

JUSTIFICATION AND THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Divinity in
Grace Theological Seminary
May 1982

Title: JUSTIFICATION AND THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST
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Degree: Master of Divinity
Date: May, 1982
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The doctrine of the judgment seat of Christ has evoked wide disagreement between scholars who hold identical views on most other areas of eschatology. The dispute centers on the nature of negative judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. It is the thesis of this paper that the doctrine of justification makes a definite impact on the controversy.

It is a presupposition of this paper that justification is an extrinsic declaration of justice rather than a dynamic process. It is closely identified with forgiveness, on which it is based, and at the time of conversion it places the believer forever beyond the reach of any judicial punishment.

Of the two major passages on the βῆμα, 2 Corinthians 5:10 has a greater impact on the issue of negative judgment. The arguments from each point of view on the meaning of φαῦλον and βῆμα are inconclusive, so the controversy concerning the nature of negative judgment cannot be settled on the basis of these words alone.

The nature of justification strongly argues for the non-punitive view, for God would not bring charges against the individual whom He has already justified (Romans 8:33). The basis of justification is that Christ already satisfied God's righteous demands that sin be punished, leaving the believer free from punishment.

The objection that unconfessed sin must be punished is based on a misunderstanding of 1 John 1:9, and the objection that the believer might be disciplined is based on a misunderstanding of both discipline and the believer's condition at the time of the βῆμα.

The meaning of verses which indicate that one "will receive the consequences of the wrong which he did" is that he will be ashamed and suffer loss of reward. The objection that the non-punitive view regards sin too lightly is in error, because it is recognized that all the punishment due the believer was fully executed, albeit on his Substitute.

It may thus be concluded that the doctrine of justification excludes the possibility of retributive punishment at the judgment seat of Christ.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity


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INTRODUCTION

In the historical development of Christian doctrine, comparatively little effort was invested in eschatology until recently. The concept of an eschatological judgment for believers has only been formulated within the last 100 years according to Hoyt; and the judgment seat of Christ is still only recognized as an eschatological reality among those who accept a premillennial return of Christ.¹

At the present time there is wide disagreement concerning the nature of this judgment, and concerning the results of the judgment. Some expect it to include a judgment of the Christian's unconfessed, post-conversion sins. 1 John 1:9 is listed as evidence that, with regard to sins committed after salvation, forgiveness is contingent upon confession.. Those who hold to this view believe that the Christian will face some type of retributive punishment for those sins.

Others believe that the judgment seat of Christ will occur only for the purpose of examination of the believer's works and motives, and that the result will be rewards, or loss of potential rewards. There are also many variations

¹Samuel L. Hoyt, "A Theological Examination of the Judgment Seat of Christ" (Th. D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, In. , 1977). pp. 2,3.

between these two positions.

It is the thesis of this paper that the doctrine of justification makes a definite impact on the controversy. For this reason it is necessary that this paper deal with the doctrine of justification itself. The two major passages related to the judgment seat of Christ are to be dealt with exegetically, followed by a consideration of the relationship between the two doctrines.

CHAPTER 1

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

It is the purpose of this chapter to present the doctrine of justification that it may serve as a foundation for the theological interpretation of the judgment seat of Christ which is presented in the third chapter. It is not the intention of the author to prove the doctrine of justification as it is set forth in this chapter, as such a venture would expand this paper far beyond its limits. For this reason it shall be considered a presupposition of this paper that justification is a "purely extrinsic declaration of justice,"¹ rather than actual change with the believer.

The Nature of Justification

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words expresses the view of justification which is presented in this paper. He describes justification as "the legal and formal acquittal from guilt by God as Judge, the pronouncement of the sinner as righteous, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ."²

¹Robert M. Horne, Go Free!, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1976), p.26.

²W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers, (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), p. 285.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism also proposes this view; "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone" (Question 33).¹

Charles Ryrie gives a definition similar to Vine's. He writes, "To justify was a legal term meaning to secure a favorable verdict, to acquit, to vindicate, to declare righteous (Deuteronomy 25:1)."² Shedd supports this understanding of δικαιώω with Luke 7:29: "And the publicans justified God," which indicates that justify means "to pronounce, or declare to be just." He suggests that Acts 13:39, "Justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses," supports the second portion of his definition, "to acquit from condemnation."³

He argues against the essential view of justification by the use of "justify" (δικαιώσῃ in the Septuagint) in antithesis to "condemn" in Deuteronomy 25:1, "If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case and they justify the righteous and condemn

¹Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 7:219.

²Charles Caldwell Ryrie, The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, 1978), p. 1706.

³William G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 3 vols. Classic Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971) 2:540.

the wicked, . . . " It is also used in parallel with "imputing righteousness" and "covering sin" in Romans 4:2-3, 6-8.¹

Horne gives the supportive illustration of Joseph's brothers leaving Egypt with supplies. When Joseph's silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack, the brothers were terrified, and Judah said, "What can we speak? and how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants" (Genesis 44:16, New American Standard Bible). Horne explains the use of "justify" (δικαιωθῶμεν in the Septuagint) here, they wanted a verdict of 'not guilty' before Joseph.² Other similar arguments are given, but this should be sufficient to make this view clear.

It should be noted that the first two definitions presented above included pardon for sin and a declaration of righteousness as elements of justification. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia concurs with the view that these are the two elements of justification.³

However, Chafer argues vehemently against this conception of justification. His response to the definition given in the Shorter Catechism is strong and pointed. According to Chafer, "There is no Biblical ground whatever for this reference to divine pardon of sin in connection

¹Ibid., p. 541

²Horne, Go Free!, p. 20.

³The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, s.v. "Justification" by John Alfred Faulkner.

with justification, for justifying has not anything to do with pardon or forgiveness though it is true that none are forgiven who are not justified and none justified who are not forgiven."¹ Perhaps his extreme position is a reaction to unclear thinking on these terms. In another place he complains, "the doctrine of divine justification has ever suffered from, and at times has been all but lost by, the unwarranted supposition that it is synonymous with divine forgiveness." He does admit that the two are related, but only in that they are both benefits to the Christian.²

While his effort to keep forgiveness and justification distinct is laudable, it is inaccurate to assert that they have nothing to do with one another. In fact forgiveness is the basis for God declaring a man righteous. Ryrie states this in a note relating to Romans 3:26. He explains, "Because of the death of Christ, God can remain just when declaring righteous the one who believes in Jesus and who is thus forgiven of his sins."³ The parallelism in thought of Romans 3:25 when compared with verse 26 clearly shows a close relationship between justification and forgiveness. In the first part of verse 25 Christ is portrayed as the propitiation which demonstrated God's perfect

¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 7:219.

²Ibid., 2:275.

³Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1706.

righteousness in forgiving sin, while verse 26 indicates that the propitiation demonstrates God's righteousness in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus.

The difference between Chafer and this view may be more a conflict of semantics than one of theology. Chafer is strictly limiting justification to the actual meaning of the verb, "to declare righteous."¹ But the meaning of δικαιωθῆντα is expanded into a doctrine which is based on the valid forgiveness of the previous verse (as Ryrie indicates),² and the word is to be recognized as representing a doctrine in this context. While "justify" may be defined "to declare righteous," it should be recognized that the doctrine of justification is based on divine forgiveness of sin.

The Extent of Justification

Two aspects of justification will be considered as to their extent: the aspect of its benefits, and its temporal aspect. The extent of the benefits of justification will be considered first.

The extent of the benefits of justification is clearly presented in Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The benefits of justification are declared to be complete. Verse 33 of the same chapter emphasized the fact that no charges

¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 2:276.

²Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1706.

will be brought against the believer, for God has justified him. Paul writes, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies" (Romans 8:33).

Chafer comments, "The argument is that if God has already justified, which is the case with everyone who believes in Jesus (cf. Rom. 3:26; 8:30), how can He lay anything to the charge of His justified one?"¹ The conclusion regarding the benefits of justification is that they extend to cover all sin, protecting the believer from all charges.

Hoyt also emphasizes the perfection of every believer's position before God. He writes, " . . . Christ's death has fully paid for all the Christian's sins--past, present, and future. The believer's sins, even his unconfessed sins, will not in any way be judicially charged against him at the judgment seat of Christ."²

The New Testament is equally clear concerning the temporal extent of justification: by its very nature, justification has eternal consequences. This is implied in Romans 8:33, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies." Hoyt asserts, "Scripture teaches that for the believer God's justice has already been fully and forever satisfied at the cross in

¹Chafer, Systematic Theology, 3:325.

²Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective Part 1: The Judgment Seat of Christ and Unconfessed Sins," Bibliotheca Sacra 137 (January-March 1980):37.

relation to the believer's sins." Hoyt supports this position from Hebrews 10:12-18. According to this passage the only offering for sin has been given, and has perfected Christians forever; and God promises that He will never again remember their sins.¹ The evident conclusion is that the believer is justified forever. The question of when this act of justification takes place is also of significance to the consideration of the judgment seat of Christ, and needs to be considered.

The Time of Justification

The issue to be considered here is whether an individual is justified at the moment he expresses faith in Christ, or whether justification occurs at another time. In one writer's survey of the history of the Protestant doctrine of judgment, he speaks disparagingly of the immediate justification view. Martin writes, "The inordinate emphasis upon the 'possession' of salvation by means of justification led to the view that the consummation was but a continuation in a slightly higher degree of this possession." The error (according to Martin's view), is that the relationship of salvation to the last judgment was overlooked. Salvation will actually not occur until that time.²

¹Ibid., pp. 33,34.

²James P. Martin, The Last Judgment in Protestant Theology from Orthodoxy to Ritschl, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963), p. 12.

According to Martin, justification should be viewed from an eschatological perspective. He writes,

Justification is in fact an anticipated Last Judgment but this does not thereby remove the necessity of the last Judgment, because this is anticipatory, according to the New Testament perspective, only against the eschatological reality of the Judgment. Otherwise justification does not rise above the level of a legal fiction. Orthodoxy often lost sight of this eschatological perspective and the fact that we are saved by hope as well as by faith.¹

James Hastings also states that the use of "justification" and other terms referring to salvation as a present reality was a historical development. These words were originally intended to be used as eschatological terms. He writes,

Men knew, as a fact of Christian experience, that they had been freed from the power of sin and from the sense of guilt before God; and so they began to use the terms 'salvation,' 'justification,' etc., to describe their own spiritual experiences rather than purely eschatological hopes.²

It is incredible that men can justify disposing of all the Scripture speaking of justification as an accomplished fact by calling these references "anticipatory." One passage will be considered here.

In Romans 5:1-2, the apostle Paul writes, "Therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which

¹Ibid., p. 16.

²Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, 1915 ed., s.v. "Eschatology."

we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

The most important observation to make regarding these verses is the tense of the introductory participial phrase. According to J. Gresham Machen the participle's tense is considered relative to the time of the main verb.¹ Since the aorist participle ordinarily indicates action antecedent to the action of the main verb;² and since the participle δὲ καὶ ὁσέως is aorist passive, and the main verb ἔχομεν is present, then the justification which is referred to must have taken place prior to the time of Paul's writing. This is, without doubt, a causal participle;³ therefore the present state of enjoying peace with God is grounded on the past justification expressed by the aorist participle.

Thus, this passage is in conflict with the eschatological views of justification held by Martin and Hastings, as presented above. It is not in conflict with dynamic justification, which holds that Christians are actually made righteous every time they sin; according to this view it is true that they were justified at some time in the past, although they are continually being justified in the present also. The important point to recognize

¹J. Gresham Machen, New Testament Greek for Beginners, (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1923), p. 116.

²H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 230.

³Ibid., p. 227.

here is that in this view as well as in the declarative view, the believer is fully justified when he stands before the judgment seat of Christ. Since only believers will be at the βῆμα according to 2 Corinthians 5:10, no individuals will approach the βῆμα who are not justified. This should be kept in mind in the discussion of the judgment seat of Christ.

In this chapter, some of the subjects that are usually associated with a study of justification have not been thoroughly dealt with, or have been omitted altogether (for example, the fact that justification is by faith, the meaning of justification by works, and other topics). Rather, the writer has sought to elaborate on the aspects of justification which will be of significance in the consideration of the judgment seat of Christ, which is the subject to be approached at this point.

CHAPTER II

AN EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATION OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

An exegetical study of the two major passages related to the judgment seat of Christ will serve as the basis for the further consideration of this doctrine in the third chapter. The passages to be considered will be presented in the order in which they were written.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:5

Contextual Observations

The idea of a reward for one's labor is first introduced in verse 8 as part of the Apostle's exhortation to the Corinthians to cease from their partisan attitudes. By arrogantly aligning themselves with various leaders they were creating an atmosphere of strife and division, rather than one of love and unity. This particularism also served to identify the Corinthian believers as immature Christians, men characterized by flesh. These "babes in Christ" were nearly indistinguishable from the unsaved.¹

In verse 4, the Corinthians are urged to see these

¹Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1730.

men as servants of God, rather than exalting them as leaders of partitive groups within the church. Paul points out that these leaders are in harmony with one another, not in competition (verse 8). It is not good to improperly honor leaders in the church, for each person will be rewarded for his work, as he asserts in verse 8. It is on this promise of a reward that he elaborates in verses 10-15, following the illustration of a building, as introduced in verse 9.

Elements of the Metaphor

The elements of the metaphor are a matter of some controversy, particularly the identity of the building itself. Of those who assert that the building materials represent the doctrines propounded by various teachers, no commentator argues more strongly than Meyer. He believes that the extremely valuable building materials denote true doctrine, while the other building materials represent teachings of little worth, although not "anti-Christian" doctrines, but doctrines which will not endure beyond the return of Christ.¹ Under this interpretation, the statement in verse 9, "You are God's field, God's building," is a specific reference to the Corinthian church.² It is not a key to verses 10-15.

¹Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians, translated by D. Douglas Bannerman, in Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament (reprinted ed., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 72.

²Ibid. , p. 69.

Dr. James L. Boyer supports the view that verse 9 is a key to the meaning of the term "building" in the metaphor of verses 10-15.¹ Like Meyer, Dr. Boyer identifies the building of verse 9 with the Corinthian Church, but unlike Meyer, he reaches the logical conclusion that the building in the metaphor following verse 9 is also a building made up of people. He points to verses 16 and 17 to strengthen this interpretation, which assert, "you are a temple of God." According to this interpretation the church leaders will be rewarded for building up the believers on both an individual level (encouraging spiritual maturity) and on a corporate level (bringing new believers into the church).²

Teachings Concerning the Judgment Seat

Although the phrase "judgment seat of Christ" is not explicitly mentioned in the text, it is clearly in view. The passage speaks of a future time when believers will be rewarded according to the quality of their service for the Lord. In the preceding verses Paul was dealing with the Corinthians' attitude toward church leaders, and in verses 10-15 it is these leaders who are in focus. These leaders are the men who are building the superstructure

¹James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours: Studies in I Corinthians, (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1971), p. 47.

²Ibid., pp. 49-50.

(of people) on the foundation which had been laid. However the leaders do not bear the responsibility of building the church alone, for all believers are called upon to edify one another (Ephesians 4:16). There are indications which suggest that Paul meant for these verses to apply to more than just the leaders. As evidence for this point, Boyer cites the indefinite terms, "any man," which appears in verses 12, 14, 15, and 17; "no man," which appears in verse 11; "another," which appears in verse 10; and "every man," which appears in verses 10 and 13.¹

While these indefinite phrases do not prove the view that Paul intended the rewards in this passage to be understood as an incentive for all believers (lay persons as well as leaders), they do open the door to that understanding. This passage is expanded to include all believers by such popular authors as G. Campbell Morgan² and H. A. Ironside.³ In light of the responsibility of all believers to build up the church (Ephesians 4:16), and in light of the other passages on the judgment seat of Christ, the truths of this passage may be applied to all believers. But the primary thrust of these verses in context is clearly the rewarding of church leaders.

¹Boyer, Studies, p. 49.

²G. Campbell Morgan, The Corinthian Letters of Paul: An Exposition of I and II Corinthians, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), p. 62

³H. A. Ironside, Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, (Neptune, N J: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc, 1938), p. 127.

Out of all the verses of chapter three, verses 13-15 provide the most insight into the judgment.

Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

It is clear from these verses that the judgment will be individual rather than corporate. It will not be a matter of the church as a whole, but the work of each individual will be tested on its own merit. The repeated use of the third person singular throughout the three verses, particularly coupled with the use of ἑκάστος, which appears twice in verse 13, makes this evident.

The event spoken of here is a certain though future, event. It is so sure that it is presented here as an incentive for service and unity. The verb ἀποκαλύπτεται is used as a futuristic present, which stresses certainty. Dana and Mantey describe this use of the present tense: "This use of the present tense denotes an event which has not yet occurred, but which is regarded as so certain that in thought it may be contemplated as already coming to pass.¹

This passage also reveals something of the nature of the judgment; it will consist primarily of an evaluation of works. It should be carefully noted in verse 13, that the

¹Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, p. 185.

fire is not testing the individual, but his work. Certainly the outcome of the test will be used to judge the merit of the individual himself (in verses 14 and 15); but it must be recognized here that the judging done with the fire in verse 13 is directed at the man's work, and not at the man himself. For this reason the word fire does not carry a connotation of punishment in this context.

The specific purpose of the evaluation of the work is to determine "of what sort it is." It is not a test of quantity, activity, or many other things which men admire, but a testing of the character of a man's work. The test will reveal the quality of the works, which may have been hidden to the eyes of men. Verse 5 of chapter 4 indicates that the Lord will "bring to light the things hidden in the darkness." Robertson and Plummer suggest that the genitive, τοῦ σκότους, may be either possessive, "the hidden things which darkness holds;" or characterizing, "the hidden things whose nature is dark" (or the hidden things which are characterized by darkness). This does not mean that the hidden things are morally wrong, but only that they are quite secret.¹

Not only will the works themselves be evaluated, but Paul asserts that even the motives of men's hearts will be disclosed (1 Corinthians 4:5). βουλῇ also may be translated

¹Archibald Robertson, and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, 2nd ed. The International Critical Commentary, Edited by Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Augustus Briggs. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914).

"counsel, purpose,"¹ and indicates the thought or the incentive which moved the individual to action. Not only will the quality of the Christian's work be evaluated, but the reasons why he performed his work will also be considered.

On the basis of the evaluation of their work, men will receive a reward (3:14) or suffer loss (3:15). If the work meets the standard of quality and motive, it will bring a reward. Μισθόν is defined by Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich as "payment for work done," and it does not refer to a gift, but to something which has been earned.² The one whose works do not measure up to the required quality will "suffer loss." This may be intended to be indefinite, or the phrase τὸν μισθόν may be understood from verse 14. The sentence would thus be translated, "He shall suffer loss [of the expected reward]."³

The first clear indication of the time of the judgment seat appears in 4:5. Before this the only information given was that the evaluation was still future. In 4:5, Paul indicates that it will occur when the Lord comes. With this statement he places the event into the eschatological scenario immediately following the longed for return of Christ. The use of ἔμς ᾧν with the subjunctive (ἐλθῇ) indicates

¹Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 145.

²Ibid., p. 525.

³Robertson and Plummer, Critical Commentary, p. 65.

an event of uncertain time,¹ thus establishing only a relative time (immediately following the Lord's return) and not setting a date.

This verse also gives the first indication of the nature of the rewards, when it asserts, "Then each man's praise will come to him from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5). This is not the total of the reward, but it will certainly be a joyous occasion to all who receive it. It should not be understood to mean that all men will receive this honor. The emphasis is that each man will receive his praise from God. Robertson and Plummer describe the praise which each man will receive as "what rightly belongs to him, which may be little or none."² The point is that the commendation will come from God Himself! More information concerning this evaluation appears in 2 Corinthians 5, which is considered below.

2 Corinthians 5:10

Contextual Observations

The burden of Paul's message in the first half of 2 Corinthians 5 is the glory of the resurrection body. Similar to 1 Corinthians 3, where Paul was seeking to develop a proper attitude toward church leaders, he is

¹Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, compilers, A Greek English Lexicon, Revised and augmented throughout by Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie et al., with a supplement. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 751.

²Robertson and Plummer, Critical Commentary, p. 73.

also dealing with leadership in this passage. From the early part of chapter 2 through the chapter now under consideration he has been dealing with the ministry in general. The topics he covers include the power of the ministry, the tribulations of the ministry, the motivation of the ministry, the aim of the ministry, and in the passage under consideration: the hope of the ministry.¹ The joy of this passage is made even more brilliant by its stark contrast with the afflictions and persecutions described in 4:8-12. The resurrection body is contrasted with the mortal body of this life, and it is viewed as superior to the mortal body, and as something to be highly desired (verse 2).

Teachings Concerning the Judgment Seat

Positive Aspects of the Judgment

One of the comforting teachings of this passage concerning the judgment seat of Christ is the fact that the prospect of this judgment is not intended to strike terror to the hearts of Christians. Paul's point in verses 6-8 is that he would rather be at home with the Lord than remain in this life. Plummer observes the change from the present tense in verse 6 (ἐνδοχοῦντες, ἐκδοχοῦμεν), to the aorist tense in verse 8 (ἐκδομησάι, ἐνδομησάι), and translates verse 8, "we are confident, I say, and are well pleased rather to get absent from the body and to get home unto

¹Morgan, Corinthian Letters, pp. 234, 238.

the Lord."¹ This ingressive use of the aorist, according to Dana and Mantey, denotes entrance into the state or condition identified by the verb.² Paul was able to say that he did not fear the point of death itself. Not only did he not fear the entrance into this new condition, but the use of εὐδοκέω with μᾶλλον indicates that he would prefer death to continuing in this life.³

The application of this is that a faithful believer with a clear conscience should not have to face the idea of the judgment seat of Christ with a feeling of dread. Certainly a clear conscience is not a guarantee of the outcome of the judgment for an individual. Paul had a clear conscience, but he recognized that this did not acquit him, for it was the Lord who was going to examine him (1 Corinthians 4:3-4); but he was still able to face this examination without fear.

Purpose of the Judgment and Persons Involved

This passage also sheds light on one of the purposes of the judgment. Certainly one purpose inherent within the very idea of rewards is that worthy behavior

¹Alfred Plummer, The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians. Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1903), p. 87.

²Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, p. 243.

³Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 319.

should be honored, and faithful work should receive compensation. But another purpose, and the one which is suggested here, is to motivate believers to faithfulness. For Paul, pleasing Christ was a personal ambition, something to which he aspired (φιλοτιμέσθαι with the infinitive).¹ The warning of the judgment seat of Christ is given for those who require additional stimulus to live a life which is pleasing to Christ. The γὰρ of verse 10 is used in the illative sense, introducing the judgment seat of Christ as a reason for serving Christ.² Beyond any doubt, love is a higher, more noble motivation for faithfulness. But the author's language makes it clear that a warning concerning this approaching evaluation is a valid motivation for godly living, even if it is not the highest motivation.

Although this passage appears in the context of a four chapter unit dealing with the ministry,³ the text under consideration here is expanded to include all believers. However, it is not proper to stretch the meaning of πάντας ἡμᾶς (verse 10) in this context beyond all believers to include all men, as Charles Hodge attempts to do.⁴ This is clearly incorrect, for the thought of unbelievers has not even been brought up in the chapter to this point.

¹Ibid., p. 869.

²Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, p. 243.

³Morgan, Corinthian Letters, pp. 234, 238.

⁴Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), p. 125.

There is no valid basis for including them in a first person plural pronoun in verse 10, when all the preceeding first person plural forms referred necessarily to believers. The first person plural pronoun with πάντας must be understood to include every individual who will have the glorious resurrection body spoken of in the first nine verses of the chapter. While these nine verses are describing a body that only truly saved persons will have, it is also true that every truly saved person will have it. On this basis it can be affirmed beyond any doubt that the judgment seat of Christ is for all believers, and only believers will be examined there.

Furthermore, it is necessary that all believers appear for this evaluation. It is reasonable that servants should be accountable for their actions; but more than just reasonable, the use of δεῖ indicates that it is a logical necessity.¹ Gromacki observes, "A Christian may serve, but he must be judged. It is not optional, but obligatory."²

The usual translation of the first phrase of this verse is unfortunate. In both the Authorized Version and the New American Standard Version it is translated, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:10). A more accurate translation of the

¹Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 171.

²Robert Gromacki, Stand Firm in the Faith: An Exposition of II Corinthians, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), p. 83.

passive sense of φανερωθῆναι (as noted by various commentators) would be, "to be made known, be revealed,"¹ or "to be manifested."² Certainly the meaning goes beyond the idea of merely being present. Gromacki observes concerning the impact of φανερωθῆναι, "He [each believer] will be revealed for what he really is. God, who looks on the heart will show what the heart of each believer is really like."³ Hughes is even more emphatic when he states,

To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward façade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one's character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will open to the scrutiny of Christ.⁴

Plummer also concurs with this interpretation. He writes, "φανερωθῆναι is stronger than 'appear' (A.V.), which is φαίνεσθαι."⁵

Nature of the Judgment

Hughes suggests another fact concerning the judgment seat taken from this passage based on the phrase πρὸς ᾧ

¹Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 860.

²Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Paul's Second Epistle to The Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p. 180.

³Robert Gromacki, Stand Firm in the Faith, p. 84.

⁴Hughes, Corinthians, p. 180.

⁵Plummer, Corinthians, p. 88.

ἔπραξεν , "with reference to what he did." He states, "The aorist is interesting: looking back from Christ's tribunal, the whole life of the individual Christian is seen as a unity."¹ This may be an attempt to draw too great a significance from the aorist tense. Although the aorist "presents the action or event as a 'point',"² this does not necessarily indicate that it will be so viewed in reality. More convincing is the observation of the neuter singular where a plural would be expected if individual deeds were being considered: εἴτε ἀγαθὸν εἴτε φαυλόν .³ Plummer suggests,

Conduct in each case will be judged as a whole. In other words, it is character rather than separate acts that will be rewarded or punished It is habitual action that will be judged. And this explains the aorist; it is what he did during his lifetime that is summed up and estimated as a total.⁴

It should be mentioned that Plummer cautiously asserts that the passage "seems to imply" this concept. It cannot be dogmatically asserted, and the plural τὰ (the things) may suggest that individual deeds will be considered.

¹Hughes, Corinthians, p. 181.

²Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, p. 194.

³Hughes, Corinthians, p. 181.

⁴Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 158.

Negative Aspects of the Judgment

The most difficult issue raised by this passage is the question of negative judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. Does the fact that "everyone will receive back (κομίσηται) the things done in the body whether they were good or bad"¹ mean that believers will be punished for evil deeds done in this life? Competent exegetes are on both sides of the question. John Sproule expresses the view that believers will face punishment. He asserts, "The force of κομίσηται in II Corinthians 5:10 also indicates that believers will experience some definite good for faithful lives and, likewise, believers will experience some definite chastisement for unconfessed wickedness."²

Concerning the verb κομίζω in the middle voice (κομίζεσθαι), Sproule states that it means "to receive," or "to receive back,"³ resulting in his translation of the verse, "For it is logically necessary that we all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, in order that each one might receive back (be recompensed) for

¹Samuel L. Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective Part 2: The Negative Aspects of the Christian's Judgment," Bibliotheca Sacra 137 (April-June 1980); 127.

²John A. Sproule, "The Christian and Future Judgment." (Term paper for the course CTA 302, Grace Theological Seminary, 1974), p. 33.

³Ibid., p. 30.

the things which he did through the body, whether good or bad."¹

Samuel Hoyt supports the view that Christians will not face punishment at the judgment seat of Christ. He believes that it is possible for a believer to receive back for the bad works which he has done without punishment being involved, in that sinful deeds merit no reward. Thus the unfaithful Christian will receive no reward, which is the recompense deserved by unworthy deeds.²

Another avenue of support for this second view is based on the use of φαῦλον for "bad." J. Dwight Pentecost summarized this argument well,

Concerning the word bad (phaulos), it is to be observed that Paul did not use the usual word for bad (kakos or poneras) either of which would signify that which is ethically or morally evil, but rather the word, which, according to Trench, means: ". . . good-for-nothingness, . . . This notion of worthlessness is the central notion." Thus the judgment is not to determine what is ethically good or evil, but rather that which is acceptable and that which is worthless.³

According to this argument the judgment seat will not involve the matters of sin versus righteousness, and these concepts are not even present in the verse. Rather, it is an evaluation of worth--the valuable versus the worthless. Thus men will be recompensed for the things done through the body, whether those things were of value

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Hoyt, "Perspective Part 2," p. 128.

³J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958), p. 223.

or worthless. However, while this view does offer a legitimate alternative to the previous view, it does not rest on an incontrovertible base.

Moulton and Milligan, for example, recognize the weaker meaning, "worthlessness," as a valid use of this word, but they suggest that the stronger meaning is the one generally intended in the New Testament.¹ "Bad, evil, or base" are also possible translations.² Mark Failing demonstrates that in the other New Testament occurrences of the word, "worthless" cannot possibly be intended.³ But because "bad" or "worthless" are both possible translations in this context, this argument is not conclusive.

Those who oppose the teaching of actual punishment at the judgment seat of Christ also support their view with the meaning of βῆμα, which appears both in this verse and in Romans 14:10. They contend that the use of the term βῆμα argues against the connotation of justice and judgment, rather suggesting the idea of reward and honor.⁴ The βῆμα is defined as "a raised platform,"

¹James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-Literary Sources, 1980 reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1930), p. 665.

²Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 862.

³Mark R. Failing, "What Happens to Believers' Sins at the Judgment Seat of Christ?" (M. Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1979), p. 50.

⁴Pentecost, Eschatology, p. 220.

and is then identified with an athletic context rather than a judicial context. Sale-Harrison writes,

In the Grecian games in Athens, the old Arena contained a raised platform on which the president (or umpire) of the Arena sat. From here, he watched all the contestants; and here, he rewarded all the winners. It was called the "bema" or, "the reward seat." It was never used as a judicial bench.¹

Samuel Hoyt follows the same line of reasoning. He states that Paul was comparing the believer to the athletes, and that the Christian is to stand before the judgment seat to receive his reward as a competitor in the spiritual contest. The judge at the athletic contests presented rewards, but he did not punish the losers.²

However, in his thesis, "What Happens to Believers' Sins at the judgment Seat of Christ?", Mark Failing provides a strong and provocative response to this view. He surveys the use of βῆμα in the New Testament, and comes to the conclusion that in two of the passages the term refers to a physical location. Apart from these references and the verses which use βῆμα with reference to the eschatological judgment of believers, the remainder of the verses refer to occasions when either Paul or Christ was before the βῆμα. Each stood before the magistrate in these accounts facing the possibility of losing his life. Failing concludes, "It must therefore be acknowledged that there is at

¹L. Sale-Harrison, The Judgment Seat of Christ: an Incentive and a Warning (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1938), p. 8.

²Hoyt, "Perspective Part 1," p. 37.

least the possibility that the passages in which the believers are said to stand before the judgment seat do not indicate only an awards ceremony."¹

In the sources used in this paper, Failing is the only writer who supports his understanding of the term βῆμα on this basis. Hoyt categorizes the twelve uses of βῆμα differently. Two refer to the eschatological judgment of believers, but concerning the other ten references, he states,

In Acts 7:5 the basic meaning of is a step, and in Acts 12:21 it refers to a rostrum or a speaker's platform. The remaining eight occurrences in the New Testament refer to an official raised seat or platform of a judge.²

Hoyt cites Thayer, Arndt and Gingrich, and Alfred Plummer to demonstrate that the basic meaning of is "a step or a raised seat."³ The fact that Christ and Paul faced the possibility of death when they stood before the βῆμα is at best circumstantial evidence that believers will face punishment at the eschatological βῆμα of Christ. In light of the wide gap between Failure's understanding of the judgment seat and Hoyt's view, and in light of the evidence for each position, it is apparent that the meaning of βῆμα in its cultural context is not sufficient to resolve the issue of negative judgment in a satisfactory manner.

¹Failing, "Believers' Sins, " p. 45.

²Hoyt, "Theological Examination," p. 35.

³Ibid., p. 37.

Thus it must be observed that the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:10 does not establish the issue of negative judgment at the βῆμα beyond question. Each view suggests its own data concerning βῆμα and φαῦλον , but neither side disproves the other. It is the position of this author that the doctrine of justification has a definite bearing on this issue, and it is to this controversy that the final chapter of this thesis is devoted.

CHAPTER III

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST IN LIGHT OF JUSTIFICATION

The exegetical study of the previous chapter revealed many facts related to the Judgment seat of Christ. According to the passages which were considered, only Christians will be present, but all believers will be there, without exceptions. Each Christian will be judged as an individual (it will not be a judgment of the church as a whole), and the judgment will focus on the quality of his service for the Lord, as well as his motives. It is a necessary, unavoidable examination, and it will occur immediately after the rapture of the church. One purpose of the βῆμα is to provide an incentive for service, although it is not something which a faithful believer with a clear conscience should dread. There is nothing in any of these facets of the judgment seat of Christ to raise a difficulty in relationship to the doctrine of justification.

The only issue relating to the βῆμα which is difficult to harmonize with justification, as presented in the first chapter, is the issue of negative judgment. If the believer is actually declared righteous, how could God ever declare him guilty and sentence him to punishment? If justification involves forgiveness of sin, as was demonstrated

in the first chapter, how can a justified and forgiven individual ever be punished for his sin?

Based on the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:10, and on the works of authors on each side of the controversy, the conclusion of the previous chapter was that the verse under consideration does not provide a conclusive answer to the question of whether or not there will be punishment at the judgment seat of Christ. This is the question which is to be considered at this point.

The Issue of Punishment

It merits observation here that the non-punitive view of the βῆμα has often been presented as an assumption, without proof. Its proponents have also been guilty of facile presentations which drastically over-simplify the issue. One author glibly states, "Because Romans 6:8 says that we are not under law, what are we under? We are under grace. There is no way that any sin in the life of a Christian is unforgiven."¹ Such travesties of logic need to be carefully avoided, and point out the possibility that one's deeply held presuppositions may disguise the inadequacy of his arguments.

But the doctrine of justification does have a valid impact on the controversy, as it is directly related to matters of punishment, forgiveness, and judicial

¹John F. MacArthur, Jr., "I'm Ready for the Judgment Seat," Good News Broadcaster, September 1981, p. 28.

proceedings. The significance of the section, "The Time of Justification," should be noted here. The Christian is not going to be justified at the judgment seat; the clear teaching of Romans 5:1-2 is that the believer has already been justified. Since only believers will be at this judgment, it will only involve persons who have already been justified.

The Nature of Justification

Romans 8:1, 33, considered earlier in this paper, under "The Extent of Justification," indicates that the believer will not face punishment at the judgment seat of Christ. According to verse 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). It is clear from this verse that believers will never face condemnation, in the sense of *κατάκριμα* as it appears here. But Sproule argues that this noun, which only appears three times in the New Testament, links together the concept of the pronouncement of judgment with the execution of judgment, citing Buschel and Vine, who also support this definition. Sproule asserts, "An examination of the use of the word in Rom. 5:16 and 5:18 demonstrates conclusively that when Paul uses the word he has in mind the actual execution of judgment."¹

Thus, in Romans 8:1, according to Sproule, Paul

¹Sproule, "Future Judgment," pp. 8-9.

is asserting that believers will never face execution of judgment; which seems to indicate that no punishment will ever be carried out on the Christian. However, Sproule assumes (he does not prove) that "execution of judgment" is equal to "damnation." According to this interpretation, believers will never face damnation, but may face punishment.¹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich also assert that *κατάκριμα* does not refer to condemnation, "but to the punishment following sentence." They list "punishment" first of the two definitions, although they use the second definition, "doom," in reference to this passage.²

It may be concluded, that, if "doom" or "damnation" is correct here, the passage is only asserting that the Christian will never face eternal damnation; which is how Sproule interprets the verse. But if "punishment" is the correct rendering, the clear expression of the passage would be that there is no punishment for the Christian to face.

The thought suggested in the latter translation is supported in verse 33 of the same chapter. The passage asks three clearly rhetorical questions (the third one is elaborated in a manner which clearly emphasizes its rhetorical nature). The answer to each question is of necessity, "No one." Paul writes,

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 413.

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:33-35).

The teaching here is not only that the Christian will not be condemned, but that he will not even face any charges. According to Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, ἐυκαλέω means "to accuse, bring charges against."¹ Since the clear answer to the rhetorical question is "No one," it is apparent that no one will bring accusations or charges against the believer. The point of the second phrase of verse 33 is that God certainly would not bring the charges, as He is the one who has justified the believer.² It is inconceivable that He would justify ("to secure a favorable verdict," or "to acquit," according to Ryrie)³ an individual and also bring accusations against the same individual. Thus the very nature of justification argues against any punishment at the judgment seat of Christ.

In the illustration of Deuteronomy 25:1, the one who was condemned was to be punished; the one who was justified was free from punishment. This is the clear teaching of Romans 8:33: no one will bring charges against the believer even at the βῆμα, for God has justified him.

¹Ibid., p. 214.

²Chafer, Systematic Theology, 3:325.

³Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1706.

The Basis of Justification

Another argument from justification appears in Romans 3:25-26, where the basis of justification is given. According to this passage Christ is the propitiation which allows God to justify the one who has faith in Jesus. Apart from this propitiation God would not be righteous in justifying the sinner. Thus these verses demonstrate that justification is based on propitiation, and apart from that basis no one is justified.

Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich identify ἱλαστήριον as "that which expiates or propitiates," but note that in this verse "place of propitiation" may be the meaning.¹ Ryrie also suggests this meaning, when he explains, "Christ is pictured as the mercy seat where God's holy demands were satisfied."² The point of significance to this controversy is that God's righteous demands have already been satisfied; and to say that the believer still deserves punishment (even if it is administered in love and not in wrath), is to say that God's demands were not fully satisfied.

Hoyt also uses this argument; He writes, "Scripture teaches us that for the believer God's justice has already been fully and forever satisfied at the Cross in relation to the believer's sins."³ According to Hoyt, it would

¹Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 376.

²Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1706.

³Hoyt, "Perspective Part 1," p. 33.

be unjust for God to require two payments for sin, which is what He would be doing if He would punish a believer for sins for which Christ had already suffered.

However, the question could be asked, "Even if Christ fully paid the penalty, could it not be true that the benefit of Christ's death was only applied to the pre-conversion sins of the individual?" Such a question fails to recognize that no one could ever pay even a part of the penalty of their sin, and spend eternity with God; for the penalty of sin is death. Hoyt demonstrates from Hebrews chapter 10 that the all-sufficiency of Christ's death is applied to all of the sins of the Christian. He writes,

Hebrews 10 removes any question in regard to the finality of payment for sin. Verse 12 reads, "but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God." The writer then applies this truth to Christians: "for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (10:14). His conclusion is stated in Hebrews 10:17-18: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." Therefore, the idea that the judgment seat of Christ is a place where punishment will be meted out for the believer's sins must be rejected.¹

Thus it can be seen that the basis of justification according to Romans 3:25-26 is the fact that Christ satisfied God's righteous demands, by enduring the penalty for sin. Since that penalty has been paid, the justified individual can never face punishment for those sins himself. It should be concluded that the doctrine of justification

¹Hoyt, "Perspective Part 1," p. 34.

is strongly antithetical to the concept of punishment at the judgment seat of Christ. The passages presented to this point already provide legitimate evidence for the non-punitive view of the βῆμα, and further evidence will be presented in the form of responses to specific objections.

Objections

The objections to the non-punitive view are well expressed by John Sproule. He asks four questions which merit careful consideration. The first question asks how the fact that the believer is justified indicates that he will not be judged for sin at the judgment seat.¹ The section, "The Nature of Justification," earlier in this chapter, serves as the answer to this question. The very meaning of the term "justify" as presented in this paper, as well as the force of Romans 8:1, 33 argue that the believer will not face punishment for sin at the βῆμα. Other objections to the non-punitive view will be dealt with more fully.

The Problem of Unconfessed Sin

The objection under consideration here has been expressed in the question, "In what proper way can one say that all sins (past, present, and future) of a believer are forgiven at conversion when the Bible explicitly states

¹Sproule, "Future Judgment," p. 25.

that God forgives the believer's post-conversion sins contingent upon confession (I John 1:9)?"¹

This may be the most significant of the objections to the non-punitive view of the judgment seat of Christ. If the interpretation of I John 1:9 on which this objection is based is correct, then the Christian (every Christian) has good reason to face the βῆμα with terror. He is to stand before a holy God and be punished on the basis of his unforgiven offences. But if this interpretation is incorrect, this whole objection loses its foundation, for it is based on the concept of unforgiven sin in the believer's life. As one proponent of the view which holds to the concept of punishment at the judgment seat states, "It would be inconsistent with I John 1:9 to imagine that sins truly confessed as a believer would ever come to light at the βῆμα for such sins are forgiven when confessed."² The force of this statement is important: forgiven sins will not be an issue at the judgment seat of Christ.

The issue then, is whether or not the believer must confess his sins to receive forgiveness. According to Catholicism the answer is that the individual must receive absolution from the church by confessing his sins.³ His sins are not forgiven until he has confessed them.

The strength or the fallacy of this objection then

¹Ibid., p. 26.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³The New Catholic Dictionary, s.v. "Confession, Auricular."

rests upon the interpretation of 1 John 1:9: is forgiveness of post-conversion sin contingent upon confession, as in Roman Catholic theology, or is the believer forgiven of all sins at the moment of salvation?

Family Forgiveness

One response to this view of the verse--that God does not forgive post-conversion sin until confession--is proposed by Hoyt. He suggests that it is a continuing, "family" forgiveness that is referred to in 1 John 1:9. He writes, "1 John 1:9 is a 'family' epistle addressed to the 'born ones' or to τέκνιά μου ('my little children'). First John 1:9 refers to 'family,' experiential forgiveness."¹

In his study on the doctrine of New Testament forgiveness, David Colman accuses scholars of trying to prove too much from this verse. He states, "Others have built a system of doctrine upon this verse, seemingly this verse alone, which teaches of 'family forgiveness.'"²

Coleman's study reveals that, with the possible exception of 1 John 1:9, there are two kinds of forgiveness in the New Testament: (1) forgiveness of one specific sin, leaving the individual in his unregenerate state (Luke 23:24, based on the assumption that the Father answered the prayer of the Son); (2) total forgiveness of all sins, at

¹Hoyt, "Perspective Part 1," p. 38.

²David F. Colman, "An Investigation of the Doctrine of New Testament Forgiveness as it Applies to 1 John 1:9," (M. Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1977), p. 2.

the moment of salvation (Colossians 2:13).¹ Colman reaches the conclusion that 1 John 1:9 does not represent a third kind of forgiveness experienced by Christians after salvation, based on three reasons. These are; (1) John's purpose in the chapter is not to deal with the relationship between the Father and believers; (2) it is not likely that such an important matter would not have been revealed earlier; (3) such an important matter would have been dealt with in more than one verse, especially since forgiveness appears such a large number of times.²

The concept of "family forgiveness" is thus demonstrated to have a weak foundation. Colman's conclusion is that the verse is an invitation to salvation.³ However there is another interpretation of the verse which does not understand the verse to be an invitation to the unsaved (unbelievers are saved by receiving Christ, not by confessing individual sins), but recognizes that the forgiveness spoken of is not a conditional forgiveness for believers. This view also harmonizes well with the major purpose of the epistle.

Evidence of Salvation

According to this view, 1 John 1:9 is to be understood as a test by which an individual who has

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Ibid., p. 37.

³Ibid., p. 47.

experienced regeneration may gain assurance of his salvation based on the evidence of new life. Robert Law writes,

The key to the interpretation of the epistle is the fact that it is an apparatus of tests; that its definite object is to furnish its readers with an adequate set of criteria by which they may satisfy themselves of their being "begotten of God." "These things are written unto you that you may know that ye have eternal life" (5:13).¹

This logical and accurate understanding of the book supports the interpretation of 1:9 which is presented here. Harlan Palser distinguishes this view from the other views, stating that the verse is "neither a formula for maintaining fellowship . . . nor a formula for the unsaved person to be saved."² He describes the view accurately, stating, "This verse, i.e. the protasis, is stating a condition which, if present in the life, gives evidence that this person truly has fellowship with God--he is really a saved person."³ Palser supports his view with the conclusion of James L. Boyer, who regards verses 8-9 to be a separate test from verses 6-7 "in which the profession of fellowship (salvation) is tested by the genuine confession of sin."⁴

Sturz also recognizes that verses 6 and 7 (walking in

¹Robert Law, The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), pp. 5-6.

²Harlan Palser, "Does 1 John 1:9 Present A Formula for Forgiveness of Sins in the Believer's life, or a Formula for Salvation for the Sinner?", (M. Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1976), p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 15.

⁴Ibid., p. 63.

the darkness contrasted with walking in the light) are in parallel to verses 8 and 9 (saying we are sinless contrasted with confessing our sins). It is on this basis that verses 8 and 9 are recognized as a separate test for evidence of regeneration: the believer is one who confesses his sins rather than denying them. Sturz expresses the parallel nature of the two couplets of verses as tests; he writes, "Just as non-Christians . . . are characterized by walking in the darkness and by non confession of sins, even so, true Christians are characterized by 'walking in the light' and confessing of sins."¹

The effect of this parallel nature of the two couplets on the relationship of the protasis to the apodosis in each should be recognized. The protasis, "If we walk in the light . . . " is not related to its apodosis as the cause of the apodosis. Walking in the light is not the cause of the blood of Jesus His Son cleansing from all sin, for that would amount to salvation by works. Rather, walking in the light is evidence that one has experienced regeneration, and he is therefore cleansed. In the parallel test of verse 9, confessing one's sins is not the basis which enables God to righteously forgive sins, for that would require merit as a necessary prelude to forgiveness. Rather, God is able to righteously forgive an individual and cleanse him from sin if he is confessing his sin, because he is a justified individual.

¹Harry Sturz, "The Meaning of 'Confession of Sins' As set Forth in First John 1:9," (M.Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1946), p. 52.

The fact that an individual is a "sin-confessor" is evidence that he is a Christian. Those who deny their sins (who do not agree with God concerning their sins) are unsaved.

This view is clearly in harmony with the fact that divine forgiveness is a part of justification itself, as is clear from Romans 4:7 and its context.¹ Colossians 2:13 also supports this point. Although the aorist participle may express action subsequent to the action of the main verb,² it is patently not possible here. The action of the aorist participle χαρισάμενος is clearly expressing the fact that forgiveness for all (πάντα) transgression occurred at the moment of salvation. Colman recognizes the force of the verse when he asserts,

The argument is that Christ's redemptive work was sufficient and efficient for the putting away of all sins, such putting away becoming effective at the moment of salvation. The context presents no reason to apply this only to sins committed prior to salvation.³

It should also be noted that according to this view, confession of sin is not a means of obtaining forgiveness, but the natural response of a believer who recognizes the sins in his life. His confession puts him in agreement with God concerning his sins. Sturz comments that confession is saying the same thing concerning one's sins that God says, with regard to their source, their well-deserved penalty,

¹David F. Colman, "An Investigation," p. 30.

²Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, p. 230.

³David F. Colman, "An Investigation," p. 17.

their heinous nature, and the provision which God has made for them.¹

One subject which needs to be dealt with in support of this interpretation of 1 John 1:9, is the perpetual priesthood of Christ. If the believer's sins are all forgiven, why is Christ described as our perpetual intercessor? At first glance this seems to be inconsistent, but further study reveals that no contradiction exists.

One of the clearest passages concerning the perpetual intercession of Christ is Hebrews 7:24-25, where Christ is contrasted with the Aaronic priests. The author of Hebrews writes, "But He, on the other hand, because He abides forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

The close relationship between the eternal security of the believer and the perpetual intercession of Christ should be noted. Two facts are evident. First, they are co-extensive in time. It is unreasonable to assert that salvation is eternal without asserting that the intercession spoken of here is also eternal. Second, The perpetual intercession is (at least in some sense) the basis for eternal salvation. Perhaps the sense is merely that since this High Priest is immortal, His saving power is unending.

¹Harry Sturz, "The Meaning," p. 31.

The important point to recognize here is that this intercession is endless. Certainly this cannot be taken to mean that He will be pleading with the Father concerning previously unforgiven sin throughout eternity. This eternal intercession must be understood to mean something other than pleading for forgiveness of believers' sins. Since it is true that eternal intercession does not involve unforgiven sins, it cannot be assumed that his present intercession for believers involves unforgiven sins.

The "high-priestly" or "intercessory" prayer of Christ in John 17 is a clear example of what is involved in His intercession. He does not once in the prayer ask the Father to forgive those for whom He is praying. This prayer is concerned with the believers' joy, sanctification, unity, and service. This is the clearest indication of what is intended in Hebrews when Christ is depicted as interceding for believers.¹

W.H. Griffith Thomas believes that the thought behind the priesthood of Christ throughout the Book of Hebrews is that He keeps the Christian from sinning; not that He pleads for forgiveness for the believer who has sinned. He writes,

The Priesthood, which is the theme of Hebrews, seems to refer specially, if not exclusively, to the prevention of sin Thus, there is no need for the believer to sin (1 John 2:1), and the Priesthood

¹F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 155.

has been provided to prevent this (Heb. 9:24). It seems to be the thought of Hebrews, that Christ ever lives for the express purpose of guaranteeing the believer against sinning.¹

Thomas rightly contrasts this truth with the concept in First John where Christ is called an "Advocate." This office is clearly exercised when the believer does sin, and its exercise provides restoration. The point here is that the believer has a representative before the Father, not that Christ is before the Father requesting that the sinning saint be forgiven (Christ Himself can forgive sins).

It can thus be concluded that the objection that post-conversion sins are not forgiven until confessed is based on an incorrect understanding of 1 John 1:9. The interpretation of the passage presented here is in harmony with the context of the passage, the argument of the Epistle, the grammar of the passage itself, and with the Biblical concept of justification. Upon this foundation it may be firmly stated that the believer will not be punished for unconfessed and unforgiven sin at the judgment seat of Christ.

The Problem of Chastisement

Another objection has been raised against the non-punitive view of the judgment seat. "How can one rule out chastisement since suffering for sins (surely a shoddy, careless indolent Christian life unworthy of

¹W. H. Griffith Thomas, Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 95.

reward is sin) seems definite at the βῆμα?¹ Suffering for sins is more assumed than stated in this objection, but the answer to the previous objection indicated that believers are forgiven for all of their sins, and therefore they will never face punishment for them. The concept of a believer suffering some penalty for sin contradicts the Biblical teaching of substitutionary atonement; Christ paid the penalty for sin. Isaiah writes, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Although the matter of suffering for sin has been treated under the previous objection, the possibility of chastisement needs to be considered. Since believers are chastened in this life, may they not face chastisement at the judgment seat of Christ? For the purpose of this paper discipline and chastisement shall be considered synonymous.

It is clear that God chastens His children: "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:6). Commenting on Hebrews 12:5-11, Ryrie mentions four reasons for discipline, including (1) the education of the Christian, (2) the proof of a true love relationship between the believer and the father, (3) training in obedience, and (4) the production

¹Sproule, "Future Judgment," p. 26.

of the fruit of righteousness.¹ The point to be observed here is that words and phrases such as "suffering the penalty of sin," and "punishment," are out of place in this context. The believer may be chastened or disciplined, but he cannot accurately say that he is paying the penalty for his sin; that was done by Christ--it was forever completed at the cross, and it was fully applied at salvation.

According to Hoyt, "to call this disciplinary judgment some sort of punishment is to misunderstand the work of God for the believer and the work of God in the believer,"² The nature of God's discipline of believers is expressed in 1 Corinthians 11:32, which states, "But when we are judged, we are disciplined (παλδευόμεθα) by the Lord" The meaning of παλδεύω according to Arndt and Gingrich is to "bring up, instruct, train, educate," and to "practice discipline."³ The nature of the believer's judgment is therefore educational, training for future improvement. This view of chastisement as something which looks to the future is confirmed in Hebrews 12:11. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"(Hebrews 12:11). The emphasis of discipline is clearly seen to be corrective,

¹Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1853.

²Hoyt, "Theological Examination," p. 85.

³Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 608.

with a view to producing certain results in the future.

Verse 10 of the same chapter strengthens this thought also, asserting that "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). Discipline does not primarily look to the sin in the past, but looks to the restoration and progress in the future.¹ It is clearly a matter of a father correcting his son, "an act of restoration rather than an act of retribution." This is strikingly different than punishment, which is a judicial retribution: a person paying for his sin by suffering.²

The only conclusion which can be made at this point is that the believer will never face the penalty of his sins: that would be contrary to forgiveness and justification. But in the light of the fact that believers do undergo remedial suffering in this life, may they not also face such chastisement at the βῆμα? It should be noted at this point, that while the very nature of God demands that sin be punished, there is nothing inherent within sin that demands discipline. God's righteous demand is that the penalty be paid, but for the believer, the penalty has already been paid. Discipline is applied for the Christian's benefit as God desires; there is no basis for believing that it must be applied for every sin on the basis of God's very nature, as punishment for sin must be applied. There is therefore no basis for assuming that discipline will occur at the βῆμα.

¹Hoyt, "Theological Examination," p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 86.

The discussion concerning the nature of chastisement (above) revealed that chastisement looks to the future; that its emphasis is on producing certain results; that it involves restoration rather than retribution. However, the indication is that there will be no need for chastisement at the βῆμα, for believers will have no need for moral improvement. Sale-Harrison asserts, "All need for disciplinary measures is over when we leave this earthly pilgrimage."¹ Hoyt also remarks concerning the believer's need for discipline, "There will be no need for discipline for he will be entirely perfected and cannot be morally improved in his experiential holiness."²

Hoyt supports his statement with 1 Corinthians 1:7-8, where Paul states, "so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 3:13 speaks of believers being "unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His Saints." These passages clearly state that the believer will be without blame when he stands before Christ at His coming ("in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" of 1 Corinthians 1:8 is apparently the same as the "day" of 1 Corinthians 3:13, and 4:5).

The Apostle John's statement, "We know that when He

¹Sale-Harrison, Judgment Seat, p. 37.

²Hoyt, "Theological Examination," p. 92.

appears we shall be like Him because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2), is significant also, especially in light of the context. Two verses earlier he had written, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29). In the verse following the verse under consideration, he writes, "Everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). Thus in the context of the promise, "We shall be like Him," He is identified once as pure and once as righteous, and the believer is identified as one who is "practicing righteousness" one who "purifies himself." It is therefore evident that the area in which the promise that "we shall be like Him" is to be fulfilled, is in the area of moral purity.

It is inconceivable that the believer could face either punishment or discipline when he has already been made like Christ. Only the matter of rewards will remain to be settled,¹ and this examination will result in rewards or loss of rewards, based on faithfulness, motives, and quality of one's ministry.

The Problem of Recompense

The last of the major objections deals with the direct statements of several verses. Sproule writes, "How is one to deal with such plain statements concerning the βῆμα that each believer is to be recompensed for his

¹Ibid., p. 93.

deeds done in the body whether good or bad (II Cor. 5:10) or that a believer who does wrong in this life will receive 'the consequences of the wrong . . .' (Col. 3:25)?"¹

The first of these verses (2 Corinthians 5:10) will not be dealt with here because it was dealt with extensively in the second chapter. It will only be noted here that it was concluded that neither the cultural nor the Biblical use of the terms βῆμα and φαῦλον was sufficient to conclusively prove or disprove either view.

The second verse referred to in this objection is Colossians 3:25. Paul writes, "He who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." The fact that the eschatological judgment of believers is in view here is evident from verse 24, where Paul writes, "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

The clear teaching of the Scriptures examined to this point is that a justified individual will face neither punishment nor discipline at the βῆμα. The consistency of Scripture demands that this verse be understood in a manner which harmonizes with the rest of Scripture. The "consequences of the wrong which he has done," are therefore to be understood as suffering loss of reward and experiencing shame at the coming of Christ.

According to this view, the faithful slaves and

¹Sproule, "Future Judgment," p. 26.

masters will receive reward, but the unfaithful ones will suffer loss of reward. The phrase "and that without partiality" indicates that no preference will be shown to the slave or to the master, but that each will be examined fairly.

It is clear that the verse should not be interpreted in a way which contradicts the doctrines of justification and the judgment seat of Christ.

Minor Objections

One other objection which has been proposed with regard to the non-punitive view is that it suggests that God will tolerate sin. Failing writes,

It should not be thought that since the Christian stands justified before God, God takes a more tolerable [tolerant] view of sin than of sin in the non-Christian. God still regards sin as sin and it still must be dealt with.¹

The fault with this objection is that it fails to recognize that God is not tolerating sin when He forgives the believer. The view which regards sin too lightly is that view which believes that men can bear even some part of the punishment for their sins, and still spend eternity in God's presence. The correct view is to understand that the only Biblical penalty for sin is death, and Christ bore all of the horror inherent within that term when God poured out His wrath on the perfect Son of God. God is not tolerating sin when He fully and freely forgives and declares

¹Failing, "Believers' Sins," p. 31.

righteous the one who believes in Jesus. He has already thoroughly executed the judgment required by the post-conversion sins of the believer.

Another objection which has been voiced is that the loss of possible rewards is ineffective in stirring believers to godly living, but that the prospect of awesome punishment would be much more effective.¹ While this may not be intended as a formal argument, it does deserve attention. Certainly what one might wish to be true is not a valid basis for determining truth, so the practical effect of Biblical doctrine should not be used to determine what actually is Biblical doctrine. It is unfortunate that the non-punitive view of the βῆμα does not have a greater practical effect, but mere pragmatism is not a sufficient basis for determining which view is correct.

If pragmatism is given any voice in this controversy, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints must also come under suspicion. If the thought of punishment at the judgment seat of Christ would encourage godly living among believers, would not the thought of losing one's salvation have the same effect? The truth regarding these doctrines must be determined on the basis of the Biblical evidence, even if it seems to lead to spiritual indifference among believers.

Certainly God does not desire that the truth of His gracious dealings with believers have this effect. Hoyt

¹Sproule, "Future Judgment," p. 26.

writes, "God intended grace to apply leverage to holy living."¹ He cites Titus 2:11-13 as evidence, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age" (Titus 2:11-12).

Whether or not the non-punitive view of the judgment seat of Christ is a strong motivation, it does give rightful honor to the grace of God. Erwin Lutzer comments,

When someone says that God's unlimited forgiveness gives license to sin, it shows that he's beginning to understand the incredible generosity of God's grace!

When Paul argued that through Christ we can be freely forgiven, he knew that if he made his point clear, his readers would object by saying, "Let us continue in sin that grace might increase!" (Rom. 6:1). Once we have grasped the unlimited favor God gives to us, the human reaction is to assume that such teaching will encourage people to sin. Paul's answer is direct: "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:2).²

¹Hoyt, "Theological Examination," p. 89.

²Erwin Lutzer, "Are we making Sin too Easy?" Moody Monthly, July-August, 1976, p. 46.

CONCLUSION

The issue of the nature of negative judgment at the judgment seat of Christ is complex, and deserves more consideration than the facile, one-sided presentations it often receives. It has been the purpose of this paper to clearly demonstrate the impact of the doctrine of justification on the controversy.

The view that justification means "to declare righteous" was accepted as a presupposition, and it was seen that this declaration was based on divine forgiveness. It was also made clear that all who approach the judgment seat will already have been justified. The fact that the believer has been declared righteous and has been forgiven in itself argues strongly against any actual punishment at the judgment seat of Christ.

This argument from the nature of justification is strengthened by Romans 8:1, 33. Romans 8:1 clearly teaches that the believer will never face "condemnation." The force of *κατάκριμα* goes beyond the mere judicial sentence to include the actual punishment. Thus the believer is clearly exempted from positive retribution at the *βῆμα*. Verse 33 of the same chapter clearly teaches that the believer will not even face any charges, because God has justified him. The answer to the rhetorical question, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" is not

even open to debate. As with the two rhetorical questions in the verses which follow, the answer is "No one." Thus it may be seen that for the believer to face punishment at the judgment seat of Christ would be inconsistent with the nature of justification.

Romans 3:25-26 (where the basis of justification is given) provides another argument for the non-punitive view based on the doctrine of justification. According to this passage Christ is the propitiation which allows God to justify the one who has faith in Jesus. It should be evident that the basis of justification is the fact that that God's righteous demand for justice has already been satisfied on behalf of the believer. To say that the believer still deserves punishment is to say that God's demands were not fully satisfied. Thus the non-punitive view of the judgment seat of Christ is clearly supported both by the nature of justification and by the Biblical presentation of Christ as a propitiation (which is the basis of justification).

Several objections have been raised in response to this view. One which has been suggested is that the believer's post-conversion sins are not forgiven until they are confessed, so the believer will be punished for those sins which were not confessed. However, this objection is based on a faulty interpretation of 1 John 1:9. It is more accurate to understand the verse as one of a series of tests by which an individual may gain

assurance of his salvation. The point of the verse is that true believers are "sin-confessors," not that the believer's sins are unforgiven until confessed.

Another objection is that believers may face chastisement (such as that faced in this life) at the βῆμα. It should be noted that chastisement does not involve paying the penalty for sin. Thus chastisement is primarily educational, directed at producing certain results in the future. The New Testament clearly teaches that believers will be transformed when they stand before God, so that there will be no room for moral improvement, and there will be no need for chastisement.

The third major objection to the non-punitive view is found in 2 Corinthians 5:10, which states that believers will be recompensed for deeds done in the body, whether those deeds were good or bad. However, the word for "bad" here (φαῦλον) may be translated "worthless;" the recompense for worthless deeds would be loss of reward. Colossians 3:25 states that believers will receive the consequences of the wrong that they have done; but the consequences of the wrong will not punishment, but shame and loss of reward.

Several minor objections are also raised against the view presented here. One author suggests that this view makes God appear to be tolerant of sin. But God is not tolerating sin when He fully forgives the believer. This objection implies that the non-punitive view takes

sin too lightly. But this view recognizes that God thoroughly executed the penalty required for the sins of the believer when He poured out His wrath on the believer's Sacrifice.

Another objection which has been voiced is that the prospect of losing potential rewards is not effective in rousing believers to godliness, but that the possibility of actual punishment might be much more effective. However, what one might wish to be true has no place in determining truth. If this approach was carried to its logical conclusion, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints would also be questioned. If the prospect of punishment at the judgment seat of Christ might stir up believers to godly living, certainly the prospect of losing one's salvation would have an even greater effect!

Even if this objection has a valid point, pragmatism is not a sufficient basis for determining which view is correct. The non-punitive view recognizes that men may try to exploit the grace of God, but God actually intended that His grace spur men on to holy living.

It is the conclusion of this thesis that a correct understanding of justification excludes the possibility of punishment at the judgment seat of Christ. The nature of justification itself makes it clear that God will not punish the believer for his sins. Romans 8:1, 33 teach that the believer is not only free from condemnation, but based on the fact that God has justified him, he is also free from any charges.

This conclusion is further supported by the fact that Christ paid the full penalty of the believer's sin (which is the basis of justification). While the believer may feel shame and face loss of reward at the judgment seat, he will not in any sense pay the penalty for his sin. That penalty has been paid in full by Christ.

It may be concluded that the justified individual will not face retributive punishment at the judgment seat of Christ. God has already rendered His judicial verdict, and the believer has been declared righteous, free from blame in God's sight.

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