



The Judgement Seat of Christ

1 Cor 3 and 2 Cor 5:1-8

This is the last opportunity I have this year to address the church in a “normal” service and it seemed an appropriate point to both underline what most of my ministry has been about this year and to prepare us for what I believe are the new things that God will be doing amongst us in 2005.

Certainly in my most recent services I have felt that the Lord would want to encourage us as to our glorious hope. We have an eternity spread out before us and as God's people, we have by God's grace come into the promise of that through our personal faith in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. In the end, our eternal security is wholly as a result of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

During this year my encouragement as a Pastor has been to look again at what Jesus has done for us and echo the words of Isaac Watts “*love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*” As we understand God's grace, we know that our response should be one of loving obedience to our heavenly Father, to our risen Lord and to the indwelling Spirit.

If we're honest, we also know that we often fall short of that mark and maybe some of you have even been in a situation in your life that has been very spiritually barren. It is true though that as we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). That's why communion is such an important part of our lives because it stands as that constant reminder that the blood of Jesus was shed for our sins and as a result we can walk confident in the love and freedom that comes from it.

Last Sunday evening we looked at the glorious hope that is laid up in heaven for us, and we contrasted that with the bleak eternity that is laid up for those who have not accepted God's grace. In the end the responsibility of accepting or rejecting Christ lies with us and God's judgement in Revelation 20 is based on that proposition. It is a question of responsibility.

In the modern day, responsibility and the sense of accountability is something people like to avoid. Years ago, people understood words like duty, responsibility and accountability. In times of war, people quite quickly acquire a sense of responsibility towards one another. You have to pull together as a community when your very neighbourhoods are being bombed. But today we have the “I” society. We look after our own needs and we find that even in a rural market town like Swaffham, we have to come to terms with the fact that a sense of responsibility is on the wane.

Even in church, it is difficult to find people to do things - even in churches where people are young fit and healthy. They have their own lives and agendas and God just kind of fits in. And when we want people to take responsibility! In your dreams!

Funnily enough, we find that we don't hear much about accountability to Christ in commitment sermons. I've avoided them to a great extent too - simply because I believe God wants us to come as grateful people, realising the grace He has shown us and expressing the desire to follow Him and realise who we are in Him.

But the bottom line is that there is another truth of God which we can't leave out of passages like the ones we had read. It is about judgement because God or more specifically, Christ holds us responsible for what we do as His people.

Is that fair? Well put it this way. Did you think it was fair when your father or mother grounded you for ignoring the rules of the house? You may have done so at the time but you know now it was for your good and for the good of the household. It was also good to get the extra pocket money for doing our chores well.

You get the idea. God the Son holds us accountable for what we do with the freedom He bought on Calvary. This is quite a different examination from the Great White Throne described in Revelation 20. This is an examination of believers and is referred to in the passages in 1 and 2 Corinthians we had read to us this morning.

The subject comes up in both letters because Paul was being criticised for the ministry he and his people had done in Corinth and were doing elsewhere. People were suggesting basically that what Paul was doing was not of God, or at least, less than what God had intended. I think I have spoken on the preceding verses in both passages before but this morning I am going to redress the balance by looking at the verses many Christians do not like to read. This is the word of God – so listen closely to it.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul has been dealing with the way in which he, Apollos and Peter each had different roles given to them in the building of the church and then in verses 9 and 10 shows his responsibility in that:

we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. 10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation.....etc

Firstly he talks about his role and then uses word like “each one should be careful” and then “if any man” suggesting that this applied to them too. It's the same in 2 Corinthians. He describes the way in which he will be examined and then says in verse 11 *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.* In other words, his motivations were determined by his his knowledge that he was going to be held accountable.

We are sure that Paul is referring to the same event in these chapters as they both refer to examination, to a point in the future (Paul uses the word Day in 1 Cor 3 referring to the Day of Christ), to the notion of loss and reward and in terms of a warning as to how we should behave now.

Why should Jesus want to give us such an examination or judgement? Surely we have been redeemed and our sins dealt with. Absolutely true. I believe in that promise in scripture: *"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."* Heb 10:17

But as we read more closely, the Judgement Seat of Christ isn't about judging our sin but about what we have done as the people of God since we believed. So let's see what it is about.

🍷 It' s about God' s grace

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

This seems a strange thing to say about something that is so obviously a matter of the believer's personal responsibility before God. Paul laid foundations as an expert builder. Why? Because he had immense natural talent? No because he was called and equipped by the Holy Spirit for that task. It was a matter of grace – God's unmerited favour. God gave him that ability because it was his purpose to do so, not because Paul had talent. As we shall discover next year if we did not already realise it, we are all called and gifted to do the work of God. That's part of our calling and role as believers.

When we trusted Christ we changed our allegiance from Satan and the world to Christ and that is reflected in many pictures we are given in the NT. We are the children of God, we are part of the bride of Christ, we are in God's army, we are Christ's ambassadors, we all come under the Lordship of Christ. All mean just one thing – that we have come under the authority of the Godhead and have a specific responsibility to Christ who is head and king over us.

What does allegiance mean? It means responsibility. Responsibility to do what? After all, some of us have been Christians for a long time, others for a short. We all have different calling and gifts. We are who we are by the grace of God – He's made us what we are as believers. The responsibility we bear is towards the grace God has given us and how we respond to that bears no relation to how long we have been a believer or what gift we have.

This is an important principle. Don't let anybody think that one person is more important than another because they seem to have a more important role in the church than others. They are who they are only by God's grace. If you know 1 Corinthians you know that Paul uses the picture of a body to show how each of us has our part to play in the functioning of the body. We have been called and equipped for God's work but we are accountable for what we do with what God has given to us.

We are responsible for our actions

The responsibility we bear is an awesome one. Each of us in a church context have a responsibility to build. How is that building described?

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

This was a word written to a church that was slowly destroying itself through dissension. Yet Paul says: you are a temple – a holy place. That can apply both to them as a church or as individuals. The wording can be taken both ways. Therefore we have a solemn responsibility.

Isn't it true that we so often take the things of God lightly? We are the temple of the Holy Spirit – how dare we take the things of God lightly and do that which dishonours Him. In 2 Corinthians Paul is even more emphatic about his own responsibility in the ministry God had given him.

5 Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Here again we find the Holy Spirit referred to as that deposit which guarantees our inheritance. But there are so many Christians that think that now they have been saved, it doesn't really matter how they behave – after all they have been saved and God will forgive them when they confess their sin. That attitude dishonours the Spirit and if we do that our response shouldn't be light because God is angry at those who abuse His grace. Look down at verse 11

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.

The AV translates that fear as terror which puts the force of what Paul says, He tried to persuade men because not to fulfil his calling was just testing God's patience. We often like to think of the fear of God in terms of respect. But fear means fear too. God is someone you don't ignore and cross. He is our heavenly Father – children cross their parents at their peril. We have our Lord, Jesus Christ – and servants cross their masters at their peril. The Judgement Seat of Christ stands as a warning to us.

🕒 Because we have a God who desires to reward us.

2 Cor 5: 10 For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

In neither of these passages is there a question of being eternally condemned, this is a judgement of the redeemed. So what are we going to be judged on? From what I have said, you have already guessed. Paul built the foundations according to the grace given him. Others built on this foundation – according to the grace given them. That's us because Paul's foundation is still there as part of the NT. As I said earlier, this Judgement Seat of Christ is an examination of what we have done with our faith.

If we look carefully at both Corinthian letters we see that what we can build may either be good or bad. It can be gold, silver and precious stones; something of great value or it can be wood, hay and stubble. The judgement will show to us and to others what of our life is commendable and what is worthless. In those days, things were shown to be valuable or not according to whether it would burn. I am burning a whole lot of old wood at the moment. It gets reduced to very light ash. But some things survive – such as nails and any other metal items. They are things that last. The fire referred to here will highlight what things about us are lasting and worthwhile in His eternal kingdom.

Tough isn't it? Most people don't like this idea of being examined. But we have a God who is gracious and wants to recognise those who were faithful to Him.

So what is gold, silver and precious stones? Paul gives us a clear pointer here in the issues that he was dealing with in Corinth. That which God finds commendable in our lives is faithfulness to Him and obedience in following what He calls us to. This is the context in which Paul brings up the whole matter. The works that are examined is what we have done with the grace given us: have we acted as though God lives in us, His temple – because by the Holy Spirit, that's what He does.

God rewards those who obey Him: those who discern His will and do it. Those who discern their calling for what He can do with their lives and do it in the power of the Spirit. And He is a God who will reward those who do this.

Just a minute, you may say: isn't this a gospel of works? No, because your sin was dealt with on the cross and it's by grace you are saved. This is about your willingness to be obedient to Christ. Unlike people who keep law and try to get status that way, this is quite different. Many legalists will keep the commandments and be churchgoers but as Jesus showed, it is possible to keep commandments and be religious without being obedient to the will of God. Paul showed that the way of obedience is one of surrender, one of discerning God's will, one of following: and that's something that

90% of Christians don't do most of the time. And the reason why we are told this is that God wants to bless us even more than He already has. After all, if we follow this definition of good works, it is He who is doing them – we are just the people who are available for Him to work.

To illustrate this point; a striking thing about the Corinthian church was that the people were “spiritual” in that they met and worshipped regularly, they examined Scripture, they even exercised the gifts of the Spirit – yet they walked in the flesh because they did what they wanted to do and dishonoured their bodies in the process. What resulted was a divisive church that dishonoured Christ.

One theme we can't avoid is the whole idea of loss. What will those who built of wood, hay and stubble lose? We know it won't be eternal life because if they get this far they are being judged as the redeemed and as we can see by verse *15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* What is going to be lost then? It's everything that has been built up in the flesh and we all suffer from it to a greater or lesser extent. We are doing what we thought were spiritual things but we weren't doing them under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

What sorts of things? Exercising a ministry that isn't ours. Passing ourselves off as spiritual yet harbouring all sorts of thoughts and actions that dishonour Christ, operating the gifts of the Spirit in the flesh, knowingly living in a way and doing actions that are not of Christ. - they wouldn't be what Jesus would do. Not spending time with Him and desiring His presence. Thinking that we have got spiritual wisdom that is superior to others – invariably it's not and of the flesh if that's the way you think! Maybe we've chosen to live life our way and not seek God as to what our ministry should be. Or maybe we just think about Him when it suits us. Or we get involved with Him and with the people of God when it suits us.

You notice in good works I haven't mentioned keeping the commandments. It is important to live lives that are exemplary in their morality; that honours Christ, but we can be outwardly moral and still not doing the will of God in our lives because we have not lived according to the grace given us and are not walking with Christ.

I know this is tough stuff, but I believe that if we are to move on spiritually as a church, we each need to understand that we are accountable to Christ for our actions as believers – and that includes all our actions whilst in the body. What have you done with the grace God has given you? What are you doing with it right now? What is likely to happen when you get to the Judgement Seat?

The reason we do passages like this and why they are in Scripture is not to make us feel bad, but to show how much God wants to bless His people. This is what Paul's reaction was: *9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men*

What's our goal? What should it be? Let's make it that as we end 2004 and enter 2005.