

# THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

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*"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall  
make you free" (Jn. 8:32)*

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## THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ has nearly reached the end of her earthly pilgrimage. She can look forward to an imminent reunion with her Lord at the wedding feast of the Lamb. But before this glorious feast can commence, each one of us has a very important appointment at the judgement seat of Christ where we will give account of ourselves.

At the judgement seat of Christ, the works of believers will be tested by fire to determine whether they were spiritual or carnal. Rewards will be meted out to those who led fruitful and victorious lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, while carnal Christians will see all their works consumed, although they will be saved as by fire. They will be ashamed and empty-handed in the presence of the Lord who purchased them at such a costly price and to whom they were not fully committed in this life.

The apostle Paul describes the scene at the judgement seat where some Christians will be rewarded while others will stand there empty-handed:

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, *ye are* God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3 : 9-15).

A close study of the judgement seat of Christ reveals the following important facts with regard to the nature and purpose of this judgement:

## A fixed appointment

Christians are reminded that the judgements of God will begin in His house:

“For the time has *come* that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if *it* first *begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17).

In the first phase of the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, His church will face her Lord at the judgement seat. For this reason the church is repeatedly challenged to be prepared for this important appointment:

“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The ‘good works’, or fruit of the Holy Spirit, will be rewarded, while the ‘bad’ works that are human in origin, will be rejected. The word *bad* can also be translated as *futile* or *fruitless*. It indicates the useless works that are likened to wood, hay, and stubble.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul confirms the fact that the nature of Christians’ lives after their conversion will be examined by the Lord:

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ... So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10, 12).

## Believers only

Only believers will appear before the judgement seat. In 1 Corinthians 3:15 it is clearly stated that those whose works are consumed will still be accepted as redeemed. Works obviously have no bearing on redemption, because there is absolutely nothing that we can add to the perfect work of reconciliation by Christ on the cross:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2: 8-9).

At the judgement seat, all the believers will have one thing in common – the foundation of rebirth. This is the only basis for their acceptance by God. That is why Paul emphatically states in 1 Corinthians 3:11 that no one can lay a foundation other than the one which has been laid, that is, Jesus Christ. There is, therefore, no other means of reconciliation to God than faith in His Son Jesus:

“...for there is no other name under the heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

## **The basis for judgement**

We have already determined that the foundation of the new life is the common characteristic of all those who appear before the judgement seat. Because Christ has already borne the punishment for the sins of all believers, it is not expected of them to give account of their faith or of whether they are saved or unsaved. On this occasion a whole new criterion for judgement is applied – that of works. The Lord Jesus on this occasion seeks to determine what kind of life each Christian led after his redemption; to what extent he carried out his Lord’s commission to act as a witness and to let His light shine in a dark world.

Verses 11 and 12 of the passage quoted above reveal that the test which will be set will have widely divergent results – the works of some believers will be consumed, while the works of others will remain. This definitely indicates that there are two categories of works, of which only one is acceptable to the Lord. From these verses also emerges the important fact that it is indeed possible to lead a fruitless life after the foundation of rebirth, by doing things that are devoid of eternal value. It is therefore of the greatest importance that the Christian should know exactly how his works and way of life should be in order to pass the test.

## Carnal and spiritual

If it is true that Christians can so decisively be divided into two groups, one would surely expect to find clear verdicts on this issue in the Scriptures. Paul does indeed make this distinction just before he describes the judgement seat. He first refers to the *natural man* who does not accept the things of the Spirit of God because he cannot understand them and they are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). This applies to those people who still remain in their unsaved condition and therefore will not appear before the judgement seat of Christ, but will be judged according to their evil works at the great white throne after the second resurrection when they will be condemned to hell (Rev. 20:12-14).

By way of contrast he then refers to the *spiritual man* who has been reborn and lives his life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:15):

“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

This type of person bears fruit that befits salvation, therefore his work will remain and not be consumed in the fire. Spirit-filled people are definitely not without problems and setbacks, but they resist the evil and persevere in a life of sanctification.

Then Paul clearly refers to another type of Christian whom he calls the *carnal man*. Such people are not Spirit-filled but immature, carnal believers:

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able *to bear it*, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The Christians referred to in these verses are those who built onto the foundation of their salvation with wood, hay and stubble. They never experience any development or progress in their spiritual walk and are satisfied to remain indefinitely in a state of spiritual immaturity. We are seriously warned against this kind of spiritual stagnation – it is certainly not for this that we were saved. Paul says:

“...let us go on to perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (Heb. 6:1).

On the foundation of repentance a fitting structure should be erected to the glory of God. We are called upon to be not only hearers, but also doers of the word of God. A process of spiritual growth must be initiated by fully surrendering ourselves to the will of God; for it is to a life of dedication that the Church of Christ has been called:

“And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the [dishonesty] of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie and wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, *even* Christ” (Eph. 4:11-15).

## Works

In the light of the above it has now become possible for us to distinguish three broad categories of works. They emerge from different motivations and sources, and therefore have quite distinctive characteristics. These are the fruits in a person’s life that reveal his inner spiritual state. “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Mt. 7:16).

## 1. The evil and sinful works of those who are lost

“For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom. 7:5).

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11).

This group of people includes all who walk along the broad way: that is not only the heathens who never heard the gospel, but often highly civilised and decent people who are members of Christian churches, but have never accepted the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour. We find a description of such people who maintain a form of godliness despite the depravity of their evil hearts in 2 Timothy 3:1-5. They try to acquire their salvation by means of rituals such as baptism, or self-imposed moral laws, without really repenting and laying down their sins. They are building their lives on false foundations which, from God’s point of view, is like building your house on sand. It will certainly fall down when the storms of life are unleashed against it.

## 2. The works of carnal believers

Many Christians who have not surrendered the full control of their lives to the Holy Spirit, establish their own righteousness and try to serve the Lord in their human strength. However, the works of the uncrucified flesh are unacceptable to God as they stand in the way of the works of the Spirit:

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17).

Such a person leads a life that is characterised by ups and downs, in which free reign is given to failure and carnal weakness. There is sound, biblical advice to people who are perpetually motivated by the uncrucified ‘old man’:

“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust *of* the flesh” (Gal 5:16).



“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25).

To be able to do this, a full surrender is required of us. Every sin and human effort of self-righteousness that still separates us from the Lord, has to be confessed and forsaken. We have to commit ourselves to the Lord with an undivided heart in earnest prayer, in order to be filled with and used by His Spirit (Lk 11:13, Eph. 5:18).

### **3. The good works that flow from a Spirit-filled life and are accepted by the Lord**

We have to emphasise here that there is no question of a humanly inspired works-holiness in the sense that we wish to present our achievements to God in an effort to earn our salvation. The works we are referring to are those which have been worked out in our lives by the Holy Spirit:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10; see also James 2:14-26).

Only those works which the Lord has done *through* us, and not those which we have done in our own strength *for* God, will be able to stand the test. Our role is that of willing channels for His use.

“Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin: but yield yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13).

We are repeatedly encouraged to persist in good works of this kind, that we may glorify God through our lives and contribute towards the extension of His kingdom:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10).

## Watch and pray

In order to be in a perpetual state of readiness for the return of Christ, a spiritual life based on prayer and watchful service to the Lord is required. Peter said:

“But the end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Pet. 4:7).

“Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy [conduct] and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11).

In this regard, the apostle Peter is in close reference to the statements of the Lord Jesus, whose advice for spiritual readiness always remained the same, namely: *Watch and pray!* (Lk. 21:36).

We are called upon to pray and be alert always, but especially in times of crisis. In the garden of Gethsemane, when the forces of darkness descended on the little group of disciples, they fell asleep because they failed to appreciate the seriousness of the situation. What did the Master say to them?

“And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me for one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh *is* weak” (Mt. 26:40-41).

The same exhortation to vigilance applies with regard to the second coming of Christ:

“Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. *For the Son of man is* as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mk. 13:33-37).

There are people who argue that it is not really essential to watch and pray, seeing that it is not possible for a Christian to be lost once he has been saved. However, it is possible that a reborn child of God can regress in grace and fall back into a carnal state (Heb.12:15). In this way he can forfeit his reward, and stand before the judgement seat of Christ with empty hands.

The Robber is ever on the look-out to lay cunning traps for the active Christian. He often succeeds in his goal of distracting and diverting them from the great commission of world-evangelism. For this reason Christ repeatedly exhorts the Christians to be watchful lest anyone should steal their crown (Rev. 3:11 and 16:15).

To remain steadfast as Christians amid the utter depravity of the end times, we have to keep on watching and praying and fighting the good fight of faith. We have to realise that the way along which we have to follow our Lord is a narrow and steep one, and that no lukewarm believer or uncommitted warrior will reach the goal victoriously.

Many Christians do not stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and fall back into some of their old weaknesses and sins. The Galatians, for instance, returned to a legalistic way of life. Paul is clearly concerned about this regression:

“Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? *If it be yet in vain*” (Gal. 3:3-4).

It is the tragedy of our day that so many believers do not experience sufficient growth and are evidently satisfied to lead a life of defeat. In this way they not only undermine their life's calling as ambassadors for Christ, but also discourage other people who might have been ready to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

There is but one solution to this problem. Only a complete surrender to Christ can transform lukewarm, sluggish and inefficient Christians into people consumed with zeal

and a burning desire to serve the Lord. It also has to be fully comprehended that total surrender is not a one-off occurrence like the step of rebirth which signifies the start of the Christian pilgrimage, but a step which often has to be renewed and reconfirmed. Holiness and self-denial must become a way of living:

“And He said to *them* all, If any *man* will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk. 9: 23).

Let us joyfully proceed with the journey and,

“...seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easlily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith” (Heb. 12:1-2).

As we approach the finishing line and draw closer to the goal with every passing day, we must reach new heights of perseverance and commitment:

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he who is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:11-12).

## CROWNING

The New Testament often refers to the promise of the Lord Jesus that He will reward His faithful servants after His second coming. It is His heartfelt desire that all Christians should exert themselves in this regard, because striving for a crown contributes to the motivation and spiritual idealism which are required in order to constructively persevere to the end. It also emphasizes the principle that we have to be continually clothed in the full armour of God in the struggle against the forces of darkness, in order not to be hampered

in our growth and stand spiritually impoverished and empty-handed in front of the judgement seat of Christ. For this reason the following advice is given to every Christian:

“Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3: 11).

The Scriptures abound in promises of reward for the faithful servants of the Lord. It serves as a special encouragement to those who find themselves in difficult circumstances and are suffering severe affliction. It is also a rich source of inspiration which fills the weary traveller with strength and zeal to persevere in the struggle. It creates in the Christian a living expectation of a glorious and incorruptible heavenly kingdom that awaits those who were willing to make significant sacrifices for the sake of Christ and His kingdom (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 8:17).

Hebrews 11 confirms the fact that the spiritual vista of the life to come was a strong motivating force in the lives of the world's greatest heroes of the faith. They derived strength from the promises of God to resist against the injustices of their day and also not to love their own lives to the point of death. Because of this same conviction, Moses chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, and considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, because he looked forward to the reward (Heb. 11: 25-26).

The following promise was made to all the warriors of Christ who have in this way assumed their positions in the front line:

“But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put on you no other burden. But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations” (Rev. 2:24-26).

## Categories of service

The Bible identifies five broad categories of service against which the granting of rewards are measured. These works are collectively called *the righteous deeds of the saints* and are compared to gold, silver and precious stones because they withstand the test of fire of Christ's judgement. As the fruit of the Holy Spirit they have the stamp of incorruptibility.

It is evident that these works essentially originate from God. Man is an important co-worker with God in this regard, because he is the channel through which the works of his Father take on a visible form on this earth. Each Christian saves up a treasure in heaven which will be awarded to him with the second coming of Christ, in direct relation to the extent to which he committed himself to the pursuance of his divine calling.

## U The crown of life for martyrs

The crown of life is destined as reward for those who have laid down their lives for their faith. This also applies to all who were severely afflicted and who bore the insult of Christ through suffering, beating and ridicule.

According to Colossians 1:24, the martyrs are seen as partakers in the suffering and afflictions of Christ because they are in the heart of the battle against the forces of darkness. This kind of service is precious to God and the oppressed are encouraged to accept their suffering joyfully:

“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

This promise is addressed to the church in Smyrna. Smyrna means *bitterness* and as such it is representative of the bitter suffering of the persecuted church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages. The ten days in prison evidently refers to the age of fanatical religious persecution which characterised the reign of ten consecutive Roman emperors, from

Nero in 64 AD to Diocletian in 312 AD. The property of the Christians was confiscated and robbed, they were kept in prison under precarious conditions, many were thrown to the lions in the big arenas in Rome, while many others were burned at the stake.

The emperor Constantine's acceptance of the Christian faith early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century didn't bring a permanent end to the persecution. Medieval Europe gradually became the scene of intensified action against Christians who refused to accept the authority of the Roman Church. Many holy wars were waged and the persecuted Christians fled to desolate parts of the Alps where they sought refuge in caves.

There have always been faithful servants of Jesus who risked their safety and even their own lives to keep the flame of the faith burning in a hostile world. They realised and accepted the full implication of Christ's words when He said that He would send His disciples out as lambs in the midst of wolves (Lk. 10:3). In the world they would be hated and persecuted (Jn. 16:33, 17:14), but like the three friends of Daniel in the furnace, they would never be forsaken.

The Protestant reformation in Europe also claimed a frightfully high price in the blood and tears of Christian martyrs – Hebrews 11:32-40 was almost literally rewritten in the histories of these heroes of the faith. They had such an important and far-reaching influence on the survival and furthering of the Christian gospel that some historians claim that our present (or past?) religious freedom can to a large extent be ascribed to the unwavering testimonies of French Huguenots who sealed their faith with their lives.

The persecution was to increase in scope and severity and, under the onslaught of communism, claim the lives of more martyrs in the twentieth century than the previous nineteen centuries put together. When communism started to crumble, fundamental, evangelical Christians started to encounter increasing hostility from human rights movements, secular or interfaith governments, radical Islam and various interfaith alliances that are gaining much power in

the world. The popular religious trend in the world today is the New Age philosophy that all religions worship the same God and that we have to accept each other as brothers and sisters in the faith. Fundamental Christians are increasingly branded as uncompromising rebels who resist true unity by refusing to take hands with the other religions.

It is under gloomy circumstances such as this that the true worth of the Christian faith is powerfully manifested. It is imperishable in the midst of the strongest persecution and to many people remains the highest aspiration in life. Its inherent strength is evidenced by the fact that some of the most cruel oppressors were conquered by the divine power of love while helpless victims were praying for them.

The gospel of salvation did not reach us in an easy or cheap way. It was confirmed by the testimonies of millions of martyrs who laid down their lives for it. They sealed it with their blood and in this way made a major contribution to its survival. Through their heroic actions they confirmed the validity and truth of our faith beyond any doubt. In critical situations they were ever ready to pay the highest price to defend the Christian faith against the vicious, satanically inspired attacks which are aimed at its total annihilation.

It is clear that costly sacrifices for the sake of the gospel are also required in countries where no religious persecution occurs. The Lord often allows difficult afflictions in the lives of people to test their faith, mostly in the form of sickness, financial setbacks or other disappointments, in order to emphasise their deep dependence on Him and to give them the opportunity to take a clear Christian stand in life (2 Cor. 1:3-10). Those who do not become bitter or despondent as a result of this, but allow themselves to be purified and uplifted by the trials and afflictions, will also receive a crown from the Lord:

“Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (Jas. 1:12).



## U The imperishable crown for a holy life

The heroic conduct of martyrs who were in the deepest and most terrible anguish has often been an encouragement to lukewarm and backslidden Christians to recommit their lives towards increased service and holiness.

“Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith;” (Heb. 12:1-2).

The image of the Christian as participator in a race, with a set goal to be crowned as victor at the end of the race, must have occurred to Paul while he was attending the Olympic or Isthmian games in Greece. Hence his remark to the Corinthians:

“And everyone [who competes *for the prize*] is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not [with] uncertainty; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away” (1 Cor. 9:25-27).

It must have struck Paul that athletes not only commit themselves wholeheartedly to severe fitness programs, but also abstain from anything which might negatively influence their performance. This is essentially also what sanctification means – to lead a pure, disciplined life in which the individual abstains from all habits and activities that can damage his spiritual life. Paul once again challenges the Corinthians in this regard in his second letter, indicating that our body *and* spirit must be cleansed:

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

Sanctification implies more than purifying a person's life from his sin and unrighteousness. It also implies the laying down of burdens which may not be sins as such, but which prevent a person from serving the Lord wholeheartedly. The devotion of time, money and energy to things that are not really important to our everyday needs, and do not directly further the kingdom of heaven, stunt our spiritual growth and can even extinguish it totally. These stumbling-blocks must urgently be removed.

It is only when a person totally denies and crucifies his old life which was so entirely focused on perishable earthly ideals, that he meets the conditions of a full surrender and will be filled with the Holy Spirit:

“As obedient children, not [conforming] yourselves to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all [your conduct] because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

The Lord wants to purify our whole life, to fill it with His Holy Spirit and set it apart for His service (Rom. 6:13). His desire is that even the most hidden thoughts of our hearts should be acceptable in His sight (Ps. 19:15), so that He can have full control of every facet of our lives and thought processes. Only then can we be transformed into examples of His holiness, and can our lives be a positive witness and shine like stars in this dark world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Lev. 10:3; Phil. 2:14-15).

This is also the apostle Paul's wish for the church and he assures them that, even though God's command to holiness is so far outside of the reach of man, He will make it a reality in the lives of all Christians who are unconditionally committed to Him:

“And *may* the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do *it*” (1 Thes. 5:23-24).

Only along the path of sanctification can Jesus Christ in all His excellence be manifested in the lives of His disciples. This experience of being clothed with the Lord Jesus also renders them well enough prepared to be introduced to Christ at the wedding feast of the Lamb in bright and clean linen, without spot or blemish (Rev. 19:7-8).

## **U The crown of rejoicing for soul winners**

World evangelisation was the most important task that the Lord Jesus committed to His disciples:

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15).

This commission applies to all Christians of all ages. Because the survival of the church on earth is so dependent on evangelisation and missionary work, it is expected of each member to be involved in this task in some capacity. It has never been easy to spread the message of Christ in a hostile world, therefore, the messengers are supplied with the necessary divine equipment:

“But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Although other disciples had already moved into Samaria with the gospel message, Paul laid the foundation for the church among the Gentiles. He took exceeding joy in the first people who repented and were saved on account of his preaching. To two of the congregations he said:

“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, *my* dearly beloved” (Phil. 4:1).

“For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 Thes. 2:19).

To everyone who leads lost souls to Jesus, the crown of rejoicing will be given at the judgement seat of Christ. This is a highly estimated calling in the kingdom of heaven, which is why soul-winners are compared to shining stars – they have brought the eternal light of Jesus Christ to a lost world where darkness prevails, so that others can find their way to Calvary and a new life.

“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

## **U The crown of glory for faithful shepherds**

The spiritual nurturing and edification of the flock is a very important aspect of Christian service that was ordained by Christ Himself and will eventually be rewarded by Him:

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for [dishonest gain], but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God’s* heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

The pastoral aspect is often undervalued by spiritual workers who measure the results of preaching only in terms of the number of decisions that were made for Christ. It is true that this first step of salvation is very important, but the Bible also teaches that second-phase work demands even more time and commitment. While people are reborn immediately upon receiving the Lord Jesus as Saviour, years of spiritual edification and development are needed before they are able to take the initiative and become Christian leaders. The great commission clearly provides for edification to follow on first phase evangelism:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19).

Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months to provide the believers with more advanced training in the Word of God (Acts 18:11). Peter, who received the emphatic order to tend the flock of the Lord (Jn. 21:15-17), devoted a lot of care to the spiritual maintenance of converts by means of regular visits and temple service (Acts 2:37-47).

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them *food* in due season? Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods” (Mt. 24:45-47).

## **U The crown of righteousness for those who love the appearing of Christ**

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me on that day: and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

It might appear strange that the Lord should specially reserve a crown as reward for a spiritual activity which apparently relates to nothing more than an attitude. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that much more than an attitude is involved. The expectation of the second coming provides a total perspective within which Christian service should be approached and carried out.

The eye should continuously be kept on Jesus who has promised to return soon and to reveal His heavenly kingdom in glory. Christians should be aware of this fact to the extent that it continuously gives purpose and direction to their daily life and work. The concept of the second coming contains a special motivation to be serviceable. It adds a dimension of urgency to evangelical and pastoral service. It is also a strong incentive towards sanctification in the sense that everyone who has the hope of the appearance of Christ in him, purifies himself just as He is pure (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

The example of the martyrs clearly illustrates that the Christian's expectation for the future provides a steady anchor for his soul as well as a conscious connection to the next life. In his moments of deepest distress and suffering, comfort and inspiration are derived from the knowledge that the way of the cross does not end at the grave, but certainly and undoubtedly leads to the resurrection and a new life:

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory... For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our [habitation] which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 4:16-17; 5:2).

When the Christian's spiritual perspective starts to fade, his attitudes and actions immediately become directed at the pursuit of secular goals. His spiritual calling to world evangelisation and the edification of the church fades ever further into the background and is increasingly replaced by social, economical and political activities. In this way the 20<sup>th</sup> century church is held in thrall by an attitude of sheer materialism which shows little or no concern for the spiritual poverty of our day (Rev. 3: 17).

The healthy interaction that should exist between our relationship with God and our relationship with our fellow men becomes disrupted on account of our loss of vision, and disintegrates into a humanistic involvement in the secular misfortunes of the peoples and nations around us. This results in a search for political, economical and even military solutions, without recognising the clear spiritual dimension which underlies these problems.

The only solution for the serious and widespread problem of secularisation is found in a restored spiritual perspective. Prof. H. du Plessis says:

“Only when the faith of the church is focused far above the horizon of the world, on the coming of the kingdom, on the second coming of Christ, only when the believer understands

his purpose within the kingdom and is willing to be used in this regard, does the conviction exist that all our labour in this regard is not in vain, and are we safeguarded against a secularised life” (*Science of Mission Today*, p. 89).

## Christ the centre

Paul could confidently write to the church in Phillipi:

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making requests with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He that hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:3-6).

So should it also be with us, because good works are what Christ, as centre of the new creation, has prepared for us. He explained this principle as follows to His disciples:

“He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

In true Christian service, there is no room for rejoicing in our own achievements. The crowns which will be awarded at the judgement seat of Christ, will eventually be laid down before the throne of the Lamb in acknowledgement and deep gratitude (Rev. 4:9-11).

Still, the promises of reward for our labour serve a positive purpose in motivating us towards dedicated action. The Lord has a glorious plan for world evangelisation which He has entrusted to His church, and He is counting on us to accomplish it. It would have been very easy for God to bring His works to pass in a direct and spectacular way, but He chooses to do it by means of His church, thus perfecting His power in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

It is the desire of the Father that every Christian be involved in the furthering of His kingdom on earth, hence the many and urgent challenges toward a life of dedication.

## THE WAY TO FULLNESS

Since sanctification is such a critical concept in preparing ourselves to appear before the judgement seat of Christ, a closer examination of this doctrine is necessary.

Already in the first five books of the Bible we find the basic guidelines for the process of sanctification, where the people of God are led step by step from the slavery of Egypt into the freedom of the Promised Land. In his first letter to the Corinthians (10:1-13), Paul clearly explains that Israel's journey to the Promised Land does not have historical value only, but that "all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11). We can, therefore, expect to find in the early history of Israel a clear reflection of the Christian's pilgrimage to the abundant life.

### **Egypt – enslaved to sin**

The sojourn in Egypt is a typical portrayal of the natural or ungodly person who is dead and in his bondage to sin. He is a captive of the world and is driven to certain ruin and destruction by merciless slave-drivers. He cannot free himself from the power and domination of the enemy and is therefore obliged to turn to God in this hopeless situation:

“And it came to pass in the process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage” (Ex. 2:23).

### **Salvation – a miracle of God**

Because of their lamentations, God took pity on the people and sent a man to free them from the bondage of slavery. All of them who were liberated and started the journey to the Promised Land, experienced the joy of the wonderful salvation of God. They were amazed to behold the mighty deeds of His redemption that allowed them to move through the Red Sea without even wetting their feet.



“I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their [slaves]; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you walk upright” (Lev. 26:13).

In New Testament terms, this dramatic exodus from Egypt can be compared to the salvation or rebirth of a sinner. The lamb without blemish which was to be slaughtered by the children of Israel on the night before the exodus is a type or shadow of the Lamb of God who through His death took away the sins of the whole world (Jn. 1:29).

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain [conduct] received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

This last sacrifice was also made during Passover and brought new life to a host of people from every nation, tongue and tribe – and the beginning of a spiritual pilgrimage to our eternal home.

## **The desert walk – conflict between the Spirit and the flesh**

In the desert, the redeemed Israelites experienced a mighty inner conflict between the sentiments of the old life in Egypt and those of the new life as people of God in a barren wilderness. On the one hand they were committed to a life of faith and sanctification by trusting God and living to His honour and glory all the days of their life:

“Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a [special] treasure to Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine. And ye shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak to the children of Israel” (Ex. 19:4-6).

On the other hand there was the hankering back to Egypt (Ex. 16:3; 17: 3), as well as the doubt as to whether God would really supply in all their needs. Dissatisfaction and rebellion, even blatant idolatry, were often manifested in their conduct. The people soon started rebelling and grumbling against God, and in this way backslided into a state of carnality:

“They soon forgot His works; they waited not for His counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Ps. 106:13-15).

In the same way half-hearted Christians who still battle with inner conflicts after their salvation, persevere in a life of carnality and sin. This state can be compared to the process in which a new shoot is grafted into a tree without the old branches being pruned away. The new and the old life are now competing with each other in order to extract the maximum amount of sap and life-giving energy from the plant. Eventually the old, established shoots oust the younger branch and subject it to a waning and fruitless existence. In the same way the lust of the flesh can cause bitter conflict in the life of a Christian (Gal. 5:16-17).

The same was true of Israel in the desert. A life of divided loyalties snuffed out the spiritual motivation of the people and stimulated carnal and sinful motivations to such an extent that they eventually got the upper hand. The result was a dissatisfactory spiritual existence, with little or no progress on the way of sanctification. This is evidenced by the forty years of aimless wanderings before the people were ready to enter into the Promised Land.

In the desert there were also opportunities for spiritual strengthening of their faith, but these were short-lived and didn't leave a lasting and marked impression on the commitment of the people. Like the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:1-3), the people suffered from prolonged spiritual immaturity, thus it was to be expected that they would not act responsibly.

On the whole, the desert walk did indeed serve a very special purpose in revealing to the people the latent unbelief in their hearts, and in this way place them in a crisis which would lead to a full surrender:

“All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, *and* to prove thee, to know what *was* in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or not. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every *word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy [garments did not wear out on] thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, *so* the LORD thy God chasteneth thee” (Deut. 8:1-5).

The same principle applies in the New Testament where the Lord subjects His wandering and disobedient sons to a process of purification that they might enter into His holiness (Heb. 12:3-14). Peter also confirms this truth:

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you: but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

## **The River Jordan – a full surrender**

This is the point at which the life of self-seeking and carnality is finally discarded and the believer commits himself totally to the Lord to be filled with and guided by His Spirit. With brokenness of heart he humbles himself before the

Lord and confesses his failed and fruitless spiritual life. Only then can the Lord take full control and equip this person to play a constructive part in extending His kingdom.

Israel's struggling desert walk finally came to an end at the Jordan river. The people were commanded to move through and take possession of their inheritance:

“Behold, the LORD thy God hath set the land before thee: go up *and* possess *it*, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged” (Deut. 1:21).

In addition to a life of abundance, this change would bring about a dimension of intensified battle against the enemies of God. Israel is assured, however, that the Lord is fighting for them and He will certainly lead them to victory:

“Hear, O Israel: Thou *art* to pass over the Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven... Understand therefore this day that the LORD thy God *is* He who goeth over before thee; *as* a consuming fire He shall destroy them, and He shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee” (Deut. 9:1,3).

## The Promised Land – on the way to victory

A spiritual transformation took place. On the other side of the River Jordan the long-cherished yearning for Egypt and the inner conflicts engendered by this longing, were soon forgotten and overcome. The struggle against an enemy from within (the carnal nature) was replaced by a struggle against an evil power from outside. Because the people were no longer their own worst enemies, they could become partakers in the battle to which the Lord calls all believers, namely to be a real *Israelite*, or *Warrior for God*.

Although the people were going to enter into a land of milk and honey, they would first have to drive out a mighty foe and take possession of the fortified cities. New Testa-

ment believers are also challenged to engage in this spiritual warfare, in the words of the apostle Paul:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Therefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:10-13).

This struggle must continue, the enemy must be driven ever further back so that we might take possession of the Lord’s holy mountain. As Christian warriors we cannot afford to be passive in the midst of the world-wide threat of sin and unrighteousness.

A fierce onslaught is directed against Christians on various fronts. Those who fail to make a definite stand and resist the evil attacks on them, are robbed of their spiritual inheritance. Those who move forward in full assurance of faith and in obedience to the Holy Spirit, however, receive the assurance that they are on the winning side and will be more than conquerors in Christ Jesus.

## **Holy to the Lord**

The key word with regard to the victorious life to which we all aspire, is *sanctification*.

“For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee” (Deut. 23:14).

This principle is just as valid in the new covenant, hence the fact that the commandment to be holy that was given in Leviticus 11:44 is repeated word by word in 1 Peter 1:15-16. The full implication is that a believer must be sanctified and

purified on every level of his existence. This renewal starts in the mind and thoughts of man from where the causes of sin must be removed. Conflict, struggle and tension are caused by wrong motives, wrong relations or a guilty conscience and must be removed through the forgiveness of sins. This can only result from a thorough self-examination and full surrender to the Lord:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

The process of sanctification must be clearly evident in a person’s conversations:

“Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Ps. 34:13).

This is in accordance with the strict warning issued in James 3:1-12. It is required of us to trust the Lord daily for a guard in front of our mouths. Apart from the abstaining from malice in our conversation, there is also a clear stimulus towards good:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

Likewise, the deeds of a person reflect the degree of sanctification and subjection to the will of God which is present in his life:

“A man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18).

On this level the motives of the heart and the words of the mouth take on concrete shape and the source and motivation behind the works of a person are revealed to all.

The process of sanctification can be broken down into two clear phases. In the first instance it consists of the total demolition of the old nature which is completely depraved

on account of the Fall. An incomplete demolition results in a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Such people pretend that everything is well, while it is not. Solomon's warning in this regard is very relevant:

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

Christians who keep certain sins in their lives hidden and attempt to build a life of holiness on the half-demolished ruins of the old life, will find that they are leading an erratic and fruitless desert life. A prerequisite for the life of abundance is a total purification and emptying of worldly mindedness. Sometimes there remains a single problem that stands in the way of a Spirit-filled life. Will you confess it to the Lord?

The second phase of sanctification is the systematic building up of the new life, after the foundation has been laid in Jesus Christ. For this, growing faith, whole-hearted commitment and a great deal of self-discipline are required. Faithfulness in Bible-study and prayer are fundamental in this regard, as is an active witness to the outside world. In the busy and rushed life of our day and age it has become increasingly important to redeem the time because the days are evil. Only in this way is the inner man nourished and enabled to unfold in continuous growth. Without all these building-blocks, spiritual stagnation and backsliding would be inevitable.

The solution to spiritual problems of this nature are not unknown to us. Every Christian knows about the stream of living waters which flows from the Rock that was cleft for us. Everyone who is willing to kneel down and drink from this stream *daily*, will not thirst in all eternity. The person who has discovered the secret of the reviving of his soul won't ever want to leave this Source of cleansing, nourishing, and strength again. He will be like a tree which is planted by the streams of water, which gives its fruit in season and prospers in everything that he does (Ps. 1:3).

## Ever ahead

In the Promised Land, the people of Israel had to continue moving onward, expanding and taking possession. This signifies the fact that sanctification is not a passive state, but a dynamic process. The horizon of the believer is constantly being broadened and new challenges are set. There is no room for basking in complacency and considering oneself to be sufficiently developed and spiritually perfect. Even the god-fearing Joshua who achieved many astounding victories in the Promised Land, was told by God at the end of his life:

“Thou art old and [advanced] in years, and their remaineth yet very much land to be possessed” (Jos. 13:1).

Everyone of us falls short of the ideal of godly sanctification to which the people of God are called. The church of Christ hasn't even come close to conquering and taking possession of the world-wide spiritual inheritance referred to in Psalm 2:8. Therefore, there is no ground for complacency on account of that which has already been achieved. On the contrary, a serious humbling because of ground that was lost to the powers of darkness, and because of millions of people who are drawn into the increasing spiritual darkness of our day, is long overdue.

It is in this hour of need and apostasy that the church of Christ is called to greater perseverance, because in these events the approaching coming of the Lord is manifested (2 Thes. 2:3). Every believer should retain his positive approach and resist the general tendency towards pessimism which takes hold of so many people. Prepare yourself to appear before the judgement seat of Christ by constantly aligning with the ideal of holiness and service:

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

Very soon the heavenly Bridegroom will come to bring our earthly pilgrimage to an end.