

REVIEWS

Truth and Error concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ

“The Judgment Seat of Christ,” by Mark L. Bailey in *Countdown to Armageddon*. Charles Ryrice, consulting editor, and Joe Jordan and Tom Davis, general editors. Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1999.

The Judgment Seat of Christ, by Rick C. Howard. Woodside: Naioth Sound and Publishing, 1990.

This Was Your Life!, by Rick Howard and Jamie Lash. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1998.

Your Eternal Reward, by Erwin W. Lutzer. Chicago: Moody Press, 1998.

“We will all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Rom. 14:10). “So then each one of us will give an account concerning himself to God” (v. 12). “We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). “The work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:13). These verses speak clearly and emphatically about the judgment of the believers in Christ at the judgment seat of Christ—a subject that is given thoughtful consideration in the article and books that will be considered in this review essay. As I will endeavor to explain in the course of this review, these four texts, which are strikingly similar in outlook and concept, deserve both affirmation and critique: affirmation because they address a weighty subject and in so doing articulate a certain amount of truth; critique because their treatment of the subject is inadequate and incomplete and because they present certain erroneous views, especially concerning heaven. I will offer a synopsis of each writing and then, with candor, present my affirmation and critique, pointing to several matters that need to be reexamined in light of the divine revelation regarding the impending judgment of the believers by the Son of Man at His judgment seat.

Mark L. Bailey’s “The Judgment Seat of Christ,” his contribution to a collection of studies of eschatological themes entitled *Countdown to Armageddon*, regards the judgment seat of Christ strictly as “a reward seat” and not in any sense a seat of discipline (92). His essay, concerned with

“the nature of that judgment which every believer will undergo” (95), explains that the “judgment of the righteous will confirm their security in Christ and will determine their eternal rewards” (94-95). The article proceeds to cover the background of the word *bema* (the Greek word rendered “judgment seat” in the New Testament), the Judge and the ones He will examine, the time and place of the judgment seat, and what will be judged there, namely the believers’ works and motivations. Concerning location, the view is advanced that “the evaluative judgment of the believer will take place in heaven between the resurrection and Rapture of the church and the personal return of Christ from heaven at the Second Advent” (97). What will be judged? We are told that the “purpose for the judgment of believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ is to determine the worthiness or worthlessness of their works,” and we are then informed that the New Testament “affirms that the Judgment Seat of Christ will evaluate various elements of the believer’s life and work” (98). These elements include the works themselves, the quality with which the works have been performed, and the motivations of the heart. A determination will be made concerning which of a believer’s works, if any, have eternal value, merit, or significance and thus deserve eternal recognition.

At the judgment seat of Christ, rewards will be either gained or lost. “Rewards are lost but the person is not. That which is forfeited is the recognition and reward that could have been achieved had the works been done according to the standards of God” (102). The rewards that may be gained are presented as a “series of crowns” (102): the crown of life, “awarded to those who remain faithful through trials” (103); the crown of righteousness, “reserved for all who anxiously await the Lord’s return” (103); the crown of glory, “promised to those who shepherd the flock of God with right motives” (104); and the crown of rejoicing, which is defined as “the soul winner’s crown” (104). It is alleged that whereas the “crowns with which the saints have been rewarded will one day be used for the praise and worship of the Lord as they are laid before the throne of heaven,” the rewards “imply future responsibilities and future privileges” (105).

Toward the end of Bailey’s article we find a chart on the metaphors of judgment. These metaphors with their related images of evaluation include building and quality of material, an athletic race and the reward stand, marriage and bridal beauty and purity, an auditor’s report and a record of good works, work and reimbursement,

farming and harvest, investment and return on money, favors and return of favor, battles of war and celebrated return, working and earned wages, stewardship and service to one's master, and a boxing match and winning the fight. The article concludes with a list of a Christian's goals in light of the Lord's coming. Here we are exhorted to be faithful with our God-given stewardships, to make it our aim to be pleasing to the Lord, to do all works heartily as unto the Lord, to be diligent to be found in peace, to not evaluate another believer's production, to stay humble, to maintain a steadfast commitment, to avoid judging others, to stop comparing ourselves with others, to cleanse ourselves from all spiritual defilement, and to work as long as it is day.

Rick C. Howard's *The Judgment Seat of Christ* (hereafter, *Judgment*) is based to a large extent on "a vision of Jesus Christ" which the author claims to have had, a vision that struck him with fear and left him "shaken and afraid" (ix). In addition to the author's preface and a forward by Loren Cunningham in which Howard is dubbed "The Teacher of the Judgment Seat of Christ," the volume contains nine short chapters and an addendum on what is called "General William Booth's Vision of Heaven."

In chapter one, "Judgment Is Not an Unannounced Exam," we are told that "definite teaching on Christian responsibility in life and work in general seems lacking everywhere" (1). Nevertheless, the believers will be judged and the "result for each believer will be degrees of two basic judgments: *reward* or *loss of reward*" (3). Since this will be the outcome, we are then told that obviously "all Christians would not have the same station in heaven" (5), a notion that is also central to the other two books considered in this review.

Chapter two, "Let's Set the Stage," continues by reinforcing the idea that the "Judgment Seat of Christ determines the reward or loss of reward for the service of each believer" (12), for "overcomers are rewarded, and unfaithful servants will suffer loss" (13). At this juncture a crucial concept is introduced: "*To understand the Judgment Seat of Christ is to understand the justice of God*" (13).

The next chapter, "The Place and the Issue," contains "Another Portrait of Christ" (19), a brief account of the Christ revealed in Revelation 1. Chapter four, appropriately called "The Vision," dramatically narrates what the author believes to be his vision of Christ, and chapter five, "What Lies at Our Feet?," advances the idea that this life is "the believer's only arena to establish the way he will spend

eternity" (33). This is actually a restatement of the thesis that as a result of the verdict at the judgment seat of Christ the believers will spend eternity in different ways, in varying degrees of bliss, as they occupy different stations in heaven.

Chapter six is called "What Is the Nature of Works?" Here we are taught that the judgment seat will be not be a "judicial bench" but "a seat of evaluation, arbitration, and, most often, reward. Certainly the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place of condemnation" (37). This chapter also offers an elementary discussion of 1 Corinthians 3, a crucial passage on the coming judgment of our works by fire.

In chapter seven, "Rewards at the Judgment Seat," we are again reminded that the judgment seat is "a place where rewards and losses are revealed" (45). This is followed by a detailed list of rewards and crowns in the New Testament. In chapter eight, "The Need for Action," we are admonished to take those actions which, when evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, will assure us of a high place in heaven, a place close to the throne of God. This chapter goes on to claim that "the time to become like Jesus, being conformed to His likeness, is during the earthly Christian experience of trial and faith" and that if "Jesus came for the Church today, I must enter heaven *as I am at this moment!*", since the "time for maturing and change is *now* in the period of the Lord's training" (63). This is followed by the words of Dr. Lovett, quoted with evident approval: "We stop maturing when Jesus comes," for we "will never be any closer to Christ, *throughout eternity*, than we are when He comes" (63). Finally, in chapter nine, "Taking the Exam," we are informed that because we are "a dream of God" (71), God cares about us, our lives affect others, and our lives are important to God. Therefore, we "should imitate Jesus Christ" (75).

In many respects, *This Was Your Life!* (hereafter, *Life*) by Rick Howard and Jamie Lash is a reworking of Howard's *The Judgment Seat of Christ*, although this seems not to be acknowledged. This volume contains fifteen chapters plus two appendices, one on getting to heaven and the other on the vision of William Booth. The basic concepts concerning the judgment seat are the same as in Howard's book; a significant difference is that, in contrast to *Judgment*, *Life* contains much anecdotal material, first-person stories "in the voice of Jamie Lash" (10), narratives that, although interesting, contribute little, if any, to the presentation of the biblical truth conveyed in this book. For the purpose of this review, it is sufficient to identify certain important statements in *Life* that are relevant to the issue of

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the judgment of the believers by Christ at His judgment seat.

The authors' purpose, we are informed in the preface, "is to bring attention to a truth of incredible power," the truth concerning the judgment seat of Christ, "one of the most wonderful truths in the Word of God" (9). Claiming that believers in Christ "will be in heaven forever," *Life* makes a startling assertion: "How we serve God in heaven *forever* is being determined by how we live this life!" (10). Then we are told that all who "put their faith in Christ will be in heaven, but some will receive great reward and some no reward at all" (10). With this in view, we may say, fairly, that the thesis of *Life* is that eternal reward and service in heaven will be determined by the judgment of our life and work at the judgment seat of Christ. Central to this thesis is the notion that the rewards, or loss of them, are related to a believer's eternal status in heaven. Whereas Appendix A explains how to get to heaven, the book as a whole is devoted to the question of rewards in heaven.

The chapter "Take Heed How You Build" calls attention to the test of fire mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3. "If we have trusted in Christ as Savior, He Himself is the foundation of the building. A fire is coming that will test what we build on the foundation, but the foundation itself is not burnable!" (24). The book rightly says that it is "tragic that many Christians have never heard about the upcoming fire. How sad that many have read the passage from 1 Corinthians 3 but do not take it seriously" (28).

For the most part, the remainder of *Life* is devoted to suggestions on how one should prepare for the judgment seat of Christ. Preparations may include laying up treasures in heaven, cultivating a "healthy ambition" (52), developing "a servant's heart" (84), and "setting godly goals" (139). Much of this material is in the nature of a self-help book or self-improvement manual, that is, instruction and exhortation directed at uplifting our life to a standard worthy of reward. The body of the book concludes with the words, "We hope that this book has increased your desire to live completely for Jesus Christ, and that you have found these truths as stunning and life-changing as we have" (153). In sum, *Life* is saying, "The judgment seat awaits us all, so improve your Christian life in order to receive rewards in heaven."

This concept is developed in great detail in Erwin W. Lutzer's serious study, *Your Eternal Reward* (hereafter, *Reward*), a book that weighs the important matter of "triumph and tears at the judgment seat of Christ." "In this provocative book," the blurb on the back cover announces, "Dr. Lutzer gives good reasons why there will be tears in heaven. When we reflect on how we lived for Christ, we might weep on the other side of the celestial gates." We are further informed, "How well or poorly we do here might

indeed determine our status in heaven for all eternity." Will we have "tears in heaven," or will we have an honorable status there? This question lies at the heart of *Reward*.

The keynote is sounded in chapter one: "I believe there are good reasons why there will be tears in heaven" (9). "Our tears will be those of regret and shame, tears of remorse for lives lived for ourselves rather than for Him who 'loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood' (Revelation 1:5)" (9). After acknowledging that the "judgment seat of Christ is, to our shame, almost universally ignored among Christians" (9) and after addressing some mistaken ideas concerning the judgment of believers, *Reward* says, "All who appear at this judgment will be in heaven, but the question that needs to be settled is the extent of our rule (if any) with Christ. This judgment is the subject of this book" (19). Once again the issue is the extent, or degree, of rule (reward) in heaven. Heaven is regarded as the location of Christ's judgment of the believers and also as the place where they will enjoy the benefits or suffer the loss (tears) of reward. The thesis of *Reward* is then stated very clearly: "The thesis of this book is that *the person you are today will determine the rewards you will receive tomorrow*" (21). If we are pleasing to Christ, we will be generously rewarded; if not, we will "receive negative consequences and a lesser reward" (21). "In other words, your life *here* [earth] will impact your life *there* [heaven] forever" (21). The issue is a believer's eternal status in heaven. Regarding this subject, the first chapter concludes with a twofold admonition: to "resist the temptation to hide behind a preconceived theological bias that would render the judgment seat of Christ of little consequence" and to "read with an open mind, willing to grapple with the full impact of what God has revealed" (22).

In a chapter called "You'll Be There," *Reward* discusses the characteristics of the Lord's judgment, telling us that we will be judged fairly, thoroughly, impartially, individually, and graciously. Interesting points are made in the section on the graciousness of Christ's judgment. "The purpose of the judgment seat of Christ," we are told, "is to properly evaluate us, to grade us so that our position in the coming kingdom is made clear" (35). This seems to relate judgment to the kingdom. However, a few pages later *Reward* speaks not of the kingdom but of being "a companion for Christ in heaven" (37). Although some believers will not get to reign with Christ and will feel distraught, we are assured in *Reward* that "Christ will search the Cosmic Internet and find something for which He can commend us" (36).

One ambiguity in *Reward*, hinted at above, concerns heaven and the kingdom. Where will the believers reign—in the kingdom or in heaven? To some extent, the issue implied in this question is addressed in the chapter "What We Can Gain," which speaks of the "prospect of

being found worthy to rule with Christ” (43). Believers may have “the high honor to sit on Christ’s throne and participate with Him in ruling the universe” (43), for the Lord “invites us to share His throne in the coming kingdom and beyond” (51). Then the discussion reverts to rewards not in the kingdom but in heaven: “Some will be in heaven but without experiencing the fullness of reward” (53). “Entering heaven is one thing; having a possession there is quite another” (54). It seems that the governing concept concerning the overcomers’ reward of reigning with Christ is still the notion of eternity in heaven. “If everyone in heaven does rule, some will be given greater positions of responsibility” (43). The controlling thought is neither the kingdom of God nor the eternal purpose of God—it is the traditional idea of heaven.

This notion of heaven also permeates the chapter on “What We Can Lose.” All believers will spend eternity in heaven. However, since at the judgment seat of Christ, some will receive a reward and others will suffer the loss of reward (resulting in tears in heaven), certain ones will enter and dwell in heaven without a reward. On the one hand, they will be admitted to heaven; on the other, they will have no reward there. “The entrance is free, but some additional benefits are based on merit” (60). The thought is clear: all enter heaven, but some will enjoy “additional benefits.” This is like having a free ticket to a theme park without being allowed to enjoy the rides. “If we think of heaven as a theme park, we must emphasize that the entrance ticket is free....But if we want to go on some of the rides...we must be faithful on earth” (60). All believers have a free ticket to the heavenly theme park, but many will not be allowed to enjoy the “rides.” This loss of “rides” is, according to *Reward*, what we can lose as the result of the verdict at the judgment seat of Christ.

In an honorable way, *Reward* struggles with “the concept of negative consequences at the judgment seat of Christ” (73). The book says, “Let us at least boldly affirm that the negative consequences of the judgment are far-reaching” (79). The question is raised, “Can we say that some believers will be *punished* at the judgment seat of Christ?” (78). The question is answered with another question: “Would not the rebuke of Christ and the loss of rewards be a form of punishment for lives carelessly lived in the face of marvelous opportunities?” (79).

“Reigning with Christ Forever” is one of the most important chapters in *Reward*. “Ruling with Christ is God’s ultimate intention for believers; it is our highest possible

privilege” (143). This privilege will be given not to all believers but only to the overcomers—“those who have successfully conquered the challenges of this life” (143). These “overcomers” will enjoy the special privilege of “close proximity to our Lord in heaven” (149). Presumably, those who are not overcomers in the sense defined in *Reward* will spend eternity in heaven at quite a distance from the Lord, although they will supposedly be satisfied with their place, whatever and wherever it is. Then the chapter goes on to speak of “important distinctions in the kingdom” (151). “Our first opportunity for rule will be over the earth in the millennial kingdom” (155). This is an important statement, but it gives rise to important questions. Will all believers participate in this kingdom? Will all reign in some sense? If some do not reign in the millennial kingdom, where will they be and what will they be doing? Later the discussion returns to heaven. “The lives we live after He has saved us prepare whatever crown(s) we will enjoy in heaven. What if there are some Christians who do

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not get to rule with Christ, or are given lesser authority in the heavenly kingdom?” (158). What is this heavenly kingdom? Is it the millennial kingdom? Is it the eternal New Jerusalem? Is it heaven itself? “Perhaps all believers will shine like stars, but some will shine more brightly than others” (157). It seems that this refers to eternity in heaven, especially in light of the following: “What we encounter there will have been determined, to some degree, by the life we lived on this earth” (160). What is “there”? It seems that for *Reward* “there” is heaven. “For we are becoming today, the person we will be throughout all of eternity” (160). Recall the statement on the back cover: “How well or how poorly we do here

might indeed determine our status in heaven for all eternity.”

The actual central thought of *Reward* seems to be this: Today we are determining the person we will be for eternity in heaven, and the judgment seat will decide our eternal status in heaven. Therefore, we should live our Christian life in light of the judgment seat of Christ, becoming the best that we can be in order to have the highest possible status “on the other side of the celestial gates.”

How should a thoughtful and serious reader respond to these four writings on the judgment seat of Christ? I would suggest that the proper response should be sincere affirmation and honest critique.

The article by Bailey and the three book-length treatments display a high regard for the truth of God’s Word. It is evident that each of these publications attempts to

present the divine truth and not human opinion or speculation. This is exemplary and should be highly appreciated.

These four writings are worthy of appreciation also because they deal seriously with the difficult and often neglected subject of the judgment of the believers at the judgment seat of Christ, a subject which many prefer neither to write nor speak about. The readers of the article and books considered in this view are likely to benefit from the attention given to a most significant matter. All believers need to realize that we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where we will give an account to the Lord concerning our Christian life and work. It is surely a help to any believer to be told, or reminded, of this fact.

In addition, these publications are to be credited for their emphasis on the need for all believers to live day by day in the light of the judgment seat of Christ. The specific suggestions regarding service, financial giving, and not judging others are practical and are based on scriptural principles. It is evident that these writings are concerned not only with presenting truth but also with encouraging the believers to uplift the standard of their living and working for the Lord. Therefore, this article and these books deserve a careful, thoughtful, fair-minded reading. Such a momentous matter as the judgment seat of Christ requires sober and thorough consideration by the Lord's people, and these publications are to be commended for the contribution they make to a reconsideration of an unpopular truth.

Nevertheless, there is much that requires honest critique and even more that merits further study, and the remainder of this article will be devoted to these matters.

The most serious shortage in these four treatments of the judgment seat of Christ is the lack of vision concerning God's economy, which is for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose according to the desire of God's heart. God's purpose is to have many sons conformed to the image of Christ the firstborn Son for His corporate expression—the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Creation, redemption, and salvation are all for this purpose. For the fulfillment of His purpose, God has an economy. God's economy is His administrative arrangement to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people as their life, their life supply, and their everything in order to make them His corporate expression. Initially this corporate expression is the Body of Christ; ultimately it is the New Jerusalem. Thus, we may say that God's economy is to produce the New Jerusalem by working Himself in Christ into His redeemed people. The judgment seat of Christ must be understood in light

of God's eternal economy. Failure to do so will result in misunderstanding.

A major misunderstanding that abounds in these four writings is the notion that heaven is the believers' eternal destiny and abode. The traditional, religious idea of heaven shapes, and actually warps, the teaching concerning the judgment seat of Christ contained in the above publications. Bailey's article claims that "whoever appears before the Judgment Seat of Christ is already in heaven" (92). *Judgment* avers that all Christians "would not have the same station in heaven" (5); that "those standing at the Judgment Seat of Christ...will already be in heaven" (12); that if "Jesus came for the Church today, I must enter heaven *as I am at this moment*" (63); that the "apocalyptic pictures of heaven all show differences in proximity to the Throne of God" (63); and that "our earthly record will be evaluated to determine our eternal status, in heaven" (66). *Life* says that how "we serve God in heaven *forever* is being determined by how we live this life" (10, 29); that all "who put their faith in Christ will be in heaven, but some will receive great reward and some no reward at all" (10); that "our experience of heaven will depend on how we live our lives on earth" (54); and that "all Christians *will* be perfect in heaven," but "not all will reflect the same amount of God's power and glory" (54). *Reward* teaches that there are "degrees of reward in heaven" (12); that "everyone will be happy in heaven" but "we shall not all have the same privileges" (12); that "some would have a different status in heaven" (13); that "*dependability on earth translates into greater responsibility in heaven*" (14); that "heaven will not be the same for everyone" (18-19); that "at death, those who know Christ as Savior go directly to heaven where the judgment seat of Christ will take place" (20); that we "should be all that we can be on earth so that we can be all that we could be in heaven" (24); that some "will be in heaven but without experiencing the fullness of reward" (53); that entering heaven is one thing but "having a possession there is quite another" (54); and that the "lives we live after He has saved us prepare whatever crown(s) we will enjoy in heaven" (158).

This kind of teaching concerning the relationship between the judgment seat of Christ and eternal rewards in heaven contains at least three serious errors.

First, it is erroneous to teach that our destiny as believers in Christ is to spend eternity in heaven. This is a religious concept that is contrary to the Word of God. The Bible does not teach that believers will go to heaven when they die or that they will spend eternity in heaven. Concerning the former, the New Testament clearly indicates that the dead in Christ are not in heaven but in Paradise, the pleasant section of Hades. Concerning the latter, the New Testament reveals that for eternity the believers in Christ

will not be in heaven but instead will be the New Jerusalem, which will descend out of heaven. The place that the Lord has prepared for us is not a “mansion” in heaven—it is an abode in the Father’s house, God’s spiritual building.

Second, the Scriptures do not teach that in eternity in the New Jerusalem the believers will have different statuses or positions or varying degrees of reward. God’s goal in His economy is to produce the New Jerusalem, which will be the consummate constitution of Christ the firstborn Son and all the transformed, glorified, and built-up believers in Christ as the many sons of God. Eventually, we will all arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. From that point on, all the sons of God will share and enjoy the same eternal privileges and responsibilities as parts of the organic New Jerusalem. Perhaps the notion of degrees of bliss or glory in heaven can be found in Dante’s *Paradiso*, but it is nowhere to be found in the Word of God, and it is a serious mistake to add this “leaven” to the pure truth of God.

Third, the New Testament does not teach that those who receive a reward at the judgment seat of Christ will enjoy their rewards in heaven for eternity. On the contrary, the Scriptures teach that the rewards will be enjoyed not for eternity in heaven but during the millennium in the kingdom.

This brings us to the crucial matter concerning the judgment seat of Christ—the question of whether the believers will receive a reward and reign with Christ during the age of the kingdom or not receive a reward and then suffer some kind of punishment during the dispensation of the kingdom age for the perfecting and maturation that will qualify them to be parts of the New Jerusalem in eternity. Those who write on the judgment seat of Christ seem to be fond of a most precious verse: “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21). To what does this refer? The four writings considered in this review article suppose that this refers to joy in heaven. However, the New Testament reveals that this word of our Lord refers to entering into His joy during the age of the kingdom. God has made the kingdom a reward as an incentive to us to be faithful. If we are faithful, we will receive the reward, a crown of righteousness; if we are not faithful, we will not be permitted to reign with Christ and share His joy.

This deserves at least a brief explanation. For the carrying

out of His eternal economy, God works in four ages or dispensations: the age before the law, the age of the law from Moses to Christ, the age of grace from the first coming of Christ to His coming again, and the age of the kingdom, from the coming again of Christ to the end of the millennium. The last age will be followed by eternity with the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. In each of these ages God accomplishes something particular for His eternal goal—the New Jerusalem as the consummation of His work throughout the ages. The believers in Christ should be faithful to the Lord in their life and service during their lifetime in the age of grace. However, the Father, understanding the situation of His children, has decided to make the age of the kingdom a reward to those who are faithful during the age of grace. All believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ for judgment related not to eternal salvation but to the kingdom reward, which will be enjoyed during the age of the millennial kingdom. Those whom the Lord

judges to be faithful, the overcomers, will receive the kingdom as a reward; those who are judged to be unfaithful and unworthy, the defeated believers, will not receive the reward of the kingdom but will instead be reproved by the Lord and then suffer some kind of dispensational punishment during the age of the kingdom.

This means that we need to take with all seriousness the possibility that the decisions rendered at the judgment seat of Christ may result not only in loss of reward and so-called “tears in heaven” but also in actual punishment or discipline. This is not a matter of eternal perdition but of dispensational punishment.

We need to take with all seriousness the possibility that the decisions rendered at the judgment seat of Christ may result not only in loss of reward but also in punishment or discipline.

The New Testament clearly speaks of such punishment or discipline. For our present purpose, three examples are sufficient. “Cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30). The outer darkness is the darkness outside the bright glory in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens during the millennial kingdom. To be cast out into the outer darkness is not to perish; rather, it is to be punished, or dealt with, dispensationally and thus to be disqualified from participating in the enjoyment of the kingdom during the millennium. Those who receive a reward at the judgment seat of Christ will be with Christ in His joy in the bright glory of the kingdom; however, the defeated, unfaithful believers will not only lose the kingdom reward but will suffer some kind of discipline in the outer darkness.

Luke 12:47 speaks of a slave who, when his master comes,

“will receive many lashes.” Of course, the master is the Lord Jesus, and the slave here is an unfaithful believer. To be sure *many lashes* refers to some kind of punishment and not merely to loss of reward followed by “tears in heaven.” Considered in the context of Luke 12 and of the New Testament as a whole, this verse must be understood as pointing to the possibility of serious negative consequences—punishment—resulting from the Lord’s decision rendered at His judgment seat.

“He who overcomes shall by no means be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:11). The second death, the lake of fire, is God’s dealing with a person after that person’s death and resurrection. The overcomers will not be hurt by the second death, but defeated believers may be hurt by it during the coming age of the kingdom. To be hurt by the second death, to be hurt by the lake of fire, certainly refers to some kind of suffering. Although the believers in Christ are saved eternally by grace through faith and will not perish in the lake of fire, certain believers may temporarily (dispensationally) be hurt by the lake of fire during the kingdom.

On the one hand, some believers will receive a reward and reign with Christ during the age of the kingdom; on the other hand, some believers will not only lose the kingdom reward but also suffer some kind of punishment. Yes, at the judgment seat of Christ there will be rewards, but there will also be negative consequences—being cast into the outer darkness, being beaten with many stripes, being hurt by the second death.

The publications reviewed in this article fail to consider these negative consequences. Instead, we are told in *Judgment* that each “will receive either reward or loss of reward...at the Judgment Seat of Christ” and that the “result for each believer will be degrees of two basic judgments: *reward* or *loss of reward*” (3), for the “Judgment Seat of Christ is similarly a place where rewards and losses are revealed” (45). But where can we find in any of these four writings a faithful word concerning the negative consequences, a warning concerning outer darkness, many lashes, or being hurt by the second death?

Those who receive the reward and escape the negative consequences are the overcomers sought by the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2 and 3. Sadly, this crucial point is not covered adequately in these four publications. *Reward* does speak of the overcomers to some extent. “If we are overcomers, we are invited to sit with Christ on the Father’s throne He rightfully inherited” (51). Unfortunately, this promising statement is not properly developed in the remainder of the book. Elsewhere we are told that those “who rule with Christ are overcomers, those who have successfully conquered the challenges of this life” (143). Again, this line of thought is promising, but we

are not told clearly where these overcomers will reign nor are we informed that, according to the Lord’s word in the book of Revelation, what needs to be overcome is not simply the challenges of this life but the degradation of the church. On page 149 certain of the Lord’s promises to the overcomers are quoted, only to be wrongly applied to “close proximity to our Lord in heaven” (149). Then, two pages later, we read about “important distinctions in the kingdom” (151).

We should appreciate the fact that *Reward* refers to overcomers and “nonovercomers,” to believers who are “not overcoming in their witness for Christ” and suggests that overcomers will have rewards (150). However, we lament the fact that *Reward* does not present a clear and accurate biblical teaching concerning the relationship between the overcomers and the kingdom reward. The reader will need to turn elsewhere (e.g., books by Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co.) for a proper presentation of the truth concerning the overcomers—the truth that only those who overcome will receive the reward of reigning with Christ and that they will reign not in “close proximity to our Lord in heaven” but as His co-kings during the age of the millennial kingdom.

Some readers of this review, uneducated concerning the judgment seat of Christ, might be startled by the elements of truth contained in these four publications. Other readers may be shocked to hear, from their reading of this review, that the believers’ destiny is not heaven but the New Jerusalem, that the rewards granted to some at the judgment seat of Christ will be enjoyed not in heaven but in the millennial kingdom, that those who are rewarded by the Lord will suffer not only loss of reward but also punishment, and that the rewards are given not to all believers but only to the overcomers, who will then reign with Christ for a thousand years. I would encourage such readers to pay attention to the following words from the opening chapter of *Reward*:

Resist the temptation to hide behind a preconceived theological bias that would render the judgment seat of Christ of little consequence. Read with an open mind, willing to grapple with the full impact of what God has revealed. Along the way we will continue to expose those misinterpretations that have weakened the biblical teaching on the subject. (22)

May all misinterpretations be exposed, and may we all grapple with the truth. Since all believers in Christ will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we all need to deal with *all* that God has revealed concerning this very serious matter.

by Ron Kangas