***The Judgment Seat of Christ

RV54-01***

We continue our study in the letter to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7-13. This is segment number 29. It is a great satisfaction to know that the living Creator God has not left the human race without guidance about successful living and personal justification. We know how to go to heaven. We know how to live in a way that is pleasing to God. The Bible is the lifeline of the human race, enabling it to survive in spite of the influence of the sin nature within man. God's divine viewpoint information has been rejected by the world, and has been replaced by Satan's human viewpoint lies on a wide scale. The consequences to the human race of this human viewpoint thinking have been the gradual destruction of personal freedom everywhere in the world, and the growth of moral corruption all about us. The devil wants to be like God, but he is a finite creature. He has shown himself to be a loser. Yet, the ignorant intellectuals of this world listen to the lies of Satan and believe that they come into great wisdom.

The Philadelphia church, which we have been studying, represents that group of humanity in church history which forms what the Bible calls the church, or the body of Christ. It is a specialized group of believers which began on the day of Pentecost when the baptism of the Holy Spirit first took place. Again, I remind you that God has a program for Israel. That program has been temporarily stopped. That program has absolutely nothing to do with the church. The church program is simply an interruption into the program with Israel. The two are completely separate. They have a separate beginning. They have a separate program. When you get to the end of the Bible, you discover they have a separate ending, each in a different direction. It is very important that you keep those distinctions straight.

This is one of the great tragedies of the Reformation. While the reformers were struggling to reestablish how a soul can enter heaven after over 1,000 years of darkness, where that doctrine of salvation had been lost, they were not able to properly apply themselves to the doctrine of future things (the doctrine of prophecy). So, they did not distinguish between Israel and the church. The reformers were completely fouled up about this area of truth. Denominations are still structured on what those men taught, instead of giving those men the break of saying, "OK, you've come this far. You've led us this far, as you were capable of applying yourself to the truth under the circumstances in which you live. Now, we will go from there," as indeed Christians have, and restored the full counsel of the Word of God, which those men were not able to handle.

So, the Philadelphia church represents this distinctive group of believers called the church. You and I are part of that body. This letter is a direct letter to you and me today. The church believers are promised in Revelation 3:10 that we are immune from the tribulation: "Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon all the world, to them that dwell upon the earth (toward unbelievers)." The church is not part of that period of trial. The church is removed before that era comes upon the world.

**Revelation 3:11 – a Warning**

In Revelation 3:11, which we want to look at now, we come to a solemn warning to Christians which has eternal consequences to every believer. It says, "I come quickly. Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown." This is a warning. You immediately spot this as a warning relative to what the Bible refers to as "rewards." In the Greek text, the word "behold" is not involved. It is not exactly out of place. The word "behold" always means: "Attention. I'm about to make a concise, dramatic statement of truth," but it is not here in the Greek texts.

The Greek actually begins with the words, "I come quickly." The word "I come" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "erchomai." The word "erchomai" stresses the act of arriving someplace, rather than the actual arrival itself. It stresses the process of arriving rather than, "Here I am. I have arrived on the scene." There's a different Greek word for "Here I am. I have arrived on the scene." It is important to notice that the Lord is using this word to emphasize the fact of His planned return from heaven for church-age believers at the rapture before the tribulation. When Jesus Christ says, "I am 'erchomai' (I'm coming)," He is saying, "I have a plan." Here you are moving along through the church age. Suddenly, we're going to come to a place in time, and it seems like we are very close to that time now, for a lot of reasons. The Lord is going to return. Christians who are in the grave will be caught up to meet Christians who are on the earth, and together they will be taken up to meet the Lord in the air. He is talking about this general event of His return for believers when He uses this word "erchomai."

It is in the present tense in the grammar, which means that it is a continual plan of Jesus Christ. It is active voice in its significance. You Greek students see this as a middle form, but it has active meaning. It means that Jesus Christ Himself will do the returning. That, of course, is exactly what the disciples were told when they saw Him rise. The two angels said, "Men of Galilee, He is going to come just the way you saw Him rise – the same physical Jesus: identical." It is indicative. It's a statement of fact.

The Lord said this to the church immediately after saying, "I'm going to preserve you from the hellish nightmare of the tribulation." Now, He says, "I do want to remind you that it is in My plan to return. I will be returning specifically for you." Furthermore, that return is going to be quickly. That's the Greek word "tachu." "Tachu" means "speedily." In terms of eternity, the absence of Jesus Christ from earth since His ascension is a short time. 2,000 years seems like a long time to us, but in terms of eternity, it's nothing. So, this word very appropriately applies – that His return is very speedy. What it reflects is that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent. That is, there is no event which must take place before He can return. He can return at any moment. In terms of what we see taking place in the world today, and matching that up to prophecy in the Bible, that return is indeed very near at hand. Even more today than ever, we can say that His return is speedy. It is going to speedily be executed.

**Hold Fast What you Have**

So, Jesus says, "I'm going to keep you out of the tribulation, but I do want to call something to your attention that's very important: I'm coming back, and it's not going to be long before I show up. Then something important is going to happen. Because I am coming back, hold fast that which you have. The word "hold fast" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "krateo." And the reason we give you these words that are in the Greek Bible is so that you know what God the Holy Spirit has said. You didn't come here to hear what I said. You didn't come here to hear what I think. You came here to see what God has said. That can only be conveyed to you with this use of the Greek language. There's no preacher on earth that's smart enough, or capable enough, to preach and convey the mind of God the Holy Spirit without the language in which the Holy Spirit recorded the thoughts of God.

This word "krateo" means "to hold firmly." It is directed toward the divine viewpoint understanding which a believer possesses from the Bible doctrine which he has learned. As we have already seen, the Christians here in the Philadelphia church were real students of the Word of God. They were there. When the church doors were open for instruction, they were there. They weren't off on some goofy enterprise that, in effect, said, "I have something more important to do when the assembly gathers for instruction than to be there to be taught." Because they understood that, they were there, and they were taught. Furthermore, they fed daily upon the Word of God. Just as they fed upon their physical food, they fed upon their spiritual food. Consequently, this was a solid, strong congregation of individual believers who knew what was going on. So, to them, the Lord says, "You have a great reservoir of divine viewpoint understanding. You know what God thinks."

I must remind you again that the Babylonian mystery religion, which we know as Roman Catholicism today, was in full operation then. It was not contaminated and joined completely to Christianity at that point, but it was fully operational. The Masses were being uttered by the Babylon system. All of the rituals were there: the sacred holidays; the holy water; and, the sign of the cross was being practiced by Nimrod's Babylonian system. All the details were there. The mother-and-child cult was at its height. It was at the core of everything they worshipped. They worshipped the mother god Semiramis, and everything was in full operation. These Philadelphia Christians were in a place where they were faced with all the temptation to accommodate themselves to the heathen, who often were very nice people indeed. But the Lord says, "You have divine viewpoint understanding. You know the falsehood of this. You know the error of this. I'm warning you now to hold firmly to that understanding – to hold to the truth of the Word of God that I have given you.

This is present tense, which means this must constantly be the attitude of believers. You and I are faced with the same thing. We always have to be on guard to hold onto the truth that we have. There are always people who are challenging the truth that we have, particularly those of us who are in a fundamentalist camp. We're made out to be the idiots. To be called a fundamentalist is a dirty word. The snide liberals are always aiming their guns at these freaks and kooks that they call fundamentalists. It is because we know that the great men, who we've been studying over several sessions who have poisoned the stream of human thinking, are wrong. We have the audacity to say, "We're right."

We're right back to where Noah was. Noah had the gall to say that he was right, and that everybody else in the world was wrong. That is really arrogance, isn't it? Here was one man, who had a family of seven, and he's telling that ancient, extremely cultured, civilized and technologically advanced world that he lived in, saying, "You people are all wrong. You're on a self-destruct course, and you are going to be punished by almighty God unless you turn around. It's going to be the punishment of a great flood that's going to cover this whole earth, and you're all going to die. And I'm building a boat to escape it, because God has told me to." Even you feel like saying, "He sure was a nut, wasn't he, especially in a world that had never seen rain before?"

But that's how it is. You do stand against the whole world. Once you have the Word of God, that is where the truth is. So, you know that you're right. And, no matter how the high-and-mighty speak otherwise, they are wrong. So, we are faced with this problem, as were the Philadelphia Christians – not to be intimidated by the world's system, or its institutions, in the things that we have learned from the Word of God. We are to just stand firm, and hold them firmly. It must be our constant attitude.

It is active voice, which indicates that it's up to each believer to preserve his own spiritual orientation. Nobody can do this for you. Only you can do it. And it takes feeding upon the Word of God to keep the food warm. Otherwise, you're trying to live on stale spiritual food, and you lose your strength in a hurry. Very interestingly, the mood of this word is imperative. It is a divine command. God says, "You do it. You don't have any option. You hang on to what you have." The reason the Holy Spirit puts this as a command is because, as we shall see, the consequences of not doing this are enormous to the believer for all eternity.

"Hold on firmly to that which you have. The Greek word for "you have" is "echo." Echo" means "to possess." This is the attitude toward your own level of spiritual progress. Everybody comes into the Christian life as a baby. Everybody, hopefully, goes up the scale until he comes to super grace blessing, where he has built a container in his soul, and that container becomes the cup into which God pours blessings and grace, which overflow then out of that cup. Everybody in the Christian life, through the Word of God, is moving up the ladder. Some are babies; some are teenagers; some have moved down toward adulthood; and, some have moved all the way to the pinnacle of super grace. That is the prime of life in the spiritual life. It is a systematic developing of your spiritual capacity. It does not take place overnight, and it is a rare position that Christians hold. Only those really instructed in the Word of God ever get up there. They are the stable Christians; they are the ones who survive in crises; they are the ones who know how to interpret life; and, they are the ones who find prosperity flooding their lives in every direction and in every aspect of their lives. The Lord says, "Hang on to wherever you have come along this road of spiritual development."

That is because the Christian life is always in motion. It's like a shark in water. If a shark doesn't keep moving, he dies. The Christian life is always in motion. It's either moving up toward that super grace (or maintaining that mountaintop level), or it's moving back down in reversionism, sliding down into babyhood and incapacity. You go one way or another. The Lord says, "It will cost you an awful lot to made some progress, and then to come back down to some other point lower down." That's going to be very costly. And it's going to be tempting to do under the pressures that you're going to endure in a world that thinks you're crazy. Hang on to the spiritual development that you have secured.

Then He gives the reason that you personally must do this. He says, "That." The word "that" is the Greek word "hina." The word "hina" is a conjunction which introduces the purpose (the reason) for guarding one's spiritual development: "I come quickly. Hold firmly that spiritual development which you have, that (for the reason) that no man." The word "no man" is a translation of this word "medeis." That actually means "no one." It has no male connotation. It's not a male person. It is no one – anybody. It refers to people such as all these people we've been listening to, like: Charles Darwin; George Wellhausen; Karl Marx's; John Dewey; Immanuel Kant; Georg Hegel; and, all these people. These are the ones he's saying, "Don't let any of them, who are the opinion-makers in your society, but who are functioning on human viewpoint and not on God's point of view, take something away from you." The word "take away" is "lambano." "Lambano" is a word for taking possession of something. The idea is to seize something that you have. If you permit these people to influence you in a way that counters the divine viewpoint that has carried you on up toward super grace intelligent understanding in the Christian life, they will take something away from you, if you permit them to influence you.

**Your Crown**

This verb is in the aorist tense. The aorist is a point in time in the past. It's that point in time when the Christian permits human viewpoint lies to replace his divine viewpoint truth. It is active voice. These opponents are the ones who take it away, but I'm glad to say that it is subjunctive. Subjunctive mood means it's just a possibility. It doesn't have to happen. It can potentially happen, but it doesn't have to happen. What happens is that something very important can be taken away from you by these men, and that is your "stephanos." Your "stephanos" is your crown. That's what the English word "Stephen" means. That's where we get the name "Stephen" from. It means crown.

**A Reward**

The Bible talks about two kinds of crowns. It talks about the crown which is on the head of a king. ... The king's crown is a diadem crown. That is not the kind of crown we're talking about. Then there is this other crown, and it's in the form of a sort of a laurel wreath. ... This is the type of crown given to the winner of the game at the athletic contest, and they have put this laurel wreath about his head. It's a victor's crown. It shows that he has won something, and that he is being rewarded by the judges for an achievement. The crown that we are talking about here (the "stephanos") is the one which has to do with a victory. It refers then to a reward. This crown is tantamount to saying, "Don't let anybody take your reward.

So, there is something that a Christian can lose. The Bible teaches that, while all those who are born again spiritually will go to heaven, some of these born-again people, when they get to heaven, will receive rewards, while others will not receive rewards. Once a sinner is genuinely saved, his destiny is irreversibly heaven. Because salvation is a grace gift (you didn't do anything to earn it), you can't do anything to contaminate it. God gives it to you. It is secure. You're born into His family. As a child is securely born into God's family, he is also called upon to serve his Father with divine good works. Titus 3:8 and Titus 3:14 are two of many verses which indicate that, once you're born again as a Christian, you are to engage in divine good works – not human good works, but divine good works. And there is a world of difference.

A Christian who is in temporal fellowship (in the inner circle of fellowship) can be led by the Holy Spirit to perform acts of Christian service which are divine good. If he performs acts of Christian service which are divine good, those are acts for which God will reward him. In our illustration of concentric circles, the outer circle is the circle of eternal fellowship. When you enter that circle, you're forever born again. The inner circle is the circle of temporal fellowship (fellowship in time). While you are in that inner circle, you are a spiritual Christian. Only spiritual Christians can produce divine good works for which God will reward you. When you sin, and you step out of the inner circle, you are still saved (in the outer circle), but the Bible now says that you are a carnal Christian. Carnal Christians cannot store charges in heaven, because carnal Christians cannot serve the Lord.

So, unless you know how to stay in this inner circle, you can't even begin to store treasures in heaven, because you don't know how to begin to serve the Lord. So, it is possible for you to permit people to take you out of the inner circle, relative to your spiritual development and your knowledge of the Bible, and to take you into the carnality area, and to rob you of reward that, potentially, could have been yours.

It is no secret that the Bible speaks to us about storing treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:16-34). We won't take time to read these now, but the Lord very clearly says, "Store treasures in heaven." Don't be concentrating upon building yourself material things like this foolish, rich man who's going to build his bigger barns, and who made himself poor relative to the things of God. He left this earth a very wealthy man in material things, but a very poor man in spiritual things. The warning is there very clearly: store charges in heaven."

Suppose that you were put on the spot tonight. Suppose that somebody came to you and said, "I'm really concerned about storing treasures in heaven. Would you please explain to me how I can do that?" Could you explain it? If you couldn't give a clear explanation, then you must suspect that you are not storing churches in heaven. I again remind you that there are going to be poor people in heaven, and rich people in heaven. There are going to be people who are going to enjoy heaven immensely because they have the capacity to do so. There are going to be other Christians who are going to be saved, but their capacity to enjoy heaven is going to be so squeezed down. And they both sat in church and sang, "My Jesus, I love Thee." They both sat in church and put money into the operation of the church ministry. They both sat in church and engaged in Christian service activities. They both were there praying.

However, one functioned in the flesh (in carnality), and the other function in spirituality. One functioned by the leading of the Spirit of God, and one functioned by human energy capacities. They both walked up to the offering box. They both put in a $100 offering. One did it in carnality, and his offering, relative to rewards, amounted to zero. The other put $100 in while in the status of spirituality. He put it in under the leading of the Spirit of God. His $100 goes on his record as eternal reward. They both did the same thing. How you do it makes a difference. It's very important to know how to store treasures in heaven. It's terrible how Christians glibly say, "Yeah, I'm storing treasures in heaven." Yet, they might be asked, "What does the Bible have to say as to how you do this? What is the technique for doing this?" They might have to say, "Oh, I don't know. You know, I just sort of say. 'I'm storing treasures in heaven.' I believe. I just believe in believing. That's going to carry me along." However, that's not going to do it. That won't cut it with God.

**Sincerity**

Some people think that sincerity is what's going to make it. They think that if you are sincere, God is going to say, "OK, kid, you had your heart in the right place. You're in. I'm going to handle it that way." How many times have I had charismatics tell me that, "I'm so sincere in this? I don't believe that God would let me be in this as a delusion, because He knows I'm trying to be really sincere, and praise Him, and honor Him. He wouldn't let me be in this delusion." It's not God who's letting them be in that delusion. It is they who are putting themselves in that delusion because they're ignoring the Word of God. God has given us the search light. There are people who think they're going to make it in heaven because they have been sincere.

What has happened to the hunger strikers in Ireland? These four men who have died now – each of them was a cold-blooded terrorist, and each of them was a murderer. And don't forget that the IRA (the Irish Republican Army) is not a Robin Hood organization as our news media is trying to convey to us – that this is a Robin Hood organization that's trying to help the poor people of Ireland against the arrogant, rich people of Ireland. It has nothing to do with that. The IRA is supported by the same people who finance the PLO (the Palestine Liberation Organization). They, you know, are terrorists to the core. And the IRA is a terrorist organization. It is a communist organization. What they want from Ireland is to bring those Protestant counties in the north into the totality of Catholic Ireland, so that they can create a Castro Cuba in Ireland. That's what they're after.

These men have starved themselves to death, and they have had a religious ceremony. The last one has just had the Mass performed for him, and it was not just an ordinary Mass, but it was a High Mass – a Requiem Mass. All of this was to give people the impression that these men have died for a noble cause, and when they have stood before God, God has welcomed them into His heaven. If these men are Roman Catholics, as they are, and if these men believe the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation, they are in the torments of Hades. They have met the rich man, and they are screaming out, "My God, I'd like to tell the rest of the IRA what's going on, and how wrong we are, that they do not come to the place that we're in." Is God just going to permit them to spend eternity in hell, while they sincerely starved themselves to death because they thought they had a cause that merited their lives?

**The Integrity of God**

People do not understand the integrity of God. They do not understand the holiness of God. They do not understand that God does not compromise His character. This was even true for a terrific man like Moses, who, in a moment of anger, struck that rock a second time instead of speaking to it like God told him. God didn't say, "That's OK, Moses. I know those cotton-picking Jews aggravated you. You are mad. You are upset. You did it because of that. They make Me mad. I know just how you feel. It's OK. We'll forget it." God doesn't act like that. He cannot act like that and be God. He would violate His own integrity.

So, you better get it straight, and you better help other people to understand that they're not going to make up their own rules by which God is going to play the game. There are millions of sincere people in Hades awaiting the transfer into the lake of fire right now – millions of sincere people, and a great number of them are very moral people. You do not play the game by your rules. God does not compromise His integrity.

So, the Word of God tells us that storing treasures in heaven is an important thing to do, and you will not store treasures in heaven on your ground rules. You will store them as God says you store them, and you will live with the consequences. You will not get to heaven and say, "Oh Lord, I really didn't understand that. Nobody ever taught me this. I see now what I've lost." I'll tell you: (it won't be possible for them to do this, because they will be completely in the image of Christ), but if it were possible for them to do, they would rise up and curse their preachers. They would rise up and curse their preachers when they get to heaven and they realize the loss for all eternity that they have suffered, just because they were never taught how to store treasures in heaven that are acceptable to the Lord.

So, in heaven, I remind you again, there will be people who are rich in spiritual rewards, and there will be those who will be dirt poor. Most of what church members consider Christian Service today is nothing but human good production. That's the difference. The Bible calls human good "our filthy rags." Isaiah says that our righteousnesses (that's another word for human good) are filthy rags in God's sight. Those of you who read the Hebrew texts know that that expression "filthy rags" means "menstrual cloths." God reduces it to a most loathsome level. He says, "This is what I think of your good works that you produce out of the sincerity of your heart, and not out of the moving of My Holy Spirit." Most of what church people do, thinking they're serving the Lord, is plain garbage with God.

The only way you can protect yourself from this is to have a fully developed spiritual maturity structure in your soul. Only with this can you be in a position for God the Holy Spirit, to lead you so that your life is being invested, in terms of eternity, where it will count. When you come into the Christian life as a born again believer, down at the beginning stage, you can produce very little in terms of divine good works, because you're so completely disoriented to the mind of God. But as you begin taking doctrine into the mentality of your soul: through church services; through things you read; through listening to proper kinds of tapes; and, moving on ahead, you suddenly find that, more and more, you are capable of handling sin in your life; you're capable of handling the thinking of this world; you're capable of discernment that you didn't ever dream you were capable of having; and, you were able to move into more and more genuine good work production for which God can reward you.

This is not a matter of how smart you are. It is not a matter of human IQ. The grace system, by which we learn spiritual things through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, makes us all equal. It is not a matter of the smart ones getting ahead, and those with lower IQs are being left behind. It is a matter of who applies himself to doctrine, and who does not. That's where the difference lies.

The developing of a spiritual maturity structure, of course, requires a pastor-teacher who is out there explaining the doctrines of Scripture on the authority of the language in which Scripture was written, and believers having availability of this truth to take into their souls. Without a pastor-teacher doing his job in this way, week-by-week, you are doomed – if you do not have a pastor-teacher who's doing that. Just go back to Ephesians 4:11 and see the chain reaction there. It starts with face-to-face teaching, and then you develop spiritually. It says, "And then you are capable of forming the body of Christ. You are capable of divine good production." And it all begins with that pastor exercising his gift properly.

So, stay away from churches where they don't do it. You might have a social relationship. You might have other satisfactions, but you're going to pay for it. When you get to out into eternity in heaven, you're going to pay for it, and you will then regret it. Heaven is going to be a greater blessing to some than to others.

**The Rapture**

So, we're talking about the fact that Christians are going to have their works judged. At some time in the future, as we have already indicated, there is going to be a great catching away of believers to meet the Lord in the air, and we call this event the rapture. That's just from a Greek word that means "catching away." This is described as the rapture event. There are certain things that we know for sure from the Bible about the rapture. John 14:1-3 tell us that Jesus is coming back for Christians. It tells us that He is preparing dwelling places for them now in heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 tell us that some Christians will never die. Some Christians will never experience physical death. They'll be alive when this event takes place. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 tell us that all Christians, whether they are dead in the grave or whether they are alive, will all be caught up to meet the Lord in the air together.

The place of the spirit and the soul of those who are now dead is, of course, up in heaven with the Lord. When He comes, they come back in their souls and spirits with Him, and their dead bodies are reunited to their souls and spirits, so all believers leave this earth in a glorified body, which means a body like Jesus Christ had after He was resurrected. This is a body which is completely free from sin; a body completely free from the ability to sin; a body completely free from death; a body that lives forever; but, a body which is free from time and space restrictions. This is a body that can move through space, and a body that can move anywhere at all.

**The Judgment Seat of Christ**

While the believers have been taken up and transferred with the Lord into heaven, something very dramatic takes place up there. That is described for us in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Paul says, "For we (that is, Christians) must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body according to that which he has done, whether it be good or bad." What does that verse mean? It's a very important verse. It's important that you understand it. We Christians must all appear at some point in heaven before what he calls the Judgment Seat of Christ. We must be judged. For what? For something that we have done in our body back here on earth, and in terms of whether those things that we did in our bodies was good or bad. To whom is he speaking? Let's put it right up front that he is talking to Christians.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1, the apostle Paul says, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." When he says "our earthly house of this tabernacle," he is talking about the physical body. He says, "We know that if the physical body dies, and it dissolves back to the elements of the earth, we are not without a house for our soul and spirit. We have a building. We have a clothing, so to speak, that God has made eternal in the heavens. That, of course, is speaking only to Christians, because the unsaved have no place in heaven.

So, immediately the context says, "I'm talking to Christians." So, let's eliminate any idea that we're dealing with unsaved people who are going to hell. He is talking to Christians. It is Christians who are going to be judged for what they did in the body on earth as to whether it was good or bad. Notice verse 4: "For we that are in this tabernacle (our physical bodies) do groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up by life." He said that those of us who are believers indeed now are groaning because we have problems with our bodies. We look forward to the time of a resurrection body where there will be no problems with it. These bodies will have no problems because they will be glorified bodies. That will never be true of the unbelievers' bodies.

So, again, we have an indication that these are Christians that he's talking about. Notice verse 5: "Now He that has wrought us for the very same thing as God, who had given unto us the earnest (the down payment) of the spirit." Only believers receive God the Holy Spirit as a down payment. It is God the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer as a promise that he will someday be in heaven. Only believers are sealed with God the Holy Spirit; that is, stamped in God's sight. Once you're stamped with the Holy Spirit, that means you're going to heaven. So, again, here we have very clearly that we are dealing with believers. Then verse 8 clinches it: "We are confident, I say, and rather willing to be absent from the body (physically dead) and to be present with the Lord in our soul and spirit.

So, obviously, those who are unbelievers are not with the Lord. When they die, they go to Hades. Hades is a staging area. It is a temporary place of great pain. Hades later is going to be put into the lake of fire that we commonly refer to by the word "hell." But people are now actually in Hades. They're going to be put into the lake of fire later. Verse 8, of course, has to do with believers who are in the presence of the Lord.

In verse nine, the apostle Paul says, "Wherefore." All of you students of the Bible have heard the expression that any time you see a "wherefore" in the Bible, you should look up in the verses that precede it and see what it's there for. "Wherefore" tells you that something has been said, and here's a conclusion. "Wherefore we labor that whether presence or absent, we may be accepted of him." Paul says, "We serve the Lord, and it is our desire to serve the Lord, so that whether I'm here on earth serving him, I'm accessible to Him; and, whether I'm in heaven, what I have done is acceptable to Him – in either case."

Verse 10 says that all believers are to face a judgment seat. Of course, this judgment is not to determine whether we enter heaven or not. We've already seen that he's talking to Christians. So, please don't come up and ask me whether this refers to people who are going to have their lives examined to see whether they go to heaven or not. Heaven is not the issue. They're already destined for heaven. These are Christians who can't go anyplace else but heaven. That's the people he's talking about. This is the judgment of those who have glorified bodies after the rapture.

Neither is this is judgment relative to the sins that you have committed. There's always some poor Christian that thinks that someplace along the line (they've picked up this Catholic idea), they're going to have to do something for the sins that they committed that they didn't confess. You've seen a Catholic priest rush to the side of a person who has just died. The Catholic priest has 15 minutes, before the soul leaves the body, to give that soul last rites (extreme unction), which means to wipe it as clean as he can get it cleaned. This is to give that soul one last forgiveness so as to minimize the time in purgatory. A priest will rush madly to the side of a person who's dying, and start through the same rigmarole that Nimrod and his religion used to go through, because Nimrod's religion also had extreme unction. That's where the thing originated. This paganistic concept is so somehow a person can, at the last moment, have his sins forgiven, like he's going to go into heaven with some burden. Once you've been born again, all sins have been forgiven: past; present; and, future.

So, we're not even dealing with something that has to do with your sins that have been confessed. The Bible makes it very clear that once God forgives, he forgets. Psalm 103:12, Micah 7:19, and Isaiah 38:17 say that He puts it behind His back, meaning behind His shoulder blades. This is an anthropomorphism in Scripture. I want you to turn your head, please. Look at something behind your shoulder blades right now. ... It's a beautiful way that the Bible makes it clear that God can't see it. Can you see anything between your shoulder blades? It is impossible. This is the beautiful way that the Scripture says, "When God forgives, He never looks at it again." You will never go to heaven to account for your sins. This passage does not deal with that.

That's a disappointment to a lot of you, because I know you were looking forward to going up there to that great television screen in the sky, where all the videotapes were going to be played about the lives of your friends, so that you can enjoy to see what they've been doing when you weren't around to watch them. You wanted to see all of these juicy little things that they are guilty of, that now they're going to have to account to God for. I'm sorry to disappoint you. It's not going to be that way. When God forgives, it's gone; it's forgotten; and, it's wiped out. Quite a few of you are breathing a sigh of relief at that. It's not a judgment relative to sin at all. Once the wall separating God and man has been removed by our faith in Christ, it is impossible for God even to keep records about your sin.

But we are facing what he calls the Judgment Seat of Christ. Right now, we can only introduce it. In the next session, we'll pick it up. The Greek word looks like this: "bema." The "bema" is the Judgment Seat of Christ. Actually, the word means "platform." It is a place where a judge sits. We call it "the bench" in our courts. We say the judge sits on the bench. It's the same thing. It's the picture of a judge on an elevated platform. In the Olympic Games, the judges were on this elevated platform, and it was called the "bema." Then when the athletes who had won were brought before the judge, they stood before the "bema." And it is here that the victor's crown, the laurel wreath, was placed around their heads, signifying that they had won that particular athletic event. So, the Christian, we are told, faces a "bema" – the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 9:24-25: "Don't you know that they who run in the race run all, but one receives the prize? So, run that you may obtain. And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." So, Paul speaks that he fights the battle of the Christian life of serving the Lord in such a way that he can stand before the "bema" seat as a winner. He played by the rules. He played by the Word of God. He served under the leading empowerment of God the Holy Spirit. He knew the difference between being in fellowship and out of fellowship. He knew how to use the confession of sin technique. He knew how to take doctrine into his soul. He knew categories of doctrine. So, he knew how to serve, and how to function. All of that was necessary in order to be capable of producing divine good service. Consequently, God's integrity is preserved, and Paul will now be in a position where God can bless him.

John 5:22 indicates that the Father has placed all judgment in the hands of the Son. We are told that it is necessary for us to appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. That appearing before the Judgment Seat of Christ has as its purpose the evaluation of our works. So, the issue that faces us is how to appear before this "bema" (before this Judgment Seat) in such a way that we do not lose reward, but that in fact we are able to receive reward.

The language is very important, and we don't have time to pursue it now, but we are going to look at what it means to appear. We're going to look at what it means to receive. We're going to look exactly at what rewards are all about. I trust that you have learned, at least, that rewards have nothing to do with salvation. There are always people, when they read about rewards in Scripture, who think that that means going to heaven. Going to heaven is not a reward. The word "reward" is attached to the word "earned." A reward is something you deserve. A reward is something you have competed for, and that you have victoriously won, so that you can have a "stephanos" given to you – a victor's crown. The consequences of receiving this crown are enormous to you as a believer. Not only that, but those of you who have put two and two together realize that this passage in Revelation 3:11 does not only bring up the subject of reward, but it brings up the subject of crowns – the spiritual medals of honors: four crowns that God is ready to give to people.

Most of you out there are eligible for only three of them. A few of us are eligible for four. I happen to be one of them. The pastor-teacher crown is only for that company of pastor-teachers. We're going to look at these crowns; at the rewards that you're capable of; and, at the consequences to having them and losing them.

I hope I can alert to the fact of this nonsense of going through the Christian life under some religious system (don't forget that religion is the devil's game), and that God is going to somehow recognize your sincerity, and He's going to somehow bless you. How tragic to have everything like the rich man here on earth, and then to have nothing when you get into the Lord's presence.

"I come quickly. Hold that spiritual development and doctrinal content which you have firmly, that no one take away your reward and the crowns that accompany that."

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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