

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 53

REWARDS & INHERITANCE, PART 5

One of the interesting facts in all this is Blomberg, while discussing 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, admits that Scripture identifies differences in rewards. "1 Corinthians 3:11-15 clearly distinguishes between the qualities of believers' works and their rewards on judgment day" [Craig L. Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35, no. 2 (June 1992): 159-172]. Yet, his entire article was written to refute that fact. This illustrates once again the inconsistencies and contradictions that inevitably creep into one's interpretations of Scripture when literal hermeneutics are abandoned in favor of theological hermeneutics. Not only does Blomberg abandon literal hermeneutics but he inserts human reasoning and secular philosophy into his hermeneutical process. "A final logical question could be asked: If the heavenly aspect of eternal life represents perfection, is it not fundamentally self-contradictory to speak of degrees of perfection? Surely theologians ought to reconsider a doctrine that involves an elementary lexical and conceptual fallacy" [Craig L. Blomberg, "Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 35, no. 2 (June 1992): 159-172]. Of course, eternal life represents the perfection that God originally intended to characterize life in His presence but that doesn't mean everyone is exactly the same. We will not be clones of one another in the eternal state; we will still be individual people. How that will play out in eternity with billions of people existing together yet without sin and discord will be an amazing thing for us to experience but experience it we certainly will. Simply assuming our glorified salvation life in eternity will be an extension of our sanctification salvation life in this age is silly and it is egregious error to use those assumptions as the basis for one's theology and it leads people away from the truth of the doctrine of rewards. We can dismiss his concern over what he calls an "elementary...conceptual fallacy" because that idea is purely driven by his faulty theology and its imposition onto the text. Our concept of rewards is driven by the text and not by theological presuppositions. I take it that his use of the word "elementary" means he believes we have an immature, childish, and undeveloped doctrine of rewards as opposed to his scholarly, refined, and deep understanding of the doctrine. His criticism of our "elementary lexical...fallacy" refers to the meaning of perfection. His assumption is that eternal perfection means everyone is the same and that is a deficient presupposition. This always comes back to hermeneutics. Literal hermeneutics are apparently too simplistic for refined, Reformed theological minds.

2 John 8 suggests that people can lose a full reward, in this case, for allowing deceivers who teach that Christ did not come in the flesh to operate within their local body. Being deceived, whether intentionally or not, will be a basis for losing rewards. Conversely, this verse does not seem to be saying all rewards are lost for following deceivers such as this. I assume the Lord will take each individual's circumstances into consideration. If we aren't operating in the truth by following false teachers, we aren't properly serving and glorifying the Lord. When that happens, we aren't operating in the realm of rewardable works; everything becomes tainted and worthless or unapproved. Operating outside the realm of biblical revelation is not appropriate.

Blomberg uses a textual problem with this verse as a basis for claiming that everyone will equally suffer loss in terms of rewards.

2 John 8 ⁸Watch yourselves, that you do not lose [ἀπολέσητε, verb, aorist active, subjunctive, 2nd person, plural] what we have accomplished, but that you [ἀπολάβητε, verb aorist active, subjunctive, 2nd person, plural] may receive a full reward [NASB].

2 John 8 ⁸Look to yourselves, that we do not lose [ἀπολέσωμεν, verb, aorist active, subjunctive, 1st person, plural] those things we worked for, but that we [ἀπολάβωμεν, verb, aorist active, subjunctive, 1st person, plural] may receive a full reward [NKJV].

Blomberg wrote, "2 John 8 warns against losing "what you have worked for," so that "you (or, more probably, "we") may be rewarded fully. [NOTE: Blomberg prioritizes the KJV manuscript group as the basis for his exegetical conclusion that "we" refers to the collective group.] The better textual reading, "we," [he inaccurately cites Bruce Metzger as the basis for this claim] by itself cautions against a doctrine of individual rewards. John is anticipating the same reward as the Ephesian Christians. But even if "you" be accepted and interpreted as a distributive rather than collective plural (also less likely), the reward in context can be nothing other than seeing the work of the ministry at Ephesus endure against false, gnostic teachers. From several angles the same conclusion recurs again and again. There is no unambiguous NT doctrine of varying eternal rewards for believers" [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 Bruce Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, he wrote these comments on 2 John 8: "ἀπολέσητε ... ἀπολάβητε {A}...Superior manuscript evidence supports the second person verbs, which are also congruent with βλέπετε ἑαυτούς...." Metzger and his committee rated the reading used by the NASB as "certain;" that is the significance of the "A" in brackets. Blomberg also claims that even if "you" is the better translation, it still refers to the group as a whole. The context suggest otherwise. It is not

unusual to use the plural pronoun “you” to warn individuals within a collective group to do or to not do something. It is also puzzling that Blomberg dogmatically asserts John was writing to the church in Ephesus; he never identified the church to which he was writing. The most you can say is that he was possibly writing to the believers in the church at Ephesus, but it is just as likely that he was writing from his home in Ephesus to another church in the area. We simply don't know.

The NASB translators used the Nestle-Aland text and the New King James used the Textus Receptus, also known as the Received Text or the Majority Text. Blomberg cited Metzger as the basis for claiming “we” is the preferred translation, but Metzger doesn't do that because he doesn't use that text. In fact, Metzger says the second person pronouns, “you” are certain to be correct. Blomberg is at least mischaracterizing what Metzger wrote in his textual commentary, if not misrepresenting him [Metzger], in order to sway people to his [Blomberg's] position. Blomberg apparently wants to use the Textus Receptus type of manuscripts because it better supports his theology but Metzger isn't using them so to claim that Metzger is supporting his position is not true.

Even if we grant that Blomberg's use of “we” is warranted, it still doesn't support his egalitarian position. All it does is change the meaning to the apostle John being subject to losing rewards for the unfaithfulness of those he taught. Blomberg refers to that when he wrote that John expected the same reward as those in the flock. Zane Hodges uses the Textus Receptus, which he calls the Majority Text, and the NKJV and that is exactly his position. “What was at risk, due to the threat of false doctrine, was not simply their work for God, but the apostle's as well. If the work of God in this church should suffer damage, therefore, it was not only their reward that would be affected, but the apostle's [reward] too” [Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love*, p. 260]. But that doesn't seem tenable and it is only possible if the reading found in the NKJV is accepted as original. Metzger rates the NASB and its use of the second person pronouns as the “certain” translation. If Blomberg and Hodges are correct, the question then becomes, are pastors who faithfully teach sound doctrine responsible to the point of losing rewards for those same pupils if they are later seduced by false teachers and fall away from sound doctrine? That doesn't seem possible. The Bible never says we will be held accountable for the faithlessness of those we have taught assuming we correctly taught them in the first place which we know John certainly did. Teachers will be held accountable for teaching false doctrine and those who hear it will be held accountable for believing it to the extent they didn't get into the Word of God to determine the truth for themselves. Just because people are deceived by false teachers doesn't mean they won't be held accountable for believing that false teaching. This has to be particularly true for those who had access to the Word of God.

This verse is telling us that following the teaching of false teachers in place of adhering to biblical truth can result in a loss of rewards. John characterized it as a loss of “full reward.” John diligently labored among them to teach then sound doctrine, in this case, that Christ came in the flesh. For them to believe the lie that He did not come in the flesh, would cause them to lose rewards. “If for no other reason than this verse, the importance of Second John in the canon of the New Testament would be firmly established. No statement in the Scriptures makes clearer the integral connection between maintaining truth and gaining eternal reward” [Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love*, p. 259]. What this verse isn’t saying is that those who follow false teachers lose their eternal life because that is impossible and departing from the faith is not certain “proof” that the person was never saved to begin with. If some Christians can lose rewards for following false teachers, then Blomberg’s egalitarian position of equality in rewards cannot be correct. We all know born again people who fall for the lies of some of the wolves out there. They will lose rewards while those who held on to their sound doctrine will not lose rewards and this, in and of itself, presents differences among believers in rewards. It is no less different for those of us living in the body today.

So how was the dispensational, Free Grace position on rewards developed? Obviously, I’m suggesting it was developed through the application of literal hermeneutics. The first thing to understand is that rewards are a doctrine clearly revealed in Scripture. They also developed as a result of the sharp soteriological distinction between justification salvation and sanctification salvation. This distinction is denied by most Christians and they combine justification with sanctification and then use sanctification standards as the gauge for determining justification salvation. Justification salvation is a free gift from God to man based on and activated by belief. It is a non-meritorious eternal position brought into existence at a moment in time that can never be lost or altered. The Bible then makes it clear that after that moment in time we are gifted in order to bear spiritual fruit and to do good works from which flows the concept of rewards for faithfully bearing spiritual fruit and doing good works in the name of the Lord and that is properly denoted sanctification salvation. These are two distinct phases or tenses of the reality of what it means to experience salvation.

The concept of a judgment seat as it is presented in the Scriptures has its roots in Greco Roman culture. There are two Greek words that could have been used to refer to the judgment seat of Christ, but Paul was careful to use only one of them.

The word that Paul used to refer to the judgment seat of Christ was Βῆμα. In early Greek, the word was used to “mean ‘step’ both in the sense of ‘pace’ (movement made by walking or distance covered thereby....) and with ref[erence] to a structure on which one rests the foot to walk up or down, thence a base or pedestal, and esp[ecially] a

platform used for public speaking....When used in a judicial setting, βῆμα referred to courtroom platforms and could bear the sense of 'tribunal'" [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "βῆμα"]. BDAG has it meaning a step forward made by a foot, step; a very limited space, or a dais or platform that required steps to ascend [BDAG, s.v. "βῆμα"].

The Greek word was used in the Septuagint only twice.

Deuteronomy 2:5⁵do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep [כַּף-רֶגֶל sole of a foot, βῆμα] because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.

Nehemiah 8:4⁴Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium [βῆμα] which they had made for the purpose. ...

As we have already noted, the word is used by Paul to refer to the judgment seat of Christ. It also refers to the judgment seat of civil authorities.

2 Corinthians 5:10¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat [βῆμα] of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Matthew 27:19¹⁹While he [Pontius Pilate] was sitting on the judgment seat [βῆμα]...

Acts 18:12¹²But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat [βῆμα]

The Romans used the word more often to refer to the seat of a judge in legal proceedings but the Greeks used it more frequently to refer to the seat of the judges appointed to oversee, administer, and award the prizes at their athletic contests. Generally speaking and according to context, that is the meaning to which we find Paul referring in his epistles. On the other hand, in the Gospels and in Acts, the Roman sense of a legal proceeding is predominant. Context is important in properly understanding how this word is being used.

The other word used in the New Testament to refer to a judgment seat type of arrangement is κριτήριον which means the place of justice; a court of justice for determining guilt or innocence.

1 Corinthians 6:2, 4²Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts

[κριτήριον]?... ⁴So if you have law courts [κριτήριον] dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church?

James 2:6 ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court [κριτήριον]?

It appears to be significant that Paul used Βῆμα rather than κριτήριον when he was referring to the judgment seat of Christ. The process of determining guilt or innocence and of deciding right or wrong are not issues in play at the judgment seat of Christ; deciding those issues is the primary meaning of κριτήριον. Everyone appearing at the judgment seat of Christ has been declared righteous by virtue of their position in Christ; there is no liability that may be attached to the believer for any reason. That's why the word Βῆμα in the context of the rewards ceremony of the Grecian athletic contests is a more appropriate description of the judgment seat of Christ where judicial condemnation is not an issue and that's how and why Paul used the word Βῆμα instead of using κριτήριον. In those athletic contests, the judges rewarded the winners but they did not condemn the losers. The judgment seat of Christ is not a judicial tribunal; it is a place of evaluation for reward. "...[κριτήριον] must be the stronger word in reference to justice, judgment, and condemnation. The word [Βῆμα]...comes from [βαινω] and basically means a step or a raised place or platform. It refers to the physical character of a place and conveys the concepts of prominence, dignity, and authority. The word [κριτήριον] comes from [κρινω] and basically refers to a place of judicial proceedings, that is, a law court. [Βῆμα] generally denotes a place of prominence, while [κριτήριον] specifically refers to a place of prosecution. The former can be and frequently is used of judicial situations at which evaluations are made in regard to life and conduct of an individual" [Samuel L. Hoyt, *The Judgment Seat of Christ: A Biblical and Theological Study*, p. 45]. Believers may feel shame at the judgment seat but this is a product of their own self-evaluation when faced in person with the ultimate righteousness and holiness of Christ. Believers may feel shame because when they see Him they will know they didn't do all they had the opportunity to do in this life to serve Him. The shame will be removed as He honestly and justly evaluates the life lived in Him and believers then enter into the joy of serving Him in His Kingdom as members of the family of God. This concept is far removed from the judicial notion of adjudication and punishment.

There are theologians who take issue with what I just said. In their view, the judgment seat of Christ may well be punitive in nature and a truly horrifying experience. "The use of the word [Βῆμα] in the preceding passages [Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10] is not at all in accord with the thought of a rewarding stand. In each instance the judicial activity of a magistrate is in view, which is exactly the Scriptural view of the judgment seat of Christ... At the judgment seat of Christ there will be an execution of perfect justice and righteousness. If rewards are merited, then rewards will be given; if, on the other hand,

punishment is merited, then punishment will be rendered. Every Christian will be judged 'according to *his* works.'...Events of the judgment seat will be one of the most hellish times many Christians will ever experience, for there Christians who have refused to 'walk in the light' will 'fall into the hands of the living God.' Such Christians will find it to be a 'fearful,' 'terrible' experience, for there the '*terror of the Lord*' will be manifested, and a *just* 'recompense' will be rendered" [Arlen L. Chitwood, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, pp. 29, 34]. This theologian's concept of the judgment seat of Christ is not even remotely correct. He does not understand the significance of the use of the Greek word $\beta\eta\mu\alpha$ as opposed to the use of κριτήριον. The Βῆμα is a place of evaluation for reward and not a place for the determination of guilt or innocence which is what the word κριτήριον would have signified, but Paul didn't use that word; he used Βῆμα instead. We have to remember, these are inspired Scriptures; it is not an accident and it is not insignificant that one word was used over the other. Those who are in Christ and under no condemnation will not have a frightening, horrifying experience at the Βῆμα. You need to understand this type of thinking is out there in the Christian universe of theology; people will use this thinking in order to scare people into doing whatever it is they define as right behavior. Words have a range of meaning depending on their context and, in this case, Scripture must inform Scripture in order to arrive at the correct understanding of the judgment seat of Christ. The end result for teaching like this is to scare people to death rather than to encourage them to look forward to their eternal life in Christ.

This concept that each believer's life and work will be evaluated by the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ is a powerful incentive to faithfully serve the One who has saved them. This what Lordship Salvation advocates and those who adhere to the Calvinist understanding of the perseverance of the saints fail to understand. Since they add works to justification, they cannot recognize differences in rewards. That theology was the predominate thought in Blomberg's article we dealt with earlier. Their thinking is that all must be faithful or they have proven to be unsaved. This is why they refer to Free Grace theology as "antinomian," or without law, in which it is presented as biblical truth that a person can be saved and never do anything for the Lord and still enter heaven. They cannot comprehend that thought; their theology will not allow it. Yet, it is true. A person may be saved at a moment in time and live an unfaithful life but they will still be a member of the family of God. However, and this is what these theologians do not and cannot understand, the unfaithful believer will undergo an evaluation of his life and be rewarded or not according to how he served and glorified the Lord. Mixing justification salvation with sanctification salvation leads to this confusion and it is totally unnecessary. They cannot comprehend these truths because in their mind there is no such thing as an unfaithful, carnal, disobedient believer, but the Bible says otherwise.

Stegall addressed this issue very well. "The Bible is clear that eternal life is a free gift from God given to all who place their faith in His Son Jesus Christ and His work alone rather than their own human goodness and achievements. But with such a free salvation, the question naturally arises about the role good works have in the Christian life. If salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then what difference does it make how a believer lives his life after he receives the gift of eternal life? If believers are guaranteed deliverance from hell to heaven, why not indulge in selfish, sinful living now? Why should believers serve God rather than themselves?"

The biblical truth of the approaching judgment seat of Christ provides a powerful impetus for godly living in the lives of all true believers in Jesus Christ. God places such a premium on the lives and good works of Christians that He has reserved a special day of judgment, accounting, and recognition for them. There is an awesome moment coming when believers' lives will be thoroughly and minutely examined by the Lord to determine the kind and degree of reward each one will receive based on the quality of the works done for Him after each believer was born again. The evaluation made by Christ on that day will be absolute, unchangeable, and eternal. For believers seeking to reverse course and change how they lived their earthly lives, it will be too late. And for those who have served Christ at great personal cost, every faithful deed will be richly rewarded by the God of all grace. Thus it pays to faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ now and later" [Thomas L. Stegall, "Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ" in *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology*, p. 420].