

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 52

REWARDS & INHERITANCE, PART 4

This concept that there is only one general judgment has been entrenched in church dogma since at least the fourth or fifth century.

Augustine spiritualized Scriptures to a very great extent, and for our purposes here he particularly spiritualized and allegorized the Millennial Kingdom. He decided the judgment was a onetime event for both believers and unbelievers and just as so much of Augustine's theology was uncritically accepted as truth by the Reformers, this aberrant doctrine of a single judgment for all was accepted as well [Merrill F. Unger, *Great Neglected Bible Prophecies* as quoted by Samuel L. Hoyt in *The Judgment Seat of Christ: A Biblical and Theological Study*, p. 18]. One of the problems of the Protestant Reformation was their failure to "reform" the eschatology of the Roman Catholic Church; whatever the reason, they simply did not deal with this area of theology. My assumption is the Reformer's acceptance of Augustinian theology prevented any questions concerning amillennial eschatology; they simply accepted it as biblical truth. Also, far too many of today's pastors and theologians rely more on the Protestant creeds to inform their doctrinal positions than they rely on the Scriptures to do so. The concept of a general judgment became solidly entrenched in Protestant theology as a legacy from Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church and it is expressed in many of the creeds.

For example, article 17 of the Augsburg Confession of 1530, a Lutheran creed, states: "...at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end" [accessed at <http://bookofconcord.org.augsburgconfession.php>].

Article 37 of the Belgic Confession of 1561 concerning "Last Judgment" states: "Finally we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come, and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as he ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare himself judge of the quick and the dead; burning this old world with fire and flame, to cleanse it. And then all men will personally appear before this great judge, both men and women and children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trumpet of God. For all the dead

shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies, in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible, become incorruptible. Then the books (that is to say the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give an account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest; and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all. And therefore the consideration of this judgment, is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect: because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labour and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honour; and the Son of God will confess their names before God his Father, and his elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates, as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God. And for a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory, as never entered into the heart of man to conceive. Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." - Rev.22:20" [accessed at <http://www.creeds.net/belgic/>].

It is a sad fact that many theologians do rely on creeds for the formation of their theology rather than on the Scriptures. If you read much Reformed theology, you will note many references to the creeds which are seemingly given more prominence and importance than the Scriptures. One Reformed theologian of the nineteenth century claimed the second advent, the resurrection, and the judgment are all simultaneous. "For support of his position, he turns to what he calls 'authoritative statements' of this doctrine which include writings of Augustine, the Augsburg Confession, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Confession" [Samuel L. Hoyt, *The Judgment Seat of Christ: A Biblical and Theological Study*, p. 21 quoting A. A. Hodge *Outlines of Theology*]. The authoritative Scriptures would have been a much better place for the formulation of this man's doctrinal position which was not biblically correct.

In the Roman Catholic Catechism in part one, article 12, section V., entitled "Last Judgment," paragraphs 1038-1041 refer to a general judgment for all mankind. "The resurrection of all the dead, 'of both the just and the unjust,' will precede the Last

Judgment....Before him [Christ Jesus] will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left....And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.... In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man's relationship with God will be laid bare. The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life..." [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp.293-294]. This represents a massive amount of confusion between the sheep and goats judgment of Matthew 25:31-46, the Millennial Kingdom in contrast to the eternal state, the judgment seat of Christ, and the Great White Throne Judgment and merges all of them into one.

One of the theological problems that prevents many people from properly understanding the doctrine of rewards is replacement theology and, at the same time, the failure to understand the nature of the Kingdom offer Jesus made to the Jewish nation at His first advent. These are dispensational and hermeneutical issues. When the Kingdom offer to the Jews is confused with the church, misunderstanding the doctrine of rewards follows. For example, in the Beatitudes, the Lord was teaching the Jewish people that their national righteousness had to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in order to enter the Kingdom but when those Scriptures are said to be for the church and used as the basis for rewarding individual believers, this meaning is obliterated and lost. This is all coupled with the fact that replacement theologians believe the Kingdom is here now in some sort of spiritual form. Schreiner presents a perfect example of this confusion. "We saw in the Synoptic Gospels that those who refuse to repent when the message of the kingdom is proclaimed will face judgment, and it follows as a corollary that those who believe and obey will receive a final reward. Many of the Beatitudes promise an eschatological benefit for those who are Jesus' disciples. The mournful will receive comfort; the meek will inherit the earth; those hungry for righteousness will be satisfied; the merciful will know God's mercy; the pure in heart will see God; peacemakers will be God's children. Each of the Beatitudes conveys different aspects of the end-time reward promised to Jesus' followers. Perhaps the recompense of the disciples is best captured by the promise they will see God" [Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, pp. 841-842]. This theologian views the Beatitudes as a promise of final rewards for Christians. He completely removed the meaning of the Beatitudes from their context and assigned an eschatological meaning to them not contemplated by Matthew and not supported by the Scriptures. The Beatitudes, in this man's theological scheme, refer to eternal rewards. Further, he does not acknowledge a 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom on earth. His replacement theology has completely destroyed the true meaning of these Scriptures.

Blomberg cites several Scriptures that are claimed by us to prove the doctrine of rewards and by using the theological hermeneutic of the Calvinist systems of theology, he unconvincingly claims to have disproved the doctrine as we understand it. We will examine some of these Scriptures using a literal hermeneutic in order to fully understand the doctrine. Bear in mind, I'm not doing a complete exegetical examination of these verses; I'm examining what they have to say about the doctrine of rewards.

The first Scripture he uses to prove the egalitarian nature of rewards is Matthew 20:1-16.

Matthew 20:1-16 ¹“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²“When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³“And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. ⁵“Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. ⁶“And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ ⁷“They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’ ⁹“When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. ¹⁰“When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹“When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ ¹³“But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶“So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

Blomberg represents the majority interpretation of these verses: “In my study of this passage I conclude: The three main points which the three groups of characters [in this parable] suggest...all deal with the status of individuals before God at the final judgment. (1) From the earlier groups of workers, one learns that none of God's people will be treated unfairly (cf. v. 4—“whatever is right I will give you”); that is, no one will be shortchanged. (2) From the last group of workers comes the principle that many seemingly less deserving people will be treated generously, due to the sovereign free choice of God. (3) From the unifying role of the master stems the precious truth that all true disciples are equal in God's eyes” [Craig L. Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35, no. 2 (June 1992): 159-172]. In his commentary on Matthew, Blomberg says, “...Matt.20:1-16 [teaches] that there are no degrees of reward in heaven. [This fact is not] commonly known or understood in Christian circles. To be sure, every individual will have a highly

unique experience before God on Judgment Day (see esp. 1 Cor 3:10-15). But no text of Scripture supports the notion that these differences are perpetuated throughout eternity. The very nature of grace and perfection preclude such a concept. The reason we object to equal treatment for all is precisely the objection of the workers in this parable—it doesn't seem fair. But we are fools if we appeal to God for justice rather than grace, for in that case we'd all be damned. Nor will it do to speak of salvation begun by grace but ever after preserved by works. True salvation will of necessity produce good works and submission to Christ's lordship in every area of life, or else it never was salvation to begin with. But all who are truly saved are equally precious in God's sight and equally rewarded with eternal happiness in the company of Christ and all the redeemed" [Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: Matthew*, pp. 304-305].

How can people be said to have a "highly unique experience before God" at the Βῆμα as Blomberg noted, if everyone is equal before and after? Ultimately, he glosses over the concept of a unique experience in favor of equality. Simply because all those in the family of God are seen as equal in the eyes of God as members of the family of God does not mean all are given the same rewards and responsibilities based on faithful service. Blomberg imposes his concept of fairness into the discussion. He confuses justification salvation with rewards. This is the product of humanistic rational thought and not exegesis. Of course everyone will be happy in the presence of God, but that does not negate the idea of varying levels of rewards. Everyone will recognize that the Lord is perfectly just in His evaluation and we will all ultimately be content knowing that we were treated fairly and received exactly what we have earned. Notice how Lordship Salvation is imposed into the discussion of rewards and this as a false gospel which he links to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Because everyone must be faithful and obedient and produce good works in order to be saved, there is no need for rewards based on varying levels of faithfulness, obedience, and works because everyone did them at a level sufficient to "prove" they are saved. Theoretically, everyone does these things in equal measure, or at least close to equal measure, thereby proving their faith. In his theology, the fact of carnal, unfaithful Christians cannot exist because they would prove they are unsaved. Blomberg seems to assume that the thought processes we will possess in our glorified bodies are simply continuations of what we experience in this age with bodies—and brains—that are still affected to some degree by our sin nature. We have no idea what is in store for us when we have eternal bodies and no sin nature but it whatever it is, it will be far superior to what we know at this time.

We have already noted the truth of the Scriptures that varying levels of rewards will be awarded; therefore, this parable cannot be teaching equality among all believers in terms of rewards and position in the Kingdom. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and Luke 19:11-27 disprove that thought even though at first glance and in a superficial way, Matthew 20:1-16 may well be understood in an egalitarian way. However, theologians such as Blomberg are expected to dig deeper into the text and use the only appropriate hermeneutic to understand it which is the literal hermeneutic, instead, he used his theological hermeneutic and that led him away from the correct interpretation.

There are various ways theologians have interpreted this parable with what are probably varying degrees of accuracy and/or completeness. One commentator believes it is referring to faithfulness in taking advantage of the opportunity that the Lord has provided to people to serve Him; it is about "Being a faithful steward of the opportunity which has been entrusted to a believer..." There is a standard for evaluation and length of service in and of itself is not the standard; the standard is to faithfully work according to the opportunity provided. [Samuel L. Hoyt, *The Judgment Seat of Christ: A Biblical and Theological Study*, pp. 116-117]. This view is accurate as far as it goes; we are responsible for taking advantage of the opportunities provided us.

Wilkin generally agrees with that but he adds a twist to it. "The real lesson of the parable is that those believers *Who have served Him faithfully for their entire Christian lives*, will be rewarded equally *regardless of the length of their Christian lives*" [Robert N. Wilkin, *The Road to Reward: A Biblical Theology of Eternal Rewards*, p. 122]. In this parable, five different groups of laborers all worked when called (hired). They all served faithfully for the length of their service and all were equally rewarded for equally faithful service. Without getting dogmatic about it, it is possible the believer who has been saved for decades but is only a faithful servant for a short period of time will lose some degree of possible rewards while a believer who has only a short time to serve but faithfully serves that entire time will gain reward. That's the point Wilkin is making. One of the problems with Wilkin's interpretation is that Christians aren't the subject of this parable. We can make some careful determinations or applications concerning rewards from this parable but it isn't specifically about the church and the $\square\square\square$; that's an application and not an interpretation.

Walvoord understands this parable to be saying that God is sovereign and He rewards according to His judgment [John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come: A Commentary on the First Gospel*, p.149]. This is true, and the Scripture also says He will do what is right. He is just and righteous and this seems to imply that He will reward people according to the work performed to glorify Him. In our glorified bodies and presumably understanding spiritual things in ways we do not understand them now, we will all know that He is just and righteous and we will be perfectly satisfied with that. Dr. Hoehner addressed this issue. "Will difference in rewards distinguish people in heaven for eternity? Biblical references to heaven suggest that entering will be far more important than any variation of rewards. Though these may exist, those in heaven will be glorified, and their values will be completely different from earthly values. There will not be envy or jealousy, but rather praise. It will not be, 'Why did you get more rewards than I?' but more likely 'It is wonderful how you allowed the power of the Lord to work in you,' or, 'It is amazing what persecution you endured for the Lord.' Finally, everyone in heaven will realize that rewards, like salvation, are of God's grace, and will give him praise accordingly" [Harold W. Hoehner quoted in Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 997-998]. In our limited knowledge at this time concerning what life will be like in glorified bodies living in the family of God, Dr. Hoehner's thoughts are likely accurate.

Individual believers will be ashamed of their unfaithful Christian lives or lives that did not live up to their potential commensurate with their Spirit given gifts, but that shame will be short lived as they acknowledge the righteousness of Christ in His evaluation of their

work. "I do not see the shame lasting beyond the Judgment Seat of Christ. But because we will have no sinful nature when we see Him, we will also not be hardened to sin and not be rationalizing it. For those who have not been abiding in Him, the remorse, sorrow, regret, confession and repentance that should have been on earth will come at the Judgment Seat" [David R. Anderson, *Maximum Joy: First John—Relationship or Fellowship?*, p. 134].

1 John 2:28 ²⁸Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence [παρρησία] and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Confidence, *παρρησία*, denotes courage, boldness, and confidence; it is a state of boldness and confidence sometimes implying intimidating circumstances. John is telling us that we can look forward to meeting the Lord with confidence and boldness knowing we have served Him well. "The verse suggests that those who have faithfully abided in Christ will have boldness (□□□□□□□□) at His appearing. The term *παρρησία* denotes courage, confidence, boldness, and fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank" [Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ is Theological Perspective, part 2: The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 546 (April-June 1980): 125-130].

Conversely, the possibility exists some believers will be ashamed when He appears as they face Him at the Βῆμα. Shame, *αἰσχύνω*, means to be ashamed; it is to feel shame or disgrace because of having done something wrong or something beneath one's dignity or social status. This verb is a passive or middle subjunctive. The subjunctive mood refers to possibility. It must be used in the middle voice because the believer moves himself away or recoils from the Lord in shame; if it were passive, the Lord would be pushing him away and that doesn't reflect what is happening at the Βῆμα. All believers are unified in Christ as part of the body, the bride of Christ; He isn't pushing them away. The shame is self-induced due to the realization that we failed to do all we could have done to serve and to glorify Him as the opportunities were provided us; the Lord will not be shaming us. "The idea would seem to be that of withdrawing ashamed from His presence, shrinking back from a sense of guilt" [Canon A. E. Brooke, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, p. 66]. I'm assuming that some of us in our glorified bodies will better understand these spiritual issues to the extent that we will just know we simply fell short in terms of what we had in the opportunity to serve Him well. It is not a punitive activity that is going on at the judgment seat. "The cause of shame at the judgment seat of Christ apparently arises from the believer's own realization of sin, unfaithfulness, and neglected opportunities rather than from being rebuked by Christ.... The Bible suggests that there will be shame at the judgment seat of Christ to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the measure of unfaithfulness of each individual believer. Therefore it should be each believer's impelling desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord in all things.

Although Christians apparently will reflect on this earthly life with some regret, they will also realize what is ahead for them in the heavenly life. This latter realization will be the source of boundless joy....The elements of remorse, regret, and shame cannot be avoided in an examination of the judgment seat of Christ. But this sorrow must be somewhat relative because even for the finest of Christians there will be some things worthy of unceasing remorse in the light of God's unapproachable holiness. This would mean that the finest of Christians could be sorrowful throughout eternity. However, this is not the picture that the New Testament gives of heaven. The overwhelming emotion is joyfulness and gratefulness. Although there is undeniably some measure of remorse or regret, this is not the overriding emotion to be experienced throughout the eternal state" [Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ is Theological Perspective, part 2: The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 546 (April-June 1980): 125-130]. John is clearly telling us we can be confident when we meet the Lord at the Βῆμα or we can be ashamed but in varying degrees from person to person according to our sanctification. Dr. Hoyt may be correct when he says that all of us may feel a bit to shame to some extent. The choice seems to be ours and it is dependent on our submission to the Spirit, walking in Him, bearing spiritual fruit, and glorifying the name of the Lord. Shame at the judgment seat upon meeting Christ seems to flow from the individual believer's realization that he fell short of the Lord's reasonable expectations and it is not from the Lord. The evaluation of each one's work is up to the Lord's judgment, but our eagerness to be evaluated by Him, at least to some extent, is dependent on our walk. Some will be confident when they meet Him and some will be ashamed and perhaps many will experience both of those emotions to some degree. Our experiential sanctification matters; be faithful and you won't have to experience apprehension or even shame when meeting the Lord face-to-face at the judgment seat. John said that abiding in Him will prevent this feeling of shame. I can't imagine that any shame and remorse felt at the judgment seat will last beyond that moment; the joy and peace found within the family of God in eternity has to replace all that at the moment the judgment seat ends.

Blomberg uses part of Revelation 21:4 in another attempt to defeat any concept of varying levels of reward. He does this by inserting his personal emotions into his interpretation according to our thinking in this age. Inserting his personal emotions into his interpretation is wrong and assuming our thinking will be the same in our glorified state is also incorrect.

Revelation 21:4 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."

“The Biblical data concerning heaven, sparse though they are, seem in concord with these suppositions. The most extensive teaching passage on the topic is Revelation 21–22, and the clearest nonmetaphorical statement in these chapters is 21:4b: “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain”—absolutely nothing to make one sad. But surely people would live with some unending sense of regret and sadness if they realized that they had not attained to as high a level of enjoyment or privilege in heaven as they might have, had their lives on this earth proved more meritorious. Theologians often sense this problem and dismiss it by assuming that we will not be conscious of such distinctions or that the great happiness of heaven will outweigh whatever small sense of regret remains. But these concessions, unsupported by any Biblical texts, give away precisely what the doctrine of degrees of reward is supposed to ensure: a powerful motivation for living a life that pleases God now. If such gradations are not perceptible [sic] or do not matter, why introduce them in the first place?” [Craig L. Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35, no. 2 (June 1992): 159-172]. The Scripture tells us that the things that make us sad will have been removed; there will be no cause for sadness. We will not be sad to realize varying levels of rewards because sins such as jealousy and covetousness will no longer be an issue. Blomberg is assuming our emotional state will be the same in our glorified bodies as it is now and that does not seem to be an accurate presupposition.

The first problem exhibited here is the merging of all the judgments into one and then the immediate transition into the eternal state occurs rather than into the Millennial Kingdom. This represents the refusal to let the Bible speak for itself; theology is allowed to interpret the Scriptures. It is also the denial of a literal Millennial Kingdom to follow the judgment seat of Christ. The text does not support this sequence of events so the starting point for this man's doctrine is flawed. Blomberg simply assumes people will be sad if other believers are rewarded in ways that are perceived to be superior and he assumes this sadness must last for eternity. It is ironic he denies that the nature of rewards are eternal but he claims the sadness that he presupposes over differences in rewards will be eternal. That is a faulty humanistic presupposition. We have already discussed the concept that God will do what is just and right and we all will, in our glorified state without a sin nature, recognize, understand, and accept that fact. No one will have an “unending sense of regret and sadness” after the judgment seat of Christ. There will be no jealousy over the rewards any other believer received. Theologians who realize there are differences in rewards do their arguments a disservice when they try to attempt to minimize the differences by saying we won't be conscious of the differences in rewards or that joy will outweigh those concerns. Blomberg is correct when he says the Bible does not support such attempts, but we will, in fact, contrary to Blomberg, be conscious of the differences in service to the Lord and we will also recognize that everyone has received what they deserved and in our glorified

state we will all accept the situation with joy. We already noted what Dr. Hoehner correctly believes about this issue. For example, the twelve apostles will be assigned duties judging the twelve tribes of Israel which can properly be considered a prestigious eternal position [Mt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30]. No one will be jealous of them; they will be awarded those positions based on the righteous judgment of the Lord. It is difficult for us to imagine what we will be like absent the sin nature and operating in the manner in which God created us to operate in the first place and that leads Blomberg into making some incorrect presuppositions about what life will be like in heaven. The Bible doesn't say much about what life in heaven will be like, but it does reveal differences in rewards. Blomberg seems to presuppose that the thought processes that characterize us in mortal bodies with a sin nature continue unabated in eternity when we will have glorified bodies absent a sin nature. We cannot assume that and, in fact, it seems highly unlikely and even preposterous to make these presumptions.