

# The Christian's Review and Reward

## *[A Brief Study of the Judgment Seat of Christ]*

Just like your nine months in the womb was preparation for life “on the outside,” so your time here on earth is preparation for life’s next stage in heaven. Living in your mother’s womb was not an end in itself, but a preface to the rest of the story. So life in the *here and now* is getting you ready for the *there and then*. The way you go about your life in this stage affects what you’ll experience in the next.

The Bible is full of promises to Christians about the rewards that await us in heaven. In this short paper we’ll cite many of those promises and rejoice in God’s grace to give us infinitely more than we deserve. But there is something else you should be aware of. And that’s the *Reviewing* before the *Rewarding*. Just as clearly as there are rewards for God’s followers, so is there a process we must go through in order to be evaluated for those rewards, a “Performance Review” so to speak.

A pastor and internationally recognized Bible teacher friend of mine had a profound dream while in his twenties of *The Judgment Seat of Christ*. Here are excerpts of his recounting of the vision God gave him.

*In my visions I saw the redeemed, as numerous as endless waves of wheat in a Kansas grain field. All Christians of every generation were there.*

*I heard two contrasting and clashing sounds. The first was crying - the weeping and wailing I had always associated with the damned. Yet I knew instinctively that no lost people were here. This was the gathered redeemed. In contrast, I heard thunderous rejoicing. What release! What praise! It sounded like a thousand Christian camp meetings rolled into one, like the “Hallelujah Chorus” sung by a multitude of choirs.*

*What an intense contrast! - uncontrollable weeping and unrestrained praise. The sounds clashed like great opposing cymbals: weeping and rejoicing, sorrow and praise - human responses to loss and reward.*

*Jesus carried a torch of fire in His hand, similar to an Olympic torch. After speaking to each Christian, Jesus dropped the flaming torch into the pile of stubble and grass at the feet of each believer. What was revealed by the resulting flash of fire brought a cry of sorrow or joy from the believer.*

[At this point Rick tells of two close friends of his at the Judgment Seat. He speaks of a little elderly woman in the church he grew up in who brought him to the altar as a teenager and led him to Christ, and a friend who chose a path of self-service instead of a particular aspect of obedient service to God.]

*“Lily Shipton,” Jesus said again. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”*

*He touched the torch to the grass and stubble at her feet. It burned instantly in a flash of fire. When the flames had consumed the stubble, I saw a pile of gold, silver and precious jewels at her feet.*

*She bent over to gather the valuables. Taking them in her arms, she laid them at Jesus’ feet and began to praise the Lord. To this day I remember that spirit of praise: “I love You, Jesus! I love You, Jesus!”*

*Now, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the majestic Christ approach my friend, Todd. The flaming torch He carried was spitting sparks out of its intensity. Christ called Todd by a nickname used only*

*by some of his closest friends, then lowered the torch to the pile at his feet.*

*Suddenly all was burned. Nothing remained but a blackened circle of earth. That black spot is engraved on my mind. To this day it makes me shudder.*

*As Todd came to the full realization that he had not pleased his Master but had wasted his life, he covered his face with his hands and began to weep and groan in agony.*

*That morning I resolved, there will be a new focus in my life. I made phone calls. I wrote letters. I got rid of bitterness. I reconciled with people. I changed some habits. Because in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, there were things in my life I did not want there, and other things not in my life I did want there.*

**...life in the *here and now* is getting you ready for the *there and then*. The way you go about your life in this stage affects what you'll experience in the next.**

For Christians there will be a *Review* and then there will be *Reward* corresponding to the results of the Review. Let's look at Reward first.

## THE CHRISTIAN'S REWARD

- *You, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done. **Psalm 62:12***
- *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. **Matthew 16:27***
- *"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. **Revelation 22:12***
- *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. **Matthew 6: 20***

*...store up* - It's a command...

*...for yourselves* - No one can do it for you...

*...in heaven* - Do things *now* that you might not get the benefit of *now*, but ship it to heaven ahead of you, so that it'll be waiting for you when you get there!

Without His strength we can't do anything that God can possibly reward. But, *we can do all things through Christ Who strengthens us!*

You should be amazed that, without your merit, God cleanses you from your past, supernaturally empowers you to do good works, and then rewards you for doing them! What a deal! Hard to pass up.

### **Crowns...**

- *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:8*

- *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12*

- *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:4*

*Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 1 Corinthians 9:25*

Notice all the references to “crowns.” It’s not about fashion, or lookin’ good in glory! It won’t be about looking regal. We won’t be arguing about who has the best one. Crowns have to do with rulership, with eternal ruling and reigning with Christ.

*If we endure with Him we will also reign with Him. 2 Tim. 2:12*  
*They will reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:5*

From the beginning God put us here to be partners with Him in His rule of the planet, and ultimately of the universe. *“Let us make man in our image and let them rule...”* (Genesis 1:26) We lost that rule almost overnight when we handed the keys to Satan and he became the “god of this world ... the prince of the power of the air.” Jesus came as the Representative Ruling Man, restored us back to God and put us into *Training for Reigning* here on earth. How we handle our assignments *here* affects us *there*. If we’ll endure *here*, we’ll reign *there*!

*“You’ve been faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things...” Matthew 25:23*  
*“Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities...” Luke 19:17*

Are you thinking that it’s kind of self-centered to aspire to achieve rewards in heaven, especially since we don’t deserve heaven in the first place? But if you look at the expert worshippers in heaven, it might affect the way you think of rewards.

*“Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne ...” Revelation 4:9-11*

I think they’re saying, “I certainly don’t deserve this crown, I lay it at the feet of the One Who alone is deserving!” This seems to be the continuous activity of heaven. It’s “whenever they give glory” to God that they lay their crowns before Him, thus acknowledging His worthiness.

Don’t you want to have something to cast at His feet - something that makes His sacrifice worth it? Don’t you yearn for Him to get the full reward of his suffering? We all want to say to Him over and over and over, “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain! You gave us these crowns for deeds that You

gave us power to do, and we cast them at Your feet. We give You all the glory for these rewards. You alone are worthy to reign. We gladly join You in *your* Kingdom, never forgetting Who the real King is!"

*You should be amazed that, without your merit, God cleanses you from your past, supernaturally empowers you to do good works, and then rewards you for doing them!*

### **Not everyone with the same reward...**

It's clear from Scripture that while everyone who goes to heaven goes there on the merit of Jesus alone. *The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ; not of works lest any man should boast...* It's clear that we shall all be with Him forever in a sinless state, see Him face to face, know Him as we are fully known, and live in glorified bodies (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:20; John 14:3; Revelation 21:1-3; 21:27). But it's also clear that we won't all receive the same rewards.

*Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. **2 John 8***

It appears that the "full" reward that God intends may be forfeited by irresponsibility on our part.

*I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. **Matthew 10:42***

Now, who would that be who would want to "take your crown"? Any ideas?

*And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." **Revelation 3:11***

So, it is possible to "lose" one's crown before he even gets it!

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. **1 Corinthians 9:24-27***

So, even after "preaching to others," it is possible to be "disqualified for the prize."

*"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. **Matt. 6:1***

It appears that if we insist on enjoying our reward *here*, we forfeit it *there*.

An old missionary couple had been working in Africa for 40 years, and were returning to England to retire. They had no pension; their health was bad, they were afraid of how it would be back home. The man said to his wife, "I wonder if anyone will be there to welcome us home." When they docked, to their surprise there was a huge crowd of people cheering, a band playing, and a banner that read, "Welcome home! We're proud of you!" "Isn't this great!" he said. They went below to retrieve their luggage, and on returning deck-side the crowd had already started to disperse. It became clear that they had all been there to welcome home a politician returning from some foreign success. No one in fact was there to greet them. He turned to his wife, "A lifetime of service, and this is what we get when we come home." She replied, "Come along sweetheart, this is just England. We're not home yet!"

*...you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:11*

Could this mean that some will receive something that approximates a welcome that is something less than "rich"? If you read the previous verses you'll find the conditions for us being confident in having a "rich welcome" into heaven. If we cultivate the qualities of *faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love* – we may confidently look forward to a "rich welcome." Otherwise...?

Charles Stanley wrote, "*The Kingdom of God will not be the same for all believers. Let me put it another way. Some believers will have rewards for their faithfulness; others will not. Some will reign with Christ, others will not (2 Timothy 2:12). Some will be rich in the kingdom of God; others will be poor (Luke 12:21, 33). Some will be given true riches; others will not (Luke 16:11). Some will be given heavenly treasures of their own; others will not (Luke 16:12).*"

**It appears that if we insist on enjoying our reward here, we forfeit it there.**

### **The criteria...**

Notice that in the following passages the *criteria* for reward has to do with what we do here on earth – how we act, think, speak as followers of Jesus here on earth.

*Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done. Ps. 62:12*

*"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." Jeremiah 17:10*

*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matt. 16:27*

*For 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. 2Cor. 5:10*

[You might be interested to note that the Greek term for "bad" here could be translated, "worthless." It's not so much the issue of sin and the Judgment Seat, but what we did with our opportunities. Did

we spend our lives with “worthless” things, in purely temporal pursuits? Or did we give ourselves to eternal things and activities which directly benefited the everlasting Kingdom of God?]

*Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. **1Pet. 1:17***

*"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. **Rev. 22:12***

*I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed." **Eccl. 3:17***

*Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. **1Cor. 4:5***

*"... Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." **Rev. 14:13***

*"His master replied, `Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' **Matt. 25:23***

*"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." **Luke 12:48***

*"Go and sell everything you have to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.."*  
**Mark 10:21**

There's no question that we're saved by grace, and yet evaluated according to what we do with that grace. Grace gets us to heaven; works determine what we do after we get there. What we do *in heaven*, our level of rulership is determined by our choices *on earth*. Our *earthly record* will be evaluated to determine our *eternal status*. Someone said, "Our difficulty at the Judgment Seat of Christ will not be with PASSPORTS, but with BAGGAGE."

*Lord, don't let us die and then regret the way we lived!*

*His master replied, `Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

## THE CHRISTIAN'S REVIEW

Before the *Reward* is the *Review*. In between life here on earth and there in heaven where we enjoy

our eternal reward is the Review, the *Evaluation*, the *Audit* or our lives. Each of us will meet with our Boss, and have a “Performance Review” evaluating how we did our job as His employees. It won’t have anything to do with how we lived before we received Jesus as our Savior. The review only takes into account our lives here as Christians.

We will all have to give an account, an answer, a report for how we stewarded our opportunities.

*God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. **Ecclesiastes 3:17***

Be sure not to confuse the two separate places of judgment – one for unbelievers and another for believers in Christ. The one is a judgment of *destination*, the other of *compensation*. There’s a day of reckoning for those who have rejected Him, called *The Great White Throne – the regal seat* (Revelation 20:11-15). And there’s an accounting for those who have received Him – *the Redeemer’s Seat (The Judgment Seat of Christ)*. Those at the *Regal Seat* will be judged for what they believed. Those at the *Redeemer’s Seat* will be evaluated on the basis of how they behaved.

The Christian’s review is clearly taught in passages such as the following:

*You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. **Romans 14:10***

*For 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 Corinthians 5:10***

The Greek term that Paul uses here, and in several other place for “Judgment Seat” is “Bema.” The “Bema” was in Paul’s day a raised platform in the public square used for distributing rewards for athletes, making public speeches, or dispensing justice.

*Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. **1 Corinthian 4:5***

Martin Luther said that on his calendar there were but two days: “Today and That Day.” That is, he lived his every ‘today’ in light of ‘THE Day’ of reckoning!

### **The dot and the line...**

Imagine a line that goes from where you are right now out into space to the next planet and beyond into the infinite. That line represents eternity. Then imagine taking a marker and putting a small dot on the line. The dot represents your life here on earth (20, 50, 80 years). Are you living for the dot or for the line? The choices you make *in the dot* determine what happens *on the line*. The Judgment Seat of Christ inspires us to *live in the dot for the line*, not the other way around. Someone said, “Make sure that you don’t sacrifice eternity on the altar of NOW!” That is, don’t lose your soul, or jeopardize your reward for the future by worshipping what makes you feel good today! *Live in the dot for the line*.

If you think about it, this evaluation of our lives dignifies our existence and actions in this life. What you *do* matters to God. Your actions have eternal meaning. The fact that we must give an account of how we live means that, in God’s mind, there is significance to how we choose to live our lives. You matter, and how you live matters, otherwise there would be no review, no audit of how you invested your time, talent, and treasure.

Think of it this way. Each of us was completely bankrupt. We owed all over the place, and were entirely out of control - hopeless. A very rich man offered to pay off all of our debts if we were willing to accept his free gift. In addition to that he gives each of us a million dollars, a manual for successful investment, a great support group of likeminded investors, and an undetermined amount of time to invest and multiply the gift. At the end of our lives the Donor will audit our portfolio and reward us accordingly. He won't be looking at our former indebtedness. That's now moot. His concern will be from the time he intervened and paid off our debts to the last day of business.

For those who choose to reject his original debt payment they'll have to pay it themselves. There won't be many (if any) payments *here and now* – that comes later. The bad news is that they'll have to pay in the *there and then*. In fact, that's all there is *there* for them to do is pay! But for those of us who have accepted his original gift, our concern now is to live our lives *here* (as Peter says, “with reverent fear”) as wise investors of the millions He's entrusted to us. There's an audit coming!

## The choices you make *in the dot* determine what happens *on the line*.

### **There's a fire coming!**

The following passage is the Bible's most explicit statement in the Bible of this Day of Review:

*For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his 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 man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. **1 Corinthians 3:9-15***

Let's change the story of the million dollar donor a little bit. Let's say he gives you the money only under three conditions. First of all, you have to spend all of it within one week. Secondly, you must spend it on tangible assets (that is, no stocks or bonds, insurance, etc.). Lastly, he tells you that you have to keep all your assets in your house. Oh, and by the way, there is going to be a devastating fire within a month, which will entirely destroy your house and all it contains. The question is, what would you spend the money on? Do you buy cars, clothes, art, artifacts...? All these would burn, and you would be back to where you started – with nothing!

Why not buy gold? The fire may turn a gold bar into a puddle, but it is still gold! Silver - precious stones – they're the best bet because they last. They endure the test of fire.

Live everyday as if a fire were coming! Don't waste your time and treasure on items of wood, hay and straw. Get gold, silver, diamonds and rubies. Invest in something that will endure the fire of his evaluation! Otherwise you'll barely escape from your burning house. You'll be singed as you walk through that wall of fire, the smell of smoke will be on your clothes. You'll be grateful to be alive, yes.

But you'll have nothing to show for your life here on earth! (Ominous words - *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames!*)

There won't be any lawyers there at the Judgment Seat of Christ (I *don't* mean that no attorneys make it to heaven!). I mean that you don't get to hire someone to represent you, speak up for you there. There will no one looking for loop-holes and trying to get you off the hook. In fact, the Bema Seat is not a *trial* at all. It's an irrefutable accounting of our lives lived here on earth as Christians. We do have Jesus as our "Advocate" ("as One Who speaks in our defense" 1 John 2:1) *here on earth* as we bring our sins and shortcomings to God. But when we get to the Redeemer's Seat for the final audit, the record of our stewardship will have to speak for itself.

When I stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ,  
And He shows His plan for me,  
The plan of my life as it might have been,  
Had He had His way - and I see  
How I blocked Him here, and checked Him there,  
And I would not yield my will,  
Will there be grief in my Savior's eyes,  
Grief though He loves me still?  
Would he have me rich and I stand there poor,  
Stripped of all but His grace,  
While memory runs like a hunted thing  
Down the paths I cannot retrace?  
Lord, of the years that are left to me,  
I give them to Thy hand;  
Take me and break me and mold me  
To the pattern that Thou hast planned!  
(Author unknown)

Have you ever said, "I want my life here to count for something"? It will be at the Redeemer's Seat that you find out how successful you were. ... *wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.* (1 Corinthian 4:5).

Lord, help us not to die and regret the way we lived!

**There won't be any lawyers there at the Judgment Seat of Christ ... There will no one looking for loop-holes and trying to get you off the hook...**

On a more positive note, consider how awesome it is that God in His grace cleanses *our past*, empowers *our present* and rewards *our future*. Think about how wonderful it is that when we let Him live His life in us, give His Kingdom to us, do His thing through us - we're in partnership with Him to create gold, silver, precious stones of eternal value. What we do *here* on earth by the will and strength of God shows up *there* in heaven as an eternal treasure reflecting God's glory back to Him forever and ever! My guess is that we won't have those crowns *on our heads* very much of the time.

We'll be taking them off, casting them at the feet of the One Who deserves the credit for their very existence. Their splendor is a constant tribute to the mercy and kindness of Him Who alone sits on the throne!

## Yeah, but what about...?

Here are some commonly asked questions about the process of *Review* and *Reward*.

- **Isn't God more interested in our hearts than our works?**

*... you will reward each person according to what he has done. Ps. 62:12*

*I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve. Jer. 17:10*

*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matt. 16:27*

*For 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*

Notice the criteria for rewards has mostly to do with deeds and works. But, deeds are the evidence of character. Actions show what's in the heart. When God tells us to "love Him with all our heart," He's not primarily asking us to have an *emotion* about Him. He's really talking about a *devotion*, a choice to live a certain way. But we're happy to make that choice because in our hearts we truly love Him, and have His love and law written on our hearts.

*For by grace are you saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10*

*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26*

Of course God cares about our hearts. He told us to "guard our hearts for out of it are the well springs of life." But deeds and actions are the visible evidence of what's going on inside our hearts. That's why Paul wrote, "*Work out your own salvation... for it is God who works in you the desire and power to do His will.*" (Philippians 2:12-13)

- **Isn't heaven the perfect place with nothing but "perfected" people? How bad could it get for someone who gets to go to heaven?**

*Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 2 John 1:8*

*I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Revelation 3:11*

*If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he*

*himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Corinthians 3:14-15*

Rick Howard points out that while everyone in heaven will be “perfect,” not everyone will “reflect the same amount of God’s power and glory.” He goes on to say, “light bulbs may be perfect, but not all shine with the same power. Some are one-quarter-watt night lights; some are thirty watts, some are sixty and some are one hundred.”

Earlier we listed some of the things that each person can count on experiencing in heaven. We shall *all* be with Him forever in a sinless state, see Him face to face, know Him as we are fully known, and live in a glorified body (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Philippians 3:20; John 14:3; Revelation 21:1-3; 21:27). But the passages above refer to “suffering loss” and “holding on” to your crown. We “suffer loss” if we don’t use what God has entrusted to us. We will suffer the loss of the opportunity to serve and glorify God more fully in eternity, the loss of the potential reward we could have had. In other words, we lost the talent and the treasure.

“*Saved, but only as one escaping through the flames...*” is a picture of a believer barley escaping from his burning house. He’s grateful to be alive, but when he turns around and watches everything he has worked for turned to ashes, he has to have a sense of “loss.” He’s in heaven with the Lord. He’s in the glorified body and experiencing the richness of God’s Presence on level only dreamed of before. But his position in the *eternal state* is limited somehow in direct proportion to the quality of responsibility he took while in his *earthly state*.

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. Deuteronomy 29:29*

That is, there are things about the eternal state that are still very much a mystery to *us* (*the secret things*). So, exactly how the Review works and precisely how it affects our eternal status we can’t be dogmatic. But what is crystal clear, the things He’s always ready to reveal to us, are things He wants us to *do* here (*the words of this law*) – obedience to His will and participation in His purposes.

**...his position in the *eternal state* is limited somehow in direct proportion to the quality of responsibility he took while in his *earthly state*...**

- ***Isn’t there a danger of falling into a “performance mentality” or a good-works-for-salvation effort?***

Keep in mind that there are two completely different issues here. There’s *Salvation* and there’s *Stewardship*. Salvation is only offered through Jesus’ finished work. Those who reject Him will stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment – Revelation 20:11-15. Believers won’t even be at the White Throne. They’ll give an account of the stewardship of their lives as Christians at the Bema Seat. It’s an evaluation of family – a family-members-only affair.

Think of the difference between the two in this way. For the unbeliever who stands before God at the Great White Throne, Jesus has two sets of books. Set number one is a collection of books registering everything “*Bob Didhisbest*” did in life - good or bad. The second set has only one large book called “The Lamb’s Book of Life.” God looks into the first set of books and says, “*Your life doesn’t meet my standard. Hell is your destiny, that is, unless your name is written in this other book, The Book of*

*Life.” A moment of silence ensues, and then... “You’re not in this book at all. That means you saw no reason to accept my offer of full and free forgiveness through the blood of the Lamb. You wanted to go it on your own, and that’s where you are now – on your own. Though my gift is eternal life, the wages of sin is death!”*

Paul wrote to Titus about “good works” and where they fit into the Christian life. He couldn’t be more emphatic that we’re not saved by human effort.

*Not by **works** of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost **Titus 3:5***

But on the other hand, he tells us to...

*...show a pattern of good works; be zealous of good works; and be careful to maintain good works. **Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14***

The other thing that helps us not fall into the *Performance Trap* is to remember not to “perform” in order to try to get God to love us. He already loves you so completely, so passionately, so deeply that He couldn’t love you any more than He already does. Let your deeds of obedience be the *overflow* of your appreciation for His love and the reciprocation of it. He doesn’t love you because you’re good. He empowers you to be good because He loves you! Don’t strive to be good to make Him love you. Let Him live His loving life in you, and then be good out of gratitude.

- ***Doesn’t this emphasis lead to a kind of “nervous” Christianity?***

I was once a ninth grade Bible teacher in a Christian school. And as such, I gave quizzes and tests to the students. I had no intention of making them nervous or adding tension to their lives. I just wanted to spur them on to achieve their potential. I was trying to inspire them to prepare themselves. I took no pleasure in giving any of them a bad grade. I wanted all of them to ace the tests and the class. Most of all, I wanted them to know God and His Word better. Howard, also a former Bible College professor, says, “My students seem to learn more in the three days prior to a test than they do in the three weeks before! Knowing an exam is coming has a way of inspiring people to prepare.”

God isn’t trying to flunk you! He’s not trying to stress you out. He wants you to approach Him in heaven with confidence. He’s not interested in making you nervous - careful, circumspect, serious – yes, but not nervous.

- ***Since all our sins have been covered by the blood of Jesus – how could we be judged for them later?***

*But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation **Colossians 1:22***

If that’s true, about what could God find to judge us? If we’re righteous in His sight what is God able to scrutinize when we stand before Him? Does He call into question His own righteousness, which He imputes to us in salvation?

***First of all***, the sin that’s “covered by the blood of Jesus” is all the sin that you bring to Him for covering. He only covers what you uncover. It’s not so much *sin* that kills, it’s *unresolved sin* that’s deadly! Certainly you brought your past sin to Him when you came for salvation. That is all covered by His sacrifice – done deal! But the sin that we commit now as Christians (I often say that I’m not ‘sinless,’ but I am ‘sinning less and less’) must be brought to Him in confession (“*If we confess our*

*sins He is faithful and just to forgive us...*" 1 John 1:9). So, the sin that you commit as a follower of Jesus that remains yet un-confessed is not covered by the blood. I don't mean that you have to remember every particular sin at the end of the day and confess it. God is not requiring us to keep a minute-by-minute ledger of infractions. I'm talking more about living a lifestyle of repentance and keeping your accounts with God short.

**Secondly**, the Bema Seat is not a place of punishment per se. Punishment in hell is *separation from God*. Heaven not a place of separation. You're not going to heaven only to get *judged* for your sins – while God keeps His distance from you for the first 1000 years or so! But, on the other hand, on the way there you do get *evaluated* for the use of your talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and opportunities.

It seems to me that the issue at the Bema Seat is not *punishment from God* as a result of our sins, but the degree of the *pleasure of God* stemming from the use of our lives to glorify Him here on earth.

**Thirdly**, it's important for us to see that our actions *here* God's eternally ordained purpose for us.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:8-10*

You must know that when you disobey God as a Christian it does have an affect on how you use your God-appointed opportunities. If you are sinning when you should be pursuing some Kingdom opportunity, you're missing at least some of the good works God ordained in eternity that you should do. I call these "good works which God prepared in advance for us to do," *Eternally Ordained Opportunities* (EEO's). It's at those EEO's that we're picking up jewels – eternal treasures along the way and mailing them on to the heaven ahead of us.

## **God isn't trying to flunk you!**

One of the common terms in the Bible for sin is "trespass." It means to be *out of line*. Seen this way, sin keeps us from our *Eternally Ordained Opportunities*. It takes *off the path* where we were supposed to run into those opportunities to partner with God, do a "good work," and gather some eternal treasure. Insofar as we are off the path that He's ordained for us, we are missing our EEO's – at least until we get back on the path of obedience.

Will God forgive us for missing those good works ordained for us in eternity? Sure He will! Are we *punished* for those sins at the Bema Seat of Christ? No, I wouldn't call it *punishment*. But I do think we'll experience great *regret* for having missed some of our chances to glorify God while on earth. We'll get a picture of what could've been, and discover squandered potential. Our reward will be less than it was meant to be, and our position in eternity will be proportionately limited. Someone said, "We won't be in heaven for 2 seconds before we say, *"What was I thinking?! Why did I waste so much time on the temporal?!"*

• ***Isn't God "pleased" with all of His children, just because we're His children?***

*Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. Romans 8:8*

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. **1 Thessalonians 4:1**

Without faith it is impossible to please God. **Hebrews 11:6**

...do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. **Hebrews 13:16**

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. **Colossians 1:10-12**

We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. **1 Thessalonians 2:4**

... because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. **1 John 3:22**

But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. **Hebrews 10:38**

The Bible clearly teaches that God loves each of us, forgives everyone who asks for it, and patiently empowers us to live better and better lives for Him. He's certainly *pleased* with each of us in the same sense a parent (any good and sane parent, that is) is pleased that each of his children are his children. He's pleased to be our Father. He's pleased with who we are and passionately pursues each of us in order to offer a closeness with Him that He so yearns to have with us.

But if you carefully read the passages above, you'll have to admit that His being *pleased* with us is clearly connected with our *actions*. It's not simply based on our justification. He accepts us, receives us as legally righteous in His sight. He loves us even before He accepts us. But His *pleasure* with us has something to do with how we think, how we act, how treat others, and whether or not we do what He says.

We won't please Him if we're "*controlled by the sinful nature*"... There is a certain way to "*live in order to please Him*"... We can't please Him if we don't "*trust Him*"... When we "*do good and share with others*" we please Him... We please Him when we're "*bearing fruit in good works*" ... and when we "*do what pleases Him*"...

We won't be in heaven for 2 seconds before we say,  
*"What was I thinking?! Why did I waste so much time  
on the temporal?!"*

**Okay, so what do I do now?**

## 1 Corinthians 11:31

- *If we judged ourselves we would not come under judgment.* **NIV**
- *If we searchingly examined ourselves – detecting our shortcomings and recognizing our own condition – we should not be judged and penalty decreed [by the divine judgment].* **Amplified Bible**
- *If we get this straight now, we won't have to be straightened out later on. Better to be confronted by the Master now than to face a fiery confrontation later.*

**The Message Bible**

This is a serious topic with a serious application. It isn't one of those subjects that you can be content to banter about in theological debate for the fun of it. If it's true that our actions in this life will be evaluated by God; and that evaluation will determine our permanent position in the next life – then we'd better do whatever it takes to shore it up. In the passage above, Paul encourages us to *examine* ourselves regularly while here (test and quiz ourselves) to prepare for the *Final Exam* there. Do it regularly, do it honestly, do it repentantly, and ask others to help you do it by holding you accountable.