

## Chapter Three

### Judgment Seat of Christ

#### Introduction

*For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

*For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

*So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. (Romans 14:10b-12)*

*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.*

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:9, 10)*

It is evident in the Scriptures that *all* Christians will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of all their works, whether good or bad. This judgment will take place after the removal of all Christians from the earth to heaven.

The events of the Judgment Seat of Christ will occur between the removal of the Church (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**), and just before the Tribulation upon the earth. In this present dispensation, Christ is ministering as our High Priest, seated at the right hand of the Father (**Hebrews 8:1**). But when the present dispensation comes to a close and Christ returns for His Church, He will then be our Judge.

In **Revelation 1:13ff**, Christ is revealed wearing garments indicative of a Judge, seen “*clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.*” His presence as Judge is also revealed by His appearance in which “*His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine*

*brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters...out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*” This description of Christ is symbolic of His authority and power as Judge.

The words, “judgment seat,” are translated from the Greek word *bema*, which is described as an elevated platform containing a magistrate’s chair. The magistrate occupying this chair issued various decrees and judgments. The word “bema” has been used in connection with the ancient Grecian athletic games in Athens, as it contained a bema seat, an elevated platform upon which sat an official. The use of the word “bema” in this respect can show a partial comparison to the Judgment seat of Christ only when dealing with rewards, as the official at the games did not pass any judicial activity in connection with loss, only rewards for the victor.

However, at the Judgment seat of Christ, every participant in the race of the faith will be judged, whether a victor or not; and depending on the Judge’s determinations, rewards or loss will follow. In **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**, Paul compared himself to a contestant in the Grecian games, except with a different goal in view. He prepared himself spiritually, as a contestant in the race of the faith, with his goal being the prize for the *incorruptible crown that does not fade away*. Paul knew that he would appear before Christ’s bema seat at the determined end of the contest and would either be approved for the incorruptible crown or disapproved (denied the crown and suffer loss). At the time of Paul’s death, he knew that he had finished the race victoriously and that he would receive the crown of righteousness in the Lord’s Day, at His Judgment seat.

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.* (**2 Timothy 4:7, 8**)

The Christian’s spirit-salvation [eternal salvation] does not automatically qualify him at Christ’s Judgment seat to enter the Millennial kingdom. It only places him in a position where he can appear at Christ’s Judgment seat. Otherwise, if he is not spiritually saved, he will not appear at His

Judgment seat; but, he will appear at the Great White throne judgment [with the unsaved] after the Millennium (**Revelation 20:7a, 11-15**).

Why are Christians judged? As seen in **Genesis 1:26b**, God created man to rule and reign in His kingdom. However, man must prove worthy to be awarded this position. Man was given a choice, in which he can choose to be faithful or unfaithful to God. After Israel's rejection of the kingdom of the heavens (the heavenly aspect of the kingdom), the Church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, was brought into existence to be the recipient of that part of the kingdom (**Matthew 21:43**). Subsequently, they must appear in judgment to reveal their qualifications [by fire] for occupying regal positions as a co-heir with Christ in the kingdom.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, Christians will be judged on the basis of “works,” whether these works were done out of faithfulness or unfaithfulness; whether they were done in the flesh or in the spirit. They will be judged by the Word in accordance to the Word. God has already judged sin at Calvary, and was satisfied based on Christ's completed work — His sacrifice on the Cross. However, man having been redeemed through the Spirit, is directly responsible for producing good works for the Lord. God's command to Christians is “*work out your own salvation,*” (**Philippians 2:12**) by putting away sin from their lives. Christians refusing to expel sin from their lives are producing works of the flesh and will be cut off from their inheritance, but not from their eternal salvation.

The Greek word for “sin” is “*harmartano*” (Strong's# G264) which simply means “to miss the mark (and not share in the prize); to offend.” Christians are to confess their sins and work at putting them away completely — for the duration of their life. When sins are confessed they are forgiven (**1 John 1:9**), as we have Christ presently interceding for us as our High Priest (**Hebrews 4:14ff**). But those individuals who fail or refuse to confess sin and who habitually sin will have to face their Judge at His Judgment seat. *Works* will be judged to determine every Christian's placement in the Millennium, whether they produced *good works* [spiritual works leading to righteousness] *or bad works* [fleshly works leading to sin]. And every person shall give account of his works as they shall be tested by fire.

*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,*

*each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*

*If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)*

During the judgment of the Church, there will be works that reflect the value of “*gold, silver, precious stones,*” which will endure the fire and gain rewards; and there will be works that reflect the value of “*wood, hay, straw,*” which will burn in the fire and produce loss. Christians will be judged on how they built upon the foundation, which is Jesus Christ, throughout their life. If they allowed the Spirit of truth to work through them, then they have built on this foundation with good works. If, however, they have built on this foundation with works of the flesh, then the works will not pass the test of fire. They themselves will be saved (*through* [lit. “in” ] *fire*), yet suffer loss in the Millennium.

*...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,*

*whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,*

*receiving the end of your faith---the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:7-9)*

At the Judgment seat of Christ, Christians will have shown to perform works under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, which will be to their “*praise, honor, and glory;*” or they will have shown to perform works under the leadership of their “*old man*” [flesh] and will be found to *shame, rejection and loss (2 Timothy 2:20, 21)*. This judgment has

everything to do with our placement in the coming Millennial kingdom. It has nothing to do with our eternal salvation.

In **Revelation** chapter **one**, Christ is seen as Judge in the midst of the seven complete Churches with **Revelation** chapter **two** and **three** providing the reason why these seven Churches (representing Christianity as a whole) are to come under judgment. In each of the messages to the seven Churches, Christ opens each Letter with the phrase, “*I know your works.*” Then, each Church is presented with a description of their past works, a call to repent and concludes with an overcomer’s promise.

It will be our “works” at the Judgment seat of Christ that will be the determining factor for rewards or loss. The word “overcome” is the Greek word *nikao*, which means “to conquer” or “to gain a victory over.” The “overcomers” are the conquerors, the victors in a contest; they are the ones who will be successful in running the race of the faith during this present age. Overcoming has to do with the one being “*brought forth from above*” now being in the position where he can keep God’s commandments and presently overcome the world. The expression, “*brought forth from above*” (born from above—**Luke 2:7; James 1:17, 18**) is always used relative to the saved. The power to overcome is derived from above, not from the individual — it is allowing the Spirit to take control of the individual’s life to perform the work, and not the flesh. These overcomers will be the ones to show “good works” at His Judgment seat, which will pass the test of fire.

God has set aside the present dispensation to allow man the grace and privilege of overcoming their soul-life and bringing forth good works. At the end of this dispensation, at the Judgment seat of Christ, man will reveal his works in response to the privilege he was given. Therefore, Christians have been saved with a view to bringing forth good works and overcoming their present life by overcoming the world. The “world,” in this respect, refers to the present world system that is under the rule and sway of Satan, a world system that is about to pass out of existence. And the purpose of overcoming is with a view to occupying regal positions with Christ in the heavenly kingdom, positions that are Millennial in scope.

Overcoming simply means to follow the footsteps of Christ, steps that are connected with suffering during this present time; but afterwards, with glory during the Millennium. The sufferings of Christ — His shame, reproach, rejection and pain on the Cross — were endured with a view to the throne. He overcame because of the “*joy that was set before Him*” (**Hebrews 12:2**) — the hope of glory. And the call has gone forth for Christians to overcome as He overcame for the same reason — to ascend the throne, to rule and reign with Him.

Many Christians are completely unaware of their offered inheritance, the Judgment seat of Christ and the salvation of the soul. They have been exposed to the teachings of only one part of their salvation, the salvation of the spirit, and therefore are only familiar with the gospel of grace, which centers on faith apart from works. This teaching attempts to apply *all* Scriptural references to the topic of “salvation,” solely to the salvation that we presently possess; thereby removing all scriptural truth having to do with our future salvation, with millennial verities in view. This has produced much confusion, complacency and indolence in Christendom. Be careful when hearing what man has to say about this matter. *The Word of God alone* contains the correct information to properly address this doctrine.

The result of being in this darkened state of mind is that a Christian will not be properly prepared to face his judgment at the close of this dispensation and will find himself at a great loss. As prophesied in the Scriptures, many Christians today walk as *in the days of Noah*, unprepared to face their Lord, and living as though nothing of significance will transpire in the future. They live to eat, drink and be merry without any thought of their future judgment or without any view of the kingdom to come. They involve themselves in the affairs of this present world system ruled under the “*god of this age* [Satan]” (**2 Corinthians 4:4**), which will result in they being overcome by the world rather than they overcoming the world.

Only those Christians who involve themselves in the Word of God and produce fruit will be the overcomers to inherit with Christ (**Matthew 21:43; John 15:1-8**). Christ Himself, when He was tempted by Satan, revealed that the way to overcome Satan and his temptation is by use of the Word of God (**Matthew 4:4**). Just as Christ overcame, having

suffered through his rejection, shame and reproach, culminated on Calvary; we, in like manner, are called to overcome, by occupying our proper place in the face of suffering. When Christ returns to earth the second time, He will exalt overcoming Christians in His kingdom, just as God the Father exalted Christ when He overcame the world (**John 16:33; 17:4, 5**).

Christ is currently seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high and is awaiting the time when He will establish His kingdom. Until then, Christians are expected to “*do business*” (KJV: “*occupy*”) until Christ sets up His kingdom (**Luke 19:12-15**). Even now, preparations are taking effect for the manifestation of climatic events, events prophesied through Moses and all the prophets, which will bring this dispensation to a close. Everything in this world is moving in the direction as God planned, for His will and purpose *will* be fulfilled.

The present dispensation will soon end and Scripture presents the rapture and resurrection of the Church and their appearance at the Judgment seat of Christ as the next prophetic event that will mark the near termination of this dispensation. At the Judgment seat of Christ, Scripture presents the Church in a dual fashion, those who are overcomers — a small remnant of faithful Christians — and those who are not, both elements as seen in the seven Churches described in **Revelation** chapters **two** and **three**.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, every Christian will receive “*a just reward*,” (**Hebrews 2:2, 3**), a just payment that will commensurate with that which is revealed by his works. Every Christian will “*receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*.” (**2 Corinthians 5:10**). Those Christians who are overcomers during this lifetime will be those who have performed good works through the Spirit — “*some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*” (**Matthew 13:23**). And because some will produce more fruit than others, they will occupy higher positions in the kingdom. There will be different levels of rewards presented, depending on the amount of works performed and judged worthy.

Likewise, non-overcoming Christians will be those who have performed bad works of the flesh, through an unholy affiliation with the world, and will receive the punishment reserved for them outside of the kingdom.

Different levels of punishment will be distributed to them, depending on the outlay and severity of their bad works performed during this present age.

In **Revelation 3:14-22**, the account of the Laodicean Church, a prophetic account of the last days of this present age, Christ stands ready to assist any Christian who will submit to Him, as He knocks, saying,

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* (**Revelation 3:20**)

This invitation is bestowed upon each individual Christian of the Laodicean Church of today. The questions we must ask ourselves are this: Do I want to commit my life to becoming an overcomer? Do I want to inherit the kingdom in the age to come and sit with Christ on His throne?

The overcomer’s promise, given to each of the seven Churches in **Revelation** chapters **two** and **three**, is connected with rewards, regality, crowns, and glory in the kingdom of the heavens during the coming Messianic Era. From decisions and determinations at the Judgment seat of Christ, Christians will either come into possession of these things or they will lose it all for one thousand years. The determinations will be based solely on the Christian’s “works” during his lifetime on earth, which will reflect his love and service to Christ or his failure to do so.

The aspect of “overcoming” in each of the seven Letters to the Churches in **Revelation** chapters **two** and **three** is related to conditions that each particular Church was experiencing; and although there were seven promises relative to “overcoming” given to these seven Churches, each promise should not be considered unique to any one Church. The number “seven” in Scripture shows *completeness for that which is in view*. Since seven Churches were addressed, this reveals the complete Church to which all of the overcomer promises apply; and, all will be realized by overcoming Christians during the Messianic Era. In other words, all works, the need to repent, and the overcomer’s promises given to the seven Churches of that day are applicable to *all* Christians today.



It is also evident that these seven Letters to these Churches, due to the order in which they have been arranged by God, present another truth. Beginning with the Church in Ephesus and ending with the Church in Laodicea, it is evident that these Churches present an overall view of Church history, covering the entire present dispensation. The order in which these Churches are addressed reflect the deteriorating condition of the Church as a whole throughout this dispensation.

*(A “dispensation” is an administration within a period of time during which God is allowing man to be tested in order to determine his ability to rule the earth. There have been three dispensations of two thousand years each since Adam and from Pentecost to the end of this age marks the third and final dispensation — more on this in Chapter four.)*

Furthermore, the conditions addressed in each Church, beginning with those in the Church in Ephesus who “*left their first love,*” are not problems unique to any one Church or period of time; rather, they represent problems that have continued to exist within the Church since its beginning. Consequently, all of the warnings to Christians in these Letters also apply to all Christians throughout this dispensation.

The warnings presented to the Churches in each of the Letters in **Revelation** chapter’s **two** and **three** cover distinct consequence, all related to the failure to “overcome.” With the Church in Ephesus, it is the removal of its “*lampstand from its place*” (**Revelation 2:5**), which is an implication of being removed from a position of rulership within the kingdom during the Millennium. With the Church in Smyrna, to overcome is “*not to be hurt by the second death*” (**Revelation 2:11**), which is associated with the “*lake of fire*” in **Revelation 20:14**. This brings one to the conclusion that Christians who fail to overcome during this lifetime will be in fact “*hurt by the second death,*” a consequence involving “*the lake of fire.*”

Fortunately, this determination, as with all determinations that emanate from the Judgment Seat of Christ, will only be applicable during the Messianic Era, the thousand year reign of Christ, which will transpire following the seven year Tribulation period upon the earth.

Therefore, experiencing the second death in the lake of fire would be synonymous with the loss of one's soul salvation in the age to come. *It would mean experiencing death in relation to the soul, being separated from Christ and from the life experiences of the riches and glory in the kingdom.*

It has been prophesied almost two millennia ago that at the near close of this dispensation, the Church as a whole will have completely fallen away from the faith. In **Luke 18:8**, Jesus' question concerning the condition of the Church at the end of this dispensation demands (in the Greek) a negative answer:

*...Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find [the] faith on the earth?*

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, every Christian will find himself in one of two camps. He will either occupy a position of honor and glory or he will occupy a position of shame and disgrace. This judgment of the Church (before the Tribulation), as well as all other judgments (Israel and the saved Gentiles after the Tribulation) will transpire at the end of this age and will only pertain to the Millennial kingdom, pictured for us in **John 5:24-30**,

*“Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

*I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” (John 5:28-30)*

Judgment is undeniably forthcoming and no one is immune to it. Man has been given the opportunity and the choice to prepare for their judgment and for Christ's return — the invitation is to overcome with the goal of occupying a regal position with Christ in the coming kingdom.

Christians have been called to “bear fruit,” to get out of their country and take the journey to another land that God will show them — this means for us to be disconnected from this world or the things of this world. Rather, we are to prepare ourselves with divine good works, with a view to occupying the throne with Christ in the Millennial kingdom.