The Day of Judgement

2 Corinthians 5:10

This week, and next week, we are going to discuss the “Day of Judgement.”

I understand that when we talk about God’s Judgement there are various school’s of thought based on many views and interpretations of the timing and the number and nature of God’s Judgement.

Some believe that there will be one Judgement when Jesus returns while there are others who have a few different points in history where God, through Christ will judge the thoughts and actions of all people.

I believe that those who have put their faith in Christ have already had their sins judged and cleared by Jesus at the cross. Which brings us to the question, why does the apostle Paul emphasize the Judgement seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:10? Please read along with me.

**6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 For we live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.**

**11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.**

**16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Many have used these verses, especially verse 10, to make a case for differing rewards, based on acts of faithful service to God. And though I believe, to some degree, rejoicing will be experienced and loss will be felt on that day, I do not believe that judgement day is a day where God will set us in some eternal hierarchy structure based upon our works on earth. Let’s consider what is in store for us and what the Bible alludes to in terms of reward.

“It is Biblically absurd to argue for additional personal rewards for the good that we do, or loss of them as Judgment for any imperfection (which is still sin), while arguing that it is not judgment for sin. It was for this reason that Christ went to the cross that we “could” appear before Him blameless, perfect, and without fault in all our works, and that we “could” appear before the bema seat and be judged according to the work of Christ. The bema seat is not to punish believers I agree, but it is not a reward anyone based on his individual righteousness (meritorious works) either, for we are all worthy of a full reward of inheritance because we are all without fault. If any of our works could be faulted as imperfect, it would constitute sin. The wages of sin is death, not the loss of rewards or diverse payments. All our punishment was paid for by Christ at the cross, and our full reward was “secured” for us by that very same work.”

First, I would like you to consider the context and the perspective of Paul and for that matter Christianity.

Christianity is an others focused religion. So far in 2 Corinthians the apostle is trying to make a case for his apostleship. And he is trying to make a case for his authority to help the people he is ministering to. It is not his goal to get accolades or boast in his apostleship. His goal is to win others to Christ. That is why verse 11 says:

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.

Paul is not saying that you better work hard because you fear God’s Judgement or your loss of rewards. That is a self-focused idea of Christianity. In fact, I would say it isn’t very Christian. Paul isn’t worried about

He is a minister of Christ and his crown is those who will be found in Christ when Jesus returns.

When he wrote to the Philippians Paul said to them:

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

Philippians 4:1 NLT

And to the church in Thessalonica he wrote:

“After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you!” (1 Thessalonians 2:19, NLT)

These statements synthesize nicely with 1 Corinthians 3, when Paul wrote:

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. 9 For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 NLT

Builders are not injured when a building that they built burns down, but there is definitely a loss of joy when what they have built is destroyed. Paul’s foundation is the gospel of Jesus and what he was building was a building of living stones. Living stones, people who he shared Christ with and ministered to. Living stones who were either added to the building through true, faith-based gospel ministry, or stones that were added based on something other than faith in Jesus. There is nothing more valuable, there is no greater source of joy than seeing someone place their faith in the Rock who is Jesus. Consequently there is nothing more painful than finding out that someone you shared the Good News with, really never believed. It truly hurts. Even more than a third degree burn. Unless of course you are only concerned for yourself.

For Paul, his concern for self was minimal, and his concern for others was great. As he once said:

9 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.

Romans 9:1-4 NLT

Paul was a minister who cared about his people, who were his crown. This is why I believe that 2 Corinthians 5 is not a text that is meant to scare us into serving God because we are concerned about our rewards. When Paul says that we must all appear before the judgment seat to give an account, he is thinking about those who are still under the wrath of God and our concern for them will motivate us to preach Christ crucified, buried, resurrected and ascended.

Before moving on I want to share that many scholars and theologians believe that the Bema seat (Judgement Seat of Christ) is only for believers. They say that the judgement described here is not to judge sin, but rather it is only to give out rewards for faithful Christian service.

If this is the case, why does it say that it is for giving an account of what was done whether good or bad?

The explanation is that the word “bad” is the Greek word for “useless.” So this judgement isn’t about sin, it is about things we do as Christians that are founded by our faith in Jesus. This sounds good, but the Bible does not confirm the idea of some things being good and some things being neutral (or worthless).

Instead the scriptures say:

“…everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

Romans 14:23 NLT

I say this, not to destroy the fact that we will give an accounting to God, I say it to suggest that the judgement spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5 cannot simply be a place where faithful service will be rewarded. Believer and unbeliever alike will stand before our righteous Judge who is Jesus and those of us who know Jesus as Savior will have nothing to fear. The accounting of our sin will be an awareness of how deeply and completely God has saved us from His wrath. It will be the moment that the words of James ring true when he wrote:

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:12-13 NLT

What are the different Rewards on the day of Judgement?

1. The reward of a full inheritance in Christ as a co-heir with Him on the throne.

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.[f] And by him we cry, “Abba,[g] Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:14-17 NLT

And as Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:3-9 NLT

As one writer said:

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” (Philppians 2:13) –It is this truth which fails to be fully comprehended by many Christians. Unlike Paul, in our day man is so full of himself that he can’t see the forest for the trees. In essence he retorts, “wrong God, it was I, and I shall get rewards for my well doing.” This in stark contrast to the faithful Christians of old who understood, it is not I, but God who is the cause of all my faithful work (1 Corinthians 15:10). Therefore all glory and any credit for the labor I do goes to Him. And that is why we all receive the same reward. Because the work in us is of God, not of ourselves. The reward is bought of Christ, of grace, not of a debt which God owes us for working.”

Should we be looking for a greater reward? Is seated with Christ in the heavenly realms with His incomparable riches not enough?

If there will be greater or lesser enjoyment in our eternal life what did Paul mean when he wrote to the Romans that we are “Co-heirs with Christ?”

1. There is another possible reward on the day of judgement. A reward for the accounting of what we have done.

In other words, people (those who are not in Christ) will receive what is due to them. As Romans 4:4-8 says:

4 Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. 5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. 6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 “Blessed are those

 whose transgressions are forgiven,

 whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the one

 whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

Romans 4:4-8 NLT

I do not want the reward for what is due to me. I want the reward that Christ brings with Him for those who have put their trust in His love, His mercy, His grace, and His forgiveness. When I give an accounting to God, I am trusting in Jesus to say, “I already covered those things.” As Christians we have “crossed over from death to life” and “there is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

But, even though I’m not looking for (bonus rewards) Paul’s reminder of the coming Judgement still has a profound affect on me and inspires accountability. It hits me hard with the realization that many are still under God’s wrath. If we have a reverence and fear for God’s holiness it should motivate to tell others of our reward in Christ a reward that they too can share in. This is why right after Paul talks about the Judgement seat of Christ he goes on to emphasize the fact that, as Christians, we play an important role in the ministry of reconciliation.

9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

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2 Corinthians 5:9-21 NLT

What pleases God? Our ministry of reconciliation to the rest of the world. A ministry that will bring great joy and celebration on Judgement day, when we see the temple of living stones which is Christ’s body. I look forward to seeing how God will work through you and through me and bring Himself glory on that day. And I look forward to seeing the crown of rejoicing that survives the trials of this world. **For those who believe there is no fear of judgement**. But the fact that we have a holy fear of our judge should cause us to put aside our own interests so that others will share in our reward with Christ instead of receiving the wages that are due them.