

# ***The Final Judgment in the New Testament***

*"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then **repay every man according to his deeds**" (Mt. 16:27).*

*God, **who has saved us** and called us with a holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace** which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity (2 Tim. 1:8-9).*

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# The Final Judgment in the New Testament

## Introduction

As we attempt to understand the event of the Final Judgment the temptation will be to jump to long held understandings, but it is essential that we caution ourselves and test our understanding against the words of Scripture. This becomes all the more challenging because we find that clear explanations are not given as often as we would like. We find that on a number of issues concerning the Final Judgment conclusions can only be drawn from implication rather than explication. The temptation is to draw firm conclusions when in fact Scripture will allow us only to form tentative conclusions on some issues, while others give us completely solid ground upon which to stand.

## I. The Intermediate State

The whole area of the intermediate state, i.e. the state of those who die before the end-time resurrection of the dead at the return of Christ, is an area which is addressed only in the broadest of terms. We have certain solid facts. **First**, the Apostle Paul teaches that it is a bodiless existence which groans for the resurrection of our heavenly bodies (2 Cor. 5:4, 6, 8). **Second**, though we are incomplete we are assured that our souls will be with the Lord<sup>1</sup> awaiting the final step of our glorification the resurrection at His return. **Third**, the glorification of our souls at death does not have the clarity of multiple testimonies from Scripture as does the first two points.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it is none the less clear by its collaboration with deductions and implications from other well-substantiated points.<sup>3</sup> The **fourth** point is that of an arraignment of some sort at death. This point is a deduction. We know that after death comes judgment (Heb. 9:27). We know that there must be some sort of determination or arraignment (i.e. a pretrial hearing) occurring at death because those who die are divided between Paradise and Hades.<sup>4</sup> The righteous and the wicked do not abide together, thus from this fact we must

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:17; 5:10; Col. 3:3; Jn. 12:24-26; Lu. 23:42-43; Acts 7:59; Rev. 6:9-11; cf. Lu. 16:22.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. 12:22-24, Col. 3:3, 4; cf. 1:22; Eph. 1:4; 5:27; 2 Cor. 11:2.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that only those made holy may appear before God (e.g. Heb. 12:14; Ex. 33:20; Rev. 21:27) is coupled with the firm promise that at death we will be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23), therefore it is consistent that the soul must be perfected or glorified at the Christian's entrance into the presence of the Lord (Heb. 12:23). The other passages which speak of total sanctification (= glorification), e.g. Eph. 1:4; 5:27; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22; Jude 24. For these reasons there is no obstacle to the fact of the glorification of the soul at death.

G. Ladd, "Eschatology," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (hereafter *ISBE*), G. Bromiley ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1982), II:140f., disagrees. "Paul knows nothing of glorified spirits apart from the body. ...although he shrinks from the nakedness of death, Paul takes courage in the realization that even though he does not know the mode of his existence, he will be 'at home with the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:8). This is all Paul has to say about the intermediate state. To depart is to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23); but it is enough."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Lu. 16:22-23; 1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 6:9; 7:9-17; 1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:9; Jude 6-7.

conclude that there is an arraignment at death which is not the final judgment, even though we have no specific Scriptural witness of this event.<sup>5</sup> We can only speculate as to what this is. Some Scriptural evidence suggests that it will be the testimony of Jesus that we are His,<sup>6</sup> or possibly it could be the opening of the Lamb's book of life (Lu. 10:20; Rev. 2:26-28; 3:5, 12; 21:27). It could be the innate decision of God or Christ without explanation or formal justification or accusation.<sup>7</sup> The point is we must speculate, but we are compelled to this conclusion from the logical necessity that when faced with the fact of a division then at some prior point a determination of that division must have been made. Undoubtedly one of the reasons Scripture is not more specific about the intermediate state is because of its focus upon the "Blessed Hope" (Titus 2:13) which is the coming of Christ and the Resurrection, our total glorification of body and soul and the universal judgment to follow.

As we explore the issues of the Final Judgment we will find again and again varying degrees of confidence in our conclusions. The critical issue is not that we have no grounds upon which to hope for we certainly and clearly do, rather the issue will be what does Scripture clearly teach about the Final Judgment. The caution is never to confuse what Scripture clearly teaches with what we want Scripture to teach because that is what we have always believed. Our task is to listen to the testimony of Scripture without reading into it our cursory or preconceived conclusions.

## II. The Dual Themes of Judgment: Works and Grace

As we direct our attention to the Final Judgment itself whether in the Old Testament (OT) or in the New Testament (NT) we find that the criteria for the judgment is expressed in two themes: (1) works and (2) grace (faith). The OT depicts Yahweh's judgment as based upon the works or deeds of men. For example, Jeremiah states, "*I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds*" (17:10). Repeatedly, we read that the Lord will render to everyone according to his works.<sup>8</sup> Yet, again Yahweh called His people to repent and call upon Him for mercy and grace as the means of receiving salvation and deliverance.<sup>9</sup> Isaiah wrote, "*For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has*

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10; Mt. 7:22-23; 25:11-12; Lu. 13:25-29; 16:22-23; 1 Jn. 4:17.

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 7:23; 10:32; 25:12; Lu. 12:8; 13:25-29 Rev. 3:5; 7:9; cf. Jn. 10:27; 2 Tim. 2:19; Gal. 4:9; Rev. 3:5, 12.

<sup>7</sup> George Ladd makes this point, "...the realized eschatology of the Bible is seen in the fact that this judgment which belongs to the last day, has essentially already taken place in history. The unbeliever stands under condemnation; the judgment has really taken place, even though the penalty has not yet been enforced (Jn. iii.18). The believer will not experience condemnation, for he has already passed from death (the condemnation) to life (Jn. v.24).

"The Pauline teaching about justification embodies the same truth. Justification is an eschatological truth. It means acquittal from the guilt of sin by a favourable decision of the Judge on the last day. The opposite of justification is condemnation by the Judge (Mt. xii.37; Rom. vii.33, 34; cf. TWNT, II, pp. 210f., 221). Yet because of the death of Christ, the justification of believers has already taken place (Rom. iii.21-26, v.1). Because of present justification, we shall be saved from wrath in the day of judgment (Rom. v.9)" George E. Ladd, "Eschatology," *New Bible Dictionary* (hereafter *NBD*), J. D. Douglas ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1962), 389.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ez. 18:30; e.g. Is. 1:2-15, 21-23; Mal. 3:5; 4:1, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Pss. 32:1, 2; 51:1-17; Is. 1:16-20, 26-31; 6:1-7; 30:15, 18; Jer. 31:27-34; Joel 2:32; Hab. 2:4; Mal. 3:16-18; 4:2.

said, **'In repentance and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.'** ...Therefore **the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for Him**" (30:15, 18). Joel wrote, "And it will come about that **whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered...**" (2:32). In the final judgment mankind will be judged against the standard of Yahweh's righteousness. Scripture declared that no man could stand against such a judgment (cf. Pss. 130:3; 143:2; Job 41:10), therefore any final approval rendered by Yahweh could only be on the basis of His graciousness. Thus, Habakkuk is told, "...the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4).

It is with this OT background in mind that we find the same themes emphasized in the NT. First, we find that the NT clearly teaches that all will be judged according to their works.<sup>10</sup> Paul wrote to the Romans,

*But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, **who will render to each person according to his deeds:** to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God (Rom. 2: 5-11).*

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then **repay every man according to his deeds**" (Mt. 16:27). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat 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**" (2 Cor. 5:10). John wrote in Revelation, "And 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**" (20:12). These verses and many others repetitiously state that the final judgment will be according to works or deeds.

In addition, the NT teaches that we have been saved by the grace through faith. This grace has been extended to believers in Christ.<sup>11</sup> Again, Paul clearly wrote this to the Romans, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us. Much more then, having**

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:27; 25:14-30, 31-46; Rom. 2:5-11, 14-16; 14:7-12; 1 Cor. 4:4-5; 2 Cor. 5:10.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mt. 20:1-16, 23; Mk. 10:24-31; Acts 15:7-11; 16:30-31; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:4-10; Phil. 3:4-14; 2 Tim. 1:8-12.

now been **justified by His blood**, we **shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him**” (5:8, 9). To Timothy Paul wrote,

*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, **who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...* (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

While the NT clearly makes the point that the final judgment will be according to deeds or works, it also speaks of being justified by grace through faith, graciously saved by God by the salvific work of Christ (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 5:9). In some cases within the same context Scripture states that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, and then without explanation states that the final judgment will be according to works. This tension causes us to ask, how can these apparently contradictory statements be reconciled or harmonized? How does this judgment according to works and justification by grace work together?

### **III. Attempts at Reconciling Judgment’s Themes:**

#### **A. Already Judged in Christ?**

The challenge is how both of these points are to be reconciled for Christians? Some argue that, being in a state of grace, we will not be subject to a further judgment for we have already been judged in Christ. This is true. “When Jesus says in John 5:24, *‘verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and **cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life,**’* he clearly means, in view of the context, that the believer cometh not into *condemnatory* judgment.”<sup>12</sup> George Ladd makes this point,

...the realized eschatology of the Bible is seen in the fact that this judgment which belongs to the last day, has essentially already taken place in history. The unbeliever stands under condemnation; the judgment has really taken place, even though the penalty has not yet been enforced (Jn. iii.18). The believer will not experience condemnation, for he has already passed from death (the condemnation) to life (Jn. v.24).

The Pauline teaching about justification embodies the same truth. Justification is an eschatological truth. It means acquittal from the guilt of sin by a favourable decision of the Judge on the last day. The opposite of justification is condemnation by

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<sup>12</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1941), 732.

the Judge (Mt. xii.37; Rom. vii.33, 34; cf. TWNT, II, pp. 210f., 221). Yet because of the death of Christ, the justification of believers has already taken place (Rom. iii.21-26, v.1). Because of present justification, we shall be saved from wrath in the day of judgment (Rom. v.9).<sup>13</sup>

Yet this does not end the matter because we are faced with a number of fundamental passages of Scripture which teach that Christians, though forgiven and judged in Christ, must under go a future judgment according to works.<sup>14</sup>

## B. Temporal Chastisement?

Some would argue that the judgment of which the NT warns is the temporal chastisement of the Lord. Certainly God does discipline His people in this life both to turn them from their sin and also for growth in holiness and righteousness. First Corinthians 11:31-32 addresses one of the sins of the Corinthian church, the violation of the unity of the Lord's Supper, and it interprets the consequence of this sin in terms of temporal chastisement. *"But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world."* God's discipline through His Church is designed to save the souls of "wandering sheep," even as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"* (5:4-5; cf. Gal. 6:1-5). Hebrews 12:7-10 defines the suffering, pain, and hardship of God's children also as God's discipline, so that they learn to live righteously and in holiness under pressure. *"It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."* But God's Fatherly discipline cannot be the meaning of the passages which warn of our appearing before the judgment seat of God and Christ. For example, 2 Corinthians 5:10 explicitly refers to the Christ's judgment of Christians for *"deeds done in the body,"* that it is a judgment after life for deeds done during life (also Rom. 14:10-12). Temporal discipline cannot be the meaning Galatians 5:21, *"...I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."* Therefore, we must conclude that the judgment according to works is not in reference to temporal chastisement, but it does identify one of the forms of God's judgment of His people.

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<sup>13</sup> George E. Ladd, "Eschatology," *NBD*, 389.

<sup>14</sup> Rom. 14:7-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23-25; etc.



### C. Works regard Rewards?

Clearly the Apostle Paul addressed Christians when he wrote, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat 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*” (2 Cor. 5:10). The challenge then is to rightly reconcile the passages of grace with those addressing a future judgment of deeds. To do this, some have understood that this judgment of deeds does not have anything to do with salvation but only heavenly rewards for faithful service to Christ in this life.<sup>15</sup> This position sees a neat division that the promise of grace through faith is eternal salvation and the judgment according to works regards not salvation but rewards for faithfulness. This seems to be the point of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15,

*Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each 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. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up. He will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved yet so as through fire.*

Again, this would seem to be the exact point of these verses. The question is then asked, but does this exhaust the meaning of the passages of the future judgment (e.g. Mt. 16:27; 25:31ff.; Rev. 20:11ff.)? For example, only by resorting to interpretative gymnastics can one make the obvious meanings of eternal judgment texts mean a judgment of rewards. Schreiner makes this very clear.

It is patently clear in Matthew [25:31ff.] that those who weep and gnash their teeth are cast into hell. They won’t sit at the banquet with Abraham and the patriarchs (Matt. 8:11-12). Those who do evil are removed from God’s kingdom, thrown into the fiery furnace, and weep and gnash their teeth (13:41-42). Similarly, ‘at the end of the age’ angels will segregate ‘the wicked from the righteous’ and cast the wicked ‘into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (13:49-50). So too, the man without the wedding garment is thrown out of the banquet hall into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (22:11-13). Jesus makes clear he wasn’t among the chosen (22:14). So it is astonishing [to suggest]...that the unfaithful servant who is among the hypocrites who weep and gnash their teeth and is ‘cut...to pieces’ (24:51) is simply losing his reward. What language would convince...that hell is in view if being cut to pieces and

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<sup>15</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, “Christians Will Be Judged According To Their Works At The *Rewards* Judgment, But *Not* At The *Final* Judgment,” Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment, Alan Stanley ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan.com, 2013), 25-70.

placed among the hypocrites doesn't refer to eternal punishment?<sup>16</sup>

Further, does this judgment of rewards do justice to the essential relationship between faith's expression of itself in works (e.g. Mt. 7:22-23; Jas. 2:14-26; Titus 1:15-16)? We will look at this more closely later.

#### IV. The Benefits of a Universal Final Judgment

This question, what is the relationship between faith's expression of itself in works, is appropriate because of Scripture's universal inclusiveness that the Final Judgment will be according to works. Therefore, the display of the Church's works will be a display of the reality of their faith. Though we are saved through faith, the judgment will be universally according to works. Note these verses: "*For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will the repay **every man** according to His deeds*" (Mt. 16:27). "*Who will render to **each person** according to his deeds*" (Rom. 2:9). And "*...all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts, and I will give to **each one of you** according to your deeds*" (Rev. 2:23). "*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to **every man** according to what he has done*" (Rev. 22:12). Note that in each of these verses that the judgment of deeds is universal in scope ("*every,*" "*each*") but personal in address ("*man,*" "*person,*" "*one of you*"). Further, the direct focus of these passages is not on faith, rather they directly address what each has done. The criterion of deeds for a universal judgment is emphatic at the judgment of the "*great white throne.*" "*And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books before the throne, and books were 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***" (Rev. 20:12; also cf. v.13). Thus, L. Berkhof writes,

It is also perfectly clear that every individual of the human race will have to appear before the judgment seat, Eccl. 12:14; Ps. 50:4-6; Matt. 12:36, 37; 25:32; Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12. These passages certainly leave no room for the view...that the final judgment will be limited to those who have enjoyed the privileges of the gospel. Neither do they favor...that the righteous will not be called into judgment. ...But it is sometimes objected that the sins of believers, which are pardoned, certainly will not be published at that time; but Scripture leads us to expect that they will be, though they will, of course, **be revealed as pardoned sins**. Men will be judged for "every idle word," Matt. 12:36, and for "every secret thing," Rom. 2:16; I Cor. 4:5, and there is no indication whatsoever that this will be limited to the wicked. Moreover, it is perfectly evident from such passages as Matt. 13:30, 40-43,

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Response to Robert N. Wilkin," *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, Alan Stanley ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan.com, 2013), 53, cf. 54-56.

49; 25:14-23, 34-40, 46, that the righteous will appear before the judgment seat of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

There is a related question to the fact that Christians will go through a public final judgment according to their works. This judgment will reveal their “every idle word” and “every secret thing.” The obvious concern is “will not such an exposure bring shame and be inconsistent with our forgiveness in Christ?” There are several insightful responses to this question.

### **A. The Vindication of God**

First, the focus of judgment is only secondarily on us but primarily upon God. Judgment will first and foremost vindicate God.<sup>18</sup> This is illustrated in Paul’s statement in Romans 9, “*What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory...*” (vv. 22-23). The prophet Habakkuk points out that God’s judgment will display His glory filling all the earth.

*Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed  
And founds a town with violence!  
Is it not indeed from the Lord of hosts  
That peoples toil for fire,  
And nations grow weary for nothing?  
For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,  
As the waters cover the sea.  
(Hab. 2:12-14).*

God’s graciousness and forgiveness, his justice and righteousness will be spotlighted by His judgment. Thus, the magnanimous grace of God extended to us in Christ will be exalted and magnified (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Rom. 5:20-21). God’s grace and His wrath will equally have their places in the final judgment. Each filling the earth with His glory!

### **B. Transparent Fellowship**

Second, the final judgment of believers will prepare the way for the blessedness of heaven. It will begin by bringing all things into the light of God and Christ (cf. Jn. 3:19-21). There will be no hidden things to intrude upon our eternal fellowship with God and Christ (cf. 1 Jn. 1:5-10). Not only will our works and words be revealed to judgment, but even our motives will be revealed and judged. To the Corinthians Paul stated, “*I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one*

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<sup>17</sup> L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 732, bold added; also R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 847 (bold added).

<sup>18</sup> God acts always for the end of His own glory: For His sake He forgives, e.g., Is 43:25; 48:11; He leads in righteousness, Ps. 23:3; for His sake and glory, Pss. **72:18-19**; 78:37-41; 103:8-14; 108:5; Nu. 19:21; Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; Phil. 1:11; 1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Cor. 10:30, etc.

*who examines me is the Lord. Therefore 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*" (1 Cor. 4:4-5). There is inherent in this openness and transparency of judgment the blessed joy of complete confession, no hidden thing can threaten our eternal joy. "And is it not the sweetest type of spiritual joy, that which proceeds from (confession and) contrition for sin?"<sup>19</sup> All will see the blessed and joyous testimony that all of the sins of all the saints have been revealed and judged in Christ, and all will know that "*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 8:1).<sup>20</sup>

### **C. Magnification of the Greatness of God's Grace**

Third, in the greatness of the elect's revealed and pardoned sin, in their blamelessness and holiness in Christ the greatness of God's grace will be magnified as will the infinite greatness of our salvation and deliverance in Christ. To the Ephesians Paul put it like this, "*...so that **in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.** For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast*" (Eph. 2:7-9). In light of such grace all we will be able to do is boast in our God, His mercy, and salvation (1 Cor. 1:31).

### **D. God's Rewarding of Obedience**

Fourth, the judgment of His saints will be God's public affirmation of all of the faithful obedient service offered to Him by His children. The writer of Hebrews testifies, "*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect*" (11: 37-40; cf. Mt. 25:34-40). These works of grace will testify to the faithfulness of God to His people in sustaining them through all the trials of their faithfulness to Him. Such deeds will be displayed as the fruit of Christ's work in every believer. They will be broadcast to all creation to the glory of God and Christ and to the blessing of His people (cf. Rev. 6:9; 12:11; 15:2ff.).

These four outcomes are the result of the full disclosure of the "pardoned sins" of God's saints. This full disclosure will accomplish: God's vindication, transparent fellowship, magnification of God's grace, and the rewarding of the obedient. There is a further outcome. It will reveal those who are false disciples,

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<sup>19</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 847, 848.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. vv. 33, 35, 37-39; Jude 24, 25; Ps. 32:1-2.

hypocrites, and wolves in sheep's clothing. Some will be obvious before the final judgment, but there are others who have pulled the wool over the eyes of those around them. These will be revealed for what they are in final judgment.

## V. The Problem of Unrepentant Sin and Hypocrisy

Paul wrote to Titus stating that a pastor cannot allow himself to be fooled by the verbal testimony of those whose lives, their works, their deeds, deny the testimony of saving faith. *“To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. **They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him**, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed”* (Titus 1:15-16; cf. Mt. 7:22-23). In a similar vein, Jesus warned, *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits* (Mt. 7:15-16).

Paul notes that situations can be even more complex writing to Timothy. *“The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after”* (1 Tim. 5:24). Paul is warning Timothy that some sins are obvious, “going before them,” while other sins are concealed or secret becoming revealed at some later time, these are the sins which “follow after.” Identifying the sin “going before” follows the rule established by Jesus for identifying wolves-in-sheep's-clothing, we do so by their works. *“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ...So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ...So then, you will know them by their fruits”* (Mt. 7:15, 17, 20). While the second kind of sin also relies on that rule but is not as obvious because of delayed evidence. Paul later assured Timothy that the final identification rests with Lord (2 Tim. 2:19; cf. 1 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 6:7). These are some of the challenges we face when seeking to distinguish between the false and the true disciple, between saving and vain faith, between the false and the fallen.

In spite of these instructions discerning between the false and the fallen can be very confusing and challenging. Timothy faced very convincing and persuasive false teachers in Ephesus. They were so charismatic and their words were so convincing that they wove a veil of deceit which blinded the church to their true identity. Paul gave this advice, *“Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘**Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.**’ Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work”* (2 Tim. 2:19-21; cf. Heb. 12:14). Paul was ultimately saying, one, that as confused as we might be the Lord is never confused, thus the final judgment will make evident that clarity. Thorough hypocrisy will be exposed and rejected Jesus promised, *“Many will say*

*to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Mt. 7:22-23).*

Two, the character of the elect will be made evident by their rejection of and turning from evil, and their evident desire to cleanse themselves, which we can understand as repentance, so they will be fit for all the good works which will please and glorify our Lord. These are foundational truths, but the application of them is not always cut and dry. Too often the fallen do not immediately recover, but their fallen state may be for a season. Scripture teaches that unconfessed and unrepentant sin, which is selfishly and faithlessly pursued will result in grief and loss in the judgment.<sup>21</sup> *"...He will **suffer loss**; but he himself **will be saved**, yet so as through fire"* (1 Cor. 3:15). The "fire" is the testing, examination, proving of our works by and before God and Christ. This too will be a testimony to the faithful justice and impartiality of our God. What kind of "loss" or its extent is left ambiguous.

This issue is complex because it addresses two possible states. One is the judgment of unrepentant sins and the fleshly works of a Christian, while the other state is the judgment of hypocrites, apostates, and wolves-in-sheep's-clothing. The first ends in salvation but with a severe but undefined "loss." The second ends in eternal wrath and punishment. Thus, we find dire warnings against sin in the NT, and with them there is an explicit or implicit warning of the judgment of the unrepentant pursuit of sin. It is the fact that these sins will be judged that is the whole point of the numerous warnings about the coming judgment for Christians and non-Christians.<sup>22</sup> Characteristically, Galatians 5:19-21 states, *"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**"* The Apostle Paul made the same point when he answered his opponents' accusation. *"Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be!"* (Rom. 6:1, 2; cf. 3:8). A Christian has no license to sin. Grace is not given so that we may freely sin (Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16), and God will not be mocked by the abuse of His grace, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap"* (Gal. 6:7; cf., vv. 8, 9). We have to conclude that Paul is addressing and warning against the state of persistent and unrepentant sin with these severe and dire warnings.

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<sup>21</sup> E.g. Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:15; 4:4-5; 5:5; Col. 3:25; 1 Tim. 5:20-22; 2 Tim. 4:16; Jas. 5:12.

<sup>22</sup> Mt. 7:1-2; Rom. 14:4-15; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 3:12-13, 16-22; 4:4-7; 2 Cor. 5:9-13; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5-6; Heb. 6:4-12; 10:26-31; 13:4 Jas. 5:9, 12, 20; etc.

## **A. The Solution: An Imprecise but Definite Line**

How then are we to understand the warnings concerning the judgment according to works and ultimately the judgment itself? It would seem best to understand that Scripture is drawing an **imprecise line**. It is the line between saving faith and vain faith.<sup>23</sup> These two kinds of faiths are sometimes self-evident, but at other times they can outwardly appear identical. When we are unable to see the internal motivations of the heart, we are left with only external appearances which can be counterfeited and camouflaged. Even self-examination can be superficial, confused, deluded, or blinded.<sup>24</sup> We are reminded of Jeremiah's oft quoted truism,

***The heart is more deceitful than all else  
And is desperately sick;  
Who can understand it?  
I, the Lord, search the heart,  
I test the mind,  
Even to give to each man according to his ways,  
According to the results of his deeds  
(Jer. 17:9-10).***

Because of the deceitfulness of our hearts, we have no absolute way to examine ourselves. Once again, we see that absolute judgment can only be rendered by God, who is not deceived by the deception of our hearts. Interestingly, we find in this context, once again, that God will examine our heart motives and render to each one according to his or her works. But this does not exclude self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:1-5; cf. 1 Cor. 4:1-5), rather it creates a great caution within us as we examine ourselves. We must approach it with great humility and a certain knowledge that our hearts are great justifying machines which must be objectively held to the standard of God's law and not our own subjective feelings and rationalizing thoughts and judgments.

How then do we know saving faith from vain faith in ourselves and others? The distinguishing line drawn by Scripture must be defined as "imprecise." There are perhaps four points of reference which give some definition to this imprecise line: 1) God's sovereign election, 2) fleeing from wickedness, 3) a tenacious clinging faith in Christ, and 4) witness of the Spirit. These must then be set over and against the character of vain faith.

### **1. God's Sovereign Election**

It is God's sovereign election which makes certain our salvation. It is with this certitude that Paul wrote the Ephesians saying, *even as he [God, the Father] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be*

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:21-23; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2; Col. 1:23; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; Heb. 3:6, 12-14.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 4:3-5; cf., Mt. 7:21-23; 15:18-20; 25:11-12. Louis Berkhof, *The Assurance of Faith* (Birmingham Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004, original 1939), 66-65, gives five reasons cautioning ourselves about drawing assurance from our fruits of faith: (1) motivations and our inner thoughts are very complex and complicated; (2) our hearts are deceitful; (3) thorough self-examination reveals so much that is defective; (4) we can get caught up in circular reasoning: good works come from true faith and we know our faith is true by good works; and (5) the lack of fruit does necessarily prove the lack of true faith.

*holy and blameless before him (1:4). To the Romans he wrote, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls.... For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy (9:11, 15-16). Paul reiterated this to Timothy, [God] who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began... (2 Tim. 1:9). Thus, it is God's election and not anything in us or by us that makes our salvation certain. It is with this fact that Paul assures Timothy.*

*Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal,  
"The Lord knows those who are His," and,  
"Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to **abstain from wickedness**"  
(2 Tim. 2:19).*

Here, Paul addresses the fact that we may be confused as to the salvation of some, yet we are assured that God is not. He knows His own! *He knows His own* because He has already, *before the foundation of the world*, elected them to salvation. This is the first pillar of Paul's assurance.

## **2. Fleeing from Wickedness**

Paul's second pillar of assurance is a certain dispositional change which makes itself evident in the lives of the elect – *to abstain from wickedness*. This fleeing from wickedness also implies a fleeing to righteousness. As certain as God's knowledge of His elect this dispositional change is equally certain. In reference to this verse (also vv. 20-21) we earlier stated that the character of the elect will be made evident by their rejection of and turning from evil, and their evident desire to cleanse themselves, which we can understand as repentance, so they will be fit for all the good works which will please and glorify our Lord. This reflects the dispositional change which occurs at conversion in God's elect as they are united to Christ by the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives.

In our union with Christ (Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 1:9), we are endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and with the Spirit comes our adoption into the family of God.<sup>25</sup> Through the gift of the Spirit comes the enablement and transformational work of conforming believers to the image of Christ. Further, in our union with Christ we are made members of a new humanity, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:11). We are moved from membership with Adam and his fall to membership in Christ and his victory (Rom. 5:12-21). We are lifted from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13; Eph. 5:8-14). We are being renewed by the Holy Spirit according to the image of Christ.<sup>26</sup> "Our 'old man' – i.e., our membership in Adam – was crucified with Christ, and now we must seek to reflect in practice the 'image' of this new man ('put on'), and to scour out the

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<sup>25</sup> Rom. 8:1-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Acts 2:38; Gal. 4:6.

<sup>26</sup> 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22-23; Rom. 8:9-17; Eph. 4:13, 22-24; Col. 3:10.



remaining image of the old ('put off')."<sup>27</sup> In addition to these, there is an inner change which occurs in the individual. J. I. Packer describes this dispositional change.

God unites the individual to the risen Lord in such a way that the dispositional drives of Christ's perfect human character—the inner urgings, that is, to honor, adore, love, obey, serve and please God. And to benefit others for both their sake and His sake—are now reproduced at the motivational center of that individual's being. And they are reproduced, in face of the contrary egocentric cravings of fallen nature, in a dominant way, so that the Christian, though still troubled and tormented by the urgings of indwelling sin, is no longer ruled by those urgings in the way that was true before. Being under grace, the Christian is freed from sin (Rom. 6:14-7:6; Gal. 5:13-25; cf. John 8:31-36); the motivational theocentricity of the heart set free will prompt the actions that form the habits of Christlikeness that constitute the Spirit's fruit (Gal. 5:22f.), and thus the holiness of radical repentance (daily abandonment of self-centered self-will), childlike humility (daily listening to what God says in His Word, and daily submission (to what He sends in His providence), and love to God and man that honors and serves both, will increasingly appear.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of this dispositional change saving faith is characterized by a rejection of wickedness in all of its myriad forms (e.g. Gal. 5:20-21). Paul writing to Timothy instructs him to "**flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness**" (1 Tim. 6:11). Later, Paul again exhorts Timothy, "**Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart**" (2 Tim. 2:22). To the Corinthians Paul instructs, "**Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**" (2 Cor. 7:1). John wrote in a similar vein, "**Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever**" (1 Jn. 2:15-17). These few exhortations and warnings make it clear that to abstain and flee from wickedness is to characterize a true and saving faith.

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<sup>27</sup> S. Motyer, "Man, Old and New," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1984), 680-681. See 1 Cor. 15:45-49.

<sup>28</sup> J. I. Packer, "Evangelical Foundations for Spirituality" (an unpublished essay distributed by Reformation and Revival Ministries, Inc., Carol Stream, Ill., weekly email letter).

On the other hand, it is the presence of wickedness which characterizes a vain and false faith. Vain faith will openly profess Christ, but it does not persevere to the end (Col. 1:23; Heb. 10:35-39). It appears as true faith, but it is empty of its substance and grace (2 Cor. 13:5). It is a rain cloud without rain. It is a form of godliness without the power of God (2 Tim. 3:5). Further, it is not constrained to repent of sins but becomes content in its sin (1 Tim. 5:6; Titus 3:9, 10; Heb. 6:4-8). It is full of self and not the denial of self-living for self-glory (2 Tim. 3:1-9; Phil 3:18, 19). It fails to love (1 Jn. 4:20, 21; Jn. 14:15). Notably the words of Jesus make this abundantly clear. *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, **you who practice lawlessness**”* (Mt. 7:21-23; cf. 25:11-12). These appeal to Jesus with a confession of faith, *“Lord, Lord,”* but their confession is disqualified for they do not simply “fall” into sin, but they “practice” it.

Yet, despite these blessings true believers still sin and even continue in sin (e.g. Rom. 7:13-25; 1 Jn. 1:8; Jas. 3:2). We are in a war against sin, and we do not always win. Our “weakness” is all too evident (Mt. 26:41; Rom. 6:19; 8:3,26; 2 Cor. 12:9-10). This “weakness” reflects the residue and stain remaining in us from our depravity. Paul refers to it as the “flesh” (e.g. Gal. 5:17, 19-21). It is the ongoing desire of “Sin” (Rom. 7:13-17, 23-24) not simply the committing of “sins.” It inspires the desires for sins (Jas. 1:14-15). It is this residue, this indwelling sin, which necessitates the death of our bodies (Rom. 8:10). It is this contaminate of our souls which the Spirit wars against (Gal. 5:16-17, 24-25; Rom. 8:5-7). It is a war already won in Christ (definite sanctification, 1 Cor. 1:30; 6:11), but it is a victory realized over our life times as we learn to live and walk in the Spirit (progressive sanctification, 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:5-17; Eph. 4:13-15) reaching its completion with our glorification at the resurrection at the coming of Christ (1 Cor. 15:50-56; Phil. 3:21).

It is in this war against the flesh that the waters of assurance can become muddied. The result is that we do not have a hard, fast clean line but an imprecise one though Scripture assures us with its warnings that it is a definite line. True believers can even fall into heinous sins (David’s adultery and murder) and even a seemingly complete collapse of faith (Peter’s denial of the Lord). The *Westminster Confession* describes this vulnerability of saving faith which can result in a loss of assurance.

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it; by falling into some special sin, which woundeth the conscience, and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation; by God’s withdrawing the

light of his countenance and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light (Pss. 51:8, 12, 14; 77:1-10; 31:22; 88; Is. 50:10; Mt. 26:69-72; Eph. 4:30); yet are they never utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived (Pss. 51:8, 12; 73:15; Is. 50:10; Lu. 22:32; 1 Jn. 3:9), and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair (Micah 7:7-9).<sup>29</sup>

This being the case, how then can one know if he or she has a true and saving faith? The key to this is that saving faith will repent, whether it is now or later. Saving faith will repent, and it is in repentance that assurance becomes assured, not while in sin. For if one unrepentantly stays in sin there is no assurance, but in earnest repentance from sin there is an assurance. Paul distinguishes between a regret which comes from being caught in sin versus a true zealous repentance.

*For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it – for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while – I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. **For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!** In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. For this reason we have been comforted... (2 Cor. 7:8-13).*

True repentance does not hold back but is earnest, zealous, dedicated in its turning from sin. Saving faith takes the warnings of Scripture in dead earnest. For this reason Paul does not hesitate to instruct the Philippians to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (2:12b). Saving faith seeks to demonstrate its true nature by its works (Jas. 2:14-23). By so doing it seeks to “*be*

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<sup>29</sup> “The Westminster Confession,” 6.100, Chap. XX (PCUS): “Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation,” #4.

*all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you*” (2 Pet. 1:10). This is the mark of a saving faith that has fallen into sin.

### **3. A Tenaciously Clinging Faith**

Here are some things we know about saving faith. Saving faith truly saves. It perseveres to the end (Heb. 3:6; 1 Jn. 5:4), and it is empowered by the Spirit to war and overcome sin. Its only hope is a clinging and relentless faith in Christ (Rom. 6:14; 8:12-16; Gal. 5:16, 17). It manifests a persistent love for Christ (Gal. 5:6; 1 Thess. 1:3). The *Scots Confession* describes true faith.

The Spirit of God who bears witness to our spirit that we are the sons of God, makes us resist filthy pleasures and groan in God’s presence for deliverance from this bondage of corruption, and finally to triumph over sin so that it does not reign in our mortal bodies. Other men do not share this conflict since they do not have God’s Spirit, but they readily follow and obey sin and feel no regrets, since they act as the devil and their corrupt nature urge. But the sons of God fight against sin; sob and mourn when they find themselves tempted to do evil; and, if they fall, rise again with earnest and unfeigned repentance. They do these things, not by their own power, but by the power of the Lord Jesus, apart from whom they can do nothing.<sup>30</sup>

The means by which all this is done is by faith. It is a faith which clings to Christ above all things and knows that Christ alone can save. This faith flies to Christ as his or her only refuge. Christ is to this faith its all and all. In the face of all doubt, of all failure, all circumstances this faith seeks refuge in Christ alone. It has no hope in good works; none are good enough. It has no hope in the goodness of self; for it knows there are none good but God. Its only hope is in Christ and His saving work on his or her behalf. There is no other confident plea. There are no excuses justifiable. There are no rationalizations reasonable. There is no blame-shifting excusable. Only Christ can save, and without Him all is lost, so saving faith clings with a death-grip to Christ. Why should I get into heaven? One reason and one reason only, Christ. Saving faith will not let go of Christ. Such faith perseveres to the end tenaciously clinging to Christ.

The perseverance of faith is an essential characteristic of the elect (Mt. 24:13; Heb. 3:6, 14; Rev. 2:10, 25-27). They persevere because God preserves them (cf. Jn. 10:28-29; Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13). The lack of perseverance is an indication that those are not elect (1 Jn. 2:19). As we have also stated the elect have been truly born again, they are regenerate, and they may backslide and fall

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<sup>30</sup> “The Scot Confession,” 3.13, Chap. XIII: “The Cause of Good Works.” Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, Ewald Plass ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), II:475, in Mark Talbot, *The Signs of True Conversion* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 31, wrote of this saving faith as “a very mighty, active, restless, busy thing, which at once renews a man, gives him a second birth, and introduces him to a new manner and way of life, so that it is impossible for him not to do good without ceasing. For as naturally as a tree bears fruit, good works follow upon faith.” Also see The Westminster Confession, Chap. XVI (PCUS): “Of Saving Faith,” Chap. XIX: “Of The Perseverance of the Saints,” Chap. XX: “Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation,” and The Larger Catechism, Questions 70-81.

into sin (e.g. Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Jn. 1:8-2:2; Jas. 3:2), but “the Holy Spirit convicts them of their sin (cf. John 16:8) and compels them to repent and be restored to righteousness. When regenerate believers manifest a humble, grateful desire to please the God who saved them, the knowledge that He has pledged to keep them safe forever increases that desire.”<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. The Witness of the Spirit**

So far we have looked at three of the four points of reference along our “imprecise” but definite line between saving and vain faith: 1) God’s sovereign election, 2) fleeing from wickedness, and 3) a tenacious clinging faith in Christ. We now press on to the last point in our imprecise line: 4) witness of the Spirit.

Paul introduces us to the witness of the Spirit, *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...* (Rom. 8:16). Louis Berkhof offers this explanation. First, he addresses what the witness of the Spirit is not.

This testimony of the Holy Spirit should not be conceived of as a communication, conveyed to the believer by a secret voice, and giving him the assurance that he is a child of God; nor as a specific operation of the Holy Spirit on the mind, by which he directs attention to a passage of Scripture containing that assurance. Neither should it be regarded as a testimony that is given once for all at the moment of conversion, to which the believer can confidently appeal ever after, no matter whether he be yielding the fruits of the Spirit, or be following the lusts of the flesh.

Berkhof continues with an elucidation of what the witness of the Spirit is.

The Spirit of God testifies continually by his indwelling in the hearts of those that fear the Lord, and by all those gracious operations in the renewal of man that are so manifestly divine. He opens the eye of faith to the beauty and glory of the promises of God, illumines the mind so that their spiritual import is understood, and fills the heart with a sense of their appropriateness for lost sinners. He discloses to the spiritual eye the gracious character of the Saviour, causes the sinner to flee to him for refuge and to seek shelter in the shadow of his wings, and leads the soul to a trustful repose, safe in the arms of Jesus. He speaks in all the movements of the new life: in the filial spirit, the spirit of love and reverence and obedience, in his intercessions in the inner man with groanings that cannot be uttered, in the manifold experiences of comfort in suffering, strength in weakness, victory in seasons of temptation, and perseverance under the trials of faith. These are all works of the Holy Spirit. In so far as they are in us and abound, they

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<sup>31</sup> R.C., Sproul (ed.), “Perseverance of the Saints,” *The Reformation Study Bible* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2003), 1627.

bear witness to the reality of our reconciliation with God, and in the very voice of the Spirit given us the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that we are children of God. These vital spiritual affections shine with their own light, and thus constitute the testimony of the Holy Spirit that carries conviction to the soul. The more the life of faith develops, the greater our progress in the way of sanctification, the clearer will the voice of the spirit ring out, dispelling all doubts and filling the heart with joy and peace.<sup>32</sup>

Much more can be said about the witness of the Spirit, but ultimately this witness is a deepening of faith in clinging to Christ and His work for the believer and a growing in conformity to Christ. The promises of Scripture become more precious and more deeply trusted. There is a deepening of one's hatred of the flesh, and a longing to be freed and be at home with Christ. The road is not a smooth one but filled with potholes, detours, and trials. But the Spirit rights us and points us toward the goal again and again. One finds the journey is appropriately described in Paul's words to the Philippians. *...I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (3:12-14).* The Spirit is ever pointing us toward the goal and leading us forward through all the vicissitudes of life.

These four points of reference: God's sovereign election, fleeing from wickedness, a tenacious faith, and the witness of the Spirit, help us become confident of our own assurance but also that of others. They are points of reference along this **imprecise line**. They especially lay stress on the fact that following Jesus, being a Christian, is not a matter of "praying a prayer," or an assent of faith, but of truly trusting Jesus, the promises of God's Word, and resolutely following Jesus in the grace of the Spirit. This leads us to what is called the "syllogism of faith." When we find our lives aligning with this profile of a follower of Jesus, then we may infer and come to the logical deduction that we belong to the elect.<sup>33</sup> Even here we must always caution ourselves as the Apostle Paul did before the Corinthians.

*For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 Cor. 4:4-5).*

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<sup>32</sup> Louis Berkhof, The Assurance of Faith, 61-62.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

Where this does this leave us? It leaves us where we must always be – tenaciously clinging to Christ alone. Here, and here only, do we find an anchor for our souls and a confidence for our salvation.

Appropriately Scripture calls us to constant vigilance and gives us ever reoccurring warnings. Therefore, Scripture warns us in a twofold way: (1) examine ourselves to see if Christ is in our hearts (2 Cor. 13:5), i.e. if you really are a Christian, as well as, to stimulate brothers and sisters to love and good deeds making sure their calling (Heb. 10:24; 1 Thess. 5:14-15; 2 Pet. 1:10); and (2) beware that there is a coming judgment where every wrong will be judged (Col. 3:25), i.e. live in the fear of the Lord, knowing that there will be an accounting, make sure you are battling the flesh, continually repenting of your sins, crying out to Him for more and more grace, and growing in Christ, so that your faith is a saving faith.

*For he who lacks these qualities [faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love (vv.5-7)] is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you (2 Pet. 1: 9-11).*

There is a zeal, an earnestness that accompanies true faith and repentance (e.g. 2 Cor. 7:9-11).

Though diligent, saving faith is not perfect. The lusts of the flesh war against us, therefore we need these warning of Scripture to spur us on in the fight of faith. Scripture is warning us to take every sin seriously because God does. It is warning us to make sure saving faith is in us and that our faith is not a vain, empty faith. Mark Talbot offers this counsel,

It is certainly not with any of us as it should be. None of us knows enough, feels enough, or yields himself or herself enough. This would be cause for alarm, if we did not remind ourselves that it is always God who is working within us to enable us to believe, feel, and will as we should. Yet if these signs are not clearly apparent in our lives, we have a task before us. We must pray, as wise Solomon did for himself and his people, that God will turn our hearts to himself, so that we will walk in all his ways and keep all his commands and decrees (1 Kings 8:58).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Talbot, The Signs of True Conversion, 32.

## B. Imperative Distinction: Salvation by Grace and Judgment According to Works

Lest anyone become overly anxious that this will lead us to a salvation by works note this imperative distinction. These passages are not referring to salvation but judgment! “...While sinners will be condemned strictly on the merit of their own conduct, sins will be acquitted solely on the merit of Christ. They are rewarded **according to**, not **because of** the deeds done in the flesh.”<sup>35</sup> Paul Helm makes this point.

There is a vital distinction to be drawn between a judgment that is *according to works* and a judgment that is *for works*. Scripture nowhere teaches that a person actually secures justification by his deeds; the very opposite, in fact. Justification is by or on account of divine grace and is appropriated by faith (Rom. 4:16). And such faith is not to be regarded as a meritorious work but a means by which the divine, all-sufficient Saviour is relied upon. No one is justified *for* works, nor justified *for* faith. We are justified by faith and according to works.<sup>36</sup>

It is critical that we grasp the importance of this point. Judgment will be according to works, but we are saved from God’s wrath by the substitutionary work of Christ’s obedience and sacrifice which we rely upon by faith. We are availed of Christ’s work through faith in Him and His work. The distinction between “a judgment that is *according to works* and a judgment that is *for works*” is that the verdict of judgment will be rendered from the evidence of works, but salvation will not be awarded because of works. Dabney puts it, “They are rewarded according to, not because of the deeds done in the flesh.”<sup>37</sup> Our works cannot save. Christ’s perfect work can save, and by our faith in Christ we are accounted righteous and thereby saved. The saving nature of our faith will be evidenced by our works.

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<sup>35</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 849. When judgment according to works is stated in a prepositional phrase (Mt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12, 13) eight of the nine times the preposition is **kataV** with an accusative object translated *according to* works. The exception is 2 Cor. 5:10 where **proVc** is used translated *for* works. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 408, reference these verses as examples of **kataV** used in reference to a norm or standard which is used for judgment, and it should be translated as “according to,” “in accordance with,” or “corresponding to.” Thus, **kataV** connects the standard (works) which the judgment will use to render its verdict. In a similar way **proVc** connects the standard to the act of judging. Above, Dabney is emphasizing that “works” should be connected not with salvation but with judgment. Our hope is not in our judgment according to works, but rather it is in our salvation won in Christ.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Helm, *Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell* (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 79, wants us to note the differences between judgment and justification. These two should not be confused. Judgment will be in reference to our works, but our salvation (i.e. our deliverance from judgment) is “because of” or “on the basis of” grace not works of any kind.

<sup>37</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 849; William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 216: “25. The sentence, to be carried out immediately, will be to eternal life or death, according to the works that have preceded. 26. The sentence to life for the elect will be given according to their works, not as meritorious causes but as effects testifying to the true causes. 27. The sentence to death for reprobates will be given according to their works as true causes.”



## VI. Judgment and Works Resulting from Grace

There is another important part, which is necessary to make up the whole of our understanding. Evangelicals have tended to misunderstand the place of works within our salvation. Works are looked upon as entirely unnecessary because we are not saved by our works. Ephesians 2:10 is a critically informative verse, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*” Note the primary point—we were “*created in Christ Jesus for good works.*” We were saved with a purpose in mind. We were saved “*for good works*”! Good works are not optional but integral and strategic. The point is made emphatic by the final clause, “*which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*” Good works are not a secondary thought to our salvation, rather they are a primary goal enabled and made possible by salvation.

In this light we read Jesus words, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter*” (Mt. 7:21). Jesus is making the point that the right profession of faith can be empty of truth and reality. People can confess “*Lord, Lord*” and not be truly converted. It is not the simple saying or professing Christ as Lord that saves, but it is the turning to Him as your only hope by the power of the Spirit. The evidence of this experience is the “*obedience of faith*” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). It is doing the will of the Father (cf. Jn. 14:15). The very nature of a good tree is that it will produce good fruit (Mt. 7:16-20). Jesus concluded this principle saying, “*Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits*” (vv. 19, 20). Fruit is the evidence of the nature of the tree or the disciple. We might further point out that those who cry, *Lord, Lord*, did not plead for Christ’s mercy or plead their hope in Him (cf. Lk. 18:13), but rather they seek to justify themselves by their miraculous works (Mt. 7:22). Helm continues,

So, either way, whether we are concerned with the last judgment of those who make no profession of faith in Christ, or with those who do, the judgment is according to works, not because salvation is by works but because the last judgment is either a judgment of those who, tragically, hope to be saved by works, or a judgment of those who profess faith in Christ and whose profession is bought to the test.”<sup>38</sup>

This is the critical point. Good works are not the cause of salvation but the confirming result of salvation. Once again, we are not saved because of our good works, but our good works are the evidence that we are saved! As the resurrection confirmed the atoning death of Christ, so, in a like manner, good works confirm the reality of our conversion and salvation.

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<sup>38</sup> Helm, *The Last Things*, 81.

## A. Good Works Result from True Conversion

The essential nature of good works is that they are the result of true conversion. David Wells makes this point.

Conversion is not an isolated event but is related to the entire life of faith that follows from it. It is the moment of birth into a new life. It is like a doorway into a room. A person is born to live, not to linger on the edge of the womb in a time limbo. A person opens a door not for the pleasure of standing forever on the threshold but to enter the room. The evangelical world has strangely perverted this truth. Evangelicals often make the test of spiritual life one's willingness to testify about the moment of birth. Describing one's sensations in passing through the doorway is considered proof that one is in the room! This shifts the focus from where it ought to be—the evidence of the Spirit's renewing work in producing a God-centered life, a God-fearing heart, and God-honoring character and witness—and places it on a person's autobiographed account of the conversion crisis. The only real proof of our conversion is an obedient and fruitful life.<sup>39</sup>

This is the point of the parable of the soils (Mt. 13:3-23). How does one know the soil is good? It is evident because it is fruitful. It is not a good beginning that matters, rather it is the fruitful result, which evidences one's true entrance into the kingdom and true conversion to Christ. Again, Wells writes, "Conversion entails a denial of ungodliness and a life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness (Titus 2:12), the avoidance of evil and the conversion to God's will in thought and action."<sup>40</sup> Becoming a Christian does not allow one to continue to live as usual. There is a demand for change and conformity to Christ, which is only possible by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The reality of this transformation is in the end confirmed by the reality of true change. "*Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness'*" (2 Tim. 2:19; cf. Mt. 7:21, 23). To be known by the Lord and to do the will of Lord were Paul's explanation to Timothy of someone's true conversion. This we find repeatedly in Scripture (e.g. Jn. 15:2, 5, 8; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Wells continues his case by asking an important question.

Why must the invisible renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit become visible in corresponding external expression? According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit, though himself hidden and invisible, manifests himself in the lives and behavior of Christians (1 Cor. 12:7; cf. John 3:6-8). Thus it is necessary to manifest conversion through practical acts that become a

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<sup>39</sup> David Wells, *Turning To God* (Carlisle, Cumbria U.K.: W.E.F. 1997), 39, 40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

testimony to other people and to the convert (cf., Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12).<sup>41</sup>

The Church is the “Body of Christ.” For this very reason we are the visible representation of Christ on earth. So how then should we live? Obviously, doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:16; 6:10).

## **B. Good Works are the Result of God’s Grace**

Good works are, as the previous point made, the evidence of saving faith, but in addition they are the evidence of God’s grace at work in us! Being works of grace, good works are not meritorious for the Christian. They are the clear manifestation of God’s graciousness to us in Christ.<sup>42</sup> The Christian’s

ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ (Jn. 15:5, 6; Ez. 36:26, 27). And that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit to work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13; 4:13; 2 Cor. 3:5); yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them (Phil. 2:12; Heb. 6:11, 12; Is. 64:7; 2 Pet. 1:3, 5, 10, 11; 2 Tim. 1:6; Jude 20, 21) .<sup>43</sup>

The Second Helvetic Confession makes the same point.

For we teach that God gives a rich reward to those who do good works.... The Lord also said in the Gospel “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12), and, “Whoever gives to one of these my little ones a cup of cold water, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward” (ch. 10:42). However we do not ascribe this reward, which the Lord gives, to the merit of the man who receives it, but to the goodness, generosity and truthfulness of God who promises and gives it, and who, although he owes nothing to anyone, nevertheless

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 43, 44.

<sup>42</sup> “The Second Helvetic Confession,” 5.117, Chap. XVI: “The End of Good Works.” “These same works ought not to be done in order that we may earn eternal life by them, for, as the apostle says, eternal life is the gift of God. Nor are they to be done for ostentation which the Lord rejects in Matt., ch. 6, nor for gain which he also rejects in Matt., ch. 23, but for the glory of God, to adorn our calling, to show gratitude to God, and for the profit of the neighbor” (cf. Mt. 5:16; Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:17; Phil. 2:4; Titus 3:14). William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 221, notes that good works should be motivated from that which honors God’s majesty (Dt. 32:3; Ps. 29:2). Secondly, they should be motivated by our gratitude for God’s kindness towards us, consequently we owe Him and are under obligation to Him for all things in us (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Rom. 12:1). Thirdly, God’s commanding sovereignty motivates us to our due obedience (Jas. 4:12; Mt. 10:28). Fourthly, the good works commanded are of themselves good, just, and useful and thereby most reasonable that they be done (Rom. 2:15; Dt. 32:47). Fifthly, the rewards from obedience also should motivate us to good works (2 Cor. 7:1). Sixthly, the consequence of not being rich in good works but rather storing up wrath for the day of judgment as the unregenerate do and the fear of grief and loss should motivate us to good works (Dt. 28:16; Heb. 12:29).

<sup>43</sup> “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1991), 6.089, Chap. XVIII:3 (PCUS).

promises that he will give a reward to his faithful worshippers; meanwhile he also gives them that they may honor him.<sup>44</sup>

One is reminded of Jesus' parable of the unworthy servant. After the servant works all day and then prepares his master's meal before he eats, Jesus posed this question, *Does he [the master] thank the servant because he did what was commanded?* Then Jesus drew this conclusion. *So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty (Lk. 17:9-10).* The Heidelberg Catechism's powerful and moving first question, "What is your only comfort, in life and in death?," points us in the same direction with its second question and answer. "How many things must you know that you may live and die in the blessedness of this comfort? Three. First, the greatness of my sin and wretchedness. Second, how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences. Third, **what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption.**"<sup>45</sup> Works for the Christian are never meritorious, but rather they are our duty rendered with the humble attitude of overwhelming gratitude and *so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:16).*

### **C. Good Works are made "Good" through Christ's Intercession**

The Scots Confession makes the further point that our works are perfected by the work of Christ and apart from Him they would be nothing (Jn. 15:5),

For as God the Father beholds us in the body of his Son Christ Jesus, he accepts our imperfect obedience as if it were perfect, and covers our works, which are defiled with many stains, with the righteousness of his Son. ...We affirm that no man on earth, with the sole exception of Christ Jesus, has given, gives, or shall give in action that obedience to the Law which the Law requires. When we have done all things we must fall down and unfeignedly confess that we are unprofitable servants. Therefore, whoever boasts of the merits of his own works or puts his trust in works of supererogation, boasts of what does not exist, and puts his trust in damnable idolatry (Lu. 17:10).<sup>46</sup>

These confessional statements establish the Biblical picture of good works as the grace of God given to His children to be performed for His glory (Rom.

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<sup>44</sup> "The Second Helvetic Confession," in The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1991), 5.122, Chap. XVI: "God Gives a Reward for God Works."

<sup>45</sup> "The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563-1963 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition," (United Church Press, 1962) in The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1991), 4.001-4.002, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> "The Scots Confession," in The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1991), 3.15, Chap. XV. Cf. the intercessory work of Christ: Heb. 2:11; 7:25; 8:2; 10:14; 13:12, 15, 21; Eph. 5:20.

12:3; 1 Cor. 10:31; 15:10; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11; Eph. 2:10; Jn. 15:5; Phil. 4:13; Titus 2:14). They directly are the work of the Holy Spirit through His effectual gift of faith. “But this faith is a pure gift of God which God alone of his grace gives to his elect according to his measure when, to whom and to the degree he will. And he does this by the Holy Spirit...”<sup>47</sup> (cf. Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29; Acts 13:48; 18:27; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Thess. 3:2; Mt. 13:11, 13; Lu. 17:5). Therefore, no one can boast (1 Cor. 1:29-31) for every good work is the result of God at work in us to will and do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Each can only confess, “*yet not I, but the grace of God with me*” (1 Cor. 15:10), and “*We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done*” (Lu. 17:10).

Good works are not just the works of grace, but they are perfected by the intercessory work of Christ as our Great High Priest. Our good works need to be perfected because they can never be perfect on their own. How mixed are our motives: concerns about how we are seen, what they say about us, magnifying ourselves, self-serving, less than an attitude of gratitude, secondarily motivated for God’s glory, doing the right thing for the wrong reason or with the wrong attitude, etc. Our works are less than perfect because even our best is less than perfect: was it the perfect word to encourage, was the act offered with all of our heart, etc. No we are not capable of offering perfect works to God. They are always tainted with the flesh that dwells within us. But we need not fear for we have a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens and intercedes for us at the right hand of the throne of God.

The ascended Christ ministers in the heavenly tabernacle on our behalf, interceding for us (Heb. 8:2; 7:25). He sanctifies and cleanses our consciences (Heb. 9:14) sanctifying us entirely (10:10, 22), and through Him we approach the throne of grace (10:19-20) with our good works. *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God...working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ...* (13:15, 21). Whether it is our good works, our praise, what is pleasing in His sight we offer it through Jesus’ intercession. His intercession sanctifies us to enter the Father’s presence as it does all that we bring as our sacrifices to the glory of God.

#### **D. The Inherent Relationship between Faith and Works**

There is another light by which we may understand works as the grace of God. As was just mentioned, good works are the direct internal working of the

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<sup>47</sup> “The Second Helvetic Confession,” 5.113, Chap. XVI: “Faith Is the Gift of God.” Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 220, #15: “Faith brings forth obedience in three ways. First, it apprehends Christ who is the fountain of life and the spring of all power to do well; second, it receives and acquiesces in the arguments which God has set forth in Scripture to induce obedience, namely, promises and threatenings; third, it has power to obtain all grace, especially that grace which occasions obedience” (cf. Heb. 10:22; 2 Cor. 1:24; Rom. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:14). Ames also points out that good works are indirectly the result of “an inner, abiding principle,” which is the gift of faith, but they are directly the result of “sanctifying grace” (#13). This sanctifying grace is described as “the very power by which we are lifted up to accommodate our will to the will of God.” It is that grace which makes us new creatures, enables new continuing obedience, and renewing the image of the creator in us (Eph. 4:24; Gal. 6:15). “For since sin came, man cannot of himself do anything acceptable to God, any work of spiritual life, except it be done in Christ through faith and sanctifying grace” (Jn. 15:4, 5) (#16, # 17).

Holy Spirit through His effectual gift of faith. This establishes a direct relationship between faith and works. Reflecting this direct relationship, we see Paul's emphasis of this fact in the language he used in describing the works of the Thessalonians, "*We give thanks to God always for all of you...constantly bearing in mind **your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you*" (1 Thess. 1:2-4, bold added). Note, he thanks God for these works, thus he sees them as coming from God. Secondly, note his language of works: "your work," "your...labor," and "your...steadfastness." The faith, love, and hope of the Thessalonians are demonstrated by their works. Again, in Paul's letter to the Romans, we see that the spiritual validity of all works, "whatever," is determined by their expression as "faith" in Christ, as an expression of desire to glorify Him in all that we do. So the Romans were admonished, "*...whatever is not from **faith** is sin*" (14:23, bold added). In this regard the Dutch theologian, G. C. Berkouwer, states the direct relationship between faith and works.

The relation between faith and works is so intimate that Paul can say that all which is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). ...With this marriage of faith and works in view, it is clear that all works done in this life are subjected to God's judgment, and that everything hinges on whether they are done in faith. ...'The doing of the will of God is proof of whether faith is true faith or empty acknowledgment and conviction, mere feeling and experience, vain repetition of *Yea, Yea, or Lord! Lord!*'

Though it is difficult to characterize this relationship between faith and works precisely, we may speak of works as *giving form to faith*. To *this* faith. Barth has called it the 'lived-out reality' of faith. And certainly the works of faith get their importance from *sola fide* [by faith alone], since faith embraces Christ and the believer is Christ's own possession. ...It is remarkable that the 'justified' of Matthew 25 ask in *amazement*, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and gave thee to drink? And when have we seen you a stranger and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee?' The questions suggest a forgetfulness of good works, and the answer says that, at bottom, what was done for the miserable and destitute was a deed done to *Christ*.

There is nothing to be seen of a self-sufficient ethic. And since the intimacy between faith and grace,<sup>48</sup> between faith and its possession, forms the background of all warnings and exhortation, the judgment according to works is, in the most

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<sup>48</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, Lewis Smedes trans. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1954), 108, "This suggests, not a contradiction in Paul's thought, but the existential character of faith, of this faith which is not a subjective human attitude, but a confident repose in God's pity and grace! Thus faith is here decisive for awful consequences. For, without pretension or conceit, it expects everything from grace. It does not create a field alongside of itself for moral exercise."

profound sense, a judgment concerning faith and unbelief. This is always the measuring rod in the judgment according to works. ...Judgment according to works, then, is not an analytical ethical judgment, but an infallible perception of works in their relation to faith. ...The biblical picture of the judgment according to works never indicates the existence of an alternative way of salvation, another way than *sola fide*.<sup>49</sup>

As faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8, 9) and works are the works of faith, we see that a judgment according to works is nothing other than the confirmation of true faith. In this we see that Paul's understanding of faith is none other than James' understanding of faith. "*What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ...For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*" (Jas. 2:14, 26). When Paul expounds justification by faith over against works, his issue is not with the works of faith but with the works of the Law (Gal. 2:16). The works of the Law was the attempt to justify oneself apart from and instead of faith in the work of Christ (Gal. 3:11, 12), but the works of faith are the fruit of being in Christ by faith (Gal. 5:6). Thus, the works of faith are nothing other than "*the obedience of faith*" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) or the reality of true faith lived out for the glory of God. Yet, there is a related issue, which we should touch upon in this context.

### **E. Are Good Works and Rewards Meritorious?**

The Apostle Paul wrote, "*Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor*" (1 Cor. 3:8). Again to the Colossians he wrote, "*Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance*" (3:23, 24). The Hebrews writer tells us that Moses by faith "*refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God...for he was looking to the reward*" (11:24-26). By these and other passages of Scripture<sup>50</sup> we are confronted with the issue that such rewards seem to be for merit, for something that our service earns. Berkouwer puts it this way,

If we were to distinguish eternal life from special rewards, we would be forced to contend that the earning of rewards has an independent significance side by side with the merits of Christ. This is not to deny that Scripture often speaks of variations and gradations in the Kingdom of Glory, not that all this bears upon the idea of rewards. Bavinck says that differing levels of glory are taught by Scripture especially where the rewards which each shall receive according to his works are under consideration. But how are we to understand this correlation

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 108, 109, 110, 111.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Prov. 6, 10: 17, 22, 27, 29, 30; 12:14; 13:13; 16:31; 19:16; 20:7; 23:18; 25:21, 22; Pss. 33:18, 19; 34:37; 37:5, 6; 84:12, 13; 94:14; 146; Mt. 5:12; 6:1-4, 16, 20; Lu. 6:35, 37, 38; 2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 6:10; 10:35; 11:6; Rev. 11:17, 18; 20:12; 22:12.

between rewards and man's life and work on earth? ...To speak the truth we must insist that on one hand the correspondence between work and reward must be maintained, while on the other that every merit that could accrue to good works be denied.<sup>51</sup>

Scripture brings balance to this question by maintaining that *“when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done’* (Lu. 17:10). The motive for ministry was not a desire of merit but appropriate gratitude, *“...let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe”* (Heb. 12:28; cf. Rom. 12:1). As Jesus instructed the Apostles, *“apart from Me you can do nothing”* (Jn. 15:5), so Paul viewed his ministry as possible only through Christ, *“Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant...”* (2 Cor. 3:3-6). This consciousness, that ministry is enabled by God, is consistent with Paul's earlier confession, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me”* (1 Cor. 15:10). The success of ministry was viewed not as coming from those ministering but from God, *“What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth”* (1 Cor. 3:5-7; cf. Mt. 13:23). Apart from the work of the Spirit our flesh, the natural self, is incapable of offering fitting service to God (cf. Gal. 5:17, 19-21; Rom. 7:15, 18; Is. 64:6; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10). Only that which is in Christ and through the Spirit can yield acceptable service to the glory of God (1 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15; Rom. 15:16; Gal. 5:22, 23). Thus, Scripture overwhelmingly teaches that service or ministry has no ground for merit, but rather every work of faith, every act of ministry comes from the grace of God dispensed to us in Christ and through His Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3-6; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11).

John Calvin of all the reformers best explained that rewards are not a result of merit on our part but rather a result of the dispensing of the grace of our inheritance by God.

First, let this truth be established in our minds, that the kingdom of heaven is not the stipend of servants, but the inheritance of children, which will be enjoyed only by those whom the Lord adopts as his children, and for no other cause than on account of this adoption [Gal. 4:30; Mt. 25:34; Col. 3:24]. ...Why, then, it may be asked, do they at the same time

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<sup>51</sup> Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, 119, 120.



make mention of works? This question shall be elucidated by one example from the Scripture. Before the nativity of Isaac, there had been promised to Abraham a seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, a multiplication of his posterity, which would equal the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea, and other similar blessings (Gen. 12:2, 3; 13:16; 15:5). Many years after, in consequence of a Divine command, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son. After this act of obedience, he receives this promise: ‘...for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee...because thou hast obeyed my voice’ (Gen. 22:16-18). What? Did Abraham by his obedience merit that blessing which had been promised him before the command was delivered? Here, then, it appears, beyond all doubt, that ***the Lord rewards the works of believers with those blessings which he had already given them before their works were thought of, and while he had no reason for his beneficence, but his own mercy.***

Nor does the Lord deceive or trifle with us, when he says that he will requite works with what he had freely given previously to the performance of them. For since it is his pleasure that we be employed in good works, while aspiring after the manifestation or enjoyment of those things which he has promised, and that they constitute the road in which we should travel to endeavour to attain the blessed hope proposed to us in heaven therefore the fruit of the promises, to the perfection of which fruit those works conduct us, is justly assigned to them [Col. 1:4, 5; 1 Pet. 1:5].

...Nothing is clearer, than that the promise of a reward to good works is designed to afford some consolation to the weakness of our flesh, but not to inflate our minds with vain-glory. Whoever, therefore, infers from this, that there is any merit in works, or balances the work against the reward, errs very widely from the true design of God.<sup>52</sup>

Calvin found many reasons for God promising rewards for His people’s faithfulness. It was the road, which would take them to holiness and the rewards that He had prepared for them. Ephesians 2:10 makes this very point. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* God has both created His people and prepared the good works for them to do. He has prepared the guests for the meal

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<sup>52</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Allen trans. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1949), Vol. II, Bk. III, Chap. XVIII, Pars. II, III, IV, pp. 62-64, 66, bold italic added.

and the meal for the guests, thus the rewards can hardly be seen as meritorious. His rewards would be a promise of compensation for their suffering and denial of self. It would be a needed incentive to persevere against the weakness of the flesh but without glorying in self. Serving all these purposes and more, the promise of rewards was never to be perceived as though the rewards came for any other reason than God's gracious blessings. For it was God who both brought the results of His peoples' labors, as well as, dispensed the rewards for their labors. "*There are a varieties of effects but the same God who works all things in all persons*" (1 Cor. 12:6). These blessings He graciously decreed to them as their inheritance in Christ from the beginning. Their rewards would be theirs by virtue of His work in them not any meriting in them by their work. Berkouwer concludes,

Good works have a part in obtaining a reward only through 'their acceptance by the divine mercy.' He who concerns himself with the relating between works and reward must keep a steady bearing on God's mercy. Otherwise he will lose himself in a maze of legalism and work-righteousness. ...Rewards do not enter as something new side by side with divine mercy. It is only through God's mercy that rewards make any sense. In the promise of reward is set a goad toward confidence in God's mercy.<sup>53</sup>

## **F. Judgment: The Vindication of God and Our Works**

The final judgment is to be the vindication of God to all (Is. 45:23; Hab. 2:14; Rom. 14:10-12; Rev. 5:13).

The sentence pronounced upon each person will not be secret, will not be known to that person only, but will be publicly proclaimed, so that at least those in any way concerned will know. Thus the righteousness and grace of God will shine out in all their splendor. ...It will serve the purpose rather of displaying before all rational creatures the declarative glory of God in a formal, forensic act, which magnifies on the one hand His holiness and righteousness, and on the other hand, His grace and mercy" (Mt. 10:26; Mk. 4:22; Rom. 9:22, 23; 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 4:5; Col. 3:25 Rev. 20:11-15).<sup>54</sup>

Dabney adds, "But the purpose of God in the judgment is to evince the holiness, justice, love, and mercy of His dealings to all His subjects. But as they cannot read the secret faith, love and penitence of the heart, the sentence must be regulated according to some external and visible conduct, which is cognizable by creatures,

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<sup>53</sup> Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, 128, 129.

<sup>54</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 734, 731. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 843, writes, "So far as God Himself is concerned in the satisfaction of the attributes of justice in His own breast, it would be enough that He should see for Himself, each man whole conduct and merits, and assign each one, at such time and place as He please, the adequate rewards. But reason and conscience make a judgment probable, because they obviously indicate the above valuable ends to be subserved by it. For it enables God, not only to right all the inequalities of His temporal providence, and to sanction the verdicts of man's conscience, but to show all this to His kingdom, to the glory of His grace and holiness; to unmask secret sin when He punishes it; to stop the mouths of the accusers of His people while He reveals and rewards their secret graces and virtues; and to apply to the soul, while on earth, the most pungent *stimuli* to obedience."

and is a proper test of regenerate character.”<sup>55</sup> The righteousness of God will be demonstrated in His judgment of the righteous deeds of His people and the wickedness and ungodliness of those who are not His people. Thus, what was hidden on earth will be made publicly manifest at the final judgment. God will be vindicated not only in His providence, justice and grace, but also He will not be ashamed to call His people His possession. The result will be that “*every knee shall bow and every tongue give praise to God*” (Rom. 14:11).

### **G. The Value of Works as a Criterion for Judgment**

There are several reasons why we should expect the final judgment to be according to works. First, it is the clear indication of Scripture that God’s judgment of works will be universal. Second, it is not inconsistent with being saved by grace through faith. Third, the Christian’s good works witness to his or her true conversion to Christ. Fourth, they are the testimony of the Spirit’s work. In parallel, we can see the necessity of Jesus’ works, “*...the very works that I do – testify about Me that the Father has sent Me*” (Jn. 5:36). Good works testify that we belong to Christ. They are the fruit of that relationship. Fifth, it gives the proper Biblical place to good works. Sixth, good works are not represented as meritorious but rather as expressions of God’s grace. Seventh, good works are seen as the visible testimony of God’s vindication at judgment. Paul Helm again helps us by providing a fitting summary.

In the last judgment two classes of people are to be involved. There are those who do not truly or sincerely rely upon Christ but on something else in order to gain acceptance with God and justification before him. Such people will be judged according to their works and, since they have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and have failed to benefit from the remedy which God has in his grace provided, they are condemned in his sight. This is not a case of salvation by works, but it is certainly judgment by works.

The other class is composed of those who rely upon the mercy of God and who, at least in the New Testament era, rely explicitly on the blood and righteousness of Christ. These are members of the universal Church of Christ. For them the final judgment will be a test, a sifting, a time when the reality of their faith in ‘Christ will be publicly put on trial. And how will this be done? How is a person’s faith to be declared publicly? Clearly, by judging that person according to works, according to those actions which go with saving faith, without which faith is dead, being alone (Jas. 2:17). In a parallel way those whose profession of faith in Christ is a sham will be shown up as insincere and hypocritical by a public testing of the reality of their faith by their works. So when the biblical writers deal with

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<sup>55</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 849.

the public judgment of professing Christians it is not surprising that the judgment of such is according to their works. For what is at issue is the reality of their faith, and the reality of faith is shown by works.”<sup>56</sup>

Travis adds,

When [Paul] writes that those whose lives are dominated by sinful acts ‘will not inherit the kingdom of God’ (Gal. 5:19-21; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5...), he implies that if professing Christians persistently did evil rather than good they would show themselves not to be Christians and to be in danger of condemnation at the final judgment. Christians are not exempt from that judgment precisely because its function is to show, by the evidence of people’s deeds, whether they are in relationship to Christ or not (2 Cor. 5:10).

Through faith in Christ they have been accepted into relationship with God and are expected to bear the fruit of this relationship in their lives. At the final judgment the evidence of their deeds will confirm the reality of this relationship, which will then find its eternal fulfillment in God’s presence.<sup>57</sup>

We now are going to attempt to deal with two more topics regarding the Final Judgment. First, we will address whether there will be two or more judgments or just one universal judgment. Second, we will look at two passages of Scripture (1 Cor. 3:10-15 and Rev. 20:11-15), which will help us better understand the nature and some specific actions to be taken and experienced at the judgment.

## VII. One Judgment?

The question of the number of judgments is prompted by two emphases of Scripture. The first is the apparent singular event of judgment represented in Scripture. When the judgment is mentioned in Scripture passages, it is only stated as a single judgment whether the righteous or wicked or both are being judged.<sup>58</sup> The second emphasis is the different audiences who are judged and the topics which their judgments address.<sup>59</sup> This has led some to offer as many as five judgments.<sup>60</sup> Further, we can reason that because there are divisions at different points, then we are compelled to conclude that some judgment was made at those points of division. For example, there is a division at death, Paradise or Hades

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<sup>56</sup> Helm, *The Last Things*, 80, 81.

<sup>57</sup> S. H. Travis, “Judgment,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (hereafter *DPHL*), G. Hawthorne & R. P. Martin eds. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 517.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Dan. 7:10; Mt. 16:27; 25:31-32, 46; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:5-11; 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Heb. 9:27; Jude 14-16; Rev. 20:11-15.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., Mt. 25:32, and Joel 3:2, the gentiles or nations; 1 Cor. 3:11-15, and 2 Cor. 5:10, believers; Ezk. 20:37-38; Mt. 19:28, Israel; Jude 6, and 1 Cor. 6:3, fallen angels; Rev. 20:11-15, unsaved dead.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., dispensationalists offer five judgments:(1) The judgment of Believers’ Works, (2) Judgment of the Gentiles, (3) Judgment of Israel, (4) Judgment of Fallen Angels, and (5) Judgment of the Unsaved Dead. See Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible, Expanded Edition* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 2077.

(Lu. 16:22-23); there is a division at the Rapture, taken and left (Mt. 24:40-41); there is a division between hypocrites and true disciples, “Lord, Lord” and “Well done” (Mt. 7:22; 25:21, 23); there is a division between Christians, greater and lesser (Mt. 25:21, 23; Mk. 10:40; Rev. 20:4); and there is a division between saved and damned, heaven and hell (Rev. 20:15; Mt. 24:30-31). The question is how can all these issues be reconciled together to best unite the information given in Scripture? Simply put, is there only one judgment or more than one?

There are numerous theological configurations of the variety of judgments mentioned in Scripture. For example, such configurations range from the five judgments of the dispensationalists to a single universal judgment of the amillennialists. What follows is the personal reasoned configuration of a historic premillennialist.

### **A. The “Already” and “Not Yet”**

We know that mankind has already been judged (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 1:18), and that those who have believed do “not come into judgment” (Jn. 5:24). In this sense, the future is already here. George Ladd makes this point,

...the realized eschatology of the Bible is seen in the fact that this judgment which belongs to the last day, has essentially already taken place in history. The unbeliever stands under condemnation; the judgment has really taken place, even though the penalty has not yet been enforced (Jn. iii.18). The believer will not experience condemnation, for he has already passed from death (the condemnation) to life (Jn. v.24).

The Pauline teaching about justification embodies the same truth. Justification is an eschatological truth. It means acquittal from the guilt of sin by a favourable decision of the Judge on the last day. The opposite of justification is condemnation by the Judge (Mt. xii.37; Rom. vii.33, 34; cf. TWNT, II, pp. 210f., 221). Yet because of the death of Christ, the justification of believers has already taken place (Rom. iii.21-26, v.1). Because of present justification, we shall be saved from wrath in the day of judgment (Rom. v.9).<sup>61</sup>

So, in the present by our faith in Christ we are already “judged” and “justified.” We have in this sense “already” faced the final judgment or at least we have been given the final verdict before the trial has even begun. We have been acquitted. Yet, the NT has still more to say about what is “not yet.”

### **B. At Death**

At death we will pass into the “intermediate state,” the state of existence in the present heaven waiting the return of Christ, the resurrection and glorification of our bodies, and the new heaven and new earth. No specific judgment is

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<sup>61</sup> George E. Ladd, “Eschatology,” *NBD*, 389.

mentioned outside of Hebrews 9:27, *“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment...”* But this is unclear whether it is an immediate or distant judgment from death. There is the fact that there is a division at death, whether our place is “Paradise” or “Hades” (Lu. 16:22-23). We are assured that at death the true believer goes to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:10). We would assume that there is an arraignment at death which is not the Final Judgment.<sup>62</sup> We can only speculate as to what this is. Some Scriptural evidence suggests that it will be the testimony of Jesus that we are His,<sup>63</sup> or possibly it could be the opening of the Lamb’s book of life (Lu. 10:20; Rev. 2:26-28; 3:5, 12; 21:27). It could be the innate decision of God or Christ without explanation or formal accusation. We would simply appear in the presence of Jesus without any arraignment. What we can be sure of is the division that occurs at death.

### **C. At Christ’s Return**

With Christ at His return will also come those who have died in Christ and the faithful OT saints (1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Thess. 2:1). With Christ’s appearance all the living elect are caught up and join Christ and the rest of the saints in the air (1 Thess. 4:14-17; cf. Mt. 24:29-31). It is not entirely clear whether Christ’s victory over the forces of the world will come first (2 Thess. 2:3-12; Rev. 19:11-20:7), or the resurrection of His saints to their glorified bodies (1 Thess. 4:14-17; 1 Cor. 15:23). First Corinthians 15:23-24 suggests the resurrection first and the victory following. *“But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet”* (cf. also vv. 51-52). The resurrection is mentioned first followed by the victory. Revelation 19 and 20 reverses this order suggesting the victory first followed by the resurrection. Neither of these passages demands such a strict interpretation to exclude the other sequence. First Corinthians is extremely compressed and the entire chapter is focused upon the resurrection, consequently it features it first. Revelation does not exclude the resurrection first, but it simply addresses it at the beginning of the millennial reign. There is no mention of a specific judgment at this point, but once again we see a division. Matthew 24:40-41 puts it this way, *“Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.”* Thus, this reference makes it appear that at this event there is division without any formal judgment.

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Heb. 9:27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10; Mt. 7:22-23; 25:11-12; Lu. 13:25-29; 16:22-23; 1 Jn. 4:17.

<sup>63</sup> Mt. 7:23; 10:32; 25:12; Lu. 12:8; 13:25-29 Rev. 3:5; 7:9; cf. Jn. 10:27; 2 Tim. 2:19; Gal. 4:9; Rev. 3:5, 12.

## D. Millennial Reign<sup>64</sup>

As the Millennial Reign begins we are told by John,

*4 Then 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. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed 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 (Rev. 20:4-6).*

John's emphasis is the exaltation of the saints<sup>65</sup> following Christ's victory over the beast, false prophet, and the kings of the earth. They are given "thrones" and "judgment" after the resurrection but at the beginning of the thousand year reign. The obvious suggestion of the passage is that the resurrection occurs following the victory, but the statement is simply that the resurrection precedes the millennial reign. Such does not preclude the resurrection from preceding the victory. Again, the emphasis is on the reign and exaltation which must be preceded by the resurrection. These are dependent upon the resurrection, whereas the victory is not. Therefore, the resurrection is not addressed in the victory drama, but it does not exclude the resurrection from the victory. It simply doesn't address it, until it is essential to do so. We might also add that in Christ's coming in 19:11-16 He is accompanied by the *armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses* (v. 14). The armies' garments suggest these are not angelic warriors but God's saints (v. 7), but there is obviously angelic accompaniment as well (v. 17; cf. 14:14-20; Mt. 16:27).

The exaltation of the saints involves their elevation to the authority of "thrones" and the responsibility of "judgment." This vision reflects Daniel 7. There the numerous thrones (v. 9) represent the dominion of the saints (v. 27). Jesus promised the Twelve that they would sit upon thrones and judge Israel (Mt. 19:28). Paul stated that the Church would judge those within the Church (1 Cor. 5:12), the world (6:2), and even the angels (6:3). The word for "judgment" (*krinō*) has a broader meaning "to rule" which would appropriately apply to the saints'

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<sup>64</sup> If one dismisses the millennial reign as the Amillennial and Postmillennial positions do, then any configuration of multiple judgments would be dismissed for a single universal judgment, perhaps followed by a believers' judgment of rewards either before or after the new heaven and earth.

<sup>65</sup> One of the interpretative challenges of this text is the number of groups who are exalted. The options are one (only the martyrs), two (saints and martyrs), three (saints coming with Christ, living saints, and martyrs) groups. Further, the location of the thrones is also argued whether they are in heaven or on earth. The best option seems to be two groups. The first group is the glorified saints which follows the promises of Rev. 3:21; 2:26; 5:9-10; while the second group is the specially recognized martyrs. Verse 4 best describes those who survived the Great Tribulation or were faithfully martyred in it. Verse 6 describes the event as the *first resurrection* in contrast to the *second death* (v. 14) which is condemnation. Therefore, of necessity the first resurrection is the resurrection unto life (Jn. 5:29) which includes all the saved from every age.

reign in the millennial kingdom.<sup>66</sup> In Jesus' letter to the Church of Thyatira those who endure to the end will be given *authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron*" (Rev. 2:26-27; cf. 3:5, 11, 21). Such authority and responsibility would reflect rewards given for faithfulness or by sovereign appointment (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:2; Mt. 20:23; Mk. 10:40). It is this last fact which brings us to another division. Again, we find no reference to a judgment at this point, but it is suggestive from other passages. For example, 1 Peter 1:7, "*so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ....*" Faith is tested by fire which is very reflective of 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 though in 1 Peter the testing is that of present trial, while in 1 Corinthians it is future. The important insight is that this tested faith will result in "*praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*" Thus, the rewards of faith will be rewarded at the return of Christ. In addition, 1 Corinthians 4:5 also places God's commendation of His people when "*the Lord comes.*"

This is suggestive that, perhaps at the return of Christ after the glorification of His people by their resurrection and after Christ's victory, there would be a judgment of rewards for believers (1 Cor. 3:11-15). This judgment would be the testing of their works done in the name of Christ. Though these works were accomplished by grace they will still be judged for their faithfulness. Thus, Christ or the Father in sovereign judgment will assign the authority and responsibility of various thrones and rewards (cf. Mk. 10:40; Eph. 2:10; Mt. 25:21, 23). These rewards will be exercised and experienced during the millennial reign.

The fact that the saints have had some acknowledgment of their state without a public judgment is consistent with the NT promises and assurances of salvation, and that they do "*not come into judgment [i.e., condemnation]*" (Jn. 5:24). Consequently, the saints are given this unquestionable confidence as they approach the Final Judgment whose verdict they have already received but which they formally await.

### **E. The Final Judgment**

When the final judgment is mentioned in Scripture, it appears only to be a single universal judgment, whether in reference to the judgment of the righteous or wicked or both.<sup>67</sup> For example, in the flow of events in Revelation 20 the final judgment, before the Great White Throne (vv. 11-15), is presented as one universal judgment. This judgment occurs after the return of Christ (19:11-16), after the first resurrection (20:4-6, the righteous), after Christ's millennial reign (vv. 2-7), and after the second resurrection (vv. 11-13, the wicked), which is

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<sup>66</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 264.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. Dan. 7:10; Mt. 16:27; 25:31-32, 46; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:5-11; 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5-10; Heb. 9:27; Jude 14-16; Rev. 20:11-15.



necessary to accommodate the final judgment of the Great White Throne. The Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 represents for us the universal Final Judgment. In Revelation 20 the judgment is mostly negative – Death and Hades is judged, then all the dead (v. 12, presumably the only dead are those outside of Christ at this junction). This followed by the announcement that the lake of fire is the second death, and those whose names were not (a negative statement) found in the book of life were also cast into the lake of fire. We have postulated that the believers will also be judged at this same time which is suggestive of Matthew 25:31-46, the Judgment of the Nations. Here all are gathered before the Son of Man on His glorious throne, and they are separated like sheep from goats. First, those, “*who are blessed by my Father,*” had their works paraded before the King of which he gives approval calling them to “*inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (v. 34). Then to the rest, their works were paraded before the King, and He condemned them, “*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (v. 41).

The difference between these two judgment scenes is that the Judgment of the Nations leaves no doubt that the judgment of the righteous and the wicked will be together. **Secondly**, the Judgment of the Nations does not have the detailed account from the “books” which the Great White Throne has. The Judgment of the Nations has instead the account given by the King of the works of both the righteous and the wicked. **Thirdly**, the end of the wicked is the same in both accounts, “*the eternal fire.*” The end of the righteous at the Great White Throne (“*the book of life*”) is only implied, while it is explicitly stated in the Judgment of the Nations, “*the kingdom...eternal life.*” **Fourthly**, in the Judgment of the Nations no resurrection is mentioned for either the righteous or the wicked, while the resurrection is part of the Great White Throne scene. **Fifthly**, the Judgment of the Nations occurs after “*the Son of Man comes in his glory,*” while the Great White Throne occurs following the coming of Christ and the millennial reign. With all of these similarities and dissimilarities one must ask, are these different judgments or simply different depictions of the same judgment? Because of the similarities of the ends, the judgments according to works, and both being judgments after the return of Christ we must conclude that they are simply two different depictions of the same judgment. Thus, the final judgment will be of both the righteous and the wicked after the millennial reign.

## **F. Summary**

Here then is the sequence of judgments which we have arrived at: 1) at the death there is an arraignment, but it is not a formal or public arraignment. 2) At Christ’s coming there is a division by the rapture, but, again, it is not formal. 3) After the resurrection of the saints and Christ’s victory there is a public attribution of authority and responsibility to all the saints for the millennial reign. 4) Finally, after the millennial reign and before the new heaven and earth there is a universal judgment of both the righteous and the wicked.

## VIII. The Experience of the Final Judgment

We now turn to look at the experience of the judgment by taking a closer look at two passages of Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and Revelation 20:11-15. From these texts we will gain an appreciation of the coming universal Final Judgment and the actual process or actions of the judgment.

### A. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

*10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each 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. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

#### 1. The Testing of a Christian's Works

Paul begins with himself (v. 10). The position which he has been assigned (v. 5) is by God's grace, *According to the grace of God which was given to me*. He is building *God's building* (v. 9) upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, *For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (v. 11). This is a holy enterprise, therefore he warns, *But each man must be careful how he builds on it* (v. 10). The reason for caution is that the work of each one building on this foundation will be tested by Christ. Paul's primary concern here is with those leading and teaching the Corinthian church. The church has formed personal loyalties around past teachers creating factions (1:12; 3:3, 5-9). Paul addresses the situation unfolding God's plan and use of each faithful leader. He says that they are assigned servants (vv. 5-6), their work is not anything compared to God's which actually causes the growth (v. 7), each is rewarded according to his work (v. 8), and are declared *God's fellow workers* (v. 9).

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 specifically explains the testing of the works of Christian leaders. Ladd adds, "...the principle is valid for all believers".<sup>68</sup> There are several reasons for seeing this testing as applicable to all Christians rather than exclusively only to church leaders. First, chapter 3 opens addressing the church as a whole (v. 1), and Paul concludes the chapter on the same note (vv. 21-23). The heart of the problem is the boasting going on throughout the church

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<sup>68</sup> Ladd, "Eschatology," *ISBE*, II:141. Contra Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 138, n. 21, 145, who believes that these verses strictly and only refer to the building of churches and nothing else.

which has caused the factions (cf. 1:11-13, 29-31; 3:21). Further, though the leaders of the church play a crucial part in God's plan for His church (Eph. 4:11-12, 16) everyone has a part to play (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; Eph. 4:16; Rom. 12: 4-8; cf. Gal. 6:9-10). In the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation (2-3) it is the churches at large who are being judged by Christ. The church is called to the task of producing *good works* throughout the NT (e.g. Eph. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:20-21; Titus 2:14). We also find warnings and examples of the judgment of these works (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:5; 13:1-4; Mt. 7:15-23). For all these reasons we should see this testing of works to apply to all Christians.

It is essential to point out that the testing is not simply in general but of that which has been built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (v. 11). For the Christian this embraces his entire life (cf. 4:5). There is no indication that the one being tested is anything other than a true Christian (cf. v. 15, *he himself will be saved*). Jesus is testing His own! He is testing for the worth that is precious to Him, *with gold, silver, precious stones* (v. 12). The Greek word for "test" or "prove" (*dokimazein*) in verse 13 is the means to "manifest" or "make evident" (*phaneron*) the worth of one's works. The word for *test* is used to describe the assaying of ore; it destroys the dross, that which is worthless, *wood, hay, straw* (v. 12), and it reveals the actual precious metal. As a result of this testing two primary results occur – receiving a reward or suffering loss (vv. 14-15).

## **2. The Nature of Our Works will be Unquestionably Revealed**

Paul uses two words to make this crystal clear in verse 13, *will become evident* (*phaneros*), and *will show* (*deloō*). The first clause of verse 13, *each man's work will become evident*, is a general statement that the works of each one will be made *evident* or *manifest*, so whatever are one's works, noble or ignoble, they will become *evident* (*phaneros*) suggesting that they are not necessarily or obviously evident initially. Those works, which seem noble to men, may in fact be ignoble to God, and Paul promises that this will be made *evident*, manifest, plainly visible. This correlates with Jesus' saying, *Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops* (Lk. 12:2-3; cf. 8:17; Mk. 4:22; 1 Tim. 5:25).

The first clause is followed by a second, *for the day will show it*, which begins with *for* (*gar*) indicating cause. *The Day* (v. 13) is the Day of Judgment which *will show* (*deloō*), declare, or make clear. F. W. Grosheide writes, "The causal connection lies in the fact that being *made manifest* is the result of the *declaring*, which is an intentional action exposing the nature of a thing."<sup>69</sup> His

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<sup>69</sup> F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), 86.

point is that *the Day* will be the cause as the occasion and activity of one's works becoming *evident* or *manifest* for *the Day* will *show* their worth.

The “because” (*hoti*) of verse 13 governs both of its last two clauses,<sup>70</sup> *because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work*; thus the last two clauses provide causes why *the day will disclose* our works. First, *the Day* will itself be distinguished from all other days by this *fire*. The *fire* will *reveal* (*apokaluptō*) the Day of Judgment (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:7).<sup>71</sup> The noun form of *reveal* is the title of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, so *the Day* will be *revealed* in a revelation, an unveiling.<sup>72</sup> The last clause explains the nature of the *fire*. It is a “testing fire.” The nature of the *fire* is that it will test the works of the Church, member by member. It will destroy the worthless and make *evident* the true worth of the works, thus each one's works will be seen for what they are without qualification or rationalization.

### 3. The Means of Revealing the Nature of Our Works

In summary, verse 13 points to two causes which reveal the true nature of our works. The first is *the Day* which will be the occasion and time in which their worth will be *shown*. The second cause is the *fire* which is the means or instrument by which *the day will show* and in turn make each one's works *evident*. The *fire*, as we have noted, first *reveals the Day*, and then it lays bare our works by testing them. The fire will *test*, “prove,” or “assay” (*dokimazō*) the quality of each man's work.<sup>73</sup> Here, the fire is not simply revealing; it is also a testing fire. It will destroy all that is worthless (vv. 14, 15). It is not purifying or refining but destroys and leaves only that which is precious. It does not leave the precious better than it was (refining it). It simply destroys what is worthless. Grosheide points out that the word “test” (*dokimazō*) “bears the sense of bringing to light the good by means of this testing with the expectation that something good will be found in the thing tested. But it must be kept in mind that Paul does not imply that something good will be found in every instance...”<sup>74</sup> (cf. v. 15). The destroying aspect is undoubtedly emphasized because in verse 10 Paul stated that his purpose is to warn: *But each man must be careful how he builds on it*, i.e. the foundation of Christ. So this fire on Judgment Day will test the works of the servants of God because it will destroy all that is worthless to Christ and all that

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<sup>70</sup> A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 64.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Is. 30:27; 64:1ff.; Dan. 7:9f.; Mal. 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:8; i.e. a theophany or visitation by God.

<sup>72</sup> There is some uncertainty as to what is the subject of the verb, “revealed.” The options are the “work” or “the day.” “Work” is considered too distant from the verb though it would be more natural and make a clearer meaning. Thus, it is the “day” which is revealed by fire, cf. Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 63, 64, and G. G. Findlay, “The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,” *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. R. Nicoll ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), II: 791, 792. Also, Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 142, who takes the *revealed* as a middle rather than a passive – *because that Day... reveals itself with fire*. *Revealed* is in the present tense while all the other verbs of the verse are future. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 312, “The present tense draws attention to the principle as an axiom, the future verbs allude to future events (*shall reveal... will test*).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Findlay, “1 Corinthians,” *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, II: 792.

<sup>74</sup> Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 87.

will remain will be that which is precious to Him (cf. Mt. 3:11). This destruction of one's worthless works is the *loss* of verse 15, and by extension it is also the *loss* of any potential or anticipated rewards which good works would have provided. The causes are first the *Day* as the occasion and then the fire which makes *evident* the worth of each one's works by its testing fire.

#### 4. The Nature of Rewards

Verse 14 states that *works* which survive the *fire* will result in *rewards*. *If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a **reward***. The Greek word for *reward* is *misthon* meaning wages, hire, compensation, but generally *reward*, that which is earned or merited. This understanding is made clear by Romans 4:4, *Now to the one who works, his wage (misthon) is not credited as a favor, but as what is due*. It gives expression to all kinds of rewards in this life<sup>75</sup> and in the life to come.<sup>76</sup> Paul first uses *misthon* in Corinthians in verse 8, *but each will receive his own **reward** according to his own labor*, and then he uses it again here in verse 14.

As we have seen earlier, as judgment will be according to works, so here, rewards will be according to works. In apparent contrast is Ephesians 2:8-9, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast*. Personal boasting is prohibited, rather all boasting must be in the Lord, so that, *just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 1:31). P.C. Böttger sees only an "apparent" contrast between Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 Corinthians 3:8 and 14. **"Misthos, then, may be thought of as God's reply to a Christian's action** although there is no strict causal connexion between the two."<sup>77</sup> The reason that he rejects any "causal connexion" is because the greater doctrine of justification through faith by grace subsumes the lesser doctrine of rewards. Therefore, he concludes, "The doctrine of justification thus gives its own particular stamp to the understanding of reward.... Paul's doctrine of justification is carried through to all aspects of Christian living."<sup>78</sup> The *reward* that Paul thinks of is a reward of grace. It is something which we have not earned, but it is freely given to us. "The ultimate validity of grace in pronouncing the verdict of righteous in the last judgment lies in the fact that not only our Christian faith **but also our good works are just as much the gift of God** (Eph. 2:10). It is God who 'is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13). All personal vainglory is excluded."<sup>79</sup> In Paul's mind he is Exhibit A of exactly this fact. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, **but the grace of God that is with me*** (1 Cor. 15:10, bold added;

<sup>75</sup> E.g., Mt. 5:46; 6:2, 5, 16; Rom. 4:4; 1 Cor. 9:17, 18

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Mt. 5:12; 10:41, 42; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:23, 35; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 2 Jn. 8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12

<sup>77</sup> P.C. Böttger, "Recompense," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (hereafter *DNNT*), Colin Brown (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), III: 143.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 142, 143.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 143 (bold added).

cf. Col. 1:29). “What we have earned is death; life is what God gives us as grace (Rom. 4:4).”<sup>80</sup> Paul makes this same emphasis in verse 10 of our text, *According to the grace of God given to me*.

This relationship between *reward* and grace is seen in the disparity between the work required for the reward and the extravagance of the gift given. Ceslas Spicq points this out from the Beatitudes. “When they insult you and persecute you and speak all manner of evil against you falsely *on my account*, rejoice and be very glad, because your reward will be great in heaven...” [Mt. 5:12]. This formulation recalls Gen. 15:1 – the clear sense is that the persecuted will receive ample compensation for their suffering – but its grandeur suggests that it is not a case of just remuneration. In addition, the recompense is not for the suffering, but for the virtues of endurance, even gladness, that were displayed, and these are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. ...Finally, and especially, it has to do with disciples of Jesus who are persecuted ‘because of him’...and who will receive their reward from God ‘in heaven,’ which can only be eternal beatitude. So this is not a just wage but a free and lavish gift, even though it is granted because of evils borne.”<sup>81</sup> His point is that one’s earthly toil is rewarded not by earthly blessings but by heavenly blessings. Paul puts it this way, *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison* (2 Cor. 4:17). Earlier Paul made the point that heavenly glory consists of *What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him* (1 Cor. 2:9). Such rewards are not commensurate with the work for which they are given. They can only be explained as gifts of grace. Thus, we can see the insight of Böttger’s comment, “*Misthos*, then, **may be thought of as God’s reply to a Christian’s action** although there is no strict causal connexion between the two.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 142. We can note that Jesus’ view of “rewards” is the same. “*Misthos* is a basic part of Jesus’ preaching concerning the coming kingdom of God. Many references give the impression that Jesus took over the prevalent Jewish conception of reward; if one sells all one’s possessions, one wins a treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21 par. Mk. 10:21, Lk. 18:22)” [p. 141]. Two passages are critical in understanding: the parables of the Laborers (Mt. 20:1-16) and the Unworthy Servant (Lk. 17:7-10). In the first, the laborers begin work at different times of the day but all receive the same pay. “...payment is made by the householder purely on grounds of freedom and generosity; all thought of balancing effort and reward is eliminated” [p. 141]. Jesus concludes the second parable with, *...when you have done all that you were commanded, say, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty”* (Lk. 17:10). “Every claim to one’s deserts must fall silent in the face of the demand for total obedience.... God does not only repay far beyond any merit (cf. Lk. 19:17, 19); payment of reward is simply independent of the worker’s achievements. Its sole root lies in God’s sovereign generosity... (Matt. 20:15)” [p. 141]. These parables describe what the kingdom of heaven is like, and with them “Jesus makes a clean break with the calculating approach of Judaism” [p. 142]. For like Paul with his subsuming of rewards to the greater doctrine of justification, so Jesus subsumes rewards to the greater doctrine of the Kingdom of God. P.E. Davies, “Reward,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (hereafter *IDB*), G.A. Buttrick ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), IV: 73, summarized Jesus teaching on rewards: “(a) the reward is of the same character as the principle, action, or service enjoined; (b) the reward can be understood as the necessary consequence of the way of life Jesus taught; life moves on to these outcomes and results, and God can be counted on to preserve the moral and spiritual order; (c) the rewards are included in the salvation offered as the gift of God to all men who will respond in faith; (d) the goal to which Jesus directed men is not self-aggrandizement, but self-forgetful service in God’s kingdom, which is ours, not by merit, but by the grace of God.”

<sup>81</sup> Ceslas Spicq, “*misqov*,” *misthos*, etc.,” *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, J.D. Ernest, translator (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), II: 509.

<sup>82</sup> Böttger, “Recompense,” *DNTT*, III: 143, bold added.

We may conclude that Paul is not strictly seeing one's works as an issue of merit deserving reward, but this insight leaves us asking, how then does he view one's works and their relationship to *rewards*? Anthony Thiselton concludes that when Paul wrote, *he will receive a reward*, he was referring to the response of faith which must be held accountable to be faithful (cf. 4:2). "Faithful servanthood...is bound up with accountability and especially with promise."<sup>83</sup> C. K. Barrett draws a similar conclusion. "In the present context he is more interested in the work being done, in the workers and their products; that they are paid underlines their responsibility to the Master."<sup>84</sup> Gordon Fee adds, "For Paul righteousness is both...gift and responsibility.... ...the 'reward' is 'according to grace,' not 'according to obligation....' The very concept of eschatology, with its final salvation and judgment, had inherent in it the concept of final 'reward.' But the 'reward' is not deserved, even though it is according to 'works' (i.e., based in part on what one has done); rather, it too is part of the gift."<sup>85</sup> Thus, commentators see two emphases here. One is the accent of responsibility and accountability, and second is that the reward must be understood as part of the overall grace extended to the believer. Perhaps it can be illustrated by a small child who has no means of purchasing a gift for his parent, so asks his parent for money to buy a gift. The child happily presents the gift to the parent who in reality bought it for himself, but none the less he delights in his child's gift to him. Implied in the provision of money is that it was given to purchase a gift not for the child's frivolous and personal indulgence, herein is the responsibility.

Yet, we still have not addressed the simple fact that Paul has something specifically in mind by his use of *rewards* (vv. 8, 14) which is beyond and in addition to the prize of salvation, *will be saved* (v. 15). The NT makes reference to two kinds of rewards: temporal<sup>86</sup> and eternal,<sup>87</sup> and within these categories there is the supreme reward of salvation and also additional graces and glories. With regard to the supreme reward of salvation it is both temporal and eternal. It is described as eternal life which begins now but endures eternally. *And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent* (Jn. 17:3). *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life* (Jn. 5:24). With regard to this supreme reward R.M. Fuller summarizes it. It is "a gain of such surpassing worth that by comparison even the finest human accolades are a loss, no better than rubbish (Phil. 3:8-11). Paul describes this fellowship also as the prize awarded to these who successfully finish the Christian race (1 Cor. 9:24-27). While these blessings are enjoyed in part now, their full experience awaits the life to come (Phil. 1:21,

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<sup>83</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 305.

<sup>84</sup> C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 86.

<sup>85</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 143.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. 2 Cor. 9:6ff.; Eph. 6:2ff.; Phil. 4:17-19

<sup>87</sup> Gal. 6:8; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Cor. 9:23-27; with regard to 1 Cor. 9:23-27 see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul – Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 286-290.

23; 3:14).”<sup>88</sup> This supreme reward is ultimately God and Christ themselves (cf. Mt. 6:1, 4, 6, 18; 11:28; Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 13:12; 15:28).

In addition to the supreme reward of salvation there are graces and glories which will be rewarded as well. These too are both temporal and eternal. *Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother and father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life* (Mk. 10:29-30; cf. Mt. 5:2-10; 10:41-42). Church elders are promised a *crown of glory* at the coming of Christ for their work of shepherding the church. *...shepherd the flock of God... And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory* (1 Pet. 5:2, 4; cf. 1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1).

There are a variety of works which promise reward. For example, perseverance when being tempted (Jas. 1:12), seeking God in faith (Heb. 11:6), persevering unto death (Rev. 2:10), shepherding God’s church (1 Pet. 5:4), *to all who have loved his appearing* (2 Tim. 4:8), leading others to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19-20; 1 Cor. 17:18; 1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1), being a good steward (1 Cor. 4:1-5), *doing good* (Gal. 6:9-10), and receiving and ministering to other in the name of Christ (Mt. 10:40-42; 25:34-40) all promise rewards. As our passage at hand also teaches rewards can be lost (1 Cor. 3:15; Rev. 1:15; 3:3, 19; 2 Jn. 8; Mt. 25:22-30; Lk. 19:20-26).<sup>89</sup> The promised rewards are often unstated apart from their extravagance (e.g. Mt. 5:12). In other instances they are described in terms of crowns (e.g. 1 Pet. 5:4). They are also stated in terms of praise (e.g. Mt. 25:21) and positions (e.g. Mt. 20:21, 23). Also they can be cloaked in a variety of images (e.g. Rev. 2:8, 17). A reoccurring reference is that of delegated authority (e.g. Rev. 2:26-27; Mt. 19:28) and the replacement of that which was lost in this life (e.g. Mt. 19:29). John 14:2 states that Jesus’ ascension enabled to *prepare a place for you*. Many have speculated rewards will be reflected in the glory of our heavenly residences.

In keeping with our conclusion that rewards though earned are ultimately of grace, we find that the rewarded works are *works of faith* (1 Thess. 1:3).<sup>90</sup> They are works “done because the runner is convinced that to trust and obey is the essential condition for the enjoyment of fellowship with God (Phil. 2:12). What motivates these works therefore is simply the desire to continue to enjoy the blessings God has promised. ...For it is the joy of fellowship with him, and confidence in his integrity in keeping his promises, that provides the

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<sup>88</sup> R.M. Fuller, “Rewards,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (hereafter *DPL*), G.F. Hawthorne and Ralph Martin eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 819.

<sup>89</sup> H.Z. Cleveland, “Reward,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter A. Elwell ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 951-952.

<sup>90</sup> 2 Thess. 1:11; Jn. 6:29; Gal. 5:6; Heb. 6:10; Jas. 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:12-13



motivation.”<sup>91</sup> The desire for rewards can be perceived as mercenary, but not if we distinguish between “self-interest” and “selfishness.” Selfishness seeks its gain regardless of its cost to others, while the self-interest seeks the joy of fellowship with Christ and seeks to bring others into that same fellowship (1 Cor. 9:19-23; cf. Rev. 3:20).<sup>92</sup> Mary was commended for choosing the best, sitting at the feet of Jesus, *Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her* (Lk. 10:42). Further, there can be no boasting in a reward for we each have been assigned his or her tasks (1 Cor. 3:5; Rom. 12:6; Mk. 10:40; Mt. 25:34) to do the good works prepared for us before hand (Eph. 2:10) by the power and grace given to us (Col. 1:29; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Jn. 15:5; Phil. 4:13). Such must always result in praise, thanksgiving, and glory to God (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 2 Cor. 9:15; Pet. 4:1-11) and in exalting Christ (Phil. 1:18, 26; Rom. 7:25). Characteristic of all of the NT rewards is they are “intrinsic” to the activity which produced them. L.D. Hurst explains, “Arbitrary rewards have nothing to do with the nature of the activity being rewarded (e.g., ‘practice the piano two hours a day and you will get a new bicycle’); proper rewards are intrinsic to the activity itself (e.g., ‘practice the piano two hours a day and one day you will be able to play Mozart’).”<sup>93</sup> Thus, the *poor in spirit* are given a *kingdom*; the *grieving* are given *comfort*, etc. (Mt. 5:2-3). The rewards are aligned with the works which earn them.

One last issue with regards to rewards needs comment. Though rewards are earned they are by grace, but as such they are gained or lost by individual diligence, *each will receive his wages [reward] according to his labor... Each one's work will become manifest...*(1 Cor. 3:8, 13). As we have pointed out this diligence is a *work of faith*, and as Paul later points out, *it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy [faithful]* (1 Cor. 4:2). At this point Cleveland offers a warning. “Paul teaches that every man shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ for the judgment of his works (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). This must be kept distinct in our thinking from judgment for sin, for this, as far as the believer is concerned is forever past (Rom. 5:1). Salvation is a gift (Eph. 2:8-9) whereas rewards are earned (1 Cor. 3:14).”<sup>94</sup> John Murray follows up on this important distinction.

While it makes void the gospel to introduce works in connection with justification, nevertheless work done in faith, from the motive of love to God, in obedience to the revealed will of God and to the end of his glory are intrinsically good and acceptable to God. As such they will be the criterion of reward in the life to come. This is apparent from such passages as Matthew 10:41; 1 Corinthians 3:8-9, 11-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7. We must maintain therefore, justification complete and

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<sup>91</sup> Fuller, “Rewards,” *DPL*, 819, 820.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 820.

<sup>93</sup> L.D. Hurst, “Ethics of Jesus,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (hereafter *DJG*), Jowl B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 214. Also see n. 80, P.E. Davies, “Reward,” *IDB*, IV: 73.

<sup>94</sup> Fuller, “Rewards,” *DPL*, 952.

irrevocable by grace through faith and apart from works, and at the same time, future reward according to works. In reference to these two doctrines it is important to observe the following: (i) This future reward is not justification and contributes nothing to that which constitutes justification. (ii) This future reward is not salvation. Salvation is by grace and it is not as a reward for works that we are saved. (iii) The reward has reference to the degree of glory bestowed in the state of bliss, that is, the station a person is to occupy in glory and does not have reference to the gift of glory itself. (iv) This reward is not administered because good works earn or merit reward, but because God is graciously pleased to reward them. That is to say it is a reward of grace. ...The good works are rewarded because they are intrinsically good and well-pleasing to God. They are not rewarded because they earn reward but they are rewarded only as labour, work or service that is the fruit of God's grace, conformed to his will and therefore intrinsically good and well-pleasing to him. They could not even be rewarded of grace if they were principally and intrinsically evil.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, it is imperative that we distinguish between our salvation which is through faith because of grace and this judgment of our works. The first, our salvation, for true faith is utterly secure. Also, good works are good for more reasons than just the nature of the work. They must be offered from a right attitude and intention. They must come from a heart of gratitude and be offered for the glory of God. Such works please God, therefore He delights to reward them. Finally, rewards reflect the degree of glory received and experienced in heaven. Some will be more glorious, more honored than others, and will be given greater authority as their rewards. The comfort and acknowledgment by our God, "*well done, good and faithful servant,*" will carry with it not just unimaginable comfort and acknowledgment but also very real and great glory and honor.

### **5. The Experience of Failed Works**

Verse 15 returns to the "figure" of *fire*. Grosheide states, "*As through fire* is a new figure, perhaps occasioned by the previous reference to fire".<sup>96</sup> Findlay adds, *through fire* is "proverbial for a hairbreadth escape."<sup>97</sup> Robertson and Plummer comment, it is "a quasi-proverbial expression, indicative of a narrow escape from a great peril, as 'a firebrand plucked out of the fire' (Amos iv.11; Zech. iii.2)." But rather than another figure they see it as a progression of the fire of verse 13. "The fire is so rapid in its effects that the workman has to rush *through* it to reach safety: cf. ...(1 Pet. iii.20), and...(Ps. lxvi.12)."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> John Murray, "Justification," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:221-222, in Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 1021-1022.

<sup>96</sup> Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 87.

<sup>97</sup> Findlay, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, II: 792.

<sup>98</sup> Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 65.

It is evident that the figure of the fire was used to make the point of a narrow escape, but we must note that this fire is that which burns up any worthless work with the result that “*he will suffer loss.*” The word for “loss” (*zemioo* from *zemia*) “signifies to fine, inflict forfeit (in passive, suffer forfeit) of what one possessed, or might have possessed.”<sup>99</sup> It is not explicitly one’s reward that will be *burned up* and *suffer loss*. Rather it will be one’s worthless *works* (the obvious contrast between vv. 14 and 15). This is clearly a punishment and a loss of significance for the result is a harrowing and narrow escape with only his life, perhaps as Lot fled from Sodom, or salvation without a crown to cast before the throne of God (Rev. 4:9, 10). Findlay adds that as the immediate context and application was to those who were teachers, “Such a minister saves himself, but not his hearers: the opposite result to that of ix.27. ‘...lest haply, after preaching to others, I myself should prove reprobate.’”<sup>100</sup> Jean Hering, writes, “Their salvation is not under discussion, for it is not acquired by works (Rom. 3:4). But their rank in the hierarchy of the Kingdom will not be the same. Those whose works go with them (Rev. 14:13) will be distinguished by a reward (as Mt. 25:21, 23), the rest will not have it. ‘*Zemioun*’ loss normally, in fact does not mean ‘punish,’ but ‘to deprive someone of something.’”<sup>101</sup>

There is a great temptation to think, “no big deal, after all I have heaven, so what if I lose my reward?” Yet, we should never think lightly of our reward. It is a gift prepared for us by God. Whatever He would give us we will suffer loss not to receive it. C. S. Lewis addresses the issue of the need for rewards when salvation itself should be enough. “Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only.”<sup>102</sup> Yet, on deeper reflection on the idea of glory, Lewis shared, that his previous ideas fell like a house of cards.

When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) ‘appreciation’ by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant.’ ...what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of

<sup>99</sup> Findlay, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, II: 792.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 792, 857.

<sup>101</sup> Jean Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock trans. (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 23, 24.

<sup>102</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), 7.

pleasures-nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. ...And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex forever will also drown her pride. ...Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself. ...In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting same that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. ...How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. ...To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is. ...We should hardly dare to ask that any notice be taken of ourselves. But we pine. The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.<sup>103</sup>

Lewis' insight of what it will mean to hear our heavenly Father say, "Well done!" is well put. To hear that which we have always longed both consciously and unconsciously to hear will be our reward, but to "suffer loss" will be to lose the reward though we still are able to enter into the bliss of heaven and eternal life. It will be a true "suffering" and a true "loss!" It will be indescribable, heart-wrenching, gut-wrenching regret.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 8, 9, 10, 11.

Yet, though the judgment of rewards can be severe Wayne Grudem reminds us of the opposite truth. He makes the point that though there will be degrees of rewards for believers this should not be construed that such gain or loss of rewards will rob us of the essential blessed joy and happiness of heaven. "...Our true happiness consists in delighting in God and rejoicing in the status and recognition that he has given us. ...Those with greater reward and honor in heaven, those nearest the throne of God, delight not in their status but only in the privilege of falling down before God's throne to worship him (Rev. 4:10-11)."<sup>104</sup> Robert Reymond adds this note. "Some Christians recoil at the thought that they will differ in the eternal state with respect to the degree of rewards meted out, contending that such differences would be the basis for one Christian lording it over another Christian. But this is to forget that glorified saints will be perfected in their love, not only for God, but for one another. The Christian with greater rewards will love the one with less rewards perfectly and will not exalt himself over him. The Christian with less rewards will love the one who has greater rewards also perfectly and will rejoice with him in his blessed state."<sup>105</sup>

In this life future rewards are to motivate us to strive to please Christ in all that we do (2 Cor. 5:9-10) and to stimulate brothers and sisters in Christ to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25) that we might all increase our heavenly reward. *The Second Helvetic Confession* makes the point that in the sovereignty of God's grace we are rewarded for our faithfulness though our faithfulness is also of grace (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 2:12-13). "Therefore, although we teach that God rewards our good deeds, yet at the same time we teach, with Augustine, that God does not crown us in our merits but his gifts. Accordingly we say that whatever reward we receive is also grace, and is more grace than reward, because the good we do, we do more through God than through ourselves, and because Paul says: 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?' (1 Cor. 4:7)."<sup>106</sup>

The experience of the judgment of rewards is both a very real judgment, and it is an experience of grace, so that all we will be able to do at its conclusion is boast in the goodness of our God. "*But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord*" (2 Cor. 10:17).

We now turn to see what is characteristic not of the judgment of works, but what is characteristic of the universal Final Judgment. Revelation 20:11-15 is not the only depiction of this judgment, but it is one of the most complete (cf. Mt. 25:31-46).

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<sup>104</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 1144f.

<sup>105</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 1022.

<sup>106</sup> "The Second Helvetic Confession," in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 1991), 5.123, Chap. XVI: "There Are No Merits of Men." Also Paul Helm, *The Last Things* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 103-107. Cf. Mt. 5:12; 6:4, 6, 18; 10:41, 42; 16:27; Mk. 10:35-40; 1Cor. 3:8; 9:17; 2 Jn. 8; Rev. 11:18.

## **B. Revelation 20:11-15**

*11 Then 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. 12 And 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. 13 And 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. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

### **1. The Great White Throne**

This passage reveals the *great white throne* of God's final judgment of mankind. Note that the throne takes center stage. Everything flees so that all that is left is the throne, this judgment. There is no place to hide, no place to go. It cannot be rescheduled. The inevitable has come, and there is no longer any delay. The accounting of all history is funneled into this scene, this time, this moment.

### **2. The Second Resurrection**

Next comes the implication of the second resurrection in verse 12, (cf. v. 5), *And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne*. In verse 13 this second resurrection is clearly stated, *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them*. Jesus called it the *resurrection of judgment* (Jn. 5:25-29), while the *first resurrection* is the *resurrection of life* which occurred at the return of Christ and the start of the millennial reign. But the unquestionable point is that all mankind is present, no matter their time in history. All are present. None escape the judgment before the Great White Throne. Both *the great and the small* are present; none are overlooked, *they were judged, every one [of them] according to their deeds* (v. 13).

### **3. The Books**

Reflective of Daniel 7:10 the "books" are introduced in verses 12 and 15. The books are divided. These are the "books" in which are recorded "*what was written...according to what they had done*" (v. 12). We might call them the "books of deeds." Note that these books of deeds are in the plural. There are many of them reflecting the multitudes of the works and deeds of mankind. In contrast is the second division of the books, "*the book of life*"<sup>107</sup> which is in the

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<sup>107</sup> Vv. 12, 15; cf. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; Phil. 4:3.

singular. Wilkin makes this point, “And we are told that people are cast into the lake of fire, not because of what is in the books of deeds, but *because they were not found in the book of life* (Rev. 20:15). This implies that works will not be the issue at the Great White Throne Judgment in relation to eternal condemnation. The issue, rather, will be whether one is in the book of life.”<sup>108</sup> We should conclude that the books of deeds do not have the power to save, but rather they will only condemn. It is the “the book of life” which contains salvation. It was this fact which Jesus emphasized to the seventy disciples returning to Him, “*do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven*” (Lu. 10:20).

The records found in books of deeds will only condemn because “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). Dabney gives us a deeper look into the possible content of these books. He states that there are three lights of knowledge: “The Gentiles will be judged by the natural law written on their hearts; the Jews of the Old Testament by that and the Old Testament alone; but those who have enjoyed the Gospel in addition to the others, shall be judged by all three. (See Rom. ii:12; Jno. xii:48; Luke xii:47; Jno. xv:22). ...In Dan. vii:10; Rev. xx:12; the same phrase is employed: ‘The judgment was set, and the books opened.’ ...one of these books is the Word of God, which is the statute-book, under which the cases must be decided; another, the book of God’s remembrance, from which the evidence of conduct will be read: and still another, the book of God’s decrees, where the names of men were recorded before the foundation of the world.”<sup>109</sup> Ladd agrees writing, “All have the light of nature by which they should recognize the existence of the true God and worship Him alone (Rom. 1:18-20). Jews will be judged by the law (2:12), and those who have not had the law will be judged by the law of God that is written on their hearts – by conscience (2:14-16). While these verses suggest theoretically that people could survive the Day of Judgment on the basis of good works, Paul states clearly that people have not lived up to their light. Gentiles have perverted the light of general revelation (1:21-23), and Jews have failed to keep the law (Gal. 3:10-12). God in His mercy, however has provided a way of salvation in the redeeming work of Christ, and the final basis of judgment will be the gospel (Rom. 2:16; 2 Thess. 1:8). God’s final judgment will be absolutely just and not arbitrary.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, all who have trusted in their own ability to justify themselves before the Judge of all creation will in the books of deeds find not their salvation but their condemnation. They will be faced with the fact that they rejected whatever light they were given.

On the other hand, the “book of life” is a book recording the saving work of Christ and the abounding grace of God resulting in the salvation of all who have

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<sup>108</sup> <sup>108</sup> Robert N. Wilkin, “Response to James D. G. Dunn,” *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, Alan Stanley ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan.com, 2013), 145.

<sup>109</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 848.

<sup>110</sup> Ladd, “Eschatology,” *ISBE*, II:141.

in true faith trusted in the work of Christ for their salvation. Ladd captures this meaning,

Since God in His mercy has provided a way of salvation by the redeeming work of Christ, the final basis of judgment is relation to Christ. This is one meaning of the 'book of life' (Rev. xx.15; cf. Lk. x.20; Phil. iv.3; Rev. iii.5, xiii.8).

Jesus taught that the destiny of men rested upon their attitude towards Himself (Mt. x.32, 33, xi.21-24; Mk. viii.38). This is the heart of the gospel: salvation, which is primarily eschatological [end time events] (Rom. xiii.11; 1 Thess. v.8, 9) and includes escape from God's condemnation in the day of judgment (Jn. v.24), is God's gift to be received by faith in Jesus Christ (Acts iv.12, xvi.30, 31) and submission to His lordship (Rom. x.9).

A further aspect of the realized eschatology of the Bible is seen in the fact that this judgment which belongs to the last day, has essentially already taken place in history. The unbeliever stands under condemnation; the judgment has really taken place, even though the penalty has not yet been enforced (Jn. iii.18). The believer will not experience condemnation, for he has already passed from death (the condemnation) to life (Jn. v.24).

The Pauline teaching about justification embodies the same truth. Justification is an eschatological truth. It means acquittal from the guilt of sin by a favourable decision of the Judge on the last day. The opposite of justification is condemnation by the Judge (Mt. xii.37; Rom. vii.33, 34; cf. TWNT, II, pp. 210f., 221). Yet because of the death of Christ, the justification of believers has already taken place (Rom. iii.21-26, v.1). Because of present justification, we shall be saved from wrath in the day of judgment (Rom. v.9).<sup>111</sup>

With the opening of the books we are given an additional piece of the experience of the final judgment. They are the hard cold evidence of one's righteousness or wickedness. Before their evidence and before the Judge whose eyes "*were like a flame of fire*" (Rev. 1:14) all will fall silent. There will be no justifying, no excuses, only conviction. This will be for all both the saved and the condemned, but those who have trusted in Christ will see their sins blotted out and forgiven for the sake of Christ. While all others will stand without defense, without an advocate, without justification, no escape from their condemnation. Paul K. Jewett makes this same observation,

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<sup>111</sup> George E. Ladd, "Eschatology," New Bible Dictionary (hereafter NBD), J. D. Douglas ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1962), 389.



In the judgment scene of Revelation 20, this dualism of grace and works seems to be the key to understanding the distinction between the 'books' and the 'book' (Rev. 20:12). 'Books' are opened and the dead are judged by what is written in them; that is, by what they have done in this life. But there is another book, called 'the book of life,' and to have one's name written in that book is salvation.

This book is sometimes called the 'Lamb's book of life' (Rev. 21:27). To say that the book belongs to the Lamb is to say that one's attitude to Christ, 'the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), is decisive in the judgment.<sup>112</sup>

#### 4. The Condemnation

The conclusion of the scene is the condemnation (vv. 14-15) of all whose names were not found in the *book of life*. The execution of the sentence begins with *death and Hades*. These are cast into the *lake of fire* which is named as *the second death*. Paul informs us that death is the last enemy to be defeated by Christ. Paul gives us this order of the events: *Christ the first fruits [His resurrection], after that those who are Christ's at His coming [the resurrection of all who are in Christ], 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 **The last enemy that will be abolished is death*** (1 Cor. 15:23-26). From the Fall of man the sentence of death has hung over every man, woman, and child, but now it is no more. Death with the abode of the dead, Hades (Lk. 16:23), which was especially the abode of the wicked dead, are cast finally and completely into the final death of even death, the *second death, the lake of fire*. The *lake of fire* is described as *the consuming fire* (Is. 33:14), *the hell of fire* (Mt. 18:9), *the eternal fire* (Mt. 25:41), and *the unquenchable fire* (Mk. 9:43). John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would *baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gatherer the wheat into his barn. But the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire* (Lk. 3:16-17). Here is the fulfillment of that judgment prophesy. Again, Paul makes this a celebratory moment contrasting it with the wonder of the first resurrection and concluding with a dirge of the death of death. *But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor. 15:54-57). This a momentous opening to this final scene of the judgment.

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<sup>112</sup> Paul K. Jewett, "The Doctrine of Last Things," *Systematic Theology General Syllabus, T32* (unpublished) (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary), 27.

Then the final sentence is rendered, *if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*. Anyone whose name is missing in the *book of life* is sentenced to the *second death, the lake of fire*. From it there is no reprieve. There are no second chances. This sentence is irrevocable. We do know that not all will suffer equally. Their punishment will be moderated according to their knowledge and opportunity. When Jesus judged the unrepentant towns where He had preached and displayed the power of the kingdom of God He said, *But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ...But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you* (Mt. 11:22, 24). Yet, though some will be spared the full extent of punishment, others' punishment will be the full extent. An example of this is when Jesus said, *whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea* (Mt. 18:6). It would have been better that they had never been born. With this the judgment scene closes.

### **C. Summary**

Christ will return as God's Judge, who is at the same time God the Judge, of all mankind and angels (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; Mt. 13: 41-43; 24:31-36; 2 Pet. 2:4, 9; Jude 6). He will conduct His judgment by an impartial administration of justice (Dt. 10:17; 2 Chron. 19:7; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17; Acts 10:34). The standard of His judgment will be the works or deeds of each, *"so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Rom. 2:6-8; Mt. 13:36, 37; 16:27; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 1:17). The judgment will take into account the light of knowledge, which each has received (Rom. 2:12-16).<sup>113</sup> No one will be justified by their works (neither Gentiles, Rom. 1:21-23; 3:9ff., nor Jews, Gal. 3:10-12; Rom. 3:9, 19-20). In light of this universal condemnation the only way of salvation is through God's provision of Jesus Christ.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, the ultimate value of the works will be judged as to whether the works reflect true faith in Him or not (Jas. 2:14, 26; Rom. 14:6-8, 12, 23; Heb. 6:1; 2 Cor. 11:15; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:24, 25; Mt. 25:31-46). Thus, the books will be opened (Rev. 20:15; cf. Lk. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 21:27; Dan. 7:10), but it is the "Lamb's book of life" which is decisive. It reveals all those who have been delivered by the Lamb from condemnation to eternal life (Jn. 5:24; Rev. 21:27; cf. Titus 2:14; 3:4-7).<sup>115</sup> Yet, every believer's words (Lu. 12:3) and works both secret and public (Rom. 2:16) will pass before the scrutinizing examination of the Judge and each motive, word, and deed will be tested as to its worth and value (1 Cor. 3:13).<sup>116</sup> For the believer there will be a condemnation of his or her sin displaying that salvation is by grace

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<sup>113</sup> Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 848.

<sup>114</sup> George E. Ladd, "Eschatology," *New Bible Dictionary* (hereafter *NBD*), J. D. Douglas ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1962), 389.

<sup>115</sup> Paul K. Jewett, "The Doctrine of Last Things," *Systematic Theology General Syllabus, T32* (unpublished) (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary), 27.

<sup>116</sup> 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

alone through faith in Christ. His or her works will be assayed their true faith, and the greatness of their faith will be rewarded. The sins of the wicked will also be judged and condemned, but with their sin they also will be condemned. Their punishment will be moderated according to their knowledge and opportunity (Mt. 11:21-24; 18:5-6; cf. Col. 3:25; Eph. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:10).

## **Conclusion**

We have attempted to follow the NT teachings regarding the Final Judgment. Of particular concern has been the repetitious standard of judgment, judgment according to works. We have found that there is a different the standard for salvation, the grace found in the work of Jesus Christ. Thus, the final judgment will truly be a judgment according to works, but salvation is not according to works but according to grace. Though judged by works we will be saved by grace. Those given a true and saving faith have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and though their sins are more than sufficient for their condemnation, they will be delivered in spite of their sin by the super-abundant grace found in trusting in the work of Jesus to the glory of God our heavenly Father. To all those given this saving faith, Jesus' words to the returning seventy ring true for us as well, *...rejoice that your names are written in heaven* (Lk. 10:20).