

The Judgment Seat of Christ

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 3:11-15
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Corinthians 3 and as we walk through a journey through the Scriptures over about a three year time period together as a family of faith, it was only a matter of time before we got to 1 Corinthians. Now obviously 1 Corinthians is the prelude to a second one of which the Lord gave the Apostle Paul to the church there in Corinth, but much like Ephesus and Colossae and Thessalonica, there were specific congregations that the Lord spoke a specific message not just simply to them but to the entirety of Christianity through their experience and their walk with the Lord. It is the book of 1 Corinthians that oftentimes is one of those blessed curses. On one side we see the, shall we say, the not so positive side of believers, and on the other side the blessedness of that is as we just heard, that we are still his in spite of our failures and mistakes.

1 Corinthians is one of those books of the Bible where if you ever thought your church was messed up, just read this book of the Bible and you'll discover that no matter what you've seen or what you've heard, you ain't done what they did in 1 Corinthians. In fact, as you pick it up in chapter 4, 5, and 6 and so forth, you discover that the behavior of the believers at the church at Corinth was so destructive that the Lord made this statement that not even the pagan Gentiles would think of some of the things that you're doing, and yet the book of 1 Corinthians starts in such an affirmative sense, it begins in chapter 1, verse 18 saying that the preaching of the cross, the message of Jesus Christ, is to them who perish foolishness, but to us, collectively to those who are at Corinth, is the power of God to salvation. Chapter 2 says that we don't think like the natural man the things of this world, but we have the mind of Christ. So the first two chapters are very much an encouragement of who the believers are in Christ, and beginning in chapter 4, it begins this, shall we say, dissertation on everything that is in error in their lives.

Chapter 3 in my opinion is the critical chapter of 1 Corinthians. It begins by admonishing them that they do or they should be in a place of greater spiritual maturity but they're not. The Bible says that they were babes in Christ when they should be eating a filet or a sirloin, they are relegated to milk as a child. And it is in verses 11 through 15 that I want to focus on this morning. I think it is the critical passage not just for the church at Corinth but for any believer in Jesus Christ who is struggling with or walking through an area of their life that may be so in disobedience to the Lord. It says beginning in verse 11,

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

This passage of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 3 has oftentimes been referred to by many as an expose on what we call the "judgment seat of Christ." You say, "Well, I didn't see that phrase in there." Well, it's actually found in 2 Corinthians 5 and in Romans 14, this declaration to those who are believers in Jesus Christ that one day they still are accountable to the life that they have lived in light of the Savior in which they have believed upon.

Now many of us are familiar with Hebrews 9:27, it says that men all must die and then face the judgment. The problem is that I think oftentimes and I don't think we necessarily do it consciously, is we find ourselves in a trap where we take that mentality of a "final judgment" and we just apply it carte blanche to everybody at all times for all reasons and all purposes, and what I want to show you today from 1 Corinthians 3 is that 2 Timothy 2 tells us to rightly divide the word, that the event that we just read about in 1 Corinthians 3 is not the same as that famous judgment event in the book of Revelation 20. Now this morning what I want to do is take these two passages of Scripture, I'm gonna refer to Revelation 20 quite a bit, we're gonna walk through 1 Corinthians 3 in a very detailed fashion, I want to compare and contrast what we often call the judgment seat of Christ here in 1 Corinthians 3 and the final Great White Throne Judgment that we see described at the end of your Bible in Revelation 20.

Now I'm hoping for those of you who are either, A, watching on the other side of the camera, or B, who are here in person, to give you a visual aid. I'm going to address six basic questions of this passage. We're gonna talk about the who, the what, the when, the where, the how and the why, and what I want to do is in the chart that you see before you, it shows the differences in the passage in 1 Corinthians 3 and the one in Revelation 20. So this is one of those where you're gonna have to stay awake and here's why: when I'm talking about the judgment seat of Christ, I'm gonna come stand under this slide, okay? I want y'all to be clear what I'm talking about. And when I'm talking about the Great White Throne Judgment, I'm gonna walk over here underneath this slide so you can see specifically what is being addressed.

So let's begin with the first question. Notice when I asked the question I stood in the middle. Y'all see how we're gonna do this? This is called Baptist tennis. Y'all ready? The first question is this: who? Who are these passages dealing with or addressing? Well, in 1 Corinthians 3, it makes it very clear in verse 11 that the "who" are believers. It says no

foundation that can be laid. You go back into chapter 3, verse 1, it says, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as spiritual, but as carnal, even as babes in Christ." There's no question that they're believers, they are just in an infancy stage when it comes to their spiritual maturity. Then you go to verse 16 of chapter 3, "Know you not you are the temple of God?" So here is this passage talking about judgment, here's this passage talking about wood and hay and stubble being burned, yet he makes it very clear that he is communicating to a people who are believers in Jesus Christ; though they may not be as mature as they need to be, they are believers.

Now in Revelation 20 toward the end of your Bible, it says that there is a time beginning in verse 10, it says when the heaven and the earth fled away, and it says that all of the dead were brought before and they stood before the Lord on his throne to be judged. It says there are two books that are opened, the book of life and the book of works. Interesting, the book of life is singular and the book of works is plural. Did not Jesus mention something about the road to destruction being broad and the road to righteousness being narrow? What's interesting is in Ephesians 2:1 and 2 when talking to believers it says that before we were saved, we were dead in our trespasses and in our sins, and over and over in Revelation 20 it says the dead were brought before him, the dead were judged, and the dead were ultimately sent to what is called the lake of fire.

What is very important about the "who" question is 1 Corinthians 3 is talking about believers, Revelation 20 is talking about unbelievers, and so right now the Lord has taken all of humanity and he's divided them into two distinct groups: those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and those who do not. 1 Corinthians 3 is to believers, Revelation 20 is to nonbelievers.

Which leads to the second question: what? What is happening here in 1 Corinthians 3? Notice what it says in verse 12, "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest," it shall be judged. What we see in 1 Corinthians 3 is a judgment of a believer's works after they are saved. I want to be very clear about that. They're already saved. They already have the foundation of Jesus Christ, the question is what did they do with the salvation that the Lord gave them through Calvary and an empty tomb?

Now allow me to give you some assurance. Go down to verse 15, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." When it speaks of the wood and the hay and the stubble being burned, there is no threat of, there is no warning of, there is no even inclination that a believer in Jesus Christ could ever one day for one moment step foot in a place the Bible calls hell because it says even though their works are judged, they, verse 15, are saved from the fire. That's what takes place in 1 Corinthians 3. It is a judgment of one's works after they are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now as we walk over to Revelation 20, it is very different, it is a judgment of works for salvation. You say, "What do you mean works for salvation? I thought in Ephesians 2 we're saved by grace through faith?" That's right. That's a believer on the other side of the

stage. An unbeliever, one who does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, is trusting in their own righteousness to save their soul for all of eternity, and it says the book of the works were opened. It is that time where one determined whatever system that they had to justify themselves before a holy God will be put to the test. Here's the interesting thing about Revelation 20: nobody who's found written in the books of works goes anywhere but the lake of fire. Why? Because according to Isaiah, even our best works are, what? As filthy rags. The Bible says we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and what is the wage or the result of that? Death.

So what we see in these two judgments in difference is that the judgment seat of Christ is a judgment of those who are already saved regarding what they did after they got saved, and what we know as the Great White Throne Judgment is a judgment of the lost and nonbeliever who tries to justify themselves based on their own standard of self-righteousness.

Now the third question we must ask is this: when will this take place? There are many who would advocate that the moment that a believer in Jesus Christ breathes their last breath, that they would walk through the experience that's described in 1 Corinthians 3. The problem with this is that in Revelation 6 you've got souls underneath the altar of God in heaven who have yet to receive their robe of righteousness. You say, "The robe of righteousness?" Well, in Revelation 19, Jesus Christ physically descends to the earth in a very famous battle that we call Armageddon. You say, "Why do we call it Armageddon?" Because that's where it takes place and when he descends, the Bible says that his army, that's you and I as believers, are behind him wearing the linen robes of righteousness.

Now what I put on the chart is simply this, that this event, the "when" part of it is sometime after the "rapture." Now I know that's one of those words that can cause all kinds of issues among believers. You know, get two of us together and we'll get three different opinions. But it simply means this: it means to be caught up to be with the Lord and in 1 Thessalonians 4, it says there's a day coming where those who are dead in Christ and those who are alive in Christ will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. So the Bible says there is a day coming where we, the entire family of God, walk through what we just read about in 1 Corinthians 3. It will take place after he calls us unto him and yet before he brings us back with him.

Now when does Revelation 20 take place? Well, according to verse 10, the heaven and the earth have fled away. That's a fulfillment of 2 Peter 3. It says there's a day where the heavens as we know it and the earth as we know it will be consumed in a great ball of fire. Don't worry, in chapter 21 it says he creates a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. What we commonly call the Great White Throne Judgment is the final act of time as we know it. It is the last event before eternity begins. So oftentimes when we talk about the final judgment, we're actually speaking of an event on this side of the equation that has nothing to do with believers in Jesus Christ and everything to do with those who did not believe and are trusting their own righteousness.

Now that is "when" it happens, the next question is very important: where does it happen? Where does 1 Corinthians 3 take place? Well, I don't know the exact specific GPS location but it happens some time after we're caught up with him and before we come back with him, and between you and I, whether it takes place in the air or takes place in heaven, I'm good with either location because what we see in just a moment is that it is an opportunity for us to have our preparation for our coming back with him. So it's either "in the air" or in the heavens, and the last time I checked, either one of those are pretty good scenarios.

Where does Revelation 20 take place? It says that, "I saw all the dead small and great stand before the throne of God." I don't know about you but that seems awfully intimidating, does it not? Can you imagine having trusted in your own righteousness, can you imagine saying, "I don't need what Jesus did for me. I got this." And then you're standing before the throne of God? You know one of the great questions of Revelation 20 is? What are you standing on? It says that, "I saw the heavens and the earth and they were fled." The only thing that we physically tangibly can recognize in that passage is the throne of God. You're not standing on your righteousness, you're not standing on your tradition, you're not standing on what anybody else thinks or feels about you, all you are is exposed before God himself saying that, "My standard is surpassing of your standard."

So when you talk about the "where" of the judgments, one takes place in the air with the Lord, the other one takes place before the throne of God with nothing else around. It's the last two questions, though, that ultimately determine everything: how? How does this famous judgment seat of Christ take place? Notice what it says in this passage, it says in verse 13, "it will be revealed by fire." Now for a believer this is completely different than a nonbeliever because in Peter 1, it begins in verse 5 by saying there are times, there are seasons in life where we must undergo heaviness, difficulty through the temptations of life, the struggles of life, and then it goes on to explain so that as gold we may be purified unto a greater experience with the Lord. What's this saying in 1 Corinthians 3 when it says that it will be revealed by fire? It's saying that one day before we reign with him of all eternity, one day before we return with him in the righteousness of those linen garments that are described, that the wood, the hay and the stubble have got to be removed.

Now here's the importance of the "how": the wood and the hay and the stubble are representative of all the things in life that once you were saved you participated in, you were involved in, you were tempted in, whatever it may be, that had no eternal value whatsoever. The gold, the silver and the jewels, that is that which honored the Lord, gave glory to the Lord, serving the Lord, maybe resisting temptation, whatever it may be. It says that there's going to be a fire. You say, "Well, what's that fire, what's that gonna look like?" I don't know exactly but in Revelation 1 when the Apostle John sees Jesus, it says his eyes were as a flame of fire. An old football coach of mine years ago, that anytime he suspected we weren't telling the truth, he'd make us look in his eyes and he'd say, "The eyes are the window to your soul." Jesus is described with eyes of fire. I don't think in terms of large bonfires much as I just see that encounter with, that accountability to and seeing the one who gave his life for us face-to-face, can we all agree as a believer that it

is at that point that all the wood, the hay and the stubble that we thought was so important here will just fall by the wayside and the only thing that will remain is the gold, the silver and the precious stones?

When you go to Revelation 20, oh, there's some fire there. In fact, not a purifying of fire but it says those who were judged according to their works, it says those that trusted in their own self-righteousness, the Bible says that they're actually cast with death and Satan into the lake of fire. Now the Bible speaks twice as much about a place you and I commonly refer to as hell, as heaven, but what we see here in Revelation 20 is a fulfillment of what Jesus said back in Matthew 25. He says that when one descends in that place for all of eternity, it is called the lake of fire, and so what we see very differently here is that the fire in Revelation 20 isn't for removing the wood, the hay and the stubble as a preparation for eternity, it is the process of and it's a word we don't like to use but it's in the Bible called damnation. In other words, it is an eternal punishment for one believing that they didn't need Jesus, they could do this on their own.

It leads to the final and most important question: why? Why are these events described not only in Scripture but so differently? Why is it that as a believer in Jesus Christ one who says, "I know I can't do this on my own," one who says, "I know that I have sinned and messed up and that Jesus Christ is the only answer," why is it so important that I walk through or experience this event? I want you to see what it says in verse 14, "If any man's work abide," that would be the gold, the silver and the precious stones, correct? "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon," look at this next statement, "he shall receive a reward." You see, when we look at the judgment seat of Christ, I have noticed throughout time that believers in Jesus Christ kind of see this as a glass that is half contained with water. Some of you see it as half full, some of you see it as half empty. There are some who look at the proverbial judgment seat of Christ and say, "Oh, that's the time where I'm held accountable to God and, boy, it's gonna be an awful long, miserable, horrible day." Well, according to verse 14, the purpose of this, yes, is to remove the wood, hay and the stubble, but it says the purpose is to receive a reward and the Bible speaks of that all throughout the New Testament and for the sake of time we won't get into the details there, but last time I checked when you go to Revelation 4, we get a glimpse into the throne room of God. It says the elders are there, the saints are there, they're declaring, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty," and do you know what they're doing? They're taking the crowns off of their head, the rewards they have received, and they are casting them or throwing them at Jesus' feet.

You see, the judgment seat of Christ, though there is the experience of the burning of the wood, the hay and the stubble, it is that time where we see our Savior face-to-face and we get the privilege of being rewarded for all that we did on his behalf and for nobody else's. Then we get the privilege of taking those rewards, isn't this incredible, and giving them right back to him. You see, one of the things I think we need to understand is you and I have never been called to be crown collectors, we've been called to be crown casters. It's not so that we can wear them for all of eternity, it's so that we can give them back to the one who we would never have received them if it had not been for his sacrifice.

So why the Great White Throne Judgment? Why Revelation 20? Why the books of works? Why the lake of fire? Because of the obligation of sin. Sin and its penalty must be paid for. Understand, the wages of sin is, what? Death. Well, if one is not gonna believe in the death and ultimate resurrection of Jesus Christ, then they must pay the penalty. One of my favorite words in the Bible and I know it's a big word, is the word propitiation. It's a big word which simply means this: someone who pays the punishment or the price thereof. All of those who stand before the throne of God in Revelation 20 who did not trust in Jesus Christ as paying the penalty for their sins, then must pay it themselves.

So what you see here in these two passages is two completely different events regarding two completely different groups of people, with two completely different destinations for all eternity, but let me share with you in conclusion what they both have in common: every single human being will go to one of these two. As a believer in Jesus Christ, the opportunity for reward. As a nonbeliever, for the ultimate punishment of one's sins that they trusted themselves to be able to handle. You see, the Bible is true. We must all die and one day face the judgment. The question you have to answer today is this: which one of these two is the one in your future?