

Ashamed At His Coming?

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. 1 Jn 2:28

Most modern Christians appear to have false ideas about the Final Judgment. They believe that there will be an accounting for sin, followed by condemnation, for all unbelievers but also think that there is no accountability for Christians. Not only that but the concept of any suffering or any loss associated with final accountability is completely out of the question for them.

This tends to go hand in hand with a loose understanding of sin, or worse antinomianism. So many modern Christians, especially those in the Charismatic Movement, seem to have few qualms about sin in general and have lifestyles that are completely worldly, (which is sin). Indeed, they pride themselves on their openness to the world, which they see as a bridge to attracting new members to their meetings. Few modern believers have any clue about the need for pilgrims to have a clear dissociation from the world (called the 'antithesis' by many Dutch Reformed teachers) and a standard of righteousness that is far higher than those around them (Matt 5:20).

So, because they have a poor view of sin and because they believe that they are not under any form of law at all (antinomianism), they also believe that there is no future accountability for their current failures; despite repeated warnings in Scripture by didactic teaching as well as clear illustrations and allegories.

The truth is that believers will give an account of their lives and how they lived with God's grace, and will suffer loss of rewards and privileges for any significant lapse that was not repented off. This will be the subject of this paper.

God expects obedience to his will and performance of good works

We are saved for a purpose, and that purpose is to glorify God (Matt 5:16; Rm 15:6; 1 Cor 6:20; 1 Pt 2:9). Those who do not glorify God lead futile lives in sin and darkness (Rm 1:21). It is impossible for a genuine Christian to be abiding in Christ and not do good works that glorify God. If a supposed convert fails to bear any fruit of godliness in his life, then that person cannot be a true disciple (Lk 8:11-15; Jn 15:16; Rm 7:4).

Thus, after explaining our deliverance from sin and Satan, and our experience of grace, Paul shows us that we are then to do the good works which God decreed from eternity (Eph 2:1-10). These good works are fulfilling God's law, which is summarised as love to God and then love to one's neighbour (Matt 22:37-40). There are many in the church who profess to serve Christ but who are far from him and eventually leave for one reason or another (2 Pt 2:21; 1 Jn 2:19); the worst of these are false teachers (Deut 13:13; Acts 15:24, 20:30). God's judgment on these will be severe (2 Pt 2:21; Heb 10:29-30).

God judges our works at the end

There are very many verses which explain that the work of men is judged by God at the end (e.g. Rm 2:5-6; Rev 20:12-13, 22:12). There is no reason to consider that believers are exempted from some form of judgment; indeed the verses usually state that 'all' men, or 'each one' will give an account. What Christians are promised is that they will avoid standing with sinners before God's throne and being sentenced to condemnation. They are not promised that their work is not assessed.

In addition there are specific verses that are addressed to Christians which plainly state that they will be judged; such as:

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. 1 Cor 4:5

Doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. Eph 6:6-8

Furthermore, there are extended parables which were given by the Lord as warnings to his own people to consider a final judgment of their work; notably the parable of the talents and the pounds.

Parable of the talents (talanton) Matt 25:14-29

This is addressed to believers since it regards the kingdom of heaven, illustrated by a man who gave gifts to his own servants. These gifts differed and each one was given to a person according to his ability. These represent the gifts of the Spirit that are given to believers which vary (1 Cor 12:1-12). Everyone has a gift from God to use in the church to edify the brethren (Eph 4:7; 1 Pt 4:10) and these gifts differ. In the parable the servant who uses the gifts finds that they increase; grace used will multiply and bear fruit. However, a small minority does not use their gifts at all but hides them away. Those that used their gifts well were given positions of responsibility in the kingdom with great joy. The one that did not use his gifts was accused of laziness, disciplined by suffering loss of privileges and weeping.

Parable of the pounds (minas) Lk 19:12-27

This is not a parallel passage to the previous case. Here it is not just a man, but a nobleman; the items are not *talents* but *minas* and the gifts given are all of the same value, not different [a *mina* was equal in the NT to 100 drachmae.]. So this represents the gift of eternal life in the Spirit, given equally to every member of the body. The world is represented by the citizens who hated the nobleman; the church is represented by his servants who were all given ten *minas*. The servants were expected to trade with the *minas*; i.e. to put their new life to good use in serving God and doing good works, not hiding their light under a bushel. The reward for trading effectively with the *minas* is authority and responsibility in the master's kingdom. The servant who did not use his *minas* is stripped even of what he has. The citizens who hated the nobleman are killed.

God expects his servants to act and to walk righteously, making every use of the time and doing good works (1 Tim 5:25; Titus 2:7, 14, 3:8, 14). Thus believers need to consider that their word and works will be judged and that even the thoughts and motivations of their hearts will be assessed and measured according to the standard of Christ (Eccles 12:14; Matt 12:36; Rm 2:16; Eph 4:13).

The heavenly situation

These parables make it clear that not only is there an assessment of a believer's works, but there is a repercussion of this in terms of privileges in the new world. But one will ask, surely all Christians are equal?

All believers are equal in justification; there are no varieties legal standing before God; no one is more holy than another because all are righteous in Christ. However, as there are varieties of function and service, so there are degrees of function in the glory.

This is normal in God's service; note the kings, prophets, priests and judges of the OT. Also note that all angels are ministers of God but there are ranks amongst the angels. Some are

archangels for instance (1 Thess 4:16; Jude 1:9) and some are called to fight other spirit beings. The angel Michael is called ‘one of the chief princes’ (Dan 10:13). The church also has various functions and a leadership. God’s plan includes variety of functions and orders of rank. In the new world the government will have different levels of stewardship; in Jesus’ words, some will be in authority over one or more cities, others will have other tasks. All will be glorious, all will be holy, all will be joyful, but there will be differences of rank and function. The gift of God’s rewards appears to be the way this ranking is measured out.

The wrong way to meet the Lord

Some believers will suffer loss at the end

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat [*bema*] of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Cor 5:9-10

The word ‘bad’ here is *kakos*, meaning: not as something ought to be, wrong, wicked, troublesome, injurious, evil, worthless etc. The word cannot be explained away as anything other than negatively and all versions translate it as either ‘bad’ or ‘evil’. Thus there is a recompense for the good we do (rewards) and the evil we do (loss of rewards).

What the verses state are very clear. All Christians appear before Christ as Judge, but not before Christ on a great white throne (*thronos*) as the Judge of sinners who will be sentenced to hell (Rev 20:11-15), but before the Lord sitting on a tribunal seat (*bema*) evaluating their life worth. What they did in the body will be assessed and each one will receive according to what he did, whether good or bad.

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 [*bema*] of Christ. Rm 14:10

Justification ensures that we are not included in the mass of mankind that will be sentenced to condemnation. From eternity the elect have been considered as different from the reprobate; they are loved and included in the Covenant, while the wicked are hated and reserved for doom (Prov 16:4). There is no possibility that God will condemn forever those who have been pronounced not guilty (Rm 8:1). God has cast all our sins behind his back (Isa 38:17). It is not the weight of our sins that Christ judges on the Last Day, but the way we used the grace God gave us. It is how we performed in our obedience to God’s as our Father. It is the testing of sons, not the judicial condemnation of outlaws.

So, unlike the reprobate, Christians are enabled to do good works in their lifetime; no other people can perform any work of any spiritual value; only believers can please God. It is the works of Christians that are tested and assessed in the tribunal of Christ. The test is – did I love God with all my heart and love my neighbour as myself? Did I live a sacrificial life or did I just please myself? Did I work for the edification of my brethren? Did I raise my children in the fear of God? Did I care for the Lord’s people? Did I perform my work as unto the Lord? Did I give to those who needed my help?

The essence of the matter is this: the works done in the flesh, dominated by the old nature, will be valued by God negatively; the works done in the new nature, while walking in the Spirit, will be positively valued. The difference is what will constitute my rewards and privileges in heaven (Lk 19:17, 19; Matt 25:21). [For more detailed information on rewards see my paper, ‘*Rewards In Biblical Theology*’.] Every believer has a place in heaven, but some will have more responsibility than others in an ordered society under God.

This assessment of behaviour is plainly taught in other places.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Gal 6:7-9

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. Col 3:23-25

I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. [Spoken to a church.] Rev 2:23

What John teaches us is that some believers will stand before the Lord at the Day of Judgment and be ashamed of their wasted lives. Indeed, this must be the case since we can see many situations around us in the churches where genuine Christian people have been led astray into wasting their lives in unsound works. It is not possible to waste your life in dead works, following false teachers, and there not be repercussions. Every moment of our lives is meant to be an opportunity to glorify God; if we waste those opportunities by submitting to false teachers then God will take this into account and our final salvation is not as abundant as we could have hoped for.

Peter explains this to us,

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 2 Pt 1:10-12

Some will have an abundant, or rich, entrance into the heavenly kingdom; some will not if they have been negligent. Indeed, Paul explains that some will gain entrance to heaven only by the skin of their teeth,

Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Cor 3:12-15

Those believers who have wasted their lives by building with inflammable things of no spiritual value, will still be saved, but like a man who escapes naked from a burning building losing everything he had built up. One key reason for losing rewards is to hold a false doctrine about Christ or fellowshiping with those who hold such ideas (2 Jn 1:8-11).

So, there is no doubt that believers will be judged for their obedience as sons and can suffer loss for failing in this obedience. Others, who glorify God with good works, will receive positions of authority in the kingdom.

The right way to meet the Lord

The rest of John's letter explains some ways that believers should meet the Lord and not be ashamed at his coming.

Abide in Christ

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. 1 Jn 2:28

It is of prime importance to abide in Christ. Jesus warned us about this at length (Jn 15:1-11) and John applies that teaching throughout his first letter. Paul's teaching on walking in the Spirit and putting on the new nature, or putting on Christ, is the same thing. It is the repudiation of our old life, walking in repentance, putting off the old man, denying ourselves (another emphasis of Jesus) and living in obedience to God.

If we abide in Christ, then we will walk as he walked, in righteousness. If we abide in Christ then we will commune with God the Father, as Christ did. If we abide in Christ we will be full of the Holy Spirit. Abiding in Christ is fundamental to holy living and to the disciple's growth in grace. It is living a life of complete dependence upon Christ and refusing to take charge by our own wisdom or strength.

Full of the Spirit and the word

But you have an anointing from the Holy One. ... Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 1 Jn 2:20, 24

The corollary of abiding in Christ is being full of the Spirit; these go hand-in-hand. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and if we are full of the Spirit we are full of Christ; if we bear the fruit of the Spirit we manifest the character of Christ.

The anointing John refers to is the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost by which all believers were united to Christ and had the Spirit indwell them. They have a new life source, the life of the Spirit, as a result of their conversion; they have been anointed from on high. When the Spirit was outpoured at Pentecost, it was like the illustration in Ps 133:1-3. The Spirit was poured out when Christ was ascended and it was figuratively like the oil running down to the edge of the High priests garments; or in reality to the extremity of every part of the body of Christ. This is the meaning behind the word 'Christian'; as Christ the Head of the body was anointed with the Spirit without measure ('Christ' = 'anointed one'), so his members are anointed in part, 'anointed ones', by union with him.

By extension, the fulness of the Spirit also implies the fulness of God's word. The Spirit always works in conjunction with the word since his job is to glorify Christ the Word. After inspiring the production of Scripture in the form we now have it, the Spirit works by that word to bring men to salvation (Acts 13:26; Rm 10:14-15; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; 1 Thess 1:5-6) and keep them in that salvation (Ps 17:4; Lk 8:15, 11:28; Jn 14:23-24). Thus the word, as well as the Spirit, abides in true believers (1 Jn 2:14)

Knowledge of the truth

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ... These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. 1 Jn 2:20-21, 26-27

Following on from the above, the true disciple knows the truth and discerns error. Having the word and keeping it means that the precepts of God are transformed from words on the page into wisdom, knowledge and power. The genuine believer does not just have knowledge about the Bible like an encyclopaedia, but he has doctrinal knowledge, understanding, and thus can make wise decisions. He has assembled and collated Biblical verses to establish a systematic theology (no matter how basic at first) and thus understands the teachings of Scripture on many matters. Armed with this he is able to maintain a wise course in his life.

But he is also able to do something else that is very important, and that is that he is able to discern doctrinal error and aberrant practices. Some people, who have much basic Biblical knowledge of facts, still fall into grievous heresies and shipwreck their lives. Biblical knowledge must be transformed into wisdom and the ability to discern evil (Heb 5:14). John makes much of this in his first letter, seeking to preserve his people from falling into heresy. The anointing of the Spirit on every believer gives sufficient knowledge to enable that believer from being deceived by false teaching, if he abides in it. This knowledge will grow as he is taught more and more, but all Christians have enough insight to know what is true. Falling for heresy involves a practical choice of the will to ignore our conscience.

Righteousness

If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. 1 Jn 2:29

By having knowledge of the truth one is able to walk in righteousness. Righteous living follows godly understanding; without doctrinal knowledge, one cannot know which way to walk. Only by learning what is good and what is evil can one know how to live. Having knowledge of righteousness then leads to walking righteously. We must practice righteousness and not just talk about it.

Good conscience

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 1 Jn 3:21

If we walk righteously according to a good Biblical understanding, then we will have a clear conscience. If our conscience condemns us, then we have made a mistake and must put it right. We cannot walk righteously without a clear conscience. If we neglect our conscience then we will shipwreck our faith (1 Tim 1:19). Now the conscience must be correctly taught, and that is why we must have prior knowledge by the Spirit. The Spirit applies the word to us to give us understanding, which illuminates the conscience in our hearts and enables it to be the arbiter of ethical behaviour.

Boldness in love

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 1 Jn 4:17

Following all these things, the outworking of them all is love; that is the righteous behaviour of the believer manifesting God's love to the world. It is not a soppy, emotional, superficial feeling, but a deep inner conviction transformed into moral action based upon true knowledge. This love is a commitment to do God's will out of obedience and thanksgiving.

Those who have developed in knowledge, being filled with the Spirit and abiding in Christ, who are walking righteously according to a good conscience, will be bold on the Day of Judgment. They will have no fear of God because they are fully committed to his will, obeying his law and looking forward to being searched by his piercing eyes. They have no

fear of falling short or being ashamed at Christ's coming because they long for it day after day, seeking to walk worthy of him.

Is this true of you?

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