
We All Must Stand...

Understanding and Preparing for the Day of Judgment

2020 Stacy Tyson | Truth Seekers Fellowship

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
so that each one may be paid back
according to what he has done while in the body,
whether good or evil.”
(2 Corinthians 5:10 NET)*

“That changes everything...”

A few years ago, I was teaching a study on the overarching plot and storyline of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Along the way, we would talk about key theological issues and topics that are significant to spiritual growth and maturity.

As we got into the final weeks of the study, I discussed some of the big issues of Eschatology, the study of the end times and last things. As we focused on *personal eschatology*—what will happen at the end of our lives in this present age—I began with the passage above, “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...*”

As I finished reading this verse, *a hand shot up.*

There was a man who sat right on the front row each week and it looked like he was trying to write down every word I said. He was in his mid-70s and told me that for most of his life he had been in a denomination where serious Bible study was not promoted and many of the things I was teaching from The Scriptures he had never heard before. At this point he asked me, “*That doesn’t apply to Christians does it??? We are not going to be judged are we???*”

“*Yes, we must all stand before Christ to give an account...*” I told him, and for the next half hour or so, I shared much of what is in the rest of these notes. As I taught what the Scriptures teach us about the Day of Judgment, the man just sat there, staring at me intently, forgetting to take his notes. As I finished, I looked at him and asked if that made sense or if he had any questions.

He sat back in his seat, face pale, eyes looking upward. Very slowly and soberly he said, “*That changes everything...*”

Setting Things in Context

Before reading through the rest of this discussion, I would encourage you to read through some of the core texts that we are going to base our discussion on. The most relevant and significant ones are:

- **Romans Chapters 1-8.** These chapters are critical to understanding the foundation of the New Testament's development of *salvation by being set right with God through faith*. If you need a "Cliff's Notes" version, focus on 1:17-23, 2:1-11, 3:10-20, 3:21-28, 4:1-8, 5:1-2, 5:6-11, 8:1-4, 8:31-38
- **1 Corinthians 4:1-5.** A very important passage about judgment and self-judgment.
- **2 Corinthians 5:9-21.** One of the most significant passages dealing with the "Judgment Seat of Christ" and our motivations to be pleasing to Christ in all things.
- **Ephesians 2:1-10 and Colossians 2:8-15.** Both of these passages, although dealing with different issues, explain the nature of our salvation as the foundation of our hope. These are critical in establishing a context for discussing judgment.

If I could sum this whole discussion up in one phrase it would be: *We are saved by grace through faith, but we will be judged/evaluated by our actions - what we have done in the time of our lives on earth.* We will spend the rest of our time unpacking this statement.

Defining the Key Truths Regarding the Judgment to Come

The idea of the "day of judgment" is often terrifying to those who do not know what the Scriptures clearly teach about this day. The truth about this Day should be a sobering reality for us, but it need not *terrorize* us—*especially if we belong to Christ*.

The Bible, and the New Testament specifically, makes it clear that there is a day of judgment coming:

Acts 17:30-31 "... God now commands all people everywhere to repent, 17:31 **because He has set a day when He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed.** He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead."

** Let me say right here at the beginning that the term "judgment" often carries a *negative* connotation to many people. When we say, "We will stand before Christ for judgment," we are not meaning judgment leading to condemnation or shame

- the way many people hear this statement. Judgment in the context of the final judgment simply implies an *evaluation*. We will have to give an account of our lives before Christ and He will *evaluate* - judge - if we have lived a life characterized by hope, faith, and love.

This passage from Acts 17 comes from Paul's famous speech at the Aeropagus on Mars Hill in ancient Athens. At this gathering of philosophers, Paul is asked to explain the Gospel he has been proclaiming centered in the Kingdom of God and the resurrection of Christ. In this speech, Paul addresses the four core worldview questions: 1) Where did we come from?, 2) Why are we here?, 3) Where are we headed?, and 4) How should we live. These questions provide the framework for understanding the *good news* centered in Christ.

At the end of the speech, in the verses quoted above, Paul addresses the issue of "Where are we headed?" or "Where is history headed?" The most important thing that the audience needs to hear is that *there is a day coming when God is going to judge the world*.

Four key points here:

1. God has set a **specific day** on which he will judge the world.
2. The standard of God's judgment will be **righteousness**.
3. **Jesus** is the man appointed to exercise this judgment.
4. Therefore, all people are called to **repent**—change their thinking about everything so that it is Christ-centered.

There is a lot here so let's take each of these four points and dig a little deeper and

1. There is a Day of Judgment coming for all people.

As Paul says in Acts 17:31, Father-God has set a day of judgment for all people. This day will come at the end of the age after Christ returns. We will see this reality reinforced in most of the passage we are going to look at from here on.

**There is an ongoing debate whether there will be one Judgment "day" of all people both righteous and unrighteous, or separate "days" of judgment - one for the righteous and one for the unrighteous. Although this is a serious debate and helpful insight are gained by pursuing the issues involved, for our purposes it is beyond the scope of this short treatment to work out all those issues. Also, debates like this can distract us from the PRIMARY lesson of Scripture: We must all stand before Christ to give an account and we need to be preparing for that day!*

2. The Standard of Judgment is Righteousness

In the Scriptures, righteousness is *thinking in the right way* (a product of repentance) and *doing* 1) the **right things**, 2) in the **right way**, 3) at the **right time**, 4) with **right motives**. Think about that for a minute or two. *How often do you get this right in everything you do?* We may practice two or three of those consistently, but the qualification of “right motives” is a tough one.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says that we are not equipped to judge others, or even ourselves, because we cannot clearly see all the factors necessary to give a just judgment:

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, **who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.**

Take note of the emphasis Paul places on “the purposes of the heart.” Jesus will expose all things and evaluate us all not just based on what we have done, but also on *why* we have done what we have done.

In Romans, Paul gives a more sobering explanation of the judgment to come:

Romans 2:6 He (God) will repay each one according to his works: 2:7 eternal life to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; 2:8 but wrath and indignation to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth but are obeying unrighteousness; 2:9 affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; 2:10 but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.

In this passage, those who are “persisting in doing good” are those who are seeking to practice righteousness - doing the things that are right in God’s eyes. Those who do these things are seeking glory, honor, and immortality. In the end, those who are persistently pursuing these things will receive glory, honor, and peace.

On the hand, there are those who are *self-seeking* (*self-focused*) and who *disobey the truth and obey unrighteous*. These people are not seeking what is good and righteous by God’s standards are seeking to do thing their own way. They will receive wrath, indignation, affliction and distress. In 2 Thessalonians Paul gives a very clear picture of what will happen to these people:

2 Thessalonians 1:7–10 ... the Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance **on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.** 1:9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 1:10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints...

Our goal in this brief discussion is to talk about the reality of the day of judgment for believers, *those who have placed their trust in Christ*. We will not be talking

about the judgment of the unrighteous. For now, all that needs to be said is that these passages make it clear those who have not trusted Christ will be excluded from His presence and will not inherit the peace and joy of The Kingdom that is to come.

If these passages on righteousness were all that we had, we might have cause to be worried. As Paul highlights in Romans 3:10-11, “There is no one who is righteous, no, not one; No one understands, no one seeks for God...” He goes on to say that, “**by the works of the Law** (*what we do*), **no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight**” (Romans 3:20).

So now, we have a real problem: *if God is going to judge us based on what we have done and we are in and of ourselves incapable of doing what is good and right then there is no way we could survive the judgment.*

This is the exact place that Paul wants us to get to in our thinking. In Romans chapters 1-3, Paul makes the strong argument that *we are not saved or set right with Father-God by doing supposed good works*; He requires something else.

In Romans 3:21 Paul begins to discuss the truth for what sets us right with God:

Romans 3:23–25 ... **for all have sinned and fall short** of the glory of God, 3:24 and **are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**, 3:25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, **to be received by faith.**

There are three big ideas here all brought together:

1. We have **ALL sinned and fallen short** of Father-God’s goal for us: to reflect His glory.
2. We are *justified*—set right with God—**by His grace as a gift**. This is something that Father-God has provided for us. He gives it to us without cost to us.
3. We are justified—set right with God—**through the redemption that is in Christ**. Although we have not paid any cost or price for this blessing, Jesus Christ has paid an enormous price: *His life*. That is the meaning of the word *redemption*. In Biblical terms, to redeem something is to pay a price to get it back or take ownership of something or someone. *Jesus has paid for our salvation through His blood, the cost of His life!* We will return to this core truth a little later. These ideas are also associated with the word *propitiation*. A propitiation is *a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God against sin and unrighteousness. Jesus sacrifice on the Cross has accomplished everything necessary for us to be set right with Father-God and fully accepted by Him!*
4. We **receive** all of this *by faith*. We cannot work or do good things to earn all of these blessings. Instead, we *receive* them by faith.

Paul makes the case for that last point—*receiving* the blessing of justification and salvation through faith in Romans 4:

Romans 4:3–8 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” 4:4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 4:5 **And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ...**

One of the clear teachings in the New Testament, and especially in Paul’s letters, is that we are **justified**—*set right with God*—through faith. To be more specific, we are saved and set right *by Grace through Faith*:

Ephesians 2:8 For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ...

Those *prepositions* are very important: we are saved *by* grace. This the *causality* of our salvation and being set right with God—His grace and mercy. We are saved *through* faith. This is the *instrumentality of, the way in which we receive*, the blessing of salvation.

So let’s bring this back to where we started our discussion of righteousness. When we trust Christ—place our faith in Him—Father-God declares that we have done the 1) right thing, 2) in the right way, 3) at the right time, 4) with the right motives! This is what Paul means by saying our faith is *counted* as righteousness.

Now let me say a brief word about that word *faith*. I would make the case that in the Bible, *faith is not just believing certain facts* about someone or something. Faith, when directed toward God, means that we are *trusting Him*. **We are trusting Father-God to save us and accept us fully through what Christ has done for us.** As we have heard several times at this point, we are *receiving* what Father-God has done for us in Christ through faith.

The Forgiveness Factor

In Romans 4, Paul goes on to say,

Romans 4:6 ... David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:
4:7 “Blessed are those **whose lawless deeds are forgiven,**
and whose sins are covered;
4:8 blessed is the man against whom
the Lord will not count his sin.”

Here, Paul is quoting King David from Psalm 32:1-2. If you know the story of David, you know that he knows something about blessing and forgiveness! His words here are powerful: the blessing of salvation means that our lawless (unrighteous, sinful) deeds are *forgiven* and the Lord *will not count these sins against us!!!!*

The word translated as “forgive” in the New Testament means “to release” or “set free.” When Father-God forgives us, *He is setting us free from the debt, guilt, and condemnation that our sins deserve.* As David says there, we are blessed because *the*

Lord will not count our sins against us! Keep that in mind; it is a major point and we will come back to it a little later.

3. We must all stand before Christ for judgment.

Going back to our main points from Acts 17, we have to understand that we must all *appear* before the “Judgment seat of Christ”:

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

The idea of a “judgment seat” (*bēma* in Greek) is taken from the Roman culture of the New Testaments time and refers to a raised platform with a seat from which rulers would address an assembly and pass judgments. Paul says that everyone will *appear* before Christ’s judgment seat to be “paid back” for what they have done “in the body” which means during our life here on Earth.

Take note that Paul says we will be *paid back*—recompensed—for what we have done, whether good or evil. This has caused problems and worries for some due to improper interpretations of this passage.

One particular teaching has circulated which taught that *only believers* would appear before Christ at his “judgment seat.” You may have heard this referred to as the “*Bēma Seat of Christ.*” There is a huge problem with this view, however. Based on what we have just discussed, Father-God has *forgiven* us our sins—set us free from the debt and guilt of those sins—so *why would He “repay” us for what those sins deserve at the judgment?* That line of thinking does not fit with the over-arching message of the New Testament.

The better way to interpret this passage is to see that the “we all” refers *all people* and not *just* all believers. So, everyone, whether believer or not, must appear before Christ. Those who have not trusted Christ, who have not received the gift of forgiveness will be paid back for the *evil* they have done.

It is clear that Paul means “all people” in this verse because he goes on to say, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, *we persuade others* ... we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. *We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*” (2 Corinthians 5:11-20). Paul is persuading and imploring *all people* to be reconciled with God in Christ. Without this reconciliation—being at peace with Father-God—no one will be able to survive the day of judgment.

Christ: Our Savior and Intercessor

The fact that we must appear before Christ should be a comforting idea. Hear these words and let them sink in:

Romans 8:1, 31-34 There is therefore now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** ...

What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can**

be against us? 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him [Christ] up for us all, how will he not also with Him [Christ] graciously give us all things? 8:33 Who shall bring any charge against God's chosen? **It is God who justifies.** 8:34 Who is to condemn? **Christ Jesus** is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, **who indeed is interceding for us.**

This passage is so incredibly important and absolutely amazing! First, Paul repeats that there is ***no condemnation for those who are "in Christ."*** In Paul's letters, to be "in Christ" is to be someone who has trusted Christ and place their ultimate confidence in Him to save us completely. Father-God placed us "in Christ" when we trusted Him. We could spend a long time discussing this critically important truth. For now, just understand that *when you trust Christ, spiritually you are placed "in Christ" so that what is true of Christ is true of you!*

What does this mean? *When we stand before Christ, He will not condemn us!* Paul goes on to expand this truth at the end of the chapter by raising some key questions: Who could be against us? Who could bring a charge against us? Who could condemn us? The answers are staggering.

Father-God is the only one who has right to be *against us*. But what has He done? He has given up His one-of-a-kind Son—Jesus—for us so that He can give us all things in Christ Jesus! Father-God is also the only one who has any right to bring any type of charge against us, and yet He is the one who *justifies* us—declares us to be "in the right" when we trusted Christ!

Jesus is the only one who could condemn us and yet what does He do? He died for us and was raised from the dead *for us!!!!* Even more than that *Jesus is now at the right hand of God interceding for us!* He is our advocate who pleads our case for us so that we will never be condemned! Father-God and our Lord Jesus Christ are for us, not against us and have blessed us beyond all comprehension through their grace and mercy.

Based on this passage alone, we should take heart and realize that the thought of appearing before Christ's judgment seat should not be a terrifying idea. *He has already given His life for us, why would He turn against us?*

We Will Be Blameless

If you have been paying close attention, you may have picked up on the reality that almost all that is "done" to accomplish our salvation has been "done" for us by Father-God and Christ. One of the ways Christ's people are represented in the New Testament is as His Bride. As such, He is preparing us for Himself:

Ephesians 5:25–27 Husbands, love your wives, **as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**, 5:26 **that he might sanctify her**, having **cleansed her** by the washing of water with the word, 5:27 **so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish [blameless].**

Christ has given Himself for us, to claim us as His own. He *sanctifies* us, which means He has set us apart for Himself and so made us *holy*. *He has cleansed us* by washing us in The Word—the Word of His Truth. The purpose and goal of all this is so that He can present us to Himself in splendor, holy and without blemish—which is to say in *glorious beauty*.

Take note: this is what Christ is doing *to us*. We are not doing this for ourselves! One of the foundationally important and astounding truths of the Scriptures is that Father-God and Christ take *full responsibility* in transforming us—turning us into the people they desire for us to be.

That last word, “blemish,” brings up another amazing truth. The word can also be translated as “blameless.” Take a look at the following passage and listen carefully to what Paul says:

1 Corinthians 1:2–9 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those **sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints** together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1:4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, ... as you wait for the revealing of our **Lord Jesus Christ, 1:8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless/blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1:9 God is faithful**, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

As you may know, the church at Corinth was not a spiritually mature church by any stretch of the imagination. They are divisive, some are still practicing temple prostitution, one man is in an immoral relationship with his step-mother, and the list goes on ... Paul is going to address each of these issues in the letter.

Yet, he begins by calling these people *sanctified, called to be saints!* That *is* who they are “in Christ,” they have just not *realized* this yet: it is *spiritually* true of them even if it is not yet *experientially* true of them. In verses 7 and 8 Paul goes on to say that Jesus will sustain them to the end so that they will be *blameless/guiltless!* “The Day of our Lord Jesus Christ” is a way of referring to the return of Christ and all that “day” encompass, including the day of judgment.

Now think about that word: *blameless*. It means exactly what it sounds like. When we see Jesus and appear before Him, there will be nothing He will *blame* us for. Remember, there is no condemnation for those who are “in Christ.” In verse 9, Paul goes on to say, “*God is faithful...*” We can be assured that all of this is true because it is based on God’s faithfulness to us! As Paul says in Philippians:

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

In Colossians 1, Paul ties together several of the key truths we have been discussing:

Colossians 1:21–23 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 1:22 He [Christ] has now reconciled in His body

of flesh by His death, **in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him**, 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard,...

At this point, I think you can see that a strong case can be made for the reality that when we who are “in Christ” appear before Him at His judgment seat, we will be presented *blameless*.

What Will Happen at the Judgment Seat for Believers

With all of this in mind, what will happen when we appear before Christ. There are two key truths that help us get a clearer picture.

1. **All of our useless, sinful, evil deeds will be burned up and taken away.**

Several passages touch on this truth:

1 Corinthians 3:9–15 For we are God’s coworkers. You are God’s field, God’s building. 3:10 According to God’s grace that was given to me, I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder, and another builds on it. But each one must be careful how he builds on it. 3:11 For no one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ. 3:12 If anyone builds on that foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, 3:13 each one’s work will become obvious, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one’s work. 3:14 **If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward.** 3:15 **If anyone’s work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.**

Here Paul is talking about all the “work” that is done in the Church—the Body of Christ—like constructing a building. The foundation is Christ. Then everything we do is built on that foundation. Some things are done well and built up with valuable things (like gold and silver). Some are done poorly with poor things, like bad motives or incomplete, maybe false teaching (wood, hay, stubble). The Lord will test these works by “fire”—probably a figurative way of talking about His *standard of righteousness*.

Those actions and motives which have eternal value will be able to survive the test. Those which are not, will be burned up. Now this is the really significant part: *the things which remain will win a reward for us, the things which are burned up will be done away with, but the person will still be saved.*

This seems to take into account what we discussed when talking about forgiveness. The Lord will not hold our sins and worthless/useless deeds against us and they will not be paid back with punishment. *They will simply be burned up.* In fact, the Lord actually removes our sins from us:

Psalm 103:10–12

He [God] does not deal with us according to our sins,

nor repay us according to our iniquities.
 103:11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear him;
 103:12 as far as the east is from the west,
so far does He remove our transgressions from us.

Again we see, the Lord-God does not deal with us as our sins deserve and He does not and will not “pay us back” based on our *iniquities*—evil, wicked deeds. He loves us and removes from us the debt and guilt that our sins deserve.

“Fearing the Lord” means to have an *awesome respect* for Him and taking His Word to us seriously. It does not mean being afraid of Him and some terrible tyrant—that is ungodly fear. *Godly fear* motivated out of love and respect for Father-God, living in a way that is *pleasing* to Him. We will return to this in just a bit.

2. We will receive reward and praise for our good, righteous deeds.

In the 1 Corinthians 3:14 that we just read, Paul says that if anyone’s work survives the “fire” of judgment, that person will receive reward. It is beyond the scope of this short work to fully discuss the “rewards” mentioned in the New Testament promised to faithful believers. For now, let me just say that these rewards all relate to a *secure* and *significant* relationship with Jesus, ruling and serving *with* and *for* Him in The Kingdom to come.

In fact, in 1 Corinthians 6 Paul reveals something that is incredible:

1 Corinthians 6:2–3 ...don’t you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest cases? 6:3 **Don’t you know that we will judge angels**—not to mention ordinary matters?

Jesus going to give us some responsibility in judging the *world*—the people who are not believers—and *angels*!

There is one other passage in 1 Corinthians that is significant for this discussion:

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 4:2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 4:3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4:4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 4:5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Here, Paul is talking about his ministry as an Apostle—someone hand-picked by Jesus to take His Gospel into all the world and be witnesses for Him. The Apostles are the “us” in the 4:1. The Apostles were a foundational part of the early church, of primary significance in Jesus’ mission. Yet here Paul says they are simply

“servants” and “stewards.” A *steward* is someone who has been entrusted with something that belongs to someone else. In this case, Paul and the other Apostles were entrusted with the *mysteries* of God. Those “mysteries” were the truths that Father-God had kept secret until the appearance of Christ and now Christ has revealed those truths. It was the responsibility of Paul and the other Apostles to take those truths to the “ends of the Earth.”

Now take note of what Paul says next, the most important *virtue* for a steward is to *faithful*—to complete the task that has been given to him. Faithfulness is the standard for judgment. When Paul appears before Christ, his *faithfulness* will be evaluated.

Until that day, Paul is not worried about being judged—*evaluated*—by anyone else and he doesn’t even judge himself! It is the Lord Jesus who judges and only He can judge properly. Notice, Paul is not aware of any way in which he is not being *faithful*, but he is not acquitted based on his own judgment. Instead, he waits for the Lord to judge.

Now Paul gives some instruction for us all: *don’t pass judgment before Christ comes!* In other words, *it is not up to us to evaluate and praise or condemn ourselves or other peoples work.* When Jesus comes, He will bring to light—*illuminate*—what we cannot “see” now: the things hidden in darkness and the *purposes/motives* of our hearts!

There are things we do that no one sees except the Lord. Our deeper motives are also unknown to others, and some times that are not even clear to us. Jesus will bring all these things to light and they will factor in to His evaluation of all that we have done. Remember our standard of righteousness? It is important to do the right things with the *right motives*.

In a similar passage, Paul reiterates several of these truths:

Romans 14:10–13 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? **For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;** 14:11 for it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God.”

14:12 **So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.** 14:13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Paul finishes his thought in 1 Corinthians 4 with the conclusion, “*then each will receive his commendation from God.*” If you look at different translations, you will see they deal with that word “commendation” differently. Some say “praise,” others “recognition.” The point is that Father God will praise us for the things we have done in faith. Paul does not mention any punishment or retribution in this passage, only recognition and acknowledgment of our faithfulness.

4. The Gospel Calls Us To Repent: *The Personal Revolution*

Everything we have talked about so far is critically important in laying a foundation of truth that leads us to hope and faith in Christ. And now here at the end, I hope you have a better understanding of the statement we made at the beginning: *we are saved by grace through faith; we will be judged by our actions - the way we have lived our lives.* Every passage dealing with the judgment to come has reinforced this basic idea.

As we close this discussion out, we come to the final “big idea” in Paul’s statement in Acts 17: because God has set a day of judgment, He now calls everyone, everywhere to *repent*. The word that Paul uses here, *metanoeo*, means “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness” (Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*).

In English, we have long associated “repentance” with the idea of being sorry, or having emotional sorrow. There is a word for that too, but this word *metanoeo* and its noun form *metanoia* mean something much more comprehensive as you can see in the definition above.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He too began with call to repentance:

Mark 1:14–18 ... Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, 1:15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent** and **believe** in the Gospel.”
 1:16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 1:17 And Jesus said to them, “**Follow me, and I will make you** become fishers of men.” 1:18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

I have taught and written on this passage in more detail elsewhere. For now, let me give you the simple “recipe” Jesus Gives us here:

Hear >>>	Turn >>> (Repent)	Trust >>> (Believe)	Follow
We begin by hearing the Gospel - the good news of what Father-God is doing In Christ through the Holy Spirit.	We have to change the way we are thinking which changes the way we are living: <i>turning away</i> from any lies and false saviors.	We turn to Jesus as our Savior and Lord who has saved us, sustains us and leads us.	We follow Jesus with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as He leads us through the Presence and Power of His Spirit.

I call this “recipe” a reliable pattern for spiritual growth. It defines both the beginning of our conscious, living relationship with Christ, but it also sustains our

walk with Him as we are constantly being transformed into people who express more and more of our faith and hope in our actions. In other words, this pattern becomes our way of life.

A life of repentance, is a life characterized by *hope in Christ by trusting in Christ and expressing the love of Christ*:

1 Thessalonians 1:2–3 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 1:3 remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Going back to the passage in 2 Corinthians 5, a life of repentance is characterized by the motivation to be pleasing to Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:9

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him.

Another passage that encourages us to live in a way that is pleasing to Christ and gives us practical advice on how we can do that is 2 Peter 1:

2 Peter 1:2–11 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 1:3 **His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us** to his own glory and excellence, 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Peter begins by reminding us that we have everything we need for “life and godliness” through the **knowledge of Christ** and **His great promises**. The term Peter uses here for “knowledge” is not just basic knowledge, like knowing facts about something or someone; this is *knowing someone deeply and personally*.

Peter then goes on to encourage us to actions that are “eternally valuable”:

2 Peter 1:5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with **virtue (excellence)**, and virtue with **knowledge**, 1:6 and knowledge with **self-control**, and self-control with **steadfastness**, and steadfastness with **godliness**, 1:7 and godliness with **brotherly affection**, and brotherly affection with **love**.

These are the qualities that are pleasing to Father God and Christ. In fact, they are the very characteristics that describe the character of Christ Himself! Now, Peter gives us the outcomes of living in this way:

2 Peter 1:8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1:9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Throughout the New Testament, there are warnings for believers to make sure they are living in a such a way that is focused on Christ and the coming Kingdom.

We want to be doing the things that are *eternally effective and fruitful*. And take note: we need to possess these qualities AND they should be growing, increasing! In others words, we are always growing in the expression of our faith.

Finally, as we practice these things, we can be assured that we will be richly welcome by Christ:

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 1:11 **For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

I think this is one of the most important passages in the whole New Testament, giving us a perspective on the way we should be living.

A Few Sober Reminders...

If you read through the New Testament carefully, you will see that as Christ's people - the Church, the household of God - we are called to live soberly aware of the day of judgment that is coming:

1 Peter 4:17-18 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 4:18 And
 "If the righteous is scarcely saved,
 what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, Christ sends 7 letters to 7 churches preparing them for His return and appearing. I believe those 7 churches were picked by Christ because they represent 7 "types" of churches that have existed all through church history. In 5 of these letters, there are issues that call for repentance. Christ is "warning" His people to be sober minded about these eternal issues.

Finally, John has an exhortation to us all in his first letter:

1 John 2:28 So now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

First, John call us to "remain in Him." This is his "shorthand" way for saying continue to live all of life in a way that we are defined by our hope, trust, and love of Christ. The reason for this is so we may have *confidence* when Christ appears, and not be ashamed.

This *confidence* that John is talking about was modeled by Paul in the 1 Corinthians 4 passage we looked at earlier. Paul was living in such a way that he was not conscious of anything he was doing that would not be pleasing to Christ. He was being faithful to what he was called to do. In all the passages we have looked at, we too can have confidence as we seek to be faithful in all things.

Paul tells us in Romans 14:23 that, “*Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*” This is a vitally important truth. The whole of our lives should be characterized by an expression of our faith in Christ and faithfulness to the Way of life He has called us to. When our faith is firmly focused on Him, we can be confident that when He appears, He will be pleased with us.

But John also contrasts this with being “ashamed” at Christ’s appearing. In the culture of John’s day, his audience would have most likely understood this “shame” in terms of putting hope in *the wrong person* or *the wrong thing*. How do we know if we are “in Him” so that we can have confidence. Three questions may help:

1. Am I placing my **hope**—*confident expectation*—in the work of Father God in Christ through the Holy Spirit in me, or am I hoping in someone or something else?
2. Do I **trust Christ** completely, believing that He *has done* everything necessary for me to be right with Father God and so enabling me to live in a way that is pleasing to Him?
3. Does **the love of Christ** control me so that I am able to think of others first and serve them as Christ has given His life for me?

As I close these notes out, I hope they have been both sobering and encouraging. I hope this brief study has emphasized the reality that the Day of Judgment is a sobering truth, but not one that should rattle our faith or cause ungodly fear. We can have *confidence* that we will be accepted completely when we see Christ face to face. But we also realize that we may suffer loss on that day: the eternally worthless things we have done will be “burned up.”

Again, *we are saved by grace through faith, but our lives will be judged according to our works*. Knowing this should encourage us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus with an “eternal perspective” - *what we do with our lives truly matters*. Knowing that we must all stand before Him to give an account of how we have lived *changes everything*.

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely. And may your spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

5:24 **He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**