2 Corinthians 5:10 (Robert Arthur Fitzhardinge Kingscote) 52614

Christian Truth: Volume 14, Judgment Seat of Christ, The (5:10)

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Cor. 5:10.

Many real Christians get troubled in mind about this passage. Perhaps they have found peace from such a verse as John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [or judgment]; but is passed from death unto life." You remember the joy it gave you when you could say for the first lime, "Thank God, I have His own Word to tell me I shall never come into judgment." Then you came across this verse, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," and it seemed to upset the other altogether. So you began to think that, after all, you would have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and the question of your sins be raised again. Then fear came into the soul, and you wondered whether you would find yourself at last on the left hand of the Judge.

Now all that comes from your taking it for granted that the judgment seat of Christ in this verse refers to one distinct day or time, whereas it does nothing of the sort.

The verse before us does indeed say that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ"; and that seems to contradict the thought of the believer never coming into judgment. But we may safely say that Scripture cannot contradict itself. So 2 Cor. 5:10 does not contradict John 5:24. Still, when it says, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," it means all-both converted and unconverted.

"Well," a person naturally exclaims, "when you say that, do you mean that the good and bad will stand together before the judgment seat of Christ?"

No, because the "judgment seat of Christ" is a very wide term. There are three distinct occasions, all of which might be called the judgment seat of Christ. We will look at them presently.

How do we know that this 10th verse of 2 Cor. 5 applies to the unconverted? We have only to read the 11th verse to see that-"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." What does "the terror of the Lord" mean?

Ah! the Apostle thinks of what a solemn thing it will be for the unconverted sinner to appear before God, with all his sins to answer for. He trembles, but not for himself. There is no terror for him. Jesus has taken away all fear of judgment from his heart; but he persuades men, as they value their own souls, to escape from coming wrath. This shows that when the Apostle said "all" must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, he had the wicked, as well as the saints, in mind.

Let us now look at the three distinct occasions which may be justly spoken of as "the judgment seat of Christ."

First. In 2 Tim. 4:1, we read, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the word."

The judgment of the quick, or living, you will find in Matt. 25:31. We know this parable of the sheep and goats is often brought forward to prove that there is to be a general resurrection. All good people are said to be the sheep, and all bad people, the goats. But this passage does not speak of any one being raised. There is no resurrection mentioned in the chapter. It is the judgment of living nations, or Gentiles, on earth, who will be living when Jesus comes back as King in glory. Observe another thing. In verse 40: "The King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Now it has been very wisely said, "If the sheep are all the good people, and the goats are all the bad, who are these brethren?" You will see that will not fit in at all. Well, the brethren spoken of here are supposed to be certain Jews that will be faithful to Jehovah after the Church has been taken up. They will go out and preach the gospel of the kingdom that we read of in Matt. 24:14. These Jewish messengers will preach the gospel in very much the same way as the disciples did when the Lord was here on earth; and as the Gentiles reject or receive them, so they will be either blessed or sent into everlasting punishment. This, then-the judgment of the living-might be called the judgment seat of Christ. He judges the quick at His appearing and kingdom.

Let us now look at the judgment of "the dead." Turn to Rev. 20 In the 12th verse we read, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." This judgment takes place not in time, but in eternity. I think it is very important to notice that the earth, as we see it at present, will have vanished away. Having served its purpose, it will be as a thing that is done with. But the unconverted sinner is not gone-he is not annihilated. No! The man who dies in his sins will stand in his body before the great white throne; he will be judged as a man, and will receive the things done in his body. And who will be the Judge? The Lord Jesus. The Apostle Peter says, in Acts 10:42, "And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." The One who might have been their Savior, will then be their Judge.

Notice the words, "The books were opened." These are what we might term the books of responsibility. A business man keeps books that he might know all that is owing to him, and all that he owes. And for what purpose are we told that God keeps books? Surely it is that we may remember that nothing is forgotten by Him. Man now thinks that he can commit sin after sin, and tries to persuade himself that God keeps no

account. But it is not so. There, on the pages of those books, every man's name is recorded. There, as it were, after the name of So-and-So, professing Christian, follow his privileges-had the Bible all his life, heard the gospel preached Sunday after Sunday, and so on-and then a list of sins, sins, sins; and the last condemning sin of all, "rejecter of the Christ of God." I should not like my name to be written in those books.

Let us remark here that great account is taken of privileges. We see this taught in Luke 12:47, 48: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." There is a poor heathen who never heard the blessed gospel of God's grace—he will be beaten with but few stripes. There is a man living in England who has heard the gospel, and has had every privilege, but he has turned his back upon Christ; he shall be beaten with many stripes. You remember how the Lord upbraided those cities in which most of His mighty works were done: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tire and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." The very thought of it is enough to make a sinner tremble.

But there is another book. It does not say that the sinner is judged out of the book of life. The book of life is a record, so to speak, kept by God, in which is written the name of every one of His own beloved people. "Then what is the use of opening the book of life at the great white throne?" one might inquire. Simply to see, as a last chance,, if his name is written therein; but it is not.

Here, then, is the final judgment seat of Christ for the unconverted. The Apostle Paul had this in mind when he said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." 2 Cor. 5:11. What Paul did, we may do also. He had no fear for himself; the question of his sins was settled; but the terror of the Lord, and the love of that blessed Savior who gave Himself a ransom for all, that all who trust in Him might be sheltered from that coming judgment, constrained him to persuade men.

Now we come to what is our chief purpose in writing this article. We have seen the judgment seat for the living in Matt. 25, and for the dead at the great white throne in Rev. 20 But what about believers? When will they stand before the judgment seat of Christ? It will be sometime between the coming of the Lord Jesus to take them to heaven, and His appearing with them when He comes hack to this world in glory to set up His kingdom.

What is the next thing that may happen for believers? It is what the Apostle Paul tells us about in 1 Thess. 4:16, 17: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." There is nothing that has necessarily to take place before the Lord comes into the air (not to earth) to take His own to be with Himself forever. Much will happen before He can appear in glory with them. This is often very puzzling to people. I remember reading a book in which the writer declared that it was a most remarkable thing, which he could not attempt to explain, that the early Christians appear to have been looking for the Lord to come at any time; and yet it was evident that many things must happen before He could return to this earth, and he could not reconcile the two things. This difficulty is solved in an instant when we see that before the Lord appears in glory He is first coming for us, so that when He appears publicly in glory, all His saints will be seen coming with Him. The last time the world saw Jesus, He was alone upon the cross; but the next time the world sees Jesus, will He be alone? No! He will come with all the trophies of His victory; He will come with all His saints.

I daresay some reader will be saying, "Is everything to be manifest at the judgment seal of Christ? H so, how do you reconcile that with a verse in Heb. 10? We read there that God has said, 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' " Well, let us look at the passage. Read first the third verse: "But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year." The meaning of that is, that every time the year came to an end, God raised the question of sins again; and there had to he fresh sacrifices. Now compare that with verse 17: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." What does this mean? It means that when once we believe in Christ, and trust Him for salvation, the question of all our sins is settled forever before God, on the ground of the eternal efficacy of the blood of Christ; and He will never raise it more. You may raise it in your own soul many a time, and so may I, but God never will. Our sins may come out before the judgment seat, but the question of their being imputed will never be raised.

But what leads us to believe that everything will come out at the judgment seat of Christ? Let us turn to Luke 12. At the close of the first verse the Lord says to His disciples: "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops." There is a sweeping statement. Think of all the things that are covered up, the secret sins that are committed, things concealed from the ears and eyes of men. All will come out. There is nothing (and nothing means nothing) covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known.

You may say, "Do you mean that all I did before my conversion will come out before the judgment seat of Christ?" I ask, Why do you shrink from that thought? Do you not care to think that all you have ever done will be made manifest in that day? Then I fear you have never laid hold of the wonderful fact that all you have done, and all that you are by nature, has already come out at the cross. "Yes!" you may say, "I know my sins were put away there." I would ask you, How many of them? Not some, but all. "What! my sins after I was converted?" There is no such thing in Scripture as sins put away before and after conversion. A good many people have said to me, "I know that my sins were put away up to the time I believed, but my trouble is that I have committed sins since then-what about them?" When Jesus bore your sins and mine, they were all future, every one of them. The Lord laid them all upon Him. It is wonderful to think of it! God laid them on the One who is going to sit on the great white throne. The Judge has come before the judgment day, and in grace and love has charged Himself with all our sins, so that He might have nothing to judge us for in that coming day.

Does any reader say, "Well, if the question of our sins cannot be raised, why do we stand before the judgment seat of Christ at all?" One thing we shall be there for is this-it will then be settled as to rewards for faithfulness to the Lord during the few years we are down here. All we have ever done for the blessed Lord will then be seen. Every bit of service that the Lord Himself has given us power and grace to do for Him, He will then give us credit for as if we had done it of ourselves. Perhaps things we thought nothing of here will be so magnified by the Lord in that day that He will, as it were, say, "Look what you did for Me." Some will receive rewards, and alas! there are those who will suffer loss, but they themselves will be saved, yet so as by fire.

And we must remember the solemn side as well as the joyful side of that coming day. There is such a thing as a man professing to serve the Lord here, whose work in that day will not stand; it proves to be nothing but wood, hay, stubble (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

I would say one thing, by the way, which, although very old, is very true, and will be a help, I think, in looking into our subject. Whenever it is a question of grace, and the value of Christ's work, then it is the Lord's coming from heaven to take us up to be with Himself forever that Scripture speaks of. This has nothing to do with work for the Lord, or service. But when it is a question of service, or faithfulness, or our responsibility as Christians, then it is always the Lord's appearing with us in glory that is looked at.

Instead of the judgment seat of Christ being a dreadful thing, it is a very blessed one to the believer. You need not be afraid. When you stand before that judgment seat, you will be like Christ Himself. You will have said goodbye to all that you were as a lost child of Adam, you will have dropped every link with the old creation. When you look back you will see, it may be for the first time, how really bad you were when God picked you up. We shall look at it all, but we shall be able to say, "That is not what I am, but what I was." Even now the believer can say, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." How much more when we have dropped the last link with this old creation! Perhaps we should never understand, except for that day, how the Lord had to deal with us; how we might have been killed before we were converted; how He spoke to us-perhaps in a dream, or through some sickness-how He kept us from harm along the way; how He preserved us all the way through, up to the very last moment. What, think you, will be the result of seeing all that? Trembling and fear? No, I believe it will produce nothing but praise. It will be like the ending of the Psalms, which, after all the trials, sorrows, exercises of soul which are there set forth, close with Hallelujah! So it will be in that day.

"When this passing world is done,

When has sunk you radiant sun,

When I stand with Christ in glory,

Looking o'er life's finished story-

Then, Lord, shall I fully know,

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