said. However, in view of the disapproving tone that some people adopt in relation to the whole subject of rewards, it probably is necessary to say it.
- c) We are *required* to believe that He rewards such people.
- d) If God gives rewards, He must be *right* to do so, given that everything He does is right.
- e) If it is right for Him to give rewards then we should *approve* of the rewards and of His system for giving them.
- f) If we approve of the rewards, and of God's system for giving them, then it would be absurd for us to then say that we *don't desire* them, and are *not seeking* to be given, those rewards.
- g) In short, we are quite obviously meant to approve of, value and seek for, the rewards that God gives.

An even more surprising fact, for some, is that God also wants us to seek for glory and honour

We are to have no truck with those who suggest that we should speak disapprovingly of God's system of honours and rewards, or act as if these things did not exist. God not only wants us to seek rewards. He expects and wants us to seek '*glory*' and '*honour*' as well.

We might argue about what the precise definition of '*glory*' may be. However, one fact which seems undeniable is that God *wants* us to seek for it. In fact, in this next verse, Jesus actually criticises people for *not* seeking for glory from God:

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

John 5:44 (ESV)

Apostle Paul also makes an important statement in his letter to the Romans. It concerns our pursuit of glory and honour for ourselves. Paul makes it unmistakably clear that God approves of those who seek for these things and that He even rewards them for doing so:

For he will render to every man according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

Romans 2:6-7 (RSV)

It is quite obviously not considered to be wrong for us to seek either glory or honour. Otherwise, God would not grant us these things or reward us for seeking them. Therefore we can safely conclude that God fully expects us to seek for both glory and honour. However, that means the kind of glory and honour that will apply in the *next* life and which will be given out at the Judgment Seat.

We are not meant to seek them in *this* life. So, if we are to seek for glory and honour, we must define them accurately. Otherwise, we could make the mistake of seeking for fame and celebrity status of the kind for which this world craves.

That is not what God means by urging us to seek for glory or honour. He means that we should seek for His approval, commendation and promotion. The ultimate glory and honour for a Christian is to hear the words “*Well done good and faithful servant*” being said to us publicly by Jesus at the Judgment Seat.

That is what glory and honour mean in this context and we are meant to want them both and to seek them both. To want God’s rewards, and to desire glory as well, is neither improper nor grasping. They are God’s way of recognising those people who have done well, and also of motivating us to do our best.

It does not please, or honour, God when some Christians say that merely getting to Heaven at all is enough for them and that they aren’t seeking for any rewards

God is totally realistic about us. He wants us to aim high and to achieve everything that we can to serve Him. We are also to help each other, while we have the chance, during our brief time on this Earth. Jesus Himself refers to these rewards as being *treasures* and He actually commands us to *lay them up*.

That means to earn them and store them for ourselves in Heaven. How much clearer could He be than that? He is positively *telling* us to seek for these rewards and to try to build up as big a stockpile of them as we can, as if we were saving up in the ‘Bank of Heaven’. He is not merely *willing* for us to seek His rewards. He *wants* us to seek them.

Indeed, He directly tells us to do so. That surely exposes the foolishness of us having any kind of inverted snobbery about the desire for rewards. People sometimes say: “*I’m not looking for any rewards. Just getting to heaven will be enough for me*”. That’s presumably supposed to sound spiritual and modest. However, anybody talking like that is really just being foolish.

At the very least, they are not accurately reflecting the way that Jesus approaches this issue. They may even be implicitly criticising Jesus for having told us to seek these rewards. In any case, anybody who thinks there is something improper or greedy about wanting to obtain as many rewards as we can, needs to argue about that with Jesus, not me. Better still, don’t argue at all, because the rewards are His idea:

¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:19-21 (RSV)

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. 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 12:29-34 (ESV)

Note that in Luke 12:29-31 above, Jesus uses the words “*these things*” to refer to both of the following things:

- a) the things we are commanded not to seek in this world, i.e. material things
- b) the things that will be added to us in His Kingdom

Therefore it surely follows that *material things* will be a part of what is given to us in the future i.e. in return for our being willing to relinquish material things in this life. The point is that what is being promised to us sounds distinctly tangible and material rather than spiritual. At any rate, it sounds just as material as the things we are commanded *not* to pursue in this life.

My point is that we should not feel squeamish or embarrassed about wanting to receive material blessings and rewards in Jesus’ *future Kingdom*. It is not wrong to do so. If it was wrong, then Jesus would not have spoken as He did, or promised these things to us. Neither would He give them to us at all, because He would hardly give us something which He thinks we ought not to want.

Returning to the question of whether it is right or wrong to seek for rewards, is also noteworthy that Nehemiah had no qualms about asking God to remember and reward the good things he had done for Israel. He knew he had done what God had wanted him to do and that he was eligible to receive rewards for his faithful service.

He clearly wanted those rewards and did not hesitate to ask God for them. Nehemiah evidently wasn’t so ‘super spiritual’ as to not want God’s rewards, or to be unwilling to ask for them. On the contrary, like apostle Peter, Nehemiah got straight to the point when asking God about his future reward:

Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.
Nehemiah 5:19 (ESV)

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

Nehemiah 13:14 (ESV)

My assumption is that ‘treasure’ means literal treasure, but even if it is a metaphor, it stands for something very good and I want it

Whatever the word *treasure* might mean exactly, we are entitled to assume that it has got to be at least as good, and presumably better than, what we generally regard as treasure in this world. Jesus did not use words lightly or carelessly. He intended to convey to us the clear message that these rewards are very good indeed.

Moreover, He obviously intends for us to aim to get, and keep, as many of them as we can. If not, He would not have told us to lay them up for ourselves in Heaven. They may be stored up for us in Heaven, but these rewards will mainly be had/kept/enjoyed in the future on this *physical Earth*, rather than in Heaven. Therefore it is all the more reasonable to conclude that the rewards will be real and tangible.

Indeed, given that Jesus uses the very word *treasure*, it should not surprise us if they were to include, at least in some way, a literal financial element. It may well be that in Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom, and

even in the eternal state thereafter, there could be some form of money or wealth. There will certainly be land and property. We know that because we are going to be living on this physical earth.

Perhaps some or all of these material things will be given to us? Why not? It is going to be a physical existence on the Earth. There is going to be land and property to distribute at the start of the Millennium and there will be infinite scope for wealth to be created thereafter, even more so than on the Earth today.

There will be nations during the Millennium, with rapidly growing populations, and there will inevitably have to be commerce, industry, farming etc for their sake. How could those natural, material things *not* exist in a physical world in which everyone will have physical bodies and will require food, housing, transport, goods etc?

Such things will all be needed. In that case, why should there not also be money? There will have to be some means by which exchanges and trade can be made possible. Personally I would expect money and wealth to continue to exist in forms very similar to what we have now. At any rate, there is no reason to suppose that they won't exist.

Certainly, there is no biblical authority, at least none that I know of, for saying that they won't. The main reason why I spend so much time emphasising that treasure may have a literal meaning is because most people automatically assume that it doesn't. But why should they assume that? If Jesus had wanted to say that the rewards were purely intangible or metaphorical, He would have used some other word and would have made Himself clear.

We should ordinarily lean towards taking Jesus literally. Therefore we should assume, until we are clearly told to do otherwise, that the rewards will involve an element of what we would now call land, treasure or wealth of some kind. However, even if the treasure is not literal, and is only a metaphor for something intangible, we can still be sure that whatever is represented by that metaphor would be good enough to be worthy of the word *treasure* anyway.

If so, then it is a distinction without a difference. Therefore there is no basis for any super-spirituality or inverted snobbery. Neither can one validly say that there is anything sordid or greedy about seeking to obtain rewards from Jesus. At any rate, whatever those rewards are going to be, I want them. Moreover, I hope to be able to amass as much, and as many, of them as I can.

If Jesus has good things to award then I certainly want them, and I want all of them. Why shouldn't I, and why shouldn't you? We would be fools not to want them, quite apart from being disobedient and dismissive about the things Jesus is saying to us. Moreover, we should not be shy or awkward about *saying* that we are seeking for these rewards. It should not be regarded as some kind of guilty secret.

So, don't be super-spiritual and don't have any false humility about rewards. We should all seek them unashamedly, and let others know that we are doing so. We should say it openly, and without apology. If not, we run the risk of confusing others and giving them the false impression that it is wrong or selfish to seek rewards, and that they ought not to be desired or pursued.

We will be judged on a wide range of different criteria

The Judgment Seat of Christ is certainly going to be very complicated. None of us could ever manage to do the mathematical calculations that will be involved in it. We couldn't even judge one person accurately and fairly. We could not take into account all the right issues with the correct weightings, discounts, multipliers and mitigating factors, quite apart from being unable to know other people's motives.

However, Jesus will take into account all of those variables, and many others too. I have pondered on this and have looked for verses in the Bible that speak about Jesus' criteria for judging us and how He will make decisions about allocating rewards.

His criteria (i.e. the factors and standards by which He will assess and evaluate us) would appear to include at least the following broad principles and issues that are set out below. No doubt there are many others too. The next three chapters are intended to be just a brief and simplified summary of some (not all) of the many different ways in which He will assess us.

CHAPTER 5

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

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

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

*great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings;
Jeremiah 32:19 (RSV)*

*Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?
Romans 2:3 (RSV)*

*⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.
Romans 2:9-11 (RSV)*

*And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.
1 Peter 1:17 (RSV)*

*For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.
Matthew 16:27 (RSV)*

*For he will render to every man according to his works:
Romans 2:6 (RSV)*

The criteria by which we are going to be judged

In this chapter I shall attempt to draw together as many as possible of the passages that I see in the Bible which touch upon the question of how we will be assessed. These seem to me to be at least some of the main criteria by which Jesus will measure us. Therefore it surely makes sense for us to know what these criteria are and to ponder them carefully.

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

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

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

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

John 15:16 (NASB)

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

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

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

There are infinite types of fruit that we could produce for God. It depends on what He has called us to do and what interests, giftings and opportunities He gave us. However, the simplest, most obvious types of fruit are those listed by apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

They are character qualities which we are meant to develop. Those are fruit which we can be quite sure we are all required to produce. However, there are many other types of fruit too, besides these:

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

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

'Fruit' does not just mean output or productivity, measured objectively, without regard to whether it's what Jesus wanted us to produce. It has to be the things that Jesus *wanted* us to do. Why should He give credit for anything else?

If we race around doing things that He never asked us to do, then how can we expect Him to reward us? Such things would not be fruit, but merely the *litter* or *debris* that our lives generated. Or you could say they are like cancer cells or weeds growing where they are not meant to grow.

They would be purely the product of our own willful ideas or even disobedience, and we cannot expect any reward for those things. What Jesus will look for is how much real, genuine fruit we produced, in *obedience* to Him, and of the kind that He *wanted*.

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

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

By doing so He will get all of us, in the end, on a level playing field. So, for example, if person A has 100 units of ability and produces 100 units of fruit, and person B has 10 units of ability and produces 10 units of fruit, then they have both achieved the same result. That's because the *proportions* are the same and they have the same *rate of return*.

However, if person B had produced 11 units of fruit then he would have done better than person A in *relative terms*, i.e. when the differences in their respective levels of talents are taken into account and allowed for. Jesus states part of this principle in the next passage from Luke:

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

Luke 12:48(b) (ESV)

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

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

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

Matthew 25:14-28 (ESV)

The above passage from Matthew illustrates the principle of *proportionality*, i.e. that each person will be judged on the basis of what they did with what they were *given*. It is the *relative* proportions, or the percentage rate of return on God's investment in us that will count, not the amount we achieve in absolute terms.

So the man who has been given five talents to begin with is expected to make five more. Therefore more is expected of him, in absolute terms, than of the man who only had two talents to begin with. But the same is expected of each of them in relative or proportional terms.

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

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

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

This tendency to do nothing with their abilities and opportunities is frequently found among those who think they have not got much to begin with. They imagine that they do not have anything worthwhile to offer. So they choose to do nothing at all with their small or solitary talent. That said, there are also lots of highly talented people with multiple gifts who don't use what they have, or who don't use their talents to produce the right kind of things that Jesus wants.

They too are in danger of being rebuked at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In short, we are all in the same boat. We must all fully use whatever talents and opportunities we have, regardless of how big, or small, or few, these happen to be. Therefore, none of us are in an advantaged or disadvantaged position in relation to anybody else when it comes to measuring our fruitfulness.

So, whatever type or quantity or level of talent you have been given, God wants you to use *all* of it to serve Him and to serve other people. It also needs to be said, for the avoidance of doubt, that nobody will be rewarded simply for being talented, clever or gifted. Such abilities, purely in themselves, are nothing to do with us.

Therefore we cannot possibly hope to be able to claim any credit for them. It would be like expecting Jesus to reward you for having beautiful blonde hair, or for having perfect pitch, or for being tall. Such features as those, if we have them, were simply given to us as a gift. They are not something that we have earned or made for ourselves.

In themselves, therefore, they cannot be any basis for rewards. Neither can their absence be any basis for criticism. All that Jesus will reward or rebuke us for is the *use, misuse, or non-use* that we make of those gifts. When you come to think about it, how could it be otherwise? Look how apostle Paul expresses this point:

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

1 Corinthians 4:7(b) (ESV)

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

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

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

Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

We are also told by Jesus Himself that His Word, which is now in written form within the Bible, will be our judge on the last day. In other words, we will be judged *according to* God's Word and by the *standards of* God's Word.

We will also be judged by reference to the degree to which we have listened to and taken note of God's Word. Therefore, in a very real sense, God's Word will itself be our judge. Accordingly, by reading it now and taking it seriously, we can become aware of how we will be judged, and by what standards and criteria:

⁴⁴ And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.

⁴⁵ And he who sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. ⁴⁷ If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 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 12:44-50 (RSV)

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

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

John 14:21-24 (RSV)

The truth is that your love for God Himself is no greater than your love for, and devotion to, His written Word, the Bible

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

They feel free to believe whatever they want to believe in place of what the Bible says. The person in question is 'religious' and a 'churchgoer' but sees no reason why they should be bound by what the Bible says. They said: "*If we love God then He will accept us and forgive us.*"

However, that approach is profoundly mistaken. There is no such thing as a love for God which exists apart from reverence for, and obedience to, His *written Word*. To imagine otherwise is self-delusion. In this regard, consider also what Jesus Himself said in Matthew's gospel about how a wise man who hears Jesus' words and does them is like a man who builds his house on the rock:

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

Matthew 7:24-27 (RSV)

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

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

Given that He has been so plain in telling us all of this, we must expect to be judged according to the extent to which we have read, studied, listened to, understood and obeyed His Word. Consider also this passage from Deuteronomy which sets out all the blessings which, under the Law of Moses, would come to the Jewish people if they would "*.....listen to the voice of the LORD....*"

It also sets out all the curses that will come upon them if they do not listen and obey. The way this word 'listen' is expressed in the original Hebrew is by the phrase "*listen listening*", i.e. "*....if you will listen listening...*". That's because the Hebrew form of emphasis, is to say the same word twice. It means to *really* listen, or to *hearken diligently*, as the King James version puts it:

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

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 (KJV)

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

Deuteronomy 28:13-15 (KJV)

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

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

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you;

let me not wander from your commandments!

*¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

*¹²Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!*

¹³With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

*¹⁴In the way of your testimonies
I delight as much as in all riches.*

*¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.*

*¹⁶I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.*

Psalm 119:9-16 (ESV)

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

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

³He is like a tree planted by streams

*of water that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.*

In all that he does, he prospers.

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

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

⁶*for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Psalm 1:1-6 (ESV)

Our devotion to God's Word will be assessed by reference to the extent to which we had access to it and whether we made full use of that access

Note also God's view of those who either *reject* or *despise* His Word, and what will happen to them. However, we must not complacently assume that this only applies to the people of Israel. The point being made here would apply to *any* person who despises God's Word.

Moreover, that does not just mean those who reject it outright, or refuse to read it at all. It may also mean those of us, especially in the affluent West, who do not make full use of our freedom and of the virtually unlimited opportunities that we have to study God's Word. The point is that many of us in the West have access to all the best teaching materials, commentaries and MP3s etc and yet we cannot be bothered to use them.

Our study of God's Word will surely be measured by reference to how much access we had to it and whether or not we used those opportunities fully. In this next passage Isaiah expresses how severely God intends to judge those Jewish people who rejected or despised His Word:

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

²⁵*Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people,
and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them,
and the mountains quaked;
and their corpses were as refuse
in the midst of the streets.*

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

Isaiah 5:24(b)-25 (ESV)

Another way in which we can believe in God and yet still despise His Word is when we read it or hear it read, or preached on, but then do not obey it or put it into practice. James tells us in his letter that we must be "*doers of the Word, and not hearers only*".

He is referring to those whose beliefs are merely passive and intellectual. Therefore their beliefs do not produce anything tangible, or result in any action being taken:

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

James 1:22-27 (ESV)

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

James 2:14-19 (ESV)

We shall also be judged on the basis of the extent to which we put man made traditions and customs ahead of God's own Word

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

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

*'This people honours me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'*

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

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

Mark 7:1-13 (RSV)

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

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

¹²*Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ¹³"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction*

and listen to my words? declares the LORD. ¹⁴The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me. ¹⁵I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, 'Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to you and your fathers.' But you did not incline your ear or listen to me.

¹⁶The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. ¹⁷Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered." ¹⁸But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, ¹⁹therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me." Jeremiah 35:12-19 (ESV)

Those who heard the prophets in person, and even heard Jesus Himself, will be judged more strictly, and so will we be, because of the ease with which we can have access to God's Word

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

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

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

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

Jeremiah 25:1-11 (ESV)

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

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

²⁰Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

Matthew 11:20-24 (NASB)

Obviously, that passage primarily relates to the unsaved, unbelieving people from those towns. Such people will go to the Great White Throne Judgment. However, it would be wise to assume that the same principle (though not the same outcome) also applies to those who will go to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

We will each be judged on the extent to which we obeyed that proportion of God's Word which we personally knew and understood. So, there are certainly advantages to be gained, and rewards to be obtained, from making the effort to study the Bible.

However, once we have done so, and have acquired some knowledge, we will each then be judged on whether we obeyed and put into practice whatever we have learned. So there's no room for complacency, no matter how well we know the Bible. The more we know, the more strictly we will be judged:

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

James 3:1 (ESV)

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

Many people give the impression of being successful, because they charge around, achieving lots of things wherever they go. However, they will only be rewarded if those things are what Jesus *asked* them to do. They will not be rewarded, or even praised, if they are just implementing their own ideas.

If so, then what they do is just the product of their own imagination or preferences. All that will really count in the end is that which was done in obedience to what we were *told* to do. Anything else is *sin* because it means we have done our own thing. If we do that, then, by definition, we have fallen short of God's standards:

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

Isaiah 30:1 (ESV)

Another way to put it is to say that you must build on the right foundation, which is Jesus. Try to make sure you do that, rather than building impulsively on the foundation of your own ideas or opinions, or out of a desire for independence:

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

1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NASB)

Therefore, if we lay any foundation other than Jesus, then whatever we build on it will not last and will not be rewarded. Everything must be done in Jesus' name, for His sake, and in response to His orders. Nothing must be done on our own authority, by our own initiative or in our own name. If we do, then it has no legitimacy.

We must therefore find out what God wants, and how He wants it done. Then we must limit ourselves to doing just those things. Anything else is a work of the flesh and we know that those who are in the flesh “*cannot please God*”:

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

Romans 8:5-8 (RSV)

It may be that He will want us to focus on fewer things than we currently get involved in. It could be that although we are busy doing lots of things, we haven't even started yet to do the things that *He* wants. Some of our current activities may therefore have to go in order to make time for what He does want.

If so, then do it – cut out whatever things He did not tell you to do. Instead, focus solely on what He does want you to get involved in. It is likely that many of the deeds that we consider good will gain us no reward because they were done presumptuously, independently, and of our own accord, rather than because God told us to do them.

That has been true of me countless times. I have tried to “help” God by doing what looked like good things, but they were things that He had never asked me to do. So, even if they were good, they will probably count for nothing and gain me no reward. Moreover, such things as those usually fizzle out and fail, whereas the things God asks us to do generally succeed and remain.

That's because He blesses them, whereas if we do something that is just our own idea, He probably won't bless it. It is like building a house without getting planning permission. It could be a good quality building, but it will still have to be knocked down by the council because they never authorised it in the first place.

Or imagine that you were a building contractor working on a large and complicated building site under the direction of an architect. Imagine that an architect had specifically told you *what* to build and *when* and exactly *where* he wanted each thing to be.

How would he react if you chose instead to make extra things, or larger things, or to put them in different places from where he had asked you to put them, or to build them in a different sequence from what he had specified? He would not be pleased, to put it very mildly. Far from rewarding you, he would quite possibly have to tear down what you had made and start again, either through you or someone else.

Therefore why should we expect God to react any differently if we charge ahead and do our own thing, rather than obeying His instructions? Accordingly, God will, in the end, have to tear down everything that was not built on His orders and with His approval.

All of this therefore begs the questions *how* can we avoid acting in the flesh and doing things in our own strength and how can we learn instead to hear God's voice and do what He wants? Please see chapter 8 below for a fuller discussion of these issues.

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

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

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

Matthew 7:1-2 (NASB)

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

Mark 4:24 (ESV)

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

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:13 (ESV)

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:7 (RSV)

So, if we are harsh, unyielding and unmerciful with others, demanding high standards from them and not allowing them any scope for error, or time to learn, then we can expect little or no mercy to be shown to us at the Judgment Seat. Therefore, when you are dealing with other people now you should look for all possible ways to be gracious.

Go out of your way to show other people mercy, to give second (and third) chances, and to allow flexibility and leeway. If we take that gracious and merciful approach with them, then we can expect the same approach to be taken with us by Jesus.

That said, it will not always be appropriate, or wise, to be entirely accommodating, or to show mercy or grace to the fullest conceivable extent on every issue. Sometimes wisdom will require us to be more guarded and to refrain from showing grace or mercy on certain points. Or it may be appropriate to show some grace and mercy, but only to a limited extent. It depends on all the facts and circumstances.

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

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 Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. ³⁶"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. ³⁸"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

Luke 6:35-38 (NASB)

Paul gives some very troubling warnings in Romans to those of us within the Church who are self-righteous and hypocritical

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

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

¹Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³Do you suppose, O man--you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself--that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Romans 2:1-8 (ESV)

We therefore need to take time to consider carefully whether we are treating others hypocritically, unmercifully or ungraciously and, if so, how? Also, from now on we need to think carefully before making pronouncements about how other people ought to behave, or how wrong or sinful they are.

Our own words about others and the wrong things which they say and do will be recorded and used as part of the basis for judging us. They will become part of the set of criteria by which we will be judged ourselves. Jesus may choose not to make any allowances, and not to take account of any mitigating factors that we, in this life, refused to apply to others who crossed us or disappointed us.

Therefore we would be well advised to start to demand less of others and to tolerate more. If we do, we have a reasonable basis to expect Jesus to take an equally patient and tolerant approach with us. The things spoken of above are generally actions and attitudes which go *beyond forgiveness*, i.e. by its narrowest definition.

We therefore need to forgive others, at least in the narrowest sense of the word, whereby we ‘recuse’ ourselves, step aside, and let Jesus judge the person, instead of judging them ourselves

At its most basic level, to ‘forgive’ another person for a wrong they have done to us simply means *stepping aside*, and refraining from judging or punishing them ourselves. It means leaving it to Jesus to judge them, instead of us.

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

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

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

In other words, the further we can go beyond basic, narrowly defined, forgiveness and progress into showing grace and mercy in a host of different ways, the better it will be for us. Now we come to an even more troubling part of this section. We need to look at what Jesus said about our specific duty to forgive other people and the fact that He will not forgive us if we do not forgive others:

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

Luke 6:37 (RSV)

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

Matthew 6:14-15 (NASB)

Moreover, He said we are to go on forgiving others (by the narrow, most basic definition of forgiveness) even when they wrong us repeatedly:

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

Matthew 18:21-22 (RSV)

The parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18 is very troubling and is directly relevant to us as Christians

What is even more troubling is the parable that Jesus told them in response to Peter’s question. It concerns an *unmerciful* servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant a small debt. Consequently his own master refused to forgive him a much larger debt.

Moreover, the master then hands him over to the jailors until he pays the debt himself. Alarming, Jesus tells us that His Father will do the same with us if we do not forgive others:

²³ *“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents;²⁵ and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’*

²⁹ *So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’*

³⁰ *He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; ³³ and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers till he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

Matthew 18:23-35 (RSV)

For a much fuller discussion of what forgiveness is (and what it isn't), why it matters, and how to do it in practical terms, please refer to Book 2 in this series. It contains a number of chapters on forgiveness which define forgiveness and examine, in some detail, the various different levels at which it can operate.

Those chapters in Book 2 also address other associated concepts, such as grace, mercy, clemency, magnanimity, peace, trust, reconciliation etc and distinguish these from basic forgiveness. These are all linked to forgiveness but they are also distinct, separate things in themselves and may not necessarily be required in order for our forgiveness of others to be genuine and complete.

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

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

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

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

Numbers 30:2 (RSV)

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

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (ESV)

⁴*When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶ Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?*

Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 (ESV)

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

Hosea 10:4 (ESV)

So, for example, if we promise to pray for someone, but do not actually do so, then we have broken a promise. That might be viewed by God as a vow. However, even if it isn't, it is still very important and God will expect you to abide by your promise. Therefore don't promise to pray for people. Just pray, for them, without ever promising to do anything.

However, if you do have to say something, to them, then just keep it low-key and don't make any promises. Nevertheless, if you have spoken, or have promised something, then it is a good idea to keep your word and do whatever you promised immediately. Do it *there and then*, while it is still fresh in your mind, and before you forget. That is what I now try to do.

Likewise, if you agree to give a gift of money, then make sure you give it. Don't forget, or fail to pay. Don't even delay paying. God will hold you accountable to pay in full and on time. For that reason, I do not like to enter into any longstanding commitments to give monthly or on any other regular basis.

I prefer to pay lump sums and get it all over with at the outset, so that there is no ongoing obligation or unpaid remainder that I need to remember about. In short, be very careful about what you say and what you promise. Otherwise you may find that when you get to the Judgment, Jesus presents you with a long list of unpaid gifts, broken vows and unfulfilled promises of prayer or support.

Therefore, do all you can now to avoid your own words being quoted back at you, as a basis for rebuking you. Ideally say nothing at all. Just *do* things, without saying or promising anything beforehand. If you must say something then keep it to a minimum and make sure you do what you agree to do.

Otherwise, every idle word that you have spoken (since you were converted) will be a basis for judging you on Judgment Day:

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

Matthew 12:36-37 (RSV)

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

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

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

1 Samuel 26:23 (NIV)

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

Proverbs 28:20 (RSV)

Real faithfulness is very unusual, even amongst mature Christians. Indeed, the Bible implies that it is one of the rarest personal qualities. That has certainly been my experience in business and as an employer, but also in churches. People who can be completely relied upon, and whose word is their bond, are very few and far between. Sadly, that is the case even within churches:

Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,

but a faithful man who can find?
Proverbs 20:6 (RSV)

***Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
look and take note!
Search her squares to see
if you can find a man,
one who does justice
and seeks truth;
that I may pardon her.
2 Though they say, "As the LORD lives,"
yet they swear falsely.***
Jeremiah 5:1-2 (RSV)

Therefore, we all need to examine ourselves. Where we see any evidence of unfaithfulness in our lives, then we must admit it, repent of it and ask God to help us to change. (See Book 2 which contains a number of chapters on faithfulness.)

Jesus also wants us to be faithful to other people, not only to Him. For example, He wants us to be loyal to our friends when they need us, even when times are hard, or they are in trouble, such that to stay alongside them is costly, or inconvenient, or may make us unpopular:

***A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.***
Proverbs 17:17 (ESV)

***A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.***
Proverbs 18:24 (ESV)

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

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

Deuteronomy 25:13-16 (ESV)

***A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
but a just weight is his delight.***
Proverbs 11:1 (ESV)

***Unequal weights and unequal measures
are both alike an abomination to the LORD.***
Proverbs 20:10 (ESV)

We are also to be faithful to our employer. Most of us spend eight or more hours per day at work. That is one third of our life and a half of our waking hours. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the way we do our job and the way we treat our employer is something which God takes a close interest in.

In some ways it is a kind of proxy for how you treat God. We are told by apostle Paul that we are to do all things as if we were doing them for the LORD. Therefore, to be slack in our work, or disrespectful or disloyal to our employer, is to let God down:

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

Colossians 3:22-24 (RSV)

We will also be judged on the basis of our faithfulness to our husband or wife

Above all, God wants us to be faithful to our husband or wife and to our children. For one thing, those of us who are married have made a solemn vows to each other in front of witnesses and in front of God. He wants us to keep those vows, even where that is extremely difficult.

God also views marriage as sacred. Therefore it is up to us to work hard at marriage. That needs to be said because, at times, it does involve hard work. It also requires unselfishness, cooperation and an abundance of mutual forgiveness.

Without those things anyone's faithfulness will be stretched beyond its limits. However, with those things, and with God's help, marriage can be made to succeed and to last permanently. That is what God wants. He has told us plainly that He hates divorce:

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

Malachi 2:13-16 (RSV)

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

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

Hebrews 13:4 (RSV)

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

We must also support each other in the careers and/or other ventures that either of us may be involved in. That duty to give support to each other and to honour each other is a major part of what marital faithfulness is about. God is watching what we do in all of those day to day areas. He will hold us accountable for the choices we make and things we do or fail to do.

Apostle Paul tells us how wives should treat their husbands, and they will be judged on that basis

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

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

Ephesians 5:21-24 (RSV)

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

Ephesians 5:33 (RSV)

God regards a good wife as being very precious:

A good wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

Proverbs 31:10 (RSV)

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

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

1Peter 3:1-6 (RSV)

Note that Peter says that God regards it as "very precious" when any woman has a "gentle and quiet spirit". That is the very opposite of the strident, demanding, self-promoting, antagonistic attitude that is displayed and advocated by much of the feminist movement.

In fairness, that is caused, at least in part, by the fact that such women have never encountered any man who behaves towards women as God intends. Many men behave in a selfish, thoughtless, boorish and even brutal way. Thus the error of feminism is, in part, a misguided reaction to those wrongs, which women ought not to have to face in the first place. Instead, husbands should behave as follows:

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

1Peter 3:7 (RSV)

Apostle Paul sets the bar even higher for Christian husbands in terms of how they must treat their wives

Apostle Paul sets the bar even higher for husbands, telling them that they must love their wives *as Christ loved the Church*. That is obviously an impossible standard to reach, but it is what a husband is to aim for.

Note the contrast in terms of what is required from the husband as compared to the wife, as we saw above. The husband is told to love his wife. By that Paul means self-sacrificial 'agape' love. Paul said that because he knew that, all too often, husbands do not love their wives in that way, even if they are believers:

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

Ephesians 5:25-29 (RSV)

When God gives commands and instructions He expects us to obey them and He holds us accountable for the extent to which we do so. Therefore, every Christian husband and every Christian wife will be judged at the Judgment Seat for the way in which they have each conducted themselves within their marriage.

In particular, He will look at the way they have treated their spouse. That duty to do as God instructs is applicable even if the other spouse is not reciprocating. So, a husband is to love his wife, and sacrifice his own needs and preferences in order to benefit her, *even if she is treating him badly.*

Likewise, a wife should submit to her husband, support him and respect him even if he does not love her in the way that Christ loves the Church. The duties are one way so far as each spouse is concerned. They do not only become operable after the other spouse has complied and done what they are meant to do.

Your duty to treat your husband or wife well is unconditional and so it does not depend on them also treating you well

You therefore must brace yourself and resolve to treat your spouse as God intends, regardless of how they are treating you, even if their mistreatment continues. Jesus will judge us for how we act, and also for how we react. We need to bear that in mind every time arguments or times of pressure arise. Jesus is always watching, listening and remembering.

That thought can, and will, alter the way we behave if we dwell on it and remember it at such times. Quite apart from that, if we choose to do what is right, even where (in our highly biased view) our spouse is behaving badly, then it could eventually influence them. They may notice and then the cycle of bad actions and bad reactions might eventually be stopped and even reversed.

Moreover, we always need to bear in mind that our own perception of “*who started it*” is very subjective and therefore probably unreliable. In other words, you may actually be starting things yourself even though you are fully convinced that you are only responding to what your spouse has said or done. In any case, whoever started it, you must still take the responsibility for being the one to stop it and to react in the opposite spirit:

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Peter 3:9 (RSV)

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

Likewise, we owe a very important duty to our children. Many men in particular allow themselves to forget this duty and put their careers, or even their hobbies, ahead of the needs of their children. We

must not do that and must regularly appraise ourselves, our priorities, and our use of time, to ensure that our children do not suffer because of our career ambitions or other interests.

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

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4 (RSV)

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." ²⁹ And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 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.

²⁸Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹Jesus 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"*.

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

²And 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:

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

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (NIV)

This has got nothing whatever to do with the fire of Hell or the Lake of Fire. It is about fire being applied to our *works*, not to *us*, to see whether they remain or are burnt up. It is as if each man's works or deeds, that he has made or done during his life, were put into a container and subjected to intense fire, as in a furnace.

Anything that we have done or produced in our lives which is just worthless dross will be burnt up. But anything which is of eternal value will remain. It is just as if you had a strong metal box filled with wood, hay and straw, but also with some diamonds, gold and silver in it. If you burned it then the precious items, which represent the things we do out of obedience and faith, and in accordance with God's will, would remain. They would not burn up.

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:

*⁹ Whoever 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)

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

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

1 Timothy 6:6-10 (ESV)

Jesus spoke about money so often because He wants us to develop a generous heart. The way we handle our money will have a major bearing on whether we succeed in developing such a heart. If we do, then it will also help us to deal with, or correct, many other faults that we have.

Financial generosity is something which we know Jesus really values and looks for. Therefore we can safely assume that He will reward it at the Judgment, given how much He focused on it during His earthly ministry.

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

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

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:

²⁸And 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:

³And 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.

⁶But 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.

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”

CHAPTER 7

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

¹⁴ And let our people learn to apply themselves to good deeds, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not to be unfruitful.

Titus 3:14 (RSV)

*¹⁷ Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will repay him for his deed.*

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)

*¹⁸ The wicked earns deceptive wages,
but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.*

Proverbs 11:18 (ESV)

⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Mark 9:41 (ESV)

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

Matthew 10:41-42 (ESV)

⁸ "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God,

Luke 12:8 (ESV)

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

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

Matthew 6:1-4 (RSV)

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

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

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,

Psalms 51:6(a) (ESV)

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

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

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

2 Thessalonians 2:8-13 (ESV)

For an example of what it means not to have the love of the truth, look at the Chief priests and scribes in Luke chapter 20

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

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

Luke 20:1-8 (ESV)

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

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

Luke 20:45-47 (ESV)

However, if we are complacently assuming that Jesus was only referring to these men and that He does not mean us, we need to think again. He means *anybody who is* not genuinely sincere in their beliefs, questions, prayers, actions and so on. In short, He means anyone who does not have the love of the truth.

As far as I can see, that is the case with the vast majority of the population, even within the Church. Truth is our defence against a host of different problems. That is why it is spoken of as part of the armour of God in Ephesians 6. Each of the pieces of armour to which Paul refers represent particular character qualities which will protect us, such as righteousness, hope, faith, etc.

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

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

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

Ephesians 6:10-17 (ESV)

For an example of what it means to have the love of the truth, look at Nathanael, the man in whom Jesus said there was no guile

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

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

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

John 1:43-50 (RSV)

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

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

The only form of control which is acceptable for us to have is self-control. God does not want us to control or manipulate any other people, or even to desire to do so. However, He does very much want us to control *ourselves*.

Self-control will bring all sorts of benefits as we learn to deny ourselves, to crucify our flesh nature, to stamp out bad habits and to create better ones. That's because self-control is essential in order to do all of these other things. Therefore it is actually listed as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

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

Galatians 5:22-24 (RSV)

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

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

Proverbs 25:28 (RSV)

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

Proverbs 14:29 (RSV)

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

Proverbs 16:32 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 17:27 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 19:11 (RSV)

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

Proverbs 29:11 (RSV)

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

Our treatment of the poor is a hugely important topic in the Bible and is clearly going to be a major criterion by which we will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We shall look at some verses in both the Old and New Testaments which speak of the need for us to care for the poor and give to them.

However, before that, we firstly need to deal with an area of confusion that has built up in the minds of many people about this subject. The problem with speaking about doing good works or helping the poor is that it tends to confuse two different groups of people in opposite ways. Two alternative misunderstandings arise:

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

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

So, this group basically thinks in terms of *salvation by works*, which is plainly wrong. We can never be justified or forgiven on the basis of our good works, no matter how good they are or how many we

do. To speak in those terms is to create a *social gospel* in place of the real Gospel. So, that's *not* what I mean here.

In speaking of our being judged on the basis (amongst other things) of what we did for the poor, I mean the things we do and give *after* we have already been saved (i.e. justified). We achieve that justification, and have all Jesus' righteousness imputed or transferred to us, solely by repenting, being baptised and putting our faith in Jesus Christ alone.

It is repenting and believing in Jesus that saves us and brings forgiveness and eternal life, not the good works that we do from then on. Nevertheless, the Judgment Seat of Christ will still be concerned with what we did for the poor. But that is only in order for Jesus to reward us (or *not* reward us) for what we did *after we were saved*, (justified).

It has nothing to do with qualifying us *to be saved* in the first place. A good passage which explains this distinction very well is in Paul's letter to Titus. Paul makes it clear that we are saved by God's mercy, not by our own good deeds. However, he goes on to say that, having been saved, God then wants each believer to do good deeds *from then on*:

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

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

Titus 3:5-8 (RSV)

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

Titus 3:14 (RSV)

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

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

Thus people who have that concern sometimes play down, or ignore, what the Bible teaches about how we will be judged for what we did *after* we were saved (justified). Therefore let me be clear. It is only the good works that we do *after* we are saved that we are discussing here. So, having hopefully made that sufficiently clear, let's examine a number of passages which speak of what God wants us to do for the poor and needy.

We shall also consider why it matters, and what results such good works will have, both in this life and at the Judgment Seat. We shall begin with some Old Testament verses, and I shall include quite a large number in order to demonstrate how important this theme is:

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

Exodus 22:25-27 (RSV)

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

Leviticus 19:9-10 (RSV)

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

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (NASB)

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

Isaiah 3:14-15 (ESV)

⁸ Open your mouth for the dumb,
for the rights of all who are left desolate.
⁹ Open your mouth, judge righteously,
maintain the rights of the poor and needy.
Proverbs 31:8-9 (RSV)

Whoever gives to the poor will not want,
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.
Proverbs 28:27 (ESV)

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord,
and he will repay him for his deed.
Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)

If a king faithfully judges the poor,
his throne will be established forever.
Proverbs 29:14 (ESV)

Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor
will himself call out and not be answered.
Proverbs 21:13 (ESV)

Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit
gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.
Proverbs 28:8 (ESV)

¹ Blessed is the one who considers the poor!
In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;
² the LORD protects him and keeps him alive;
he is called blessed in the land;
you do not give him up to the will of his enemies.

*³ The LORD sustains him on his sickbed;
in his illness you restore him to full health.
Psalm 41:1-3 (ESV)*

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

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

Some passages from the New Testament which speak of our duties towards the poor

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

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

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

*²⁵but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.
Romans 15:25-27 (NASB)*

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

¹For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ²for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. ⁶Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so

that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹as it is written, “He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

2 Corinthians 9:1-11 (NASB)

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

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

Galatians 2:9-10 (NASB)

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

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

James 1:27 (RSV)

¹⁴ What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren?

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, ²³ and the scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness”; and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

James 2:14-26 (RSV)

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

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

Similar considerations arise here as with the question of caring for the poor. Remember, we are not advocating a *social gospel* or *salvation by works*. We are just speaking of another of the factors upon which those of us who have already been saved (justified) will be judged on what we did from conversion onwards. So, let us look at some verses which make clear how important it is to do righteous acts and what rewards flow from doing so, both now and at the Judgment:

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

Hosea 10:12 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 21:21 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 11:18 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 11:14(b) (RSV)

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

Micah 6:8 (RSV)

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

Proverbs 28:10 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 11:21 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 11:28 (ESV)

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

Proverbs 20:28 (ESV)

Consider also this powerful passage in which the prophet Jeremiah directly criticises Shallum and Jehoiakim, the Kings of Judah, who reigned in place of their godly father, King Josiah. Jeremiah contrasts the righteousness of Josiah with the self-serving, self-promoting, self-indulgent reigns of his sons, King Shallum and King Jehoiakim.

Jeremiah therefore pronounces God's judgments on them and others. Note in particular the emphasis that God clearly places on how we live our lives and whether or not the things that we do and build are done with righteousness:

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

¹³*“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice,*

who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages,

¹⁴*who says, ‘I will build myself a great house*

*with spacious upper rooms,
who cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar
and painting it with vermilion.*

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

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

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

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

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

“They shall not lament for him, saying,

‘Ah, my brother!’ or ‘Ah, sister!’

They shall not lament for him, saying,

‘Ah, lord!’ or ‘Ah, his majesty!’

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

Jeremiah 22:11-19 (ESV)

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

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

Micah 6:6-8 (ESV)

Criterion Number 21 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we loved one another and what we did to help and care for our fellow Christians

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

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

John 13:34-35 (RSV)

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

John 15:13 (RSV)

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

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

Galatians 6:9-10 (RSV)

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

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

1 John 3:16-19 (RSV)

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

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

Hebrews 13:3 (RSV)

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

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

Hebrews 13:16 (RSV)

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

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

Mark 9:41 (ESV)

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

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

Criterion Number 22 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of whether we did the work of the ministry and also what we did to help other workers

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

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

Ephesians 4:11-14 (RSV)

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

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

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

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

Matthew 10:40-42 (ESV)

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

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

Philippians 4:14-19 (ESV)

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

Criterion Number 23 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of whether we had the fear of the LORD

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

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

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

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

Proverbs 22:4 (ESV)

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

Psalm 31:19(a) (ESV)

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

Psalm 34:7 (ESV)

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

Psalm 34:9 (ESV)

Criterion Number 24 – Jesus will also judge us on the basis of what we did to care for and provide for our own families, in particular our own parents and children

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

Please refer to chapter seven of Book 1 which contains quite a detailed section on our duties towards the elderly in general and our own parents in particular. God takes all those duties very seriously. Consider also this next verse. We can see that it is undeniably addressed to Christians, not unbelievers, because how can a man “disown the faith” if he has no faith? Likewise, how can he be “worse than an unbeliever” if he is an unbeliever?

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

1 Timothy 5:8 (RSV)

Sadly, in the modern Western world there has been an alarming decline in respect for the elderly. Increasing numbers of people are now expecting the State to care for their elderly parents instead of them doing it themselves. That is partly why we see this growing crisis of neglect, and even abuse, of the elderly in hospitals and care homes. Many elderly people have too few relatives, or even none at all, who can “police” the care that they receive and speak up for them.

In part it is also caused by the hardness of heart of an increasing number of medical staff and care home workers, for whom neglect has come to be seen as normal. For many of them, including managers, indifference, and even abuse, are no longer viewed as wrong. Such attitudes and standards are just a

part of the job and many employers wouldn't even attempt to stamp out such conduct, or to remove such staff. They know that any replacement staff would probably be as bad, or worse.

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

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

Exodus 20:12 (RSV)

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

Ephesians 6:1-3 (RSV)

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

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

Mark 7:9-13 (RSV)

Criterion Number 25 - Jesus will also acknowledge and reward us on the basis of the extent to which we acknowledged Him before men in this life

Here is an interesting passage from Jesus' own mouth:

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

Luke 12:8 (ESV)

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

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

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

John 12:42-43 (RSV)

We need to take care to ensure that we openly identify ourselves with Jesus in this life and that we are not ashamed of Him. Consider these sobering words which Jesus Himself said. They are generally assumed to refer only to unbelievers who are not saved. However, I am not so sure. I feel this statement may well also refer to believers, i.e. those who were simply afraid or embarrassed about being publicly identified with Jesus:

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

Mark 8:38 (RSV)

Clearly, the above verse applies primarily to those who reject Jesus entirely, because they do not want to be associated with Him, or His Name, at all. However, I can see no reason to assume that the same principle does not apply to Christians as well. It may be that even a saved person could find that Jesus expresses Himself to be ashamed of them at the Judgment Seat.

Even the possibility of His rebuke, and of the look in His face as he raises this with us, should be enough to persuade us never to be ashamed of Him, and if we are, then to acknowledge it and repent of it.

Criterion Number 26 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we were ready and waiting for His return

This is a rather controversial area, especially when you try to define the details of how this will operate and who exactly is being referred to. What we can confidently say is that Jesus wants all of us to be actively engaged in waiting for His return to the Earth. We are not to be passive about it but are meant to *prepare and wait actively*.

Jesus explains this by way of a parable about a group of servants waiting for their Master to return home. He equates Himself with that Master and urges all of us to make sure that while He is away, pending His return, we are:

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

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

Luke 12:35-40 (ESV)

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

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

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

Luke 12:41-48 (ESV)

Why does it matter to God that we should be alert and waiting for the Rapture?

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

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

The rapture must not be confused with the “*Second Coming*” of Jesus, which is also known as His “*glorious appearing*”. Unlike the rapture, it will be visible to everyone, including unbelievers. After His Second Coming Jesus will *not* go back to Heaven. He will stay on the Earth and will rule it for 1000 years.

Moreover, the approximate timing of the Second Coming can be fairly easily calculated in advance, i.e. by the people who are on the Earth at that time. However, the timing of the rapture, which comes earlier, cannot be known in advance. Once we realise that it is the rapture of the Church that is being referred to by Jesus, not the Second Coming, it makes sense why it matters so much for us to be ready and waiting at all times.

A person who is actively waiting for the rapture is also, in effect, waiting for the Judgment Seat of Christ, which will follow very shortly after the rapture. Such a person is much more likely to be focused upon, and attending to, all those things which Jesus has commanded us to do.

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

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

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

What does Jesus mean when He refers to the Master in the parable in Luke 12 becoming angry with those servants who were not ready and waiting for His return? Will Jesus also be angry?

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

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

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

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

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

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

- a) Unbelievers/non-disciples would not be waiting for or preparing for the return of Jesus at all. Why would they be? They would have no reason to. Therefore Jesus would have no expectation of them being *ready* or *alert*, or of having obeyed His instructions during His absence.
- b) Jesus would have far bigger issues to raise with unbelievers than their state of preparedness for His return. He would be far more concerned with their sinfulness in general and, above all, with the fact that they did not repent of their sins, or even believe in Him.
- c) The event being described here is the rapture of the Church, i.e. when Jesus returns for His Church. When that occurs He will only be seen by His own followers who are alive on the Earth and by

those who have previously died, who are all resurrected at the rapture. Thus unbelievers, whether alive or dead, will play no part in the rapture. It does not concern them. Indeed, they will not even be aware of it when it is happening.

- d) The point at which Jesus will concern Himself with unbelievers is not until after His Second Coming, which is when He will return to the Earth visibly, to destroy the wicked and to set up His Millennial Kingdom. At the end of that 1000 year Kingdom there will be the Great White Throne Judgment. That is when unbelievers will be judged and when all of them, without exception, will be punished. None of them will be called “blessed” because none of them will be doing Jesus’ will in any way when He returns at His Second Coming.
- e) The timing of the Second Coming, unlike the rapture, will be relatively easy to calculate in advance, at least approximately. The Bible tells us the length of the Great Tribulation. Therefore those who live through it will know that in so many days Jesus will return to depose the antichrist. So there will not be any element of surprise and nobody need be caught out by His return. Beyond doubt, it will be spoken of and written about by the believers at that time and even unbelievers will hear of it. They may ignore it, or refuse to believe that it is coming, but they are likely to hear of it.

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

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

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

Criterion Number 27 - It would seem likely that Jesus will give some credit for partial achievements, or for specific things which we did well, even if in other areas we were disobedient or unfaithful

Every Christian is a mixture of good and bad, strengths and weaknesses and obedience and disobedience. We might listen to God, and obey Him in certain areas of our life, but be deaf, blind and disobedient in other areas. It is unrealistic to think of any Christian as being 100% faithful, obedient and diligent all the time.

Nobody is that consistent. The flesh, or sinful nature, is still very active, even in the most mature of believers, and even in apostle Paul. Conversely, even in a worldly, fleshly, Christian who has let God down in many ways, there will probably be specific things, perhaps things they did in the past, which may still gain them some praise, and perhaps even rewards, at the Judgment Seat.

It is hard to see how it could be otherwise, such that there could be a Christian somewhere about whom Jesus would have nothing at all to praise and nothing at all to rebuke. The only exception to that might be in the case of a deathbed conversion, where the person's time on this Earth as a born again believer might only have lasted minutes or even seconds.

However, for most of us, if we have walked as disciples of Jesus for many years, we are likely to have done many things which will cause us to receive both praise and rebuke. That is we are likely to get both. Therefore the real question is in what *proportions* will these be, and what *specific* things will be raised with us?

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

¹ *Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem.* ² *But Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD.* ³ *Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Asheroth out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God."*

2 Chronicles 19:1-3 (ESV)

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

Criterion Number 28 - Jesus will also take note of the extent to which we have already been recognised, praised and rewarded in this life. In particular, He will withhold rewards from those who were seeking prestige and honour in this life

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

The problem is that Jesus has made it plain that rewards will *not* be given to those who do their good works with the motive that they want to be seen and admired by other people in *this* life. Such recognition, fame and admiration will be the only reward that those people ever get.

Their actions will receive no *further* reward at the Judgment Seat. Therefore they are making a very poor bargain and are actually minimising their own reward, as well as shortening its duration:

¹ *"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.* ² *"Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.* ³ *But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,* ⁴ *so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

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

Matthew 6:1-6 (RSV)

¹⁶ *"And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.* ¹⁷ *But when you*

fast, anoint your head and wash your face,¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:16-18 (RSV)

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

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

Criterion Number 29 - Jesus will also judge us on the basis of the extent to which we told other people about the Gospel so that they could turn from their sins, be saved, and avoid His wrath

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

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

Matthew 28:18-20 (RSV)

In part, the task of sharing the good news of the Gospel involves warning people about sin and its consequences and about God’s judgment which is coming on the whole world. We are each *accountable* for whether we tell others and thereby make it possible for them to believe and repent.

God addressed this issue with the prophet Ezekiel, making clear that if Ezekiel did not warn people of the danger of their position, then He would hold him accountable for their blood:

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

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

Ezekiel 3:17-21 (NIV)

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

CHAPTER 8

A CLOSER LOOK AT HOW WE WILL BE JUDGED ON WHETHER WE DID THINGS IN OUR OWN STRENGTH OR IN HIS, THAT IS IN THE FLESH OR IN THE SPIRIT

It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

John 6:63 (RSV)

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Matthew 26:41 (RSV)

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

Romans 7:18 (RSV)

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness.

Romans 8:2-10 (RSV)

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:16-24 (RSV)

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:4-5 (RSV)

For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

Philippians 3:3 (RSV)

⁷ And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; ⁹ but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (RSV)

The old nature and the new nature, the old man and the new man

See Book 7 for a fuller explanation of our *old man* or *flesh*, i.e. our sinful nature that we inherited from Adam. It cannot do anything good. Everything it does is sin, because it always falls short of God's standards. Our flesh is completely selfish and self-centred. It cannot, and will not, ever serve God or obey Him. So, nothing that we ever do in or through our flesh can ever please God:

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

Romans 8:5-8 (RSV)

We can only do good things which please God when our body, mind, emotions and will are operating in accordance with the wishes and instructions of our *new man* or *new nature*. That is our own *human spirit*, which comes back to life when we are born again.

Our new nature always wants to please God and to do His will. Conversely, everything that is done in accordance with the desires of our own flesh is sin and cannot be rewarded. However, that which we do while listening to and cooperating with our new man will be rewarded.

That is because our new man has the same nature as Jesus and is therefore sinless. Therefore our new man or new nature is the part of us which is able to hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit and to be guided by Him. It is through our new man that we "*walk by the Spirit*" and produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. ¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Galatians 5:13-17 (ESV)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Galatians 5:22 (ESV)

However, if we choose instead to operate in the flesh, doing the kind of things that come naturally to our old man, or sin nature, then these are the very different things that we will produce:

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 (ESV)

The things listed above are obviously fleshly. However, even things which, on the face of it, are good works can be mere works of the flesh, if done of our own accord, and for our own reasons. They could be done to indulge our pride, or to promote ourselves.

God will not bless or reward things done for such carnal reasons. Jesus speaks in these terms when He refers to those who give or pray, but whose real motive for doing so is that they want to be seen and admired by others:

¹"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ²"Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:1-6 (RSV)

Operating “in your own strength” or “in the flesh”

This is something which it took me a long time to understand. I can remember when I was a young Christian, in the early 1980s, being told by older believers “*It’s no good you doing things in your own strength; you need to operate in God’s strength*”. I could never grasp what they were talking about.

Partly that was because I was immature. However, it was also partly because nobody ever seemed to be able to give me any reasonably clear explanation, let alone a precise definition, of what it means to do things “*in your own strength*” or “*in the flesh*”.

Perhaps they just did not know how to put it into plain words. So, I will attempt to do that now and to explain this difficult concept as clearly as I can. Hopefully you will not then need to spend years, as I did, not even knowing what it means, let alone how to avoid it.

God wants to do things *through* us, and for us to *cooperate* with Him, rather than have us acting independently of Him. He does give us talents and gifts. Sometimes those are at such a high level that we can impress others with our ability and drive and we can make spectacular things happen.

However, such things can often be done solely through the use of our own natural ability or effort, without involving God or relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. If so, then God will not allow Himself to be glorified by what we do. Neither is He likely to give any reward for it. He will probably see it as presumption and as our acting independently of Him.

That was the view God took of the Israelites when they started a battle against the Amorites which He had not told them to get involved in. They had acted without involving or consulting Him. Therefore He did not assist them. In fact, He allowed them to be defeated. Moreover, God considered their willfulness and presumption to be sin and it displeased Him:

⁴¹"Then you answered me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' And every man of you girded on his weapons of war, and thought it easy to go up into the hill country. ⁴²And the LORD said to me, 'Say to them, Do not go up or fight, for I am not in the midst of you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.' ⁴³So I spoke to you, and you would not hearken; but you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and were presumptuous and went up into the hill country. ⁴⁴Then the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against

you and chased you as bees do and beat you down in Se'ir as far as Hormah. ⁴⁵ And you returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD did not hearken to your voice or give ear to you.

Deuteronomy 1:41-45 (RSV)

Many things that I have done, including good things like evangelism, were done at least partly in the flesh, in my own strength and so they did not last

I can remember when I was a young believer I would evangelise eagerly, which is obviously a good thing. However, a lot of what I did was just me being naturally energetic, enthusiastic and persuasive. I was good with words and effective at arguing. Therefore I was able to persuade other students to come to church or to attend a debate or to do Bible studies with me.

Many of them agreed to become Christians, or at least they said they were doing so. Sadly, a lot of those people fell away later and did not persist. It was probably because they had never genuinely repented or believed in the first place. They had just been talked into it *by me personally*, not by the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit.

So, most of what I was producing were probably just ‘tares’ rather than wheat. That is a weed which looks like wheat, to begin with, but isn’t actually wheat and therefore it produces no harvest. So, what I mean is that many of them were not real converts, because they were drawn along by *me* rather than by *God*.

Reaching them with the Gospel had mostly been done through my own natural persuasiveness and energy, not by God's leading. That is not to say that there is anything wrong with effort, enthusiasm or persuasiveness. Those are all good things. The point is that God will not take pleasure in, or be glorified by, the things we do if they are done *solely* through our own natural talent or energy.

Another example of this is a married couple with whom I shared the Gospel many years ago. I basically talked them both into believing and got them to agree to repent and to accept a set of doctrinal points. They both did so, but with obvious reluctance. They were also rather casual and even flippant about it all.

I could sense, even at the outset, that they were being persuaded by me, against their will, and that their hearts weren't really in it. The reality was that they simply couldn't match my arguments or defeat my logic. But that is no basis for any genuine conversion. One needs to be convicted to such an extent that one makes a genuine decision of one's own will to repent and to change.

Otherwise the person will not become a real disciple and will not continue. Sooner or later they will just fall away. It later became apparent that their hearts had not changed in any meaningful way, or at least not adequately. They did not feel any deep conviction or grief about their own sin. It was all too casual. Therefore neither of them lasted.

They both fell away after a few years of intermittent church attendance and sporadic and unenthusiastic Bible reading. They were effectively my own converts, rather than God's. They were responding to me, not to Him. Their conversion, such as it was, had mostly been brought about by me, without the conviction that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

Such evangelistic achievements, or apparent achievements, as those above can only reflect glory upon us, not on God. That is not acceptable to Him and my own feeling is that He would not regard such service as valid, even if it was useful. At any rate, He would not reward it, which is our particular focus in this chapter.

The same point applies equally to all service for God which is done in one's own natural strength, as this problem is by no means unique to evangelism. Consider what Jeremiah says below which is linked to what we are discussing here:

²³ Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (ESV)

Jeremiah even goes so far as to say that a person who is operating in the power of their own flesh and trusting in their own strength, or even in the strength of other people rather than God, is actually under God's *curse*:

Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD."

Jeremiah 17:5 (ESV)

If God was to accept and reward such fleshly, man-centred service, then He would be sharing His glory with you, or even allowing you to glorify yourself. You ought not to want to do that, but even if you did want to, He will not cooperate with you anyway. What God is looking for is people who are *broken*:

***The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.***

Psalms 51:17 (RSV)

The meaning and importance of 'brokenness' in the life of a Christian

Brokenness is yet another word which few preachers speak about today, possibly because it is impossible to explain until it has happened to you. Becoming broken generally takes years, because it is a process rather than an event. Moreover, it tends to be a long and drawn out process.

To be broken means that you have to come to the end of yourself. It means you have reached the end of your own personal resources or gifting and no longer want to rely on them. You have, at last, realised that, in themselves, your own natural strengths and abilities are:

- a) incapable of achieving God's purposes,
- b) incapable of pleasing Him,
- c) insufficient even to please you, let alone Him,
- d) only a basis for pride and self-glorification.

A broken person is rather like a young horse which has been worked on by its trainer over a period of time in order to break its will. He brings it to a condition where it is not only *willing* to obey its master's instructions, but it actually *desires* to do so. Such a horse still has a will, but of a different kind.

It is now a will which has been yielded to the will of its master. Therefore that horse is now willing, indeed eager, to act entirely in accordance with the will of its owner. A horse is at its best, and most fulfils the purposes for which it was created, when by the free exercise of its own will, it chooses to serve the purpose of its owner rather than to indulge itself or act independently of Him.

Such a horse can then be trained how to run, jump, work and even to fight, under the instruction of its owner. Eventually it will instantly obey every command. It will even anticipate what those commands are likely to be, so as to be all the more ready to comply immediately.

A horse which operates on that basis is infinitely more useful than one which is still making its own decisions, in its own way, for its own purposes and on its own timescales. Moreover, that characteristic of yieldedness, far from diminishing the horse's dignity, actually enhances it.

A horse which is broken has not lost any of its own honour. On the contrary, it has gained more than it had to begin with. It is in no way demeaned by the fact that it obeys the will of its master. It is more truly a horse, and more worthy of respect and praise, than it ever was before.

That's because it is now acting in accordance with its true purpose, because it was created to serve its master, not to serve itself. Likewise, a Christian can be broken by the long series of trials and difficulties that God deliberately arranges. If so, then he can reach a point where he is more free than he ever was when he used to serve (and worship) himself.

A Christian whose will has been broken in this way only wants to find out what God's will is. He now longs to do whatever God wants him to do. There is no longer any reluctance about doing so, because the lesson has at last been learned that God's will is always best. In fact it is the only thing worth doing.

Any person to whom God has given a lot of natural ability, or revelation, or who has a lot of knowledge, education or wealth, is particularly prone to relying on those things instead of relying on God. It is actually difficult not to do that, because our very nature is so carnal. Therefore we tend to revert to type and do things in the flesh unless either we, or God, take steps to avoid it.

The responsibility for avoiding that is mainly ours. However, God will not leave it entirely up to you. His main way of tackling this problem is that He will deliberately bring problems, weaknesses, and even opponents, into your life to try to get you to rely on Him rather than on yourself.

He also makes sure, when He creates you, and also when He puts you into situations, jobs or roles, that your own natural ability or strength is *insufficient*. He does that so that you have to turn to Him in your need, or even in desperation, to seek His help. That does not happen by chance. *God arranges it that way on purpose.*

The lengths to which God went, in the life of apostle Paul, to break him and to keep him humble and reliant upon God, rather than his own abilities

We see an example of this in the life of apostle Paul. He had enormous natural advantages in terms of his background, ability and formal education. That was even more the case when it came to the extent of the supernatural revelations that were given to him. He was shown far more than any other man, including the 12 apostles.

Paul was actually taken to Heaven and allowed to see and hear things which nobody else has ever seen or heard. So, if God had not done something about it, Paul would probably have become extremely conceited about his unique status and the enormity of his privileges.

Indeed, it would have been hard for any human being not to have become proud if they had all of extraordinary Paul's gifts. Therefore God gave Paul what he described as a "*thorn in the flesh*" in order to keep him humble and reliant on God:

⁷ And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; ⁹ but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for

my power is made perfect in weakness.” I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (RSV)

Opinions differ as to precisely what Paul’s “*thorn in the flesh*” was. My own personal view is that it was a very powerful and high-ranking demon which was given permission by God to attack and undermine Paul on an ongoing basis. That would explain the extraordinary amount of persecution and hostility that Paul faced, and yet always managed to survive. He describes some of this turmoil earlier in 2 Corinthians:

²⁴ Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 (RSV)

To one extent or another, God will do the same with us as He did with Paul, in order to break us and to cause us to rely on Him, not on ourselves

The thorn in the flesh that was given to Paul was exceptionally severe. Most of us will never have to face even a fraction of the things Paul endured. Nevertheless, the likelihood is that some kind of thorn in the flesh will be given to every one of us, especially if we are prone to over-confidence or self-reliance. If nothing else, God tends to arrange things so as to ensure that there is always some ability or resource that you *lack*.

Alternatively, He will put some *obstacle or opponent* in your path which requires you to rely on Him, and also on other people, and which prevents you from achieving things all by yourself. Have you ever wondered why God made you the way He did, ‘forgetting’ to give you some particular ability or character trait that you sorely wish you had?

If so, consider whether it could be deliberate. Perhaps you are shy and you wish you weren’t. Or maybe you are not a confident public speaker, or you went to the wrong school or university, or to no university at all. Things such as those could just be ordinary obstacles, which God simply wants you to overcome. However, they could also be something which God put there, or left out, intentionally, so as to leave you with no option but to rely on Him if you are to succeed.

Some of the things which God did in my life, or allowed others to do, in order to break my wilfulness and excessive self-confidence and to get me to rely on Him instead. It began with me failing to get into Cambridge.

I can look back myself, at more than 34 years of Christian life, during which God has been working on me like a horse trainer. When I do that I can see many of the things God was doing to break my stubborn, proud will and to reduce my sense of independence and self-sufficiency.

He was doing this even in the years before I was converted. Throughout it all, He was trying to get me to set aside my own plans and ambitions and to yield to Him willingly and accept His plans instead. But he wanted me to do so by my own free choice. I will share just a few of the things He did to break me. If you look at your own life and reflect on things you have been through, you will probably see God attempting similar things, though the precise details will obviously be different.

When I was 17 I was offered a place at Cambridge University to study law and economics and I fully expected to get in. I felt sure that that was where my future lay. I had been made a conditional offer which, amongst other things, required me to get an A in economics. It was in the days before the A* grade existed. I felt sure I would get that A, since it was by far my best subject.

However, the next summer when I was 18, I found I had only got a B for economics, not an A. I couldn't believe it. I wondered if there had been a mix up at the examining board. The school therefore appealed and had the exam papers remarked. It then emerged that I'd done well in paper one, getting well over the grade A mark. However, on paper two, they said something very odd had happened.

I had scored zero out of 25 for one of the four long essay questions. The school was told that the other three essays were fine, but that for one of them, I had entirely missed the point of the question. Therefore nothing that I wrote earned even a single mark. It was all totally irrelevant. I had somehow been diverted off the point of the question entirely and I now feel sure that God had arranged it deliberately.

Nothing of the sort has ever happened before or since. I believe God scrambled my mind for one quarter of that exam and caused me to write an answer to some other imaginary question, without even realising that I wasn't addressing the actual question. It was rather like what He did with King Nebuchadnezzar. God took his mind away and gave him the mind of a beast for seven years.

Thankfully, I only experienced that demotion for about 45 minutes, but it was long enough to keep me out of Cambridge. Even though I got all the other grades they had asked for, they refused to compromise on their overall offer. Therefore I was rejected. It was the most painful experience I had ever had up to that point and it left me reeling. In fact, it felt like a sudden bereavement, as all my plans were destroyed.

Yet, that painful loss, which I considered to be a tragedy at the time, created an emotional wound or opening, as when skin is broken by a cut. During the following year that sense of trauma and bewilderment allowed the message of the Gospel to get past the thick, leathery skin of my heart. I therefore became a Christian 10 months later, in my first year at university. However, that was just the start of the breaking process.

Another pulverising experience that God allowed me to go through was the loss of my first business, which was taken from me by two wicked business partners

God had merely created some cracks in the 'tarmac', so that His Word could get in. It took another 25-30 years before the breaking process came anywhere near to what one could call complete. In fact, there is probably never a time when it is absolutely complete. Let me briefly describe three other traumatic experiences along the way, which God also used to break me. However, there were many more of them. These are just some examples.

This second example of a trauma was something to which I referred in Book 2. It happened in a business in which I used to be an equity partner. I was a one third owner in a law firm, but I discovered that one of the partners was dishonest. Moreover, the other one didn't care, and wasn't willing to do anything about it. I caught the first one forging a false invoice on the firm's letterhead.

He had sent it to a large commercial client of the firm and intended for that client to pay *him personally*, rather than send his cheque to the firm, as it should have been. When I reported this to the Senior Partner he promised to help me to tackle the wrongdoer, but he later broke his word and did nothing. So I told them that I was leaving the firm and that I wanted to take my staff and files with me.

Initially they refused to allow me to leave. Therefore I began a legal action to wind up the practice on the basis of the second partner's misconduct and the Senior Partner's refusal to help me tackle him.

Then the two of them, who had known each other for years and were very close, voted to expel me from the firm. They did so because I was rocking the boat by challenging the wrongdoer.

So, instead of the wrongdoer being brought to justice, it was I who ended up having to leave, and with nothing. They kept for themselves all of my capital which I had built up in that firm. It seemed a lot of money to me at the time, and I never got any of it back. They refused to repay me anything at all and invented a number of bogus reasons to justify the non-payment.

That meant that the only way I could get my capital back would be to sue them. However, if I went down that route, then I would have had to spend about two years, and a fortune in legal fees, trying to recover it. They sized up the situation and judged that I would probably not have the money or the time to do all of that.

They were therefore quite brazen and calculating about holding on to my assets and money and felt that it was something they were likely to be able to get away with. The problem I faced was that I would not be able to afford to fight a case against them at the same time as starting a new business.

I therefore had to make an agonising choice. I could either use the small amount of money I had got left to start a new firm of my own. Or, I could use it to sue them and to force them to give me my capital back. It was clear to me, and also to them, that I couldn't do both.

So, I chose to walk away. I then started a new law firm with no staff, no files, no clients, no equipment, no telephones, no furniture, no cash flow, no anything. All I had on day one was a dining room chair from home which I placed in an empty office, with my mobile phone as the firm's only telephone.

Even to call it a "*firm*" would be a misnomer, because it was just me, sitting in an empty room on my own. It was all entirely pathetic and unimpressive in the eyes of the world. However, I came to see that it was God's chosen way for me to set up a law firm. Moreover, it was God's way of reducing my pride, willfulness, independence and excessive self-confidence.

From that extremely lowly starting point, the business grew and grew, until it was unrecognisable. Nevertheless, in those early months and years, it was a harrowing ordeal. The sense of injustice I felt at what had been stolen from me, plus all of the stress and pressure of setting up a new firm from a standing start, were pulverising. I would liken it to being dragged through a hedge backwards, or rather a series of hedges, by a high speed tractor.

I had always been a very confident person and I had strongly believed in my own abilities. However, the whole experience knocked a large percentage of the pride and self-sufficiency out of me, until I felt like a punch-drunk boxer. Yet God was in all of it, and He used every bit of it for His purposes. Moreover, that wasn't it. God was very far from having finished the job.

A third example of a traumatic experience that God allowed me to go through was when I tried to tackle a very carnal church leader

Therefore, shortly afterwards, while I was still reeling from the first crisis, God allowed yet another series of problems to hit me. This time it was in the church, rather than at work. A church leader whom I will call 'Rick', whom I had known very closely for many years started to lie to me and about me. He did so because I had begun to challenge him about his conduct, especially his level of personal honesty, because he was getting a reputation for being a liar.

I write about that difficult period in both Book 1 and Book 6. Rick, and also the other leaders, caused both me and my wife a lot of harm within that church, and also in a series of other churches which we later went to. We therefore left Rick's church and spent a long time trying to find a decent, honest, godly set of church leaders somewhere else. However, we simply couldn't find any.

Instead we encountered insincerity, greed, manipulation, haughtiness, personal ambition and the desire for control. What's more, we found those things *in one church after another*. Eventually I came to realise that these features are actually the norm rather than the exception, at least within Great Britain.

God had opened my eyes and had begun to give me a measure of discernment. Therefore I began to be able to see those same character flaws in a great many church leaders, whereas I'd been entirely blind to it all before. The problem was, from then on, that I could quickly see the same pride, falseness, ambition and haughtiness all over the place, in church after church.

Accordingly, there was no church that we could find that was not apostate, at least in part. During those wilderness years, as we searched in vain for a suitable church, God taught me a series of lessons about the appalling reality of the dire condition of the churches in the West. That was partly because He wanted me to be able to write about it. However, He also wanted to use that series of difficult experiences to continue the breaking process in me.

A fourth example of what God allowed me to go through was 13 years running my own law firm and dealing with a succession of wicked employees

On top of all that, after I had set up my new law firm, I unwisely recruited a lot of new staff, far too quickly. God stepped back and let me have my own way, so that I could learn from my own mistakes. Sometimes, that is the only way we can really learn a lesson properly. Therefore He allowed me to make many disastrously unsuitable appointments.

That said, I have to admit that I did not actually seek His guidance about this surge of expansion. I just assumed that He wanted me to grow the business as rapidly as possible, which He actually didn't. Therefore, for over ten years, I always had one or more people working for me who were causing me a severe headache through their dishonesty, laziness, malice or incompetence.

At its peak I had over 80 staff working for me, so it wasn't difficult for some very bad ones to get past my recruitment processes. God used a long series of very bad staff to teach me about the grim reality of human wickedness. That was a subject which I had had no desire to study, but which I was then forced to focus on and specialise in for over a decade.

One of God's ancillary purposes was to enable me to learn how to recognise and handle wickedness and wicked people so that I could write about it and them. However, I think His primary aim was to use a long succession of wicked people to help Him to continue to break me by 13 years of stress, difficulty and opposition.

God still isn't finished with the will-breaking process, even now. I expect that He will carry on with it, as an ongoing project, until I die. However, the lessons I've learned so far about the folly of operating in my own strength and abilities have changed me to such an extent that I:

- a) no longer want to be independent of God or achieve things by myself
- b) no longer have anywhere near as high an opinion of myself
- c) genuinely just want to do whatever God wants and nothing else
- d) no longer want to pursue my own ideas
- e) only want to do things God's way, not my own way
- f) only want the good staff that God sends me, not the bad ones that I seem to find for myself

- g) only want the volume of business that God wants, and no longer want to build an empire
- h) no longer seek for the praise of men, just God's praise
- i) am thankful for all the bad experiences and traumas I have faced and can see their value.

The breaking process that God caused Joseph to have to go through as a preparation for his future role

We see a similar breaking process in operation, albeit on a much larger scale, in the life of Jacob's son, Joseph. God allowed him to go through a series of even more appalling experiences. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers and then falsely accused by his master's wife, so that he spent years in prison as an innocent man.

That long, slow, agonising process of affliction broke Joseph. Yet it eventually made him into the kind of man who could become Prime Minister of Egypt and also save his whole family from the famine which was coming. However the breaking process in Joseph's life wasn't over until it was over.

Let's join the Genesis account of his long and drawn out sufferings while Joseph is still in prison, two years before God arranges for him to be released. At this point he had already been in prison for years. Yet he had become an extremely skilled and effective administrator. Indeed, the keeper of the prison had seen Joseph's exceptional qualities and had put him in charge of all the other prisoners.

Also, he had grown in wisdom and was able to interpret dreams and operate prophetically. Yet, even after all that, he was still not quite ready to be released from the prison. God could see that there was still too much pride, independence and flesh in Joseph.

In this next passage listen to Joseph speaking to Pharaoh's chief butler. That man had just had his dream interpreted by Joseph, who told him that he was about to be released from prison. Joseph then pleads with the butler to remember him when he gets out and to help him to get released too. Count how many times the pronouns "I" and "me" occur in what Joseph says:

¹⁴ But remember me, when it is well with you, and do me the kindness, I pray you, to make mention of me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. ¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

Genesis 40:14-15 (RSV)

Although it is fully understandable that Joseph should feel aggrieved and eager to get out of prison, the fact remains that there is still some self-centredness and fleshliness left in him. The breaking process was not yet complete. So, God left him in prison for two more years of suffering and injustice, during which God continued to break Joseph.

It eventually came to an end when Pharaoh himself had a dream, about cows and ears of corn. The butler then belatedly remembered Joseph and advised Pharaoh to seek an interpretation from him. Pharaoh then met Joseph and praised him for the way he had interpreted the butler's dream. However, note the very different way in which Joseph now speaks when he replies to Pharaoh.

He is no longer absorbed with himself, but modestly redirects Pharaoh's praise to God. He makes it clear that it was God who gave the previous interpretation to him about the butler and that only God can now interpret Pharaoh's dream:

¹⁴Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. ¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it; and I have heard it said of

***you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."*¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."**

Genesis 41:14-16 (RSV)

Accordingly, in Joseph's case, God could very clearly see that even though it had gone on for some years, the breaking process still wasn't quite finished. Joseph needed another two years in the furnace of affliction to knock some more of the willfulness and self-centeredness out of him.

God also wanted to deal with the boastful insensitivity thoughtlessness and lack of tact which had so upset his brothers in the first place. The humble way in which Joseph later replied to Pharaoh shows that the objective of removing those faults had largely been achieved.

Some conclusions about what we can do to stop operating in the flesh, or in our own strength

So, moving back to our original question about what it means to operate in our own strength, let's explore this and also examine some verses which touch upon it. Firstly, unless God is already doing something and is clearly involved in a project, don't even think about joining in with it, or doing anything at all to assist with it.

You must never try to build anything *by yourself* or *for yourself*. If you do then it is a work of the flesh. However, you must not support any other man either, if he is making that same mistake. Only support ministries which God supports, not those which are a work of other men's flesh. Their flesh is no better than yours and so they too would be working in vain:

***¹Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labour in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
²It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.***

Psalms 127:1-2 (ESV)

Pray to be given God's strength, rather than relying on your own strength or trying to produce more of it from within yourself. Also pray that God will guide you to become involved only in what *He is doing* and not to initiate anything by or for yourself. Then put all your trust in Him, not in yourself. Furthermore, don't ever aim to be anybody important or famous, at least not in this life.

Also, start to pray for the desire for *Him* to be glorified rather than you and for *His* purposes to be achieved, not yours. Ideally, that should be your sincere wish. However, if it isn't, then still pray for it anyway. Ask God to change you, so that it becomes your sincere wish. Pray also for you to be able to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than in your own strength:

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

***The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.***

Psalms 118:14 (ESV)

***Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually!***

1 Chronicles 16:11 (ESV)

*The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.*
Psalm 28:7 (ESV)

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.*
Psalm 84:5 (ESV)

*The king is not saved by his great army;
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.*
Psalm 33:16 (ESV)

*⁶The righteous shall see and fear,
and shall laugh at him, saying,
⁷"See the man who would not make God his refuge,
but trusted in the abundance of his riches
and sought refuge in his own destruction!"*
Psalm 52:6-7 (KJV)

The sooner we grasp this point, and cooperate with God, the better it will be for us. Until we do, He will just have to continue the breaking process.

Until we realise that doing things in our own strength and on our own initiative is useless and futile, we will get nowhere. God will just keep us on an ongoing breaking in program until we eventually grasp the point. He wants us to start to listen to Him, let go of our own ambitions, follow orders and stop trusting in our own abilities.

We must start to realise that we can do nothing in, or through, our own flesh, and that only things done in God's strength, and on His initiative, are going to be considered valid. When we eventually grasp these things we can then begin to learn how to do things *with* God, *alongside Him*, rather than by ourselves.

He cannot involve us in any of His projects until we have thoroughly understood these things and begun to listen to His voice and obey it, rather than do our own thing in our own way and on our own initiative. God does want us to have a proper, healthy sense of confidence. However, He does not want that to go too far, such that it becomes self-confidence or self-sufficiency.

He wants our confidence to be in *Him*, not in *ourselves*. He actually also wants us to be fully aware of, and even glad about, our own weaknesses. Such awareness of our own shortcomings actually brings some advantages. It makes us feel more dependent on Him, which is exactly what He wants us to feel. In fact, He wants us to boast only of our need for Him:

⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (ESV)

God takes no pleasure from our strengths or abilities in themselves. As we have seen, it was He who gave us whatever natural strength or ability that we have anyway. He put it all there in the first place. Therefore God is not impressed by us merely using our natural abilities.

Why should He be? What gives Him pleasure is seeing those people who, like a well broken horse, put all their focus and trust in Him. Then they can love, respect and fear Him and do what He guides them to do, in reliance upon Him:

*¹⁰His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,
¹¹but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

Psalm 147:10-11 (ESV)

How to tell whether you are operating in the flesh or in the Spirit

One of the hardest things in the Christian life is to recognise when you are actually operating in the flesh, i.e. to catch yourself doing it. Even if you can understand the concept, which is a hard one to grasp, it's even harder to see it in yourself and realise when you are doing it. It is something which we tend to drift into by long established habit, without being aware we are doing it.

However, there are some tell-tale signs that you can watch out for. They will help you to see this fault in yourself or at least to see it earlier. Here are some examples. Firstly, when you are operating in the flesh then a project, ministry or task will be likely to be a *strain* and to create *stress and exhaustion* in you.

You may find that you are regularly *pressing and shoving* and becoming irritable about it, rather than gliding along easily with a smooth, steady rhythm. This is often called *striving*. By contrast, if you are operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, through your new man rather than your flesh, things will generally feel more relaxed and peaceful.

You might still get tired from your work. However, it will be in a healthy way, not the strained, exhausted, frazzled kind of tiredness that striving produces. God therefore wants us to work hard, but not to strive:

*Cease striving and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.*

Psalm 46:10 (NASB)

Secondly, if you are operating in the flesh you are likely to end up feeling *insecure, suspicious* and even *paranoid* about other people. Instead of being relaxed about seeing others around you succeeding and getting promoted, you are likely to feel threatened by them and unhealthily competitive. Your new man is not envious of anybody else or insecure about himself, but your old man certainly is.

Thirdly, if you are operating in the flesh you are likely also to feel anxious, worried, troubled and fearful, and on a regular basis. Conversely, if in your heart you feel you are simply joining in with one of God's projects and helping Him, then such negative emotions will not arise.

For example a soldier with the rank of private does not feel any anxiety about whether the war is being conducted well, or whether the invasion of France is being properly planned. He just does his part and leaves it to generals and politicians to worry about such things. However, if that soldier was anxious, it may be a sign that he is wrongly taking upon himself responsibilities and concerns that are not rightfully his.

Fourthly, a person who is operating in the flesh also tends to *grab or seize* opportunities rather than waiting and allowing God to give those opportunities to them. They will try to force doors to open and

make things happen, rather than letting God open doors if, and when, He wishes to. I have done this many times, as it is an easy mistake to make.

Fifthly, whenever God is involved in something then it will almost always *start small* and progress *slowly* to begin with. Thus if you are planning a project and you are thinking of doing anything large at the start, or making rapid progress or expansion in the early stages, then the likelihood is that what you are doing is your own plan not God's.

Moreover, it is probably being conducted according to your timetable, not His. Starting large and growing quickly are tell-tale signs that you are operating in the flesh. I have made those very mistakes myself in business, where I have been impatient to get things moving and to get more staff recruited, and more teams in place, even before the staff I already had were properly trained.

Over the years God has helped me to learn how foolish such impatience is, and to recognise it as fleshly. It is a departure from His will, because God is never impatient. He always does things properly, rather than quickly or urgently.

It is not only the over-confident and gung ho types who operate in the flesh. It is also carnal to be fearful, timid and reliant on the approval of others.

So far I have been focusing on people who have a lot of self-confidence and an excessive and unhealthy belief in their own abilities. Such a person is obviously operating in the flesh. However, the same can be equally true of a person who lacks confidence and is reluctant to do things for God because he fears being considered a failure or being criticised by other people.

Such concerns are just as much a product of the flesh nature as boastful, gung-ho, self-confidence is. If you fear criticism or failure, and therefore are not willing to take any risks in attempting things for God, then ask yourself:

“Why am I more concerned about how I appear to others, or what they say about me, than I am about being obedient to God and useful in His service?”

The same carnal focus upon self that causes a confident person to seek to promote and to project himself can just as easily cause a timid, diffident person to hold back and avoid obeying God for fear of being reduced in the opinions of others. Either way, it is the same flesh nature which keeps each person focused on himself, and on what people think of him, rather than on God. Their flesh nature is simply being manifested in a different way.

One of the hardest lessons to learn is to refrain from grabbing things or opportunities and to allow God to give them to us

Returning to the theme of grabbing for things, sometimes it can appear, when some opportunity or position has become available, that it must be a God-given opening. It can look and feel good. Indeed, it can seem to be the very thing you have been waiting for and praying for. Then it suddenly becomes available, except for some blockage, or delay, or some person who is standing in the way.

The test you then face is how you deal with that. A carnal Christian will not find it difficult to persuade themselves that this apparent opportunity that has arisen is obviously an answer to prayer. They immediately feel sure that it is right for them, and that God has provided it. Therefore they conclude that they should grab it now, while it is still available, before someone else gets it.

That Christian can easily forget, or ignore, the fact that any *genuine* opening or position that God gives to us will not need to be *grabbed*. It will be put into our hands by God, without the need for any

aggressive, manipulative or hasty action on our part. If you allow yourself to be ruled by your flesh, such that you respond impatiently, then you may well get that job or opportunity, but you will have got it *for* yourself and *by* yourself.

It will no longer be a gift from God. Neither will it necessarily have His blessing on it. You will have seized it for yourself, by your own effort. Therefore you will have to *operate in it*, and *hold on to it*, by yourself, in your own strength. Moreover, you will, quite possibly, have to do all of that without God's help.

You will then find that you have got yourself a job, promotion or business, or perhaps a leadership position in a church. However, God may not give it His full blessing, or even any blessing at all, because you didn't get it from Him. You got it for yourself. God will not allow you to manipulate Him or 'bounce' Him into a position where He *has* to support you.

Nobody can make God feel obligated to do anything. Some people act in that manipulative way with others. They get involved in something, or buy something, and then the people around them feel obliged to help, because otherwise it could end up in disaster. However, God won't allow you to box Him in like that.

He won't let you use or manipulate Him as your tool or resource. Therefore, if you get yourself into a situation, job or ministry by grabbing it, then you may find that God will leave you to flounder. He might leave you to get yourself out of that mess by yourself, without His help.

It is not that He is unmerciful. It would actually be for your benefit, in the longer term, that He should allow you to face the consequences of your own carnal decisions or actions. Then you can learn not to do it again. If He was to bail you out every time, then you would never learn and would continue acting in this manner all your life, grabbing things for yourself whenever you want them.

We must avoid grabbing, even when an opportunity really is from God. A genuine God-given gift can be spoiled by the manner in which you receive it. However, if an opportunity is received and entered into in the right way, at the right time, with the right attitude, and without pushing other people out of the way, then God can really bless it and give it increase.

The demons who are involved in your life are well aware of all this. Therefore they will try to tempt you to seize things which God did not intend you to have or to do. They will also try to get you to receive things in the wrong way, or prematurely, or at the wrong speed, even if it is something that God does want you to have or to do.

Demons are realistic. They know how far you can be deceived and also the types of tricks that you won't fall for. They know that if they tried to tempt you to rob a bank you wouldn't do it. You would see through it and refuse to cooperate. However, if you can be got to think that God is offering you an opportunity, then it is not very difficult for them to get you to spoil that by the manner or timing of your acceptance of it.

The demons know that they may not be able to prevent you from receiving that job or position, but they can at least tarnish it. They can turn it, even at the last minute, from a God-given opportunity into a work of the flesh, simply by putting the idea into your head of grabbing it for yourself. If they can achieve that it will have long lasting consequences and can partly, or even completely, spoil what God intended to give to you.

A classic example, from the Bible, of how not to grab for opportunities is the way Boaz handled the process of marrying Ruth

A classic example of how to receive something patiently, and without any involvement of the flesh, is the way Boaz dealt with Ruth. He wanted to marry her after her first husband died. However, there was another man who had a prior right to marry Ruth. He was a closer relative to Ruth's first husband than Boaz was. If that man had chosen to marry Ruth then Boaz would have been bitterly disappointed because he could see that she was a woman of worth.

Nevertheless, Boaz kept calm and did not do anything to push the other man out of the way or to assert his own claim. He waited to see what the other man did, because he knew that that other man's claim was legally stronger than his own. Boaz trusted in God to arrange matters and did not try to fix it all for himself:

¹² And now it is true that I am a near kinsman, yet there is a kinsman nearer than I. ¹³ Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will do the part of the next of kin for you, well; let him do it; but if he is not willing to do the part of the next of kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will do the part of the next of kin for you. Lie down until the morning.

Ruth 3:12-13 (RSV)

It transpired that the other man chose not to marry Ruth, because he did not want to harm his own children's future inheritance. So the way then became clear for Boaz to become Ruth's husband. They later had a son who became the grandfather of King David and, ultimately, the ancestor of Jesus Himself. It was all in God's plan, but the point is that *Boaz allowed God to work it out* rather than trying to make things happen by himself, using pressure or manipulation.

Some examples from the Bible of how God's projects begin small and progress slowly in the early stages

Turning now to what was said earlier about the telltale signs of when you are operating in the flesh, consider a couple of examples from the Bible. These illustrate the principle that any genuine move of God usually *begins small* and *progresses slowly* for a time.

Take firstly the Promise made to Abram, who was later renamed Abraham. God told him that he would be a "*father of multitudes*". When that was said to him he had no son at all. He then had to wait for 24 long and agonising years before his wife, Sarah, eventually became pregnant. So by that stage, 24 years later, when he was 100 years old, Abraham had just one promised son, i.e. Isaac, and even he was a newborn baby.

That does not sound much like a 'multitude'. Moreover, it took a very long time after that before Isaac had any children. He was aged 40 when he married Rebecca and she was unable to have children for another 20 years. Therefore, it was not until Isaac was aged 60, and Abraham was 160, that Esau and Jacob were born.

However, even then, only Jacob was part of the promise. Esau was not. So, even after 85 years of waiting, there were still *only two* descendants of the promise who had been born to Abraham. They were Isaac and Jacob. If that was a start-up business, most of us would view it as a dismal failure. Those three men did not look the least bit like a 'multitude', let alone a 'nation'. Yet, that is how God does things, and that kind of timetable is not unusual for Him.

In the third and fourth generations it did begin to speed up a little. Jacob had 12 sons and they each had wives and children. However, even when they went into Egypt, about 215 years after the promise was first made to Abraham, the entire extended family still only numbered 70 people. Many other families have achieved far greater increases than that in just 50 years.

Nevertheless, that was how slowly and carefully God moved. However, over 400 years after that, when the descendants of Jacob left Egypt, they numbered roughly two million and they then grew more numerous from then on. It is a hallmark of God's projects that the rapid stages of expansion come in the *later stages*, not at the start. Conversely, a work of the flesh will often start big, grow rapidly and then collapse or fizzle out.

As a second example, take what Jesus did. He spent three and a half years pouring most of His time and energy into training just 12 men. Moreover, He did not even start doing that until He had first worked as a builder/carpenter until He was about 30. Jesus deliberately chose not to start big but to start small. He is our model in this regard and I regret to say that when I began my business I did not follow His example.

I was in such a rush to grow that I took on too much work from too many clients. I then foolishly appointed a lot of unsuitable staff to do that work, whom God had never wanted me to recruit. Therefore, realistically, I do not expect to receive much, if any, reward for the way I managed my business in those early years. If I had my time again I would do it very differently.

CHAPTER 9

ADDITIONAL POINTS ABOUT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward.
2 John 8 (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)

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

Revelation 2:25-28 (RSV)

The most important thing of all is just to hear Jesus praising you for how you lived your life

It must surely be the most thrilling and moving experience to hear Jesus praise and congratulate you when you stand before Him. What could ever compare with that? I would like rewards as well but, above all, I want to know He was pleased with me and to hear Him say so, rather than rebuke me. Consider how people speak of the immense honour they feel when they attend Buckingham Palace to receive a knighthood, peerage or other award.

They stand or kneel in front of the Queen for a few moments and have a brief conversation. Most of them never forget the experience. Some become very emotional during it, as do their families who are watching. Yet that is trivial in comparison to what is going to be done for those who please Jesus by their service to Him. I would like Jesus to say of me something similar to what the Bible says about King Hezekiah:

¹Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. ²He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.

2 Chronicles 29:1-2 (NASB)

Contrast that with the Bible's blunt assessment of King Ahaz:

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David had done.

2 Kings 16:2 (NASB)

Remember that whatever Jesus' assessment of you is, it will stand for all *eternity*. His words about you at the Judgment Seat of Christ will be remembered with joy and satisfaction forever. Alternatively, they will be a source of deep, ongoing regret. We therefore need to bear that in mind and live each day with the Judgment Seat of Christ firmly in mind, because so much depends on how we are assessed on that Day.

Many will be surprised, and many will be disappointed, at the Judgment Seat of Christ

I suspect that there is hardly a person on this Earth who accurately sees themselves as Jesus sees them, or at any rate, who consistently does so. Virtually all of us get it wrong in one direction or another. Some feel insignificant and cannot see much in their own service to God that is worthy of any praise or reward. They may well be in for a pleasant surprise.

Conversely, those who feel quite smug and satisfied with themselves and who see no need for repentance or improvement, are probably heading for a nasty shock at the Judgment. It would seem that there are likely to be many surprises in both directions. Those who assume they have done well may be astonished to find Jesus rebuking them.

Others, who assumed that they were very ordinary during their lives and that they had done nothing impressive, may be delighted to discover that Jesus rated them very highly, although they never realised it. There is a pattern to this. Both groups see themselves inaccurately, but for opposite reasons.

The overly confident people do not engage in much, if any, self-examination. It is unsurprising therefore that they find nothing wrong in themselves. Such people will only find out about their faults for the first time at the Judgment. By contrast, the sincere, earnest, repentant person is willing, and even determined, to examine himself. The trouble is he tends to so overly critically.

Therefore he finds plenty of faults in himself now as he goes through life, trying to change and grow. The very nature of a godly, sincere person tends to cause them to see their own faults quickly and easily. But they often overlook, or are unaware of, their own qualities or achievements. They tend to focus only on what they need to do to improve.

So they never feel they have arrived, which is correct in one sense. However, they have usually made more progress than they realise. The willingness to criticise oneself is a quality, but it too can sometimes be overdone and can lead us to form overly harsh conclusions.

Therefore, let us examine ourselves as rigorously and honestly as we can. We must firstly ensure that we do not fall into the self-congratulatory camp which believes that it can confidently expect to get an A* at the Day of Judgment. However, we also need to avoid the opposite error of being unable to recognise any signs of progress in ourselves.

If we do that, we can easily become discouraged, by assuming that nothing we ever do is pleasing to God, or is of any value. That too is a false and unhelpful way to think. God is far more realistic and patient than some of us imagine. Therefore He is actually pleased with every part of our progress, even where we are still a long way from the finishing line.

Also, He will judge us relative to how long a period of time we were given. So, God does not expect us to make in one year the kind of progress that can only be made in 20 years. He is fair and reasonable and He fully recognises those disciples who are on the way, and who are making some steps forward.

That said, if we look at the generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, we find that with most of them God was *not* pleased:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ and all ate the same supernatural food⁴ and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.⁵ Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things are warnings for us, not to desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance.” ⁸ We must not indulge in immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 (RSV)

We are told about that generation of Israelites for our instruction, so that we can take note of how and why they went wrong and displeased God. By looking at them, with a genuine desire to learn and to avoid imitating them, we can prevent ourselves ending up as they did. Those who are willing to learn from their errors will do so, but those who are not are likely to go wrong in the same ways.

We get a glimpse of the surprisingly varied kinds of verdicts that Jesus makes about different Christians in the seven short letters that He dictates to apostle John. These are in the book of Revelation, at chapters two and three. In those letters we see Jesus giving His assessment of seven different local churches in the area of Asia Minor (which we now call Turkey) at the very end of the first century AD.

These were seven real churches and Jesus made some surprising assessments of them, both positively and negatively. In every case, what He has to say seems not to be what the church in question would have been expecting.

The assessments Jesus makes in His seven letters in the book of Revelation reveal a little more of how the Judgment Seat of Christ will operate

Revelation chapters two and three are unique because they contain the only letters we have that were directly written by Jesus Himself, albeit that they were written down and recorded by apostle John. In these seven letters Jesus sets out what He thinks of each church and how well, or how badly, they are doing. He is surprisingly tender and generous with some of them, but also extremely frank and blunt with others.

With some He is a bit of both. These seven letters give us a foretaste of what the Judgment Seat will be like. We see tenderness and encouragement, but also stern rebuke. He appears to be particularly gracious and understanding towards those churches where the people have had to *suffer* on His account. However, He is at His most forthright with those who are *complacent, self-satisfied and lukewarm*.

Those are faults which most of us don't regard as being particularly bad or blameworthy, but Jesus evidently does. Let's look at some brief extracts from each of the seven letters. The way that Jesus handles these churches gives us a good indication of how He is likely to deal with us at the Judgment Seat, and what issues He is likely to focus on.

Praise and rebuke for the church at Ephesus

In this first letter to the church at Ephesus, Jesus gives a mixed report. He both praises and rebukes them and He also calls upon them to repent. This is a letter written to a genuine church, containing real Christians. Yet Jesus still criticises them where it is due.

Therefore we surely have no conceivable reason to suppose, that Jesus will be unwilling to criticise or rebuke us at the Judgment Seat. On the contrary, it seems clear that He will do so and, moreover, that He will be as frank as is warranted by our behaviour and attitudes. For example, this is Jesus' assessment of the church in Ephesus:

¹"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ²I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; ³and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

⁴"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵"Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent. ⁶"Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷"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 2:1-7 (NASB)

Jesus praises them for their toil, perseverance and intolerance of evil men, and also for their discernment and endurance. However, He also gently corrects them for having *left their first love*. He then calls on them to repent and warns them that unless they do, their '*lampstand*' will be removed.

This is interesting, because, centuries later, the whole of Turkey, including Ephesus, was overrun by the Muslims. The whole area has been under the oppression and darkness of Islam ever since. Islam almost entirely extinguished the light of the Gospel. Could it be that the church in Ephesus, and also the other Turkish churches, failed to take to Jesus' warning seriously enough?

Encouragement to the church at Smyrna

By contrast, Jesus has nothing but praise and encouragement for the church at Smyrna. However, note what He is encouraging them to do. He tells them to be faithful until death! In return for that, He says that He will give them the crown of life (See below for a discussion of what this crown, and other specific crowns, might be):

⁸"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

⁹'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

Revelation 2:8-11 (NASB)

Praise and warning to the church at Pergamum

Jesus both praises and rebukes this church. He commends them for remaining faithful to Him, even in the face of persecution. However, He also rebukes them for holding to "*the teaching of the Nicolaitans*". When He says that, Jesus is rebuking them for their wrong doctrine and practice. That proves that having accurate doctrine does matter and that it is possible to be rebuked for holding the wrong *beliefs*, not only for our wrong *behaviour*.

This particular false doctrine, '*Nicolaitanism*', appears to be a reference to the practice, which was, even then, starting to creep into the churches, of having a distinction between leaders and those who

are led. Jesus is talking about the creation of a special professional *clergy class* which is seen as different from, and higher than, ordinary Christians.

There is not meant to be any such group as *clergy*. The very concept is a man-made invention and does not exist in the Bible at all. They should not therefore exist in the Church. However, by about the year AD 95 they had already begun to appear. Jesus does not want there to be any such thing as clergy and lay people.

He wants churches where everyone participates and where there is also a group of several unpaid leaders, called *elders*, who protect and serve the people, not a single, paid leader who rules over them. It is not biblical to have one man operating as a paid 'professional leader', least of all one who calls himself a *priest*.

That concept of priesthood is another quite separate error. It has its origins in the vast influx of pagans who joined the churches at the time of Emperor Constantine. They brought the pagan concept of priests with them into the churches. However, no such title or role exists in the Bible. (See Book 8 for more details.) Here is what Jesus says to the church in Pergamum:

¹²'And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

¹³'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. ¹⁵'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

¹⁷'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 2:12-17 (NASB)

Praise and rebuke for the church of Thyatira

Jesus praises this church for various things, but then rebukes them for their willingness to tolerate a woman in their church who was operating as a false prophetess. That is a clear warning to us. Most of us do not choose to display the courage that is needed to stand up and confront wrong practices or wrong teaching in the church. However, we should.

I used the word 'choose' deliberately, because courage is primarily a choice, not an ability. We have a duty to make the decision to do what is right, not what is easy or safe. Note also the further reference to the need to be an *overcomer* and how much significance that clearly has to Jesus. Why else would He keep on referring to that factor in virtually every letter?

¹⁸'And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: ¹⁹'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. ²⁰'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. ²²'Behold, I

will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

²³'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. ²⁴'But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them - I place no other burden on you. ²⁵'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. ²⁶'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; ²⁷and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; ²⁸and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Revelation 2:18-29 (NASB)

Nothing but rebuke for most, but not all, of the church in Sardis

This is a sobering letter, because what Jesus says to the church in Sardis could be said of most Western churches today. He says they are *dead*. By that it would seem that He means they are complacent, unmotivated and lacking commitment. He probably also means that they contain some people who are not genuine Christians.

Nevertheless, despite the *overall* condition of that church being unacceptable to Him, it does still contain at least a few people whom He wishes to commend. This letter also implies that, at the Judgment Seat, there will probably be more for Jesus to rebuke than to praise, at least amongst our own generation in the West:

¹'To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ²'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

³'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. ⁴'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

⁵'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. ⁶'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Revelation 3:1-6 (NASB)

Praise for the church in Philadelphia

This is a letter to a church which is struggling in the face of hardship and difficulty due to Satanic/demonic opposition. Consequently they have had to persevere. Jesus urges them to “*hold fast what you have so that no one will take your crown*”.

This implies that it is possible to be in a position where we currently deserve rewards, and are in line to receive them, but then succumb to some pressure or deception and so cease to qualify for those rewards. That possibility must concern us, and it means there can be no complacency, even if we have been doing well so far:

⁷'And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: ⁸'I know your deeds Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. ¹⁰'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

¹¹'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹²'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 out of heaven from My God, and My new name. ¹³'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Revelation 3:7-13 (NASB)

Nothing but rebuke for the church at Laodicea

This church receives nothing but rebuke. Again that is worrying, because they sound even more reminiscent of the Western churches of our own day. The church in Laodicea is complacent, lukewarm and self-satisfied. They imagine themselves to be rich and to be doing well, but they aren't.

Jesus is very frank indeed and says He wants to spit them out of His mouth. That can hardly be described as a gentle correction. It is very blunt. However, how can our generation expect a verdict any better than this? On average, we are probably even more lukewarm than they were.

¹⁴'To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

¹⁵'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ¹⁸'I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Revelation 3:14-18 (NASB)

Concluding comments arising out of Jesus' letters to the seven churches

The main conclusion one feels obliged to reach as a result of these seven letters is that none of us can expect an easy interview when we face Jesus. His remarks to the seven churches are just a brief summary of His view of them. However, when we face Him we will have to hear His detailed comments, concerning our entire lives since we became Christians.

For many of us much of what He has to say will surely be as painful as what was said to some of these seven churches, and probably more so, because it will be an exhaustive and comprehensive assessment, not just a brief summary. Above all, we have no valid basis to suppose that Jesus will pull His punches with us, i.e. go easier on us than He did with them. Why should He?

Our generation in the West has had more comforts and privileges than any group of people that has ever lived. Yet we have largely failed to share the Gospel. We have been even less faithful when it comes to making disciples. Many of us have also been unfaithful in a host of other ways too.

We can therefore learn a lot from these seven letters. Even though they are not written to us, they are highly relevant. We should listen to them, take them seriously, and repent, wherever we are at fault in the same ways as they were. We should then turn back to Jesus now and repent, while there is still time for us to *change the outcome* of the personal judgment that awaits us.

Repentance changes everything and can be the basis for us to turn things round, so that we can be rewarded after all. Jesus has therefore issued an invitation to all of us in the Church who are not right with Him, or who have left our first love, or neglected Him, or been unfaithful. He is asking us all to *open the door* and invite Him back into our churches and into our own lives. If we will do this, then He promises to come in:

¹⁹'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. ²⁰'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²²'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Revelation 3:19-22 (NASB)

CHAPTER 10

A CLOSER LOOK AT REWARDS, CROWNS AND INHERITANCE

²³ *I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.* ²⁴ *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.* ²⁵ *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.* ²⁶ *Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.* ²⁷ *No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

1 Corinthians 9:23-27 (NIV)

⁷ *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;* ⁸ *in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NASB)

¹² *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

James 1:12 (NASB)

⁴ *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

1 Peter 5:4 (NASB)

⁸ *Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*

2 John 8 (ESV)

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

Revelation 3:11 (ESV)

Some general points about the rewards that will be given out at the Judgment Seat of Christ

We do not know exactly what the rewards will be. They are spoken of only in general terms, without much detail. Even so, let us try to look at some of the references in the Bible to rewards and see what we can piece together to establish some broad themes and principles. That may help us to understand the rewards better.

One general point to make is that if we are seeking for the praise of men now, then that will probably be our only reward. There will probably be no further praise or reward from Jesus for anything we do with that attitude. We must therefore do all our good works as quietly and secretly as possible, seeking only for *Jesus* to praise and reward us, not for praise from *people* now:

¹⁶ *"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.* ¹⁷ *"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face ¹⁸so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.*

Matthew 6:16-18 (NASB)

One is reminded of people or companies who make a donation to a charity, but ask to be photographed with a ten foot long cardboard cheque, so that they can have their picture in the local newspaper. Why not simply give the cheque quietly instead, so that virtually nobody knows about what we gave?

From the next passage we can deduce that there are such things as a 'prophet's reward' and a 'righteous man's reward', i.e. the rewards that such people will receive. It refers to where ordinary people like us help a prophet or a righteous man and look after them, thereby assisting them in what they are doing for God. If we do, then we will be allowed to have some of the same kind of reward that they are due to receive:

⁴⁰"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. ⁴¹"He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴²"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

Matthew 10:40-42 (NASB)

What are the various crowns referred to in the Bible?

The passages we have looked at above tell us that there will be rewards, and of various types and levels, but they don't say exactly what they will be. We get some further information on that from other passages, where some of the rewards are referred to as *crowns*. In Greek there are two different words which mean crown. The first is *diadem*, which is the type of crown worn by royalty.

The second type is a *stephanos*, which means a crown given to a winner in a race or contest. Our equivalent to this today would be an Olympic medal. It is nothing to do with being royalty. It is a mark of success or achievement. It is important to note that it is this second type of crown, the *stephanos*, that we are told will be given out to certain believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

There are five different categories of these crowns referred to in various places in the New Testament. However, there are probably many others as well that haven't been mentioned and which we will only find out about at the Judgment. Let's now look at each of these five crowns that we are told about and see what they are intended to recognise and reward:

1) "The crown that will last forever"

We are not told what this crown is, or on what basis it is awarded. However, we do learn that it is to last forever. So, it will still be there, all through the Millennium and then on forevermore, even in the eternal state in the New Jerusalem. Given that this crown is eternal, it is infinitely more valuable and worthwhile to pursue than any temporary possession or honour that we may get in this life.

This quality of being eternal seems not to be unique to this specific type of crown. They might all be eternal, or at least many of them probably are. In that case, they will last beyond the 1000 year Millennium and on into the eternal state, when there are new heavens and a new Earth. Alternatively, perhaps some of the crowns may only be for the Millennium. That is not spelled out for us, so we will have to wait and see.

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NIV)

It would seem that this particular crown is given to those who *exercise self-control, and discipline themselves* in their spiritual life, such that they are victorious in the tests they face and are not disqualified. How many of us can say that that accurately describes us? Paul disciplined himself very strictly, but few of us do.

Most of us enjoy our comforts too much and don't want any stress, difficulties or trials. We need to change that attitude. There is so much at stake, and so much available to be gained and kept forever. Therefore it would be tragic for us to miss out on any of these rewards just because we were too soft on ourselves in this life and always avoided hardship.

There has been much debate over what exactly Paul was concerned about when he spoke of the possibility of being *disqualified*. It seems clear that he was *not* referring to the possibility of losing his salvation entirely, i.e. losing his eternal life. I believe he meant that he might lose some or all of the *rewards, crowns or treasures* that he had already built up or become qualified to receive.

He was probably also concerned about those *further rewards* that he still hoped to be awarded. In addition, he must have been concerned about possibly losing the *role or position* to which he was hoping to be appointed in the Millennium and in the eternal Kingdom thereafter.

2) "The crown of exultation"

It would seem that this particular crown is given to those who *tell other people about the Gospel*, so that they can be saved. In other words, it looks like it could be a reward for evangelism and for making disciples. It would appear that, in some sense, the crown Paul is referring to here has something to do with the very people that Paul, Timothy and others had evangelised and disciplined.

I believe it is likely that, when we reach the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will find out the real extent of the effectiveness of our ministry work. We may then be told how many people we ultimately influenced, whether directly or indirectly. Possibly this crown will be determined by the number of the people we have helped to reach or to train. It may also reflect how effective they, in turn, became:

¹⁷ But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.
1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 (NASB)

3) "The crown of righteousness"

Here Paul is writing to Timothy shortly before his own death. He knew that his death was coming soon, because he was in prison, awaiting imminent execution:

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.
2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NASB)

This crown appears to be given to those who have "*loved the appearing*" of Jesus. That means those who have looked forward longingly to the return of Jesus. We are all meant to do that, but few of us actually do. We therefore need to focus our thinking on His return to the Earth, and to long for that day.

The *rapture*, when Jesus returns for His Church to take all believers away, needs to be on our minds. It should motivate us to do our very best. This longing for the return of Jesus at the rapture, or even at the Second Coming, when He will appear visibly to the whole world, is not a widespread feature of the modern day Western church.

In fact it is very rarely discussed or taught on. For most of us it barely even registers as an issue at all. If you are willing, you can choose to make sure that that is not true of you, and that you fall into the category of those who “*love His appearing*”.

4) "The crown of life"

Here we have the words of James, who was Jesus’ own physical half-brother. He was one of the natural sons of Joseph and Mary:

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

James 1:12 (NASB)

This crown is evidently given to those who *persevere* under difficult circumstances, because of their love for Jesus. We also hear of this crown in the book of Revelation:

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10 (NASB)

These people appear to receive this crown because they have been *faithful*, perhaps even until *death*. The emphasis is on long term, determined faithfulness that does not fizzle out or give way under pressure. One would have to assume that, from the church in the West, in our own day, there will not be very many who will receive this crown.

It would seem that many more are likely to receive it in those countries in our own day where the real Church is being persecuted. It will probably also be given to those from past centuries in the West, when the European churches were more faithful.

A prime example of that would be the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when many men and women suffered and died for what they believed. They gained freedoms for us which most of us today do not value and cannot even be bothered to use.

5) "The crown of glory"

It would appear that this is a crown given to those who are *faithful leaders* of God's people in the Church, i.e. to those *genuine shepherds*, or pastors, who lead and care for the people who are in Jesus' flock. It is a reward for faithful pastoral care and teaching.

That is leadership which comes not from the desire for financial gain, or the wish to have power over people, but from having a true shepherd's heart. Sadly, such leaders are rare, whereas those who seek for money, or for power over God's people, are far too common. (See Book 8.)

¹Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for

sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NASB)

There is also a specific reward or honour which Jesus refers to as ‘the morning star’

Jesus will give this reward to those who *hold fast* what they have until Jesus comes, who *conquer*, and who *keep His works to the end*. To such people, Jesus says He will also give *authority over the nations*. That must surely be a reference to allowing them to reign under Him in various positions of subordinate authority, during the 1000 year Millennium and beyond.

However, Jesus also says that such a person will be given ‘*the morning star*’. He does not explain what this honour or award consists of, but it is referred to again, later in the book of Revelation. On that occasion it would appear that the ‘morning star’ is *Jesus Himself*. The term is used as a title, or description, of Him:

“I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

Revelation 22:16 (RSV)

Whatever the morning star may be exactly, we can be sure that it is something very good. It would appear to be given only to a quite small minority, i.e. those who hold fast and conquer etc and who are therefore appointed to ruling positions in Jesus’ Kingdom:

²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

²⁷ ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—

as I also have received from My Father; ²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

Revelation 2:25-28 (NKJV)

I only know of two other references to the morning star in the Scriptures, but neither of them really help to clarify what this reward would consist of. The passages are from Job and Isaiah:

*while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?*

Job 38:7 (NIV)

*How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!*

Isaiah 14:12 (NIV)

The first passage from Job does not make it entirely clear who ‘*the morning stars*’ were, but they sound like angels. The second passage is clearer. It is a reference to Satan, in his previous form as an archangel, i.e. when he was called Lucifer. That was before he fell into sin. At that time he was the highest created being in the universe and was more senior than all the other angels.

At any rate, whatever this reward of being given the morning star may involve, it is clearly something that we are meant to want and which will be a huge honour to be awarded. So, there are at least five

crowns available for us to earn, plus this specific award called the morning star. There are almost certainly many others too, which haven't been mentioned in the Bible.

There is no reason to suppose that the ones that we are told about add up to a complete list. The very fact that even these five crowns, and also the morning star, are only briefly mentioned suggests that, for whatever reason, this subject of rewards is not an area about which God has chosen to go into detail.

Accordingly, there could well be dozens, or even hundreds, of different types and levels of reward, honour, crown, medal, treasure, inheritance etc. Different types of people will receive each of the various crowns or rewards for different types or levels of service. There would actually need to be a wide range to enable God to accurately reward the many different types of people and levels of service that He will want to recognise.

Consider the honours system in Great Britain. We have a huge range of peerages, knighthoods, medals and so forth. There are many different levels of peerage, going all the way up from a baron to a duke – and there are different levels of knighthood. One has to assume that God's system of honours will be even broader, better and more varied than what the Queen has to offer.

Why is the Judgment Seat of Christ so widely ignored and forgotten?

Isn't it obvious that we should give high priority to trying to do well so as to be praised and rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ? We should be thinking about it every day. Yet, the reality is that most of us barely even consider it. Contrast that with the experiences of a former client of my firm. He was wrongly arrested after a football game. Two police officers lied about him and assaulted him, despite the fact that he had *not done anything wrong*.

He then had to wait a year or so for his trial. During that year he felt very apprehensive, as he feared he could be wrongly convicted. Thankfully he was found not guilty by the Magistrates Court and, instead, it was the police who were criticised. We later found CCTV evidence from the football club which proved our client's innocence.

Therefore we sued the Police for assault, wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution. They eventually settled the case and paid full damages and costs. One of the things we claimed for in that case was the stress, anxiety and apprehension that our client felt for a whole year, as he awaited his initial criminal trial. It was a very difficult time for him, even though he knew he was innocent.

However, compare the heightened concern that he felt with the apathy of most Christians, who ignore the infinitely larger prospect of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Admittedly, our face to face encounter with Jesus is not going to be a criminal trial. We will not be 'prosecuted' by Him. Nonetheless, what we face at the Judgment Seat of Christ is vastly bigger, more important, more long-lasting and more serious, than the trial our client faced.

The worst that he could have received was a fine and a criminal record, albeit undeservedly. However that would only have affected him for a few decades at most, i.e. until he dies. Then it would no longer matter. However, the results of our future appraisal before Jesus will last *forever*. Therefore it ought to matter to us far more than our client's impending trial mattered to him.

Nevertheless, the truth is that for most of us, at least in the Western church, the concept of judgment simply isn't real. We may say we believe in it, but if we really did, then our behaviour would surely be very different. We would be motivated, zealous and determined to persevere and to do well.

However, the reality is that most of us aren't any of those things. In fact most of us don't even know about the concept of the Judgment Seat of Christ, let alone focus on it. It simply isn't preached on, or

even mentioned, in most churches. There are probably many reasons for that widespread silence, including the following:

- a) There is a famine of hearing the Word of God. Most churches do not teach the Bible adequately. Such teaching as they do is limited and superficial, such that concepts like judgment never get spoken about.
- b) Many leaders and pastors don't know the Bible well enough themselves to be able to teach on this topic.
- c) Many leaders would not want to teach on judgment and choose not to do so, because they fear that they would become unpopular and lose members if they did.
- d) They also fear that they would also arouse the opposition of their denominational hierarchies if they ventured into this kind of territory. So they steer clear of it and deliver ear tickling, '*feel good*' messages instead.
- e) Some may fear that if they were to teach that our works (from conversion onwards) are going to be judged/assessed/appraised, then they might be misunderstood to be preaching that salvation itself (justification) is on the basis of works rather than faith. Therefore the minority who have that concern avoid this subject altogether, for fear of being misunderstood in that way.

Therefore, today, very few church leaders, let alone members, know anything about the Judgment Seat of Christ. Consequently, here are some of the most common errors that many preachers make, in so far as they ever think or speak about any of this at all:

- a) Some think that judgment is only for *unbelievers*, i.e. when they are sent to the Lake of Fire. Therefore they think that judgment, of any description, cannot be for Christians at all.
- b) Some think that not even unbelievers will be judged. They believe that the entire concept of judgment is an *old fashioned* one, which should be abandoned, even in relation to non-Christians.
- c) Some think that God is "*too loving*" to judge anybody at all - whether unbelievers or believers. However, this is to seriously misunderstand His love and also to make the mistake of seeing it in isolation from His other characteristics like His justice, righteousness, holiness etc. Some people therefore focus on God's love alone, or else they over-emphasise it, to such an extent that His other characteristics are forgotten, ignored or under-emphasised.
- d) So, if such a person is objecting to the very concept of Judgment (of whatever kind) on the basis that it does not seem *loving*, then they are forgetting God's justice. That is actually the very thing which makes it necessary for God to judge us in the first place. Therefore, if we redefine or redesign God so as to eliminate judgment, we would also have to get rid of His sense of justice. However, that would not be a good idea, even if it was possible.

Is it right to want to be praised and rewarded by Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

If God has chosen, to set up an *honours system*, such that He rewards and recognises those who serve Him well, then who are we to disagree or disapprove as some people do? In view of that, is it right or wrong for us to try to pursue rewards, crowns, treasures in heaven, recognition, roles and positions in the Kingdom?

Should we actively seek for those things or just wait for them passively and see whether we get them, without taking any interest in them? Should we be aiming to please God *in order* to be honoured by

Him? As we saw in Chapter Two, the answer is that the desire for rewards should be at least one of the factors which motivates us to seek to please God and to obey His Word.

If you are still unpersuaded, consider the attitude that Nehemiah had. He not only sought for rewards and recognition; he openly prayed that God would not overlook his loyal deeds and good service for Him:

Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

Nehemiah 13:14 (NASB)

Nehemiah felt able to pray like that and the Bible records his prayer without expressing any disapproval. Therefore why shouldn't we take the same approach? The truth is we should feel able to be much more open about seeking for rewards and not be ashamed in any way that we are setting out to get them.

Indeed, it will help others if we speak of this openly and let other Christians know that we are seeking for rewards, including treasure. That will help to prevent others from making the mistake of thinking that we should not seek for rewards, or that we should feel ashamed of doing so, and thus keep quiet about it.

We shall do better at the future Judgment Seat of Christ if we start to judge ourselves and to voluntarily receive God's correction now

To improve our position at the Judgment Seat we should start to *judge ourselves* i.e. to critically assess ourselves now, in this life. Where we find sins, faults, bad habits, bad attitudes etc, we should confess them, and seek God's help to change. If we examine and judge ourselves now, we will not need to encounter God's judgment later, or at least not to the same extent.

We come across this concept of self-examination and repentance in relation to taking the bread and wine in an unworthy manner. If we do, then we are told that we bring God's judgment upon ourselves. We are also told that we can avoid that outcome simply by judging ourselves and repenting, as above, before God judges us. Surely the same point must apply in relation to the Judgment Seat?

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. ³⁰That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. ³²But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 (RSV)

Paul tells us above that we are to judge ourselves now by examining ourselves, looking for areas which require repentance and self-improvement. However, earlier in the same letter to the Corinthians he suggests that he does *not* judge himself. That may sound like a contradiction, but it isn't. He is actually using the word *judge* in a different sense:

¹This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. ⁴I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (RSV)

When Paul says in the above passage from 1 Corinthians 4 that he does not *judge* himself, he does not mean that he does not *examine* himself. We know he does that, because he has said so previously and he says it again later. Moreover, he tells us to examine ourselves. He would never say that if he considered it wrong or unnecessary for us to do so.

What he means is that when he does look at his conduct and achievements he neither *acquits* nor *convicts* himself. Paul does not reach a verdict about himself of the kind that Jesus will reach, whereby He will find a person guilty or not guilty, worthy or unworthy, faithful or unfaithful and so on.

Neither was Paul willing to give any “grade” to himself about his own performance. He knew that it was not his place to do that. Such final conclusions and verdicts as those are only for Jesus to arrive at, just as He is the only Person who can judge other people. So, it is not our place even to judge ourselves in that way.

We are not to arrive at any definite, overall conclusions about how well, or how badly, we have done, or even try to decide what our motives were. We simply aren’t clever or honest enough to manage any of that, or to bear in mind all the right factors. That’s why we aren’t qualified to judge other people either, at least not in that sense. For the same reasons, we aren’t qualified to judge ourselves in that way.

However, that brings us back to where we started, with the apparent contradiction of Paul telling us above, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, that we *are* to judge ourselves. How therefore can we do that, and what exactly should such judgment of oneself involve? We get further guidance about this from what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 9:

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; ²⁷but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (RSV)

Paul explains in the above passage from 1 Corinthians 9 that he treats himself as a boxer or athlete would do. He sees himself as being in a race and is aiming single-mindedly to win the prize. He therefore disciplines himself, denies himself things, and takes care not to be disqualified.

He wants to avoid losing out on the prize or rewards that he is aiming for. That involves being willing to see, and even to look for, faults and sins in ourselves and to want to eliminate them voluntarily. That sums up what our attitude should be towards carefully preparing ourselves for the Judgment Seat of Christ.

God's minor acts of judgment and discipline in this life are meant to wake us up and to warn us, so that we can change, ready for the final judgment

God’s holiness means that He must judge us. However, His mercy means that He also warns us about this impending judgment because He does not actually *want* to punish us. He takes no pleasure at all from doing so:

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Ezekiel 33:11 (ESV)

God therefore ensures that even while we live our lives now, we receive small doses of His judgment in the form of discipline or chastisement. He does what any good parent does. He makes sure that in our daily lives we reap what we sow. We are therefore corrected, convicted, and even punished, in small ways when we do things that displease Him.

If we are willing to be taught, such correction helps us to learn about the things that are going to please, or displease, Jesus at the Judgment Seat. If He did not discipline us during this life then that would be a sign that He does not consider us to be saved and that we are not His. Parents only discipline their *own* children, not someone else's.

Therefore it's actually a good thing to be disciplined and corrected by God, even if it is painful. It confirms that we really are His children. It also helps us by giving us the chance to realise our faults now, and to change, before we ever get to the Judgment Seat of Christ:

⁵Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. ⁶So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

Deuteronomy 8:5-6 (ESV)

*Blessed is the man whom you discipline,
O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law,
Psalm 94:12 (ESV)*

⁵And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:5-11 (ESV)

*¹¹My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
¹²for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.
Proverbs 3:11-12 (ESV)*

So, when we face God's correction in this life, then we should welcome it. It is for our benefit, both now and later. Any adjustments we make now to the way we live as a result of that correction will eventually result in us being rebuked less and rewarded more. Moreover, that will have eternal consequences, whereas God's discipline in this life is only temporary.

Therefore, instead of resisting God's correction and rebuke in this life, we should accept it all willingly, whether it comes directly from Him, or indirectly, via other people. You should actually go looking for it, and get as much of it as you can. If you are willing to listen and change, it has the potential to alter the outcome of the final Judgment that you will, one day, receive from Jesus face to face.

Don't lose, or throw away, your rewards

It is not easy to earn rewards. It takes effort, persistence and courage and it also takes time. However, one gets the impression that it is much easier to lose them or have them reduced. That does appear to be the case, because we are warned a number of times not to act in such a way as to *lose* our rewards or crowns, or to be *disqualified*:

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.
2 John 8 (ESV)

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.
Revelation 3:11 (ESV)

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)

For us to *lose* our rewards or crowns, or to have them *seized* from us, or for us to be *disqualified* from receiving them, sounds very much like a *punishment* to me. See below for a discussion of why it may be correct to view such losses or disqualifications as being *punishments*, rather than referring to them in a more neutral sense, as the mere absence of rewards.

CHAPTER 11

WILL THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST INVOLVE ANY ELEMENT OF PUNISHMENT?

*Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.
2 Timothy 4:14 (ESV)*

²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:29-31 (ESV)

Will any Christians be punished at the Judgment Seat?

This is a highly controversial question which very few people even ask, let alone attempt to answer. People get very sensitive and insecure about it. It can cause them to lash out defensively, rather than face the question calmly and analyse what the Bible actually says.

Accordingly, in attempting to deal with this question of the negative aspect of what might occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ we must be meticulously precise in our language and ensure that we define every word exactly. If not, then words like *condemnation*, *punishment*, *rebuke*, *loss*, *disqualification* and so on are likely to be mistaken for each other, or merged together, creating confusion.

So, let's begin by restating the question more carefully and defining exactly what we mean by it. The wider question could actually be broken down into the following series of shorter questions:

- a) Can a *real* Christian who goes to be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ end up being *condemned* at it, such that he is classified as being ‘unrighteous’ and sent from it to the Lake of Fire?
- b) Can such a person, even if not condemned in that drastic way, nonetheless, be *punished* in some lesser way?
- c) What exactly do we mean by the word ‘*punishment*’ and what kind of things might be included within it?
- d) Can punishment include the loss, withdrawal, reduction or cancellation of rewards, positions, roles, status, titles, crowns, treasures etc which we might otherwise have been given, or which might already have been provisionally allocated to us?
- e) Even if condemnation cannot be the outcome for anyone who actually goes to the Judgment Seat of Christ, is it possible that before they ever go to it the *venue* for their judgment could be changed, such that they are instead judged at the Great White Throne? Can that change of destination ever happen to a *real* Christian, who has been genuinely saved, but later becomes false or apostate?

Why is the question about the possibility of punishment for real Christians so sensitive and controversial?

If the question is asked about the possibility of real Christians being punished at the Judgment Seat, some people tend to become very agitated. Some people are so determined to uphold the valid doctrine that salvation (i.e. justification) is by grace alone and through faith alone, that they get alarmed if they think that anyone is even suggesting that we might be saved (i.e. justified) on the basis of our *works*.

The concept of us being *punished* for our works, or lack of works, appears to them like another way of saying that we are *saved* or justified by works. They therefore recoil from that instinctively and cannot cope with discussing something that even sounds like it.

Others are very committed to the (valid) doctrine which says: “*He who believes in Him is not condemned....*” and that “*there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*” (See John 3:18 (a) and Romans 8:1).

Therefore they become agitated by anything which sounds, even remotely, like saying that there might still be some form of punishment that might come upon real Christians. They confuse *condemnation* and *punishment* for each other, as if they were the same thing. Such people therefore become agitated needlessly. They then try to defend the Gospel from a charge which isn't even being made, but which they imagine is being made.

Others wrongly think that to say that real Christians may face punishment, of whatever kind, comes dangerously close to sounding like the Roman Catholic idea of purgatory. Roman Catholics (wrongly) believe that most people go to this place called purgatory after their death. The idea is that they will be *purged* of their sins, so as to be got into a fit state to go to Heaven.

However, the very concept of purgatory is a false and entirely man-made one. Only the sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ can actually pay for our sins. Nothing else can pay for them, or remove them, least of all a period to be spent in so-called purgatory, a place which does not even exist, and of which the Bible never speaks.

Others have simply never heard of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Many have never been taught anything about it and some may even have been taught not to believe in it. Therefore they “edit out” and ignore any reference to the Judgment Seat when they read the Bible.

However, when they hear somebody else mention the subject, they then feel insecure, and even threatened. So they panic and close down the conversation. In that way they believe they are upholding right doctrine, but they are really just closing their own minds, and silencing other people, in order to make themselves feel more comfortable.

Bearing all of that in mind, let us consider this short passage from the letter to the Hebrews, in which the writer clearly indicates that *during this life* God disciplines, chastises and punishes us:

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?—

***“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor lose courage when you are punished by him.***

***⁶ For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”***

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline

us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Hebrews 12:4-10 (RSV)

Why is it that we can easily accept that in *this life* God should find it necessary to chastise, and even punish us, but find it unthinkable to suggest that He will also do so at the Judgment Seat? Surely, if it is right for Him to deal with us in those ways now, it is equally right for Him to do so when we are finally judged, if not more so. At any rate, one clearly cannot continue to argue that the concept of God chastising, or even punishing, a genuine Christian is in any way unbiblical.

An example from the workplace to show the kind of punishments that may be given to some of us by Jesus

If you are struggling, to accept the idea of Jesus going beyond rebuking us and actually punishing some of us, then the following analogy may help you. Imagine a situation which arises from time to time in the police. I should add that I used to be an officer myself. Consider how it would be for a policeman who has done something wrong, or neglected his duties, and is therefore summoned to appear before the Chief Constable or Commissioner to be *disciplined*.

Let's consider the wide range of responses that are available for the Chief Constable to use. Then let's ask whether we could properly classify any of them as punishments, or whether they must be seen as something less than that, such that it would be inappropriate even to use the word 'punishment'.

Imagine you were that policeman who had done something wrong and that your supervisors had gone through all the necessary investigative and disciplinary stages and procedures. What if at the end of it all the Chief Constable finds that you have acted wrongly and are in breach of the internal Police disciplinary rules, or even that you have broken the criminal law?

Let's briefly set out the range of potential options which are open to the Chief Constable, starting with the least serious and ending with the most serious. Then let's consider whether we would classify any of these as punishments:

- a) a mere *rebuke*, i.e. to tell you, just in words, about his disapproval, disappointment and concern and to say that he feels you have let him down.
- b) for him to go further and to impose some *sanction*, albeit a minor one, such as to deduct some of your wages for a month or more.
- c) to go further and to transfer you into a *less desirable role* such as to move you from CID into traffic, or to put you back onto an ordinary shift in uniform.
- d) to *demote you in rank*, for example from sergeant to constable, which means reduced status and also reduced pay.
- e) to knock you down by *several ranks* eg from Chief Superintendent down to Inspector, or even all the way down to Constable.
- f) to *dismiss you* from the Police Force entirely, i.e. to sack you, but to allow you to keep your pension.
- g) to sack you and *strip you of your pension* as well.

- h) to go beyond the internal disciplinary procedure and to *charge you with a criminal offence* and prosecute you through the courts. That could lead to a fine, or prison sentence or even, (in the past) to a death sentence.

Now, which of those responses do you feel it would be right to classify as *punishments*? Most of us would say that they are *all punishments*, with the possible exception of (a) i.e. a rebuke alone with no other sanction. However some of us would say that even a rebuke by itself could be seen as a punishment.

Who would relish the prospect of driving over to Force Headquarters to see the Chief Constable even if they knew it would *only* result in a rebuke and nothing more? Most of us would flinch even at the prospect of such a rebuke, let alone actually experiencing it.

Moreover, even a rebuke by itself could still have long term or even permanent consequences, it could blight your promotion prospects and cause you to be held back in future years. So, if someone was to say that only option (h), criminal prosecution, can properly be called a punishment, most of us would probably disagree.

I suspect that you too would probably regard most or all of those responses as punishments, especially if it was you who was facing them. Why then do so many people see it so differently when it comes to the Judgment Seat of Christ? Why do so many of us insist on saying that it will not involve any negative dimension at all, or at least nothing that could properly be classed as a punishment?

Many of the responses that Jesus is likely to make in His assessment of our lives sound very similar to what our imaginary Chief Constable might do at a disciplinary hearing. If so, then they must surely be classed as punishments, even though they fall very far short of us being condemned and sent to the Lake of Fire.

A simplified list of some of the negative sanctions, or punishments, which Jesus may dispense to some of us at the Judgment Seat

Let's make a similar (simplified) list of the range of potential options which appear to be available to Jesus in relation to a Christian with whom He is not pleased, or who has not achieved what he ought to have achieved with the talents and time he was given. His responses might involve some of the following things, in rising order of seriousness/importance:

- a) for Him to '*merely*' rebuke us, i.e. to speak of His disapproval or disappointment but with no other sanctions. I personally would be appalled by that. Even so, let us concede for the moment, and for sake of argument, that a rebuke by itself is not a punishment in the proper or full sense, because no further sanction is involved.
- b) for Him to *withhold rewards* from us, e.g. crowns, or treasures, that we might otherwise have been given during the 1000 year reign of Jesus (the Millennium) or even beyond that in the eternal state, the New Jerusalem.
- c) to *revoke or take away* from us rewards, crowns, treasures, that we might *already have qualified for* in relation to our past services to Him. This would be like a person being stripped of their knighthood. That happened with the dictator, Robert Mugabe, the disgraced Chairman of Royal Bank of Scotland, Fred Goodwin, and the spy and traitor, Anthony Blunt. The Queen revoked all their knighthoods and it must have been a major humiliation for them and a source of regret and grief. I would certainly class such a loss as a punishment. Yet to be stripped of rewards/crowns etc by Jesus must be infinitely worse. Why then should we deny that such a sanction is a punishment? We would all be devastated if it happened to us. Yet the Bible suggests that it will

happen to at least some of us, i.e. that we will be stripped of rewards which we would, otherwise, have been given.

- d) to *demote us* and to withhold from us, or strip us of, roles, positions, ranks, titles etc that we might already have earned, or which we might have been about to earn or be awarded. This would mean going through the Millennium, and probably also the eternal Kingdom thereafter, in a reduced role or rank, rather like being demoted from Superintendent to Inspector.

Surely one must accept that all of the above responses from Jesus, if they were to happen, would properly be described as:

- i) *negative* – they could hardly be called positive
- ii) *punishments* – they all involve a loss or sanction, with the possible exception of where He only rebukes us and does nothing else

Once you start to look at it in that way then it is hard to deny that the Judgment Seat of Christ will contain at least a negative *dimension* to it. For some people it may even be a negative, unpleasant experience *overall*. Accordingly, those who insist on seeing it solely in positive terms are either missing the point or are not being quite honest in their use of words.

If there was no negative element at all within the Judgment Seat, and no sanctions, then why would Jesus be asked to show mercy at it?

If there was no negative element to the Judgment Seat at all, then why would any of us need Jesus to show *mercy* to us when judging us? Yet it is plain that we do need His mercy. Indeed, Apostle Paul wrote about his friend Onesiphorus, who had helped him in the past when he was in great need. He then prays that Jesus will grant mercy to him (Onesiphorus) on that Day (the Day of Judgment):

¹⁵ *You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.* ¹⁶ *May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains,* ¹⁷ *but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—* ¹⁸ *may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.*

2 Timothy 1:15-18 (ESV)

If we had no need of mercy, then why would Paul pray for Onesiphorus to be given it? It is clear that Onesiphorus is already a genuine believer. Thus we know that Paul is not merely asking for him to be given mercy in terms of having his *sins forgiven*. That cannot be Paul's meaning.

He does not expect Onesiphorus to go the Great White Throne Judgment. Paul clearly means that He wants Jesus to take into account, at the Judgment Seat, the great help and mercy that Onesiphorus showed to Paul and for Jesus to grant equivalent mercy to him when He judges him.

One can only conclude therefore that Paul is asking for Jesus not to rebuke or chastise Onesiphorus for other sins or failings, or else to rebuke/chastise him less severely for those things. But, again, why bother to ask for any of that unless the Judgment Seat will contain elements of rebuke, chastisement, loss of rewards, demotion etc?

What is more, there is an intriguing passage in 2 Timothy chapter 4 where apostle Paul is speaking of a time when he was facing criminal charges because of his evangelistic work. He names certain Christians who had let him down and failed to stand by him or speak up for him in his time of trouble.

He says that they ‘deserted’ him. Thus we can be sure they were real Christians, otherwise why would Paul have expected them to stand by him in the first place? However, note what Paul then says at the end of that passage:

⁹ Do your best to come to me soon. ¹⁰ For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. ¹² Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!

2 Timothy 4:9-16 (ESV)

Paul ends by saying “...*May it not be charged against them*”. Again, we have to ask why Paul would feel it necessary to ask Jesus not to charge these men with having deserted him, abandoned him, or let him down if there is no possibility of any real Christian being charged with, or punished for, anything anyway.

Whatever it might mean for Jesus to ‘charge’ us in relation to some sin, omission or act of disobedience or neglect, it is plainly not something we would want to be said or done to us. Paul therefore wanted those believers who had failed him to be let off.

He wanted their wrongdoing to be overlooked by Jesus. Accordingly, the passage, and the prayer, can only make sense if there is a real chance for some or all of us to be charged with such things. Otherwise, Paul’s request would be meaningless and unnecessary.

There is no condemnation for those who go to the Judgment Seat of Christ. However is it possible for a real Christian to fall away and to be sent instead to the Great White Throne Judgment, where they would be condemned?

The question of whether a *real* Christian can fall away, so as to cease to be a Christian and be sent to the Great White Throne Judgment when they die, is a very complicated one. It cannot be answered in a short sound-bite. Please refer therefore to chapters 21 and 22 within Book One, in which I have attempted to give some balanced answers to the above questions.

However, if you doubt that there is even a question to be answered here, because you are convinced that no real Christian could ever fall away to that extent, then please consider passages such as these, from the letter to the Hebrews:

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God

Hebrews 10:26-31 (ESV)

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;

³⁸ *but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.”*
³⁹ *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed,
but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*
Hebrews 10: 36-39 (ESV)

Consider also what apostle Paul says in Romans about Israel being the vine from which branches (some of the Jewish people) were broken off because of their unbelief. That would not concern us so much, were it not for the fact that Paul then warns his readers, in the church in Rome, that *they too* could be cut off.

¹³ *Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry* ¹⁴ *in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.* ¹⁵ *For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?* ¹⁶ *If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.* ¹⁷ *But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree,*

¹⁸ *do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.* ¹⁹ *Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."* ²⁰ *That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.* ²¹ *For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.* ²² *Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*

Romans 11:13-22 (ESV)

My argument is that these warning verses need to concern all of us, not just somebody else. We have no basis for complacency. However, it is essential that we also seek to be balanced about this, as with every other question. Therefore, if you have not already done so, please do refer to the fuller, more balanced discussion on this point within chapters 21 and 22 of Book 1.

Are we meant to feel some fear about the prospect of facing Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

In the light of all that we have now seen, is it valid to feel some measure of apprehension, or even fear, at the prospect of being judged? I think it is, and it would appear that the Psalmist did too:

*My flesh trembles for fear of you,
and I am afraid of your judgments.*
Psalm 119:120 (ESV)

Moreover, so did apostle Peter. When referring to the subject of God's judgment, Peter urges us to "conduct (ourselves) with fear":

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

1 Peter 1:17 (RSV)

Therefore, we should not be coy or squeamish about using the word "*fear*" to describe how we should feel about the Judgment that awaits every one of us. Indeed, if we don't fear the Judgment Seat of Christ, then it is likely that we have not properly understood what it is.

We are meant to be taking active steps now to prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ

Hopefully this book has convinced you, if you didn't already know it, that we all face Judgment, either at the Judgment Seat of Christ or at the Great White Throne. If we really believe that, then we would be fools not to take it seriously and not to prepare ourselves. Of course, the first priority is to avoid even being present at the Great White Throne Judgment.

We achieve that by becoming a genuine Christian, i.e. by repenting, believing the gospel and putting our trust in Jesus Christ to save us from our sin. Doing that prevents us from being judged for our sins at the Great White Throne. If you have not yet taken that step, then take it now.

If you are not yet sure how to do so, then I would recommend that you look at my Book 1 and follow the advice given in that. However, if you already know that you are a real Christian, and are aware that you are going to be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ, then how can you best *prepare* for that?

What steps can you take now in the years, months or days that you have left, to get yourself into a better position to do well at that judgment? Let us firstly face the fact that you do not know how long you have got left to prepare yourself. You cannot just assume that you will live until you are about 80 or more.

Therefore you cannot be sure that you have plenty of time to get ready and that you can safely leave it for now and think about it later. I can remember being deeply affected when I was a new convert, aged 19. A student I knew who was very active in the Christian Union, died very suddenly aged 20 due to an accident in his home.

It shook me to think that I had seen him only a short time before, alive and well. Then he was suddenly gone, literally overnight. Then a couple of years later another Christian student from the same CU was killed while mountaineering. His life literally came to an end, in seconds, with no warning.

Again, his death made me think deeply about the fact that I could not know when I would die. It could be at any moment. Perhaps you consider that to be a morbid and unhelpful thought? In fact, as I see it, dwelling upon such questions has been one of the most useful things that I have ever done. It has helped me to become judgment-focused, which I have found to be very helpful, and even life-changing.

Let us return to the key question, i.e. what should we be doing now to prepare for our own judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Indeed, is it even possible to prepare ourselves? I believe that it is, and that God wants us to do so.

Indeed, that is the very reason why He has gone to such lengths to inform us of, and warn us about, that judgment and to make us aware of the many criteria by which we shall be judged. So, to attempt to answer the question, let us begin by reminding ourselves of the main purposes and objectives of the Judgment Seat of Christ. It will enable Jesus to:

- a) evaluate and assess our lives and in particular our faithfulness, obedience and fruitfulness
- b) decide what rewards and/or rebukes are due to us and to allocate us a place, position, role and rank within His Kingdom, i.e. during His 1000 year millennial reign and even beyond that, in the eternal Kingdom

Some practical advice on how to prepare yourself for the Judgment Seat

Accordingly, it would seem that we can best prepare for the Judgment Seat of Christ in the following ways:

a) Seek to be made aware of your own faults

Actively seek for correction, criticism and even rebuke now, rather than wait to be given those things at the Judgment itself. Would it not be foolish, and sad, to leave it until that Day of Judgment to learn things about yourself and your habits, attitudes, sins, faults and failings that you could have discovered now, and sought to reduce or eliminate?

Such knowledge can be obtained, first and foremost, by careful study of God's Word and by sincerely praying for God to open your eyes to your own faults. It can also be got by being willing to listen to the criticism and correction that can be given to us by other people, i.e. our bosses, colleagues, friends, family and especially our husband or wife.

By all of these means we should test and examine ourselves. Then we should change whatever needs to be changed so that we can get back to God and live His way:

*Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the Lord!*

Lamentations 3:40 (RSV)

Apostle Paul specifically tells us to judge ourselves now, so that there is then no need for God to judge us or chasten us. We can judge ourselves, by simply comparing the way we *actually* live with what the Bible says about how we *should* live:

³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:31-32 (RSV)

We therefore need to go out of our way to look for, and welcome, such discoveries about our faults and failings, wherever they may come from, and however painful they may be to hear. Above all we need to look for them in the Bible. Willingness to be corrected and to see one's own shortcomings as they really are, rather than in the self-justifying way in which we tend to portray them to ourselves, is rare.

However, it is extremely valuable. It is obviously better to seek for and accept rebuke, correction and criticism now, from the Bible, or from a boss/colleague/friend or spouse. Then you can do something about your faults and seek to change, rather than wait to receive these rebukes for the first time from Jesus Himself. By then it will be too late then for you to change so as to alter His assessment of you.

So, ask God to judge you now and to make you aware of your faults during this life. Ask Him to do it *in whatever way seems best to him*, whether it be through your spouse or other people or bosses or through His Word. We all go wrong and we all do wrong, but it is much better to be made aware of what you're like now, rather than later.

Therefore ask God to make you aware of your shortcomings now. It is perfectly legitimate to ask Him to do this gently, so that it does not overwhelm you. Look how Jeremiah went about it. He asked God to correct him, but not to do so in anger:

²³ I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. ²⁴ Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure; not in thy anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.

Jeremiah 10:23-24 (RSV)

b) Actively seek to change now, while you still have the chance

What is the point of learning more about how God wants us to be, or of learning about our faults, if we do not set out to do something about it and to change? Whatever period of time you have left to you in

this life is your opportunity to change. Don't waste any of it. However little time there is left, even if it is only minutes, that time can, at the very least, be used to sincerely acknowledge and repent of whatever sins or failings you are aware of.

Even if that was all you did, you would at least change the nature of your meeting with Jesus on that Day because He would no longer need to rebuke you for those sins. They would have been removed from you as far as the east is from the west. They would even be deleted from God's memory, at least for purposes of judgment. Therefore such repentance is profoundly worthwhile, even if the only thing it achieved was to reduce the extent to which we will be rebuked at the judgment.

However, repentance has so much more potential than that, if we allow it to lead to real change in our character and in the way we live. If so, then those changes will also have a very material effect on the outcome of our judgment in terms of rewards and also the role or rank allocated to us.

c) Seek to invest in God's Kingdom right now and to build a stockpile of 'treasure'.

I have met very few people who take this point seriously. If people think of it at all, or if they respond to things I have said on the subject, it is usually only to brush this aside. They speak as if it was inappropriate, or even improper, to seek for rewards. But God very clearly wants us to think this way and to see every day as an opportunity to invest in His Kingdom and to add to our stockpile of rewards or treasures.

The Bible refers to these things frequently and Jesus Himself emphasized them. Therefore make it your aim to start to focus more and more on taking God seriously when He refers to rewards, treasures, roles, inheritance, positions etc. Make it possible for Him to allocate more of these good things to you.

It is hard enough to focus on these issues when one is trying to do so. It is virtually impossible if one isn't even seeking to do so, because the question of rewards is not even on one's agenda. We therefore need to deliberately put it on our agenda. And we must keep putting it back on the agenda again, every time it falls off or gets forgotten.

Jesus did not repeatedly emphasise rewards so that we could just ignore and forget them. He wants those rewards to be very much on our minds. The difference is that it is with the treasure of the *next world*, not *this world*, that He wants us to be concerned.