

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 50

REWARDS & INHERITANCE

If believers, simply by virtue of justification salvation are all treated the same in eternity, why did Paul declare that we will be judged both for the good deeds and the bad deeds we have done as believers in this dispensation? What difference does that possibly make apart from varying degrees of rewards? Assuming that once we are all glorified and attain a state of equality, then what we did in the past is of no significance if everything is equal. If everyone is rewarded exactly the same, then there is no need for a judgment seat of Christ. But the Bible says it is significant and that significance will be on display as a result of the doctrine of rewards. Only through a biblical understanding of the doctrine of rewards can Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 5:10 make any sense. It is interesting to note that Blomberg has a good understanding of this text, but he still insists on an egalitarian understanding of rewards. That thinking cannot be sustained according to the truth that each person is judged and evaluated according to their own specific sanctifying behavior that will be good or worthless to varying degrees one believer from the other. If that is the basis for rewards, how can they possible be the same for each person? In a way this is all quite babbling. Blombergs' treatment of this verse is a prime example of reading a Scripture, understanding that Scripture, and then denying the truth of it in order to impose a theological interpretation, meaning, and application onto it.

2 Corinthians 5:10 ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed [κομίζω] for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad [φάυλος, worthless, mediocre, unimportant].

Bad, φάυλος, is variously used to mean vile, evil, wicked, foul, corrupt, good-for-nothing, depraved, worthless, mediocre, or unimportant. In the context of this verse, the concepts of being worthless, mediocre, and unimportant seem to be correct. It is no accident this word was used in connection with born again believers; we can act in this way and be worthless as Christians whose task it is to glorify the Lord who has saved us. However, we should be walking in the Spirit and doing the good things because we will be rewarded for them, and conversely we will be held accountable for the bad things, or better understood as worthless things, by losing rewards. It is obviously not impossible that we can do good things and, at the same time, avoid worthless things; the doctrine of rewards and the concept of walking in the Spirit highlight this truth. "The Greek word translated "bad" (*phaulos*) really means worthless. The idea is not that God will reward us for the good things we did and punish us for the bad things we did. He will rather

reward us for the worthwhile things we did and not reward us for the worthless things we did. The worthwhile things are those that contribute to the advancement of God's mission and glory in the world. Worthless deeds are those that make no contribution to the fulfillment of God's good purposes" [Thomas L. Constable, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible*, s.v. "2 Corinthians 5:10"]. "The bad works are discarded as unworthy of reward but good works are rewarded. The penalty is limited to the loss of reward [John F. Walvoord, "The Church in Heaven: The Judgment of the Church in Heaven" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 123, no. 490 (April-June 1966): 99-102]. I would add that it is not only that we lose rewards because of the worthless things we have done, but we also fail to earn rewards based on what we could have done for the Lord and failed to do as the opportunities arose. Not only can we do that which is worthless, we can fail to do that which we should have done and in either situation, rewards are not realized that could have been awarded. We aren't going to earn rewards for things we didn't do but could, and should, have done. We won't be punished for not doing them but we can't be rewarded for doing them because we didn't. Constable noted that worthless deeds do not contribute to the fulfillment of God's purposes, but I would also add that the worthless deeds done by Christians may actually do harm to God's purposes and the failure to take advantage of opportunities to do good deeds retards or inhibits the realization of God's purposes. In circumstances such as these, rewards are forfeited. None of those circumstances mean the individual is not a believer; it simply means rewards may be gained or lost through various circumstances. It is apparent there are several aspects to this idea of good and worthless as it pertains to the doctrine of rewards.

The word translated "recompense," κομίζω, is an aorist, middle, subjunctive verb. It means to get back something that is one's own or owed to one; to receive as recompense [BDAG, s.v. "κομίζω"]. The middle may also refer to bearing something for oneself, hence, to receive [G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "κομίζω"]. The subjunctive mood refers to possibility; each person may be recompensed or they may not be recompensed. The middle voice indicates that the subject has participated some way in the action of the verb. That is why the word is translated "recompense" meaning something received for something done. "The verb κομίζω, when in the middle voice, as here, communicates the idea of getting or receiving back something that is owed or deserved" [George H. Guthrie, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 2 Corinthians*, p. 289]. The middle voice indicates that the recompense is dependent on the actions of the subject, the individual believer. "The word *komizo* most likely refers to obtaining a recompense (a return for something one has done, payment, receiving something one deserves)" [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 216].

This word also refers to receiving what one deserves in the negative sense. In Colossians 3:25, the verb is in the indicative mood meaning one will, in fact, receive the negative consequences for that which is wrong. It is in the middle voice which indicates the subject, the individual, participated in doing or committed the wrong deeds; therefore, in the negative sense, he is receiving what he has earned. It is possible this verse is not referring to believer's rewards. The context relates to believing slaves and the recompense may be referring to unsaved slave owners who abuse them. The clue to this is in the use of the second person "you" in v. 24 to refer to the believing slaves and the use of the third person in v. 25. Either way, the use of the word κομίζω is appropriate in both 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Colossians 3:25 and carries the meaning under discussion in both verses. Context determines meaning.

Colossians 3:25 ²⁵For he who does wrong will receive [κομίζω] the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

"In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul indicated that everyone will receive back (κομίσηται) the things done in his body whether they were good or bad (φαῦλον). The question this verse raises is how one "receives back" what Paul calls "bad." The things a believer receives back for his good works are obviously rewards, but how can one receive back for sinful works without some sort of punishment being involved? The answer rests in the fact that unworthy, sinful deeds merit no reward. An unfaithful Christian receives the appropriate recompense for that which is worthless, namely, no recompense at all. For example, a student who turns in a worthless assignment receives a failing grade. He receives what he deserves. His poor work results in a just recompense, a loss of the grade that could have been his if his work had measured up to the established academic standards. Likewise an unfaithful Christian will receive the commensurate recompense for his worthless works. He will receive no reward at all for those particular deeds.

Reward will be granted only for righteous deeds. All sinful deeds, thoughts, and motives will be consumed instantaneously as works of the flesh which are unworthy of reward. Some Christians will stand empty-handed, without excuse, having had much of their work and service rendered unworthy of reward. They will experience a real and eternal loss of reward, but they themselves shall be saved, yet so as through fire....The judgment seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential" [Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective, part 2: The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 546 (April-June 1980): 125-130].

Dr. Hoyt confused me a bit here; I couldn't determine whether he was singularly limiting worthless deeds to personal sins or if he was including all our worthless acts in his remarks. In terms of rewards, personal sins are not the issue except as they affect our walk relative to how they impact good and worthless. As noted above, the concept of "bad" as it is expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:10 is properly thought of as worthless rather than as sinful. There are many worthless activities that will not earn rewards that are unconnected to sin. Loss of rewards also results in the passive sense when we fail to do that which opportunity has afforded us the duty to do. Failing to do something we should do to advance God's purposes and to glorify Him, is not sin in and of itself, but it certainly isn't fulfilling our duties as disciples of Christ either.

Everything we do as believers will have an impact at the judgment seat of Christ in one way or another. Sin, to the extent it prevents us from doing good or taints what otherwise would be good does affect rewards even though the debt for not only that specific sin but for all sin has been paid by Christ Jesus. "...what people do is of eternal consequence, their deeds bearing directly on their final eternal condition and that all the deeds of consequence for that final state performed in the 'here and now.' Eternal destiny is settled here and now without opportunity for revision of the record or change of destiny after death" [Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical & Historical*, p. 1077]. This is true for justification salvation and it is true for experiential sanctification salvation as well; how we live our lives in this age, our sanctification, matters, to some extent, for eternity.

Many people do erroneously believe sins will be an issue at the judgment seat of Christ. The failure to understand there are two judgments, one for believers and one for all the unsaved at a later time, probably fosters this confusion. It is also likely a product of the failure to understand the difference between justification salvation and sanctification salvation. Those who add behavioral conditions to justification place a great deal of emphasis on repentance and on turning from sins so it seems natural they would view personal sins as part of the judgment seat of Christ and they do. "...Thus the day of judgment can be portrayed as one in which believers are rewarded and unbelievers are punished [NOTE: he is assuming there is only one judgment event for all people all at the same time]...Will all the secret words and deeds of believers, and all their sins, also be revealed on that last day? It seems that this is so, because in writing to *believers* about the day of judgment he says that when the Lord comes he will '*bring to light the things now hidden in the darkness* and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God' (1 Cor. 4:5; compare Col. 3:25). Certainly this fact should provide a motive for godly living, and Paul uses it that way in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10: '*We make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.*' But it should not cause terror or alarm on the part of believers, because even sins that are made public on that day will be made public as

sins that have been *forgiven*, and thereby they will be the occasion for giving glory to God for the richness of his grace" [Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1144]. If Christ paid the penalty for all sins for all time on the cross, in terms of reward, why would they be an issue at the judgment seat of Christ? For believers, sins have been paid for and forgiven, restoration for those who believe has occurred, God has been propitiated, personal sins are forgotten, and the sin nature has been removed from our glorified bodies.

To be fair, not all Reformed theologians agree with Blomberg that all believers receive the same level of reward. Grudem acknowledges degrees of rewards based on the Lord's evaluation of each individual. "Scripture also teaches that there will be *degrees of rewards for believers*....Paul similarly says of Christians that 'we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive *what is due him for the things done while in the body*, whether good or bad' (2 Cor. 5:10), again implying degrees of reward for what we have done in this life.....Many other passages likewise teach or imply degrees of reward for believers at the final judgment" [Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1144]. In his footnote, Grudem cites over twenty Scriptures that he believes present the concept of unequal rewards among believers.

Grudem also addresses Blomberg's concern about equality in heaven. "But we must guard against misunderstanding here: Even though there will be degrees of reward in heaven, the joy of each person will be full and complete for eternity. If we ask how this can be when there are different degrees of reward, it simply shows that our perception of happiness is based on the assumption that happiness depends on what we possess or the status or power that we have. In actuality, however, our true happiness consists in delighting in God and rejoicing in the status and recognition that he has given us. The foolishness of thinking that only those who have been highly rewarded and given great status will be fully happy in heaven is seen when we realize that no matter how great a reward we are given, there will always be those with greater rewards, or who have higher status and authority, including the apostles, the heavenly creatures, and Jesus Christ and God himself. Therefore if highest status were essential for people to be fully happy, no one but God would be fully happy in heaven, which is certainly an incorrect idea. Moreover, 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 (see Rev. 4:10-11)" [Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 1144-1145].

It is a bit amusing to see Grudem, who is of the same theological system as Blomberg, characterize Blomberg's thinking that people must be sad to see others with greater rewards as "foolishness." Grudem made an important point here. Sin in the form of both the sin nature and personal sins will not be present in heaven; therefore, no one will

experience jealousy or hatred or covetousness over what other people received they did not receive. Another element will be that everyone will recognize the absolute righteousness and justice of the Lord. No one will receive what he does not deserve relative to everyone else. In reality, we all could say we will receive that which we do not deserve and that is correct, but that isn't the point I'm making. Everyone will be fairly evaluated and will be rewarded or not based on what is right. Further, everyone will know they have been fairly evaluated by the Righteous Judge and accept it without question or complaint.

But there is another aspect to this situation Grudem doesn't recognize, or, at least, doesn't acknowledge. He is relating his commentary only to heaven and eternity. Glorified believers will be serving the Lord in the Millennial Kingdom in some capacity so there will be sin present to some degree at that time because there will be mortal people with sin natures populating the Kingdom. However, every glorified believer will be removed from the possibility of sinning so Grudem's comments concerning them hold true but it is a nuance for which he did not account. In terms of glorified believers, his remarks apply to the Millennial Kingdom as well.

In addition to Grudem, at least one prominent dispensational theologian met Blomberg's egalitarian mindset part way when he stated that every believer will receive some sort of reward. He did not, however, go as far as Blomberg and say everyone will be equally rewarded as Blomberg claims. That theologian was Dr. Ryrie and his reasoning is based on 1 Corinthians 4:5.

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

In this verse, Paul is telling the Corinthians to stop judging one another and wait for the Lord, who is the Righteous Judge, and who will judge the motives of the heart and praise those who He judges to be worthy of it. This isn't about some universal praise applicable to all believers.

In his study Bible, Ryrie placed this note with the verse: "At the judgment seat of Christ, when *motives* are revealed, all believers will receive some *praise* from God, for all will bear some fruit" [*The Ryrie Study Bible* (NASB), expanded edition, p. 1822]. But is this true? Is this verse actually saying all believers must bear some degree of spiritual fruit? In the immediately preceding chapter, Paul wrote that some believers would find their works to be worthless and they would receive no rewards but they would be saved as through fire. In the metaphor of the vine and the branches, the Lord Himself said that

believers who fail to abide would be removed and “burned.” It is possible that some believers abide for a time and bear fruit that could be rewarded and then fall away, but there are others who never grow and mature and fail to bear any spiritual fruit at all. These unproductive, unfaithful believers will likely fail to have any work survive the Lord’s evaluation and therefore go unrewarded. “[Paul] evidently does not intend to teach that all without exception will receive praise. Instead, he is saying that each man who has earned praise will receive it” [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 394]. It appears that Dr. Ryrie’s position is as untenable as is Blomberg’s egalitarian position; Scripture supports neither.

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

John 15:6 ⁶“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

In the story of the vine and the branches, Jesus is simply teaching the truth that believers can fail to be spiritually productive. Spiritually unproductive believers will not receive rewards at the judgment seat of Christ; that judgment is based on fruit bearing, faithfulness, service, good works, and so on. These are things that glorify the Lord and advance the Lord’s program for this dispensation and He will evaluate them at the judgment seat and reward believers accordingly. There is no contextual reason to understand the Lord to be talking about some final judgment; this lesson was for His disciples. It is not about unbelievers. He was encouraging His disciples to abide in Him and bear much fruit. Those who fail to abide are not destroyed but they do experience temporal discipline in an attempt to get them back into abiding in the vine where they have the opportunity to be fruitful. If they remain worthless believers, they will not be awarded rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

Paul wrote that scorning or judging other believers over non-essential issues will have consequences at the judgment seat of Christ where each one of us must give an account. Again, if what we do now has no bearing on what the Lord awards us in the future, why bring it up at all? The implication is that those doing these things are damaging their work for the Lord by damaging the body of Christ and they will “suffer loss” as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 3:15. If everyone will be rewarded with the same rewards, what is the point of giving an account? Doesn’t giving an account imply an examination of that which is recounted? Each believer should be giving thought to his own behavior because the only account he will give to God concerns his own behavior; no one will answer for anyone else. No one will stand up and be the advocate for another. We shouldn’t be bothered with condemning other believers; the

Righteous Judge will deal with each person in His own time and according to His own judgment.

There is a textual issue in play here in Romans 14:10. The NASB uses texts that say “the judgment seat of God” [θεός] but the majority of texts have it “the judgment seat of Christ” [Χριστός] which corresponds to 2 Corinthians 5:10. Metzger has an early reading of θεός and he believes it was changed to Χριστός by scribes who were influenced by 2 Corinthians 5:10 [Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* s.v. “Romans 14:10”]. The KJV and the NKJV translate it the judgment seat of Christ but most translations have it the judgment seat of God. This represents the difference between using certain manuscripts and groups of manuscripts over others. Nevertheless, Scripture makes it clear Christ will be doing the judging at the Βῆμα, the judgment seat of Christ.

Romans 14:10–12 ¹⁰But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat [Βῆμα] of God [θεός or Χριστός?]. ¹¹For it is written, “AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.” ¹²So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

This is not to say that each believer should not come under biblical scrutiny concerning their doctrines and their behavior especially as evaluated by the leadership, but except as a last resort in terms of church discipline they are not to be condemned; they are to be corrected and restored. False doctrine is to be zealously guarded against.