The Judgment Seat of Christ

"Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." 2 Cor 5:9–11

Among the many truths of the Bible which have suffered obscurity through the neglect of careful discrimination, few are more frequently misunderstood than the solemn doctrine of divine judgment. It has become a common persuasion that all mankind, without distinction, shall stand together in one identical judgment at the consummation of all things. Howbeit, the word of God, when reverently compared with itself, unfolds a more orderly manifestation of the divine economy. The Apostle here addresses not the unbelieving world, but the household of faith; and it is unto believers that he declares, with all the gravity of one who speaks beneath the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, **"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."**

Observe well the object of this august tribunal. It is not convened to determine the believer's justification, for that question was settled once for all at Calvary, where the Son of God bore in his own body upon the tree the condemnation due unto his redeemed. The Judgment Seat of Christ concerns not the possession of eternal life, but the stewardship of that life already bestowed. It is the solemn examination of Christian service, the Lord's estimate of faithfulness, obedience, and labor rendered unto him who purchased us with his own precious blood. **(Acts 20:28)**.

Hence, the Apostle declares, **"Wherefore we labour... that we may be accepted of him."** He speaks not of acceptance unto salvation, but of that gracious approval bestowed by the Lord upon the faithful servant. Every prayer offered in sincerity, every sacrifice made for Christ's sake, every hidden act of obedience, every faithful discharge of duty, every temptation resisted, every opportunity redeemed, every talent diligently employed, shall then receive its righteous evaluation

before him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, from whom no motive is concealed, and before whom every secret thing shall be brought into perfect light.

Equally solemn is the declaration that **"every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."** The Lord Jesus Christ is neither forgetful of faithful service nor indifferent to negligent stewardship. As surely as he rewards every labor performed for his name's sake, so likewise he shall faithfully reckon with every wasted opportunity, every neglected duty, every selfish ambition, and every work proceeding from flesh rather than faith. His judgment shall be perfectly righteous, altogether impartial, and wholly free from the errors, biases, and partialities which so often characterize the judgments of men.

Little wonder, then, that the Apostle immediately adds, **"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."** These words are not the language of servile dread, but of holy reverence before the majesty of him with whom we have to do. The realization that every believer must one day stand unveiled before the searching gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ imparted to Paul's ministry both urgency and earnestness. It should likewise awaken our own consciences from every form of spiritual indifference.

Nor do the holy scriptures leave this doctrine standing alone. The Apostle elsewhere teaches that **"every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire." (1 Cor 3:13)**. Fire tries not the foundation, but the structure erected thereon. The foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, secure beyond all possibility of failure; yet the superstructure of our earthly service shall be tested by the perfect measure of Jesus Christ That which has been wrought by faith, through grace, and for his glory shall abide; that which has

proceeded from pride, self-interest, or mere earthly ambition shall perish, though the believer himself shall be saved.

Thus, we learn that while salvation is the free gift of God's grace, reward is bestowed according to faithful service. The Apostle therefore exhorts the church of God:

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." (Col 3:23–24).

How searching is this consideration! Every unnoticed labor, every unseen act of devotion, every quiet faithfulness which escapes the observation of men is fully known unto him before whose tribunal we shall shortly stand. Equally, every neglected opportunity, every squandered hour, every talent buried through sloth, shall likewise appear beneath his all-discerning eye.

Brethren beloved, the days allotted unto our earthly journey swiftly hasten toward their appointed end. Time, once departed, returns no more. Opportunities, once neglected, cannot be recalled. The world continually whispers, "There is plenty of time," but eternity proclaims, "Redeem the time." Wisdom teaches us to live, not for the applause which expires with the present evil world, but for that blessed commendation which alone shall endure throughout eternity, namely, **"Well done, thou good and faithful servant." (Mt 25:21)**.

Let us therefore labor while it is still called "today." Let us serve with singleness of heart, walk circumspectly before our God, and persevere in every good work, remembering always that the eye which now observes in secret shall one day reward openly. Then, when faith has given place to sight, and every earthly stewardship has reached its conclusion, may we be found among those faithful servants who shall receive with exceeding joy the unfading crown from the hands of him whom, having not seen, we love.