

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 54

REWARDS & INHERITANCE, PART 6

One of the problems with combining the judgment seat of Christ for believers with the Great White Throne judgment for unbelievers is that good works and obedience generally become the standard whereby it is determined whether or not one is actually a believer and saved. In other words, if all people are at one judgment, how are believers identified as different from unbelievers? What is the basis upon which the Lord will determine His decision? Works rather than faith become that determining factor. One Puritan wrote that "...[works] are considered in the judgment passed upon every man" and that "Examination of the works done by humans, with God rewarding or damning according to the character of those works..." [Thomas Manton as quoted by Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, p. 796]. Because this Puritan acknowledges only one judgment, he can only view it in terms of life and death where eternal life is viewed as the reward and works are the basis for determining life or death. Eternal life is not a reward; it is positional truth granted immediately upon belief in Christ as a result of the non-meritorious exercise of faith/trust/belief. The concept of one judgment isn't true, it's not supported by Scripture, and it won't happen this way, but this is what many pastors and teachers teach people and the majority of those who call themselves believers think their eternal life will be granted based on their good works.

Some Calvinists have argued that John Calvin taught justification on two levels based on his interpretation of Ezekiel 18. Most students of Calvin reject this interpretation of his theology but Calvin is the theologian who coined the term, "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone"; therefore, I'm thinking there is some truth to this thought that he taught two levels of justification salvation and I believe his teaching supports that view. Based on his research of Calvin's writing, Steven Coxhead writes, "Covenant righteousness is the right standing before God that a member of the covenant enjoys on the basis of covenant obedience or loyalty, which consists of a genuine commitment to living one's life in accordance with God's word....Calvin acknowledges, therefore, a form of righteousness that consists of holy living and which is necessary for the eschatological salvation of believers in the outworking in history of God's covenants of grace....In Calvin's thinking, justification by faith *alone* operates on the level of absolute righteousness, *and* justification by works on the level of God's gracious covenant. Those who deny that Calvin taught a subordinate and legitimate doctrine of justification by works have arguably not understood the genius of Calvin's teaching on this issue" [Steven R. Coxhead, "John

Calvin's Subordinate Doctrine of Justification by Works" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1-19]. Calvin taught on the one hand justification by grace alone through faith alone but on the other hand he also taught justification by works. That cannot be; those two things are mutually exclusive. That's why he had to get into nonsensical word games with his cliché, "It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone." It is sad to say that millions of people have believed this dichotomous, false view of justification salvation and have therefore believed the false doctrine of faith plus works.

There are a number of issues at play here and the problem with faith plus works is more than simply works but it also extends into developing a theological system in the areas of replacement theology that recognizes only one people of God and places the church back into the Old Testament which destroys the truth about the Kingdom and makes it here and now, the theological construct called the covenant of grace which is not biblical, Lordship salvation which is faith plus works, and in addition to all that one judgment seat at one time for all people, saved and unsaved which makes works the determining factor for heaven or the lake of fire. A major contributing factor to this faulty understanding of faith and works is the incorrect interpretation of James 2:14-26. While there is much more to the problem of faith plus works, the concept of one general judgment for all mankind at one time only serves to reinforce that faulty doctrine. It also creates a false understanding or rewards.

It is interesting to note that the Bible does not say that Old Testament believers, Tribulation saints (believers), and Millennial Kingdom believers ever face any sort of judgment seat. The Lord told Nicodemus that those who believe do not face judgment. There are judgments that separate believers from unbelievers but no separate judgments for believers other than those people in this dispensation who are in the Church, the body and bride of Christ. Believers, those who make up the body and bride of Christ, will not face punishment at the judgment seat of Christ but instead they will be evaluated for commendation for work done on the Lord's behalf. Apparently, once a person believes, no matter the dispensation, there is no possibility of any sort of negative judgment. Perhaps it would be less confusing if the judgment seat of Christ was called the evaluation seat of Christ. To the contrary, unbelievers without exception will face judgment.

John 3:18 ¹⁸"He who believes in Him is not judged..."

If the judgment seat of Christ for those in the body of Christ and the Great White Throne judgment for history's unbelievers are held at different times, when will they occur? Let's examine the judgment of unbelievers first.

All unbelievers will be judged at the Great White Throne judgment and that occurs after the conclusion of the Millennial Kingdom and immediately prior to the eternal state.

Revelation 20:11–15 ¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

These unbelieving people are not judged for their personal sins; Christ Jesus paid their sin debt on the cross just as He paid the debt for all human beings on the cross. It is interesting to note the eternal destiny of the unbelieving people of all time will die twice. There is no generation of unbelievers that will avoid physical death prior to judgment as there is a generation of age of grace believers who will not experience physical death as well as some Tribulation saints who will survive the time of Jacob's trouble to enter alive into the Millennial Kingdom. Unbelievers will die a physical death and then they will be resurrected to an eternal existence that is spiritual death eternally separated from their Creator God. I've heard a saying that says, "Born twice, die once; born once, die twice." That is a concise way of saying that believers are born two times; they are born physically and they are born spiritually. They then experience a physical death once, with the exception of the rapture generation, and are resurrected to eternal life. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are born physically and die a physical death. They are then resurrected to die the second death which is eternal separation from God.

1 John 2:2 ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Because they have rejected the work Christ did on their behalf, they are relying on their works to "prove" they are worthy. They can't do that because their sin nature has them condemned in Adam and they have not believed in the One who made provision for them on the cross.

Romans 5:16–19 ¹⁶...for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation...¹⁷For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one...¹⁸So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation

to all men...¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners...

John 3:18 ¹⁸...he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

There is one set of books containing the deeds of these people and another book called the book of life which contains the names of all the redeemed. These people are unsaved, they have not believed, their names are not written in the book of life, and their fate is to be thrown into the lake of fire. There are no believers being judged at this judgment. "This book [book of life] is singled out from among the other books because of its paramount importance. Unlike the books which record their works, this book records their *faith*, or lack thereof. The mere appearance of this book in the judgment is proof that access to God is by faith alone. For if salvation could be by works, the books recording their deeds would be sufficient for judgment" [Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p. 2:127].

The judgment seat of Christ will take place after the Rapture of the Church and before the Second Coming. The judgment seems to be connected to the day of the Lord's coming for His bride.

1 Corinthians 3:13 ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

Philippians 2:16 ¹⁶holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

The Rapture of the Church and the anticipation of it by individual believers is an incentive to live the sanctified life which becomes a life that glorifies the Lord and that is a life that will be rewarded.

1 John 3:2–3 ²Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Titus 2:13–14 ¹³looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

“The connection between the rapture of the church and the rewarding of the church is not surprising since the imminency of Christ’s coming is intended to induce greater practical holiness and purity in the lives of each believer. The realization that believers could be caught up to be with Christ at any moment, and immediately afterwards have one’s Christian life judged by the Lord, should have a practical, sanctifying effect in the daily life of every believer” [Thomas L. Stegall, “Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ” in *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology*, p. 431].

The judgment seat of Christ is one of only two events we know for sure will take place in heaven during the period between the Rapture and the end of the Tribulation period. The other event is the actual wedding. In Jewish weddings of biblical times, the wedding occurs when the bridegroom goes to fetch his bride and takes her away to his father’s house where they enter the bridal chamber for a week. Many people mistakenly assume the Wedding Supper of the Lamb will be held during that time as well but that cannot be. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb must and will take place on earth as the inaugural event of the Millennial Kingdom. The reason it has to take place on earth concerns the matter of guests at the Wedding Supper. The Old Testament believers and the Tribulation saints will be the wedding guests but they will not be resurrected until after the Second Coming. The Bride cannot be counted among the guests; what bride is a guest at her own wedding? Humanly speaking, the bride is the main attraction at the wedding; in the case of the Church, the Lord is the main attraction. Again, using the imagery of the Jewish wedding, after the bride and groom emerge from the wedding chamber, they join the guests for their wedding supper. That’s the same picture we have concerning the wedding of Christ and His Church and the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. The Lord comes for His bride and takes her back to His Father’s house where the wedding occurs and when they “emerge” from the Father’s house, which is the Second Coming, the Wedding Supper of the Lamb will take place on earth in the company of the guests who are those believers not part of the Church.

We know that Tribulation saints are not resurrected until the Lord returns at the end of the Tribulation.

Revelation 20:4–6 ⁴Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over

these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

The Old Testament Scriptures also tell us that the saints of those dispensations will be resurrected after the time of distress to which Israel will be subjected.

Daniel 12:1-3 ¹“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. ²“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. ³“Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Ezekiel 37:11-14 ¹¹Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’ ¹²“Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³“Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. ¹⁴“I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.’ ”

Isaiah 26:19 ¹⁹Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, For your dew is as the dew of the dawn, And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.

All these people will be guests at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb celebrating the union of Christ and His Bride, the Church. That must take place after Israel is rescued and placed in the land in belief and this will be the inaugural event for the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom. Concerning rewards, the judgment seat of Christ will be over and those in the body of Christ will have received their appointments in service to the King during the Kingdom.

I have demonstrated that many people believe salvation itself is the reward at the judgment seat of Christ and that is why, at least in part, they cannot recognize varying degrees of rewards among the saints. The problem with that doctrine is the Bible clearly differentiates between justification salvation and rewards. Justification itself is not the

reward; it is a positional truth based on and flowing from one's faith in Christ Jesus. It is entirely non-meritorious and non-rewardable.

The most obvious difference between justification salvation and rewards is that justification is only available to unbelievers; those who are justified have already experienced salvation and have no further need of it in terms of the new birth. They have already been awarded eternal life. Believers are, however, commanded to do good deeds and to bear spiritual fruit by abiding in the Lord and glorifying His name through the activity they do in His name. Conversely, there is nothing an unbeliever can do in Christ's name; they are not in Christ. Unbeliever's can do nothing to merit reward and there is nothing in the Bible commanding them to do good deeds in Christ's name. Unbelievers are spiritually dead in Adam and separated from God; they are operating only within the parameters of Satan's world system. Those in Christ have nothing spiritually in common with those in Adam.

2 Corinthians 6:14–18 ¹⁴Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. ¹⁷"Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸"And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

The evangelistic passages in Scripture are always directed to unbelievers; reward passages are always directed to believers.

Justification salvation is by grace alone through faith alone with no consideration given to human effort or works before, during, or after the moment one places his faith in Christ. Rewards are also grace gifts from Christ Jesus but they the result of works that honor and glorify Him as believers abide and bear spiritual fruit. Eternal life is a grace gift from God based on Christ's work for us while rewards are awarded to individual believers based on their work for Christ. Works are absent from justification salvation but works are the basis for rewards.

Ephesians 2:8–10 ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

Romans 6:23 ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Revelation 22:12 ¹²“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

Another aspect of the difference between justification salvation and rewards is time. The moment a person believes in Christ Jesus, they are granted eternal life which, by definition, can never be lost; it endures for eternity from that moment forward. Rewards, however, are earned over the believer's lifetime of faith whether that is a long period of time or a short period of time. Whichever the case, it is a period that is much longer than a specific moment in time.

John 5:24 ²⁴“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life [sanctification salvation, the present], and does not come into judgment [glorification salvation, the future], but has passed out of death into life [justification salvation, the past].

Hebrews 12:1 ¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Justification salvation is eternal truth; the moment a person believes they pass from death into life (just as Jesus said in John 5:24) and that life can never be abrogated or even diminished in any way. In other words, no one who is born again can lose eternal life; if eternal life could be lost, it would not be eternal and Jesus said we receive eternal life. Conversely, believers can lose rewards for unfaithfulness and for failing to take advantage of the opportunities provided them by the Spirit. Losing rewards is not punishment and it does not diminish the quality of eternal life. The quality of life is a separate issue from the services performed for the Lord in the Kingdom.

John 10:28 ²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

1 Corinthians 3:15 ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Revelation 3:11 ¹¹“I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Justification salvation is the same for all believers. There are not varying degrees of the new birth. A person is either spiritually born of God or not. Just as all people are physi-

cally born in the same manner, all people are spiritually born and made alive in the same manner and to the same degree. If every born again person is clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ, how can that possibly vary from believer to believer? Christ's righteousness is not incomplete so how can His righteousness be incomplete on behalf of every believer? If every believer is granted every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, how can they attain any greater positional blessings? Every believer is made complete in Christ; there can be no lesser degree of being complete because that would then be less than complete. No one can be more complete than anyone else; by definition, everyone is totally complete in Him. Degrees of reward will vary from believer to believer based on their works. We've already discussed 2 John 8 which says there is the possibility of failing to achieve a "full reward" which implies varying levels of rewards based on our works.

Colossians 2:10¹⁰and in Him you have been made complete...

Romans 5:17, 19¹⁷... much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ....¹⁹... even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Ephesians 1:3³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

Justification salvation results in complete acceptance by God into the family of God. Every born again person becomes family. There are no degrees of familial acceptance; we are all brothers and sisters in Christ living in the family of God on an equal basis. Our position in the family is secured not by anything we have done but by everything Christ has done on our behalf. Rewards, on the other hand, are bestowed based on Christ's approval of the work, or disapproval of the lack thereof, each person has done in His name.

Ephesians 1:5-6⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

God determined in eternity past that every person who would place their faith in Christ Jesus, His person and His work, would be adopted into the family of God. It is strictly a grace operation; no human being deserves this amazing promise. This Scripture confirms that all are equal within the family of God; no one is superior to or exalted over any other person. This positional truth is not affected or altered in any way based on the determination the Lord makes concerning individual rewards. Rewards are a distinct issue dependent on the Lord's evaluation of work performed in His name and they

result in varying levels of service and responsibility in the Kingdom which has no bearing on position. This is further biblical evidence that justification salvation is not the reward; they are distinct issues.

1 Corinthians 3:12–15 ¹²Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 Corinthians 4:4–5 ⁴... but the one who examines me is the Lord. ⁵Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

Justification salvation determines eternal destiny and that is an unchangeable positional truth equally applicable to all who believe and it is not the reward. Those justified will enjoy eternal life and those who reject the life offered them in Christ will suffer eternal death in the lake of fire. These are positional truths. Rewards are applicable only to those possessing eternal life and they result in privilege and responsibility in the Kingdom; these vary from believer to believer.