

With Eternal Glory

**A Study of Promotion
in the Age to Come**

by Dan Lash

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**Weston Street Bible Church
340 Weston Street
Rome City, IN 46784**

(260) 854-3994

www.WestonSBC.org

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to help the believer make a clear distinction between the freeness of a secure relationship in Christ and the costliness of rewards to be distributed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Most people who name the name of Christ have never been taught that there is more at stake in their futures than simply whether or not they are going to make it to heaven. They have never considered that there are actually rewards for achievements in this life which are being accrued for the age to come. These rewards will determine the degree of authority which the believer will be allowed to exercise alongside Christ. This book sets out to demonstrate beyond all doubt that this principle is clearly taught in Scripture.

One reason for making this important distinction lies in maintaining the clarity of the free grace gospel. To conflate the two above principles, that is, to view the gift of eternal life as a reward for obedience, would be to redefine the gift of salvation as a reward for our works. This understanding would fly in the face of the multitude of New Testament passages which clearly teach that an eternally right standing before God is received as a gift, bought and one hundred percent paid for by Christ's perfect sacrifice for sin. This confusion of grace would transform the saving response to God into a work, or series of good works, rendering such response impotent to produce eternal life.

Another purpose for this book is to demonstrate to the believer that being saved is just the beginning, and not the end-all, of a relationship

with God. Becoming a child of God by believing the gospel of grace gets one into the kingdom; but pressing onto maturity gains for the child of God eternal distinction. Just as every citizen of the U.S. has the right to travel down the roads of the country, not every U.S. citizen has the right to walk onto the south lawn of the White House. That privilege is reserved for a distinguished group of people. Thus, helping the Lord govern the earth in the age to come will also be reserved for those who, in this life, in addition to being saved, prioritized the remainder of their earthly sojourning to bring glory to Christ.

The rewarding of the believer at the judgment seat of Christ is for the purpose of forever honoring that child of God with eternal distinction. The possibility of being thus honored serves as an impetus for the believer to press on to maturity, knowing that, a thousand years from now, he will still bear the crowns and robes of distinction which he received at the judgment seat. He will be a trophy of God's transforming power of grace because, even though he was constantly bombarded by the world's values and definition of success, he allowed God's truth to reign in his heart, thus growing into the image of Christ. This growth results in the greatest testimony to the transforming power of God's grace that can exist; and God will put such believers on display, with eternal glory, throughout eternity.

Daniel 12:3: Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

CHAPTER 1

CONTRASTING ETERNAL SALVATION WITH REWARDS

With that introduction, let us now distinguish in the Scriptures between the gift of eternal righteousness and the costliness of rewards.

An eternally right relationship with God is a gift, having as its source the completeness with which Christ satisfied the righteous demands of the Father against our sin. An eternally right standing with the Father is received as a gift, based upon the perfect sacrifice of Christ and not upon the imperfection of our post-conversion walk.

Notice that the following verses all demonstrate that an eternally right relationship with God is bestowed upon an individual as a free gift:

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin *is* death, but the **GIFT** of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:17: For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the **GIFT** of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:8, 9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the **GIFT** of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

In contrast to the freeness of eternal life is the costliness of rewards. Rewards at the judgment seat of Christ are a result of the child of God's consistent investing of his time, talent and treasure into those priorities which are of eternal significance to the Lord. Salvation is free; rewards are costly. Rewards in the age to come will be distributed to those who say "no" to the riches of this present evil age so that they can devote their energies to what are true riches in the eyes of Christ. Rewards will also be distributed according to the degree to which a person was transformed into the image of Christ during the post-conversion remainder of his earthly sojourning.

The primary result of these rewards will be that the one thus rewarded will be honored with authority to rule and reign with Christ over this world. Such additional authority will also grant greater access to the governmental facilities of the heavenly administration over this earth, since his responsibilities will require such access. These truths shall be developed later in this book.

CHAPTER 2

LIVING - OR REIGNING - WITH CHRIST?

Most people, when considering their eternal destiny, seem to be satisfied with the idea of simply making it to heaven when they die. “Well, just as long as I make it,” more often than not, is their attitude when it comes to the issue. They have never considered the possibility that there might be more at stake for eternity than merely making it past the pearly gates. They have never considered the possibility that there are distinctions which can be experienced by those who, in this life, prioritize that which is important to God.

That there is a difference between just merely making it to heaven and being promoted to a place of greater significance there is made obvious from the following context:

Romans 8:17: and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Paul here makes a distinction between being merely an heir of God and being a joint heir with Christ. This verse demonstrates that there are

degrees of inheritance or promotion to be experienced by certain believers in the future kingdom of Christ. The distinction would be similar to a person just living in a house as opposed to being the owner of the house.

Notice the condition of receiving promotion in the above verse: suffering with Christ.

Suffering with Christ is not the same as asceticism, which is suffering in order to gain brownie points with God. Suffering with Christ is a daily setting aside of the believer's own personal worldly agenda and perspective in favor of God's agenda and perspective for his life. This involves saying "no" to personal goals and ambitions, saying "no" to worldly goals of earthly gain, and counting God's goals for his life a greater daily pursuit.

To become a joint heir with Christ means to be glorified together with Him. This glorification is not the believer's resurrection; it is, rather, his promotion to a position of authority alongside Christ in the age to come. This is not to say that such a believer will be equal to Christ; it is, however, a promotion to a leadership class of saints.

Being glorified together with Christ, in this context, means that we will share with Christ in the governing responsibilities over this earth in the age to come. In the age to come, which is the millennial reign of

Christ, Christ will be ruling and reigning over this world with a rod of iron. Contrary to what many assume about the next dispensation, not everybody in the age to come is going to willingly abrogate their authority to Christ and his New Jerusalem-centered administration. Many nations of the earth will have to be governed with, as the Bible states, “A rod of iron.” (Psalms 2:9, Rev. 2:27, Rev. 12:5) It will be an administration which will involve the authority of Christ being extended to the ends of the earth. Believers who, in this age, experience the transformation of their character will be promoted to a place of authority and, thus, help the Lord govern the world in the age to come.

Promotion in the age to come can also be seen in the following context:

2 Timothy 2:10-13: Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

¹¹ *This is* a faithful saying:

For if we died with *Him*,

We shall also live with *Him*.

¹² If we endure,

We shall also reign with *Him*.

If we deny *Him*,

He also will deny us.

¹³ If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.

Notice the end of verse ten. It does not say that the elect may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus. It says that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus WITH ETERNAL GLORY. If a person is elect, he is already destined to obtain the salvation of the coming age. Once again, we see in this verse a distinction between merely living with Christ or reigning with Him in the age to come.

We also see in this context that that eternal glory results in reigning with Christ. Those who have died with Christ, (the passing away of our former identity before God experienced in the New Birth) shall live forever in the presence of Christ; however, to those who endure is promised an additional privilege of co-regency with Christ. The criteria which must be met by the believer to experience this promotion in the age to come is “enduring.”

Enduring with Christ is the practice of consistently confronting our trials with previously assimilated Bible truth and allowing that truth to carry us through our trials. Enduring is, instead of reaching for an “of this world” solution to our trials, embracing a great and precious promise of the word of God to carry us through the trial. As the believer is consistently attentive to reach for a great and precious promise to

address his trials (II Pet. 1:4), instead of his favorite addiction, he will be experiencing the gradual transformation of his character in the direction of Christ-likeness. Operating in this world with such trial-forged proven character gains the child of God distinctions in the age to come. One of these distinctions is leadership with Christ in the age to come.

This distinction is also referenced in the following verse:

2 Corinthians 4:17: For our light afflictions, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory

The passing of tests experienced during afflictions is an indispensable part of our maturity. Such afflictions, when confronted with divine perspective, are used to develop proven character in the believer. Those with such proven character will, in the age to come, experience a far more exceeding and eternal weight (measure) of glory. That is, governmental responsibilities will be placed upon the believer who, in this present age, allow truth and trials to transform his life.

Unlike many governmental bodies today, the Lord will not tolerate dishonorable people to constitute the governmental authorities of the age to come. Elevating dishonorable people to positions of authority would create all sorts of protests of corruption and would be resented by the

population of the world. The people who will be calling the shots alongside Christ in the age to come will be the people who, in this present age, exhibit an impeccable Christ-like character.

Consider also the following context:

Revelation 2:26, 27: And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations –

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'
– as I also have received from My Father;

We can clearly see here the promise to overcome consists of authority to exercise power over the nations of the earth.

The Lord also promised a similar promotion in the coming kingdom to His Apostles:

Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye

also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Likewise, Joshua is promised greater access to the center of the heavenly administration in the age to come, if he would walk in the Lord's ways:

Zechariah 3:7: "Thus says the LORD of hosts:

'If you will walk in My ways,
And if you will keep My command,
Then you shall also judge My house,
And likewise have charge of My courts;
I will give you places to walk
Among these who stand here.

At the time the promise was made to Joshua, he was standing in the very throne room of God. Joshua, in this verse, is promised the ability in the age to come to walk into the presence of the Lord.

Consider also the earthly choice that Moses made:

Hebrews 11:24-26: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

This verse has all of the components of a life which will one day be rewarded.

Self-denial involves a turning away from the prosperity to be had by a pursuit of this world's wealth. A life that will be rewarded leaves behind the worldly success-seeking lifestyle. Enjoying the passing pleasures of sin means consuming time, talents and affections on the pursuit of self-gratification. Moses' being the adopted grandson of the ruler of Egypt meant he could have anything this world could offer him; but, rather than pursuing a life a self-gratification, Moses found a greater calling in accomplishing intercession for the children of God.

Notice also here that Moses looked to the reward.

Every child of God has to make a decision: Is he going to milk this world for all the creature comforts and approbation of men he can get, or is he going to deny himself such earthly gains, and forge a path of self-denial which chooses instead the path of serving the Lord? Such a

choice results in rewards in the age to come. Moses esteemed such reward as greater riches than all the worldly gains he could have enjoyed.

In the age to come, the faithful believer will be at the center of the heavenly administration, helping the Lord subjugate a world to His earthly kingdom. That will be an exciting time. Christ will be on His throne. His will, as it is in heaven, will be executed upon the earth with the faithful helping him call the shots.

CHAPTER 3

TWO FAITHS: SAVING FAITH AND LIVING FAITH

There are some great distinctions which need to be observed in the word of God, if we are to properly discern God's wonderful plan of salvation. One of these distinctions is in regard to faith.

There are two types of faith recorded for us in Scripture; these two faiths must be clearly distinguished, if we are to remain clear on God's grace way of salvation. The distinction is between saving faith and living faith.

Salvation is not a reward for obedience. It is the gift of God with no strings attached. What our rewards will be in the age to come is an issue with which the child of God will be confronted AFTER he is saved. It has nothing to do with our getting to heaven; it has everything to do with our eternal distinction after we arrive there.

Let us more closely examine these distinctions in the Scriptures.

1. Saving faith looks back to the cross and there finds one's justification. Saving faith looks to something that happened in the past as being our standing before God:

Romans 5:9: Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

1 Corinthians 1:21-23: For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

2. Living faith looks forward to the judgment seat of Christ, something that is going to happen in the future, and there finds one's future hope of reward:

Hebrews 11:24-26: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

3. Saving faith is a one-time act of believing which receives the gift of an everlasting, secure standing before the Father:

Ephesians 1:13, 14: In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,
¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 4:30: And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10: since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,
⁷ and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,
¹⁰ when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you **WAS BELIEVED** (emphasis added).

Notice that the reason that the Thessalonian saints will not be on the receiving end of God's wrath is that they believed the testimony of God concerning His salvation.

4. Living faith is a patient continuance in truth and service which yields rewards:

1 Corinthians 3:8-14: Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

5. Salvation is free

Romans 5:17: For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

6. Rewards are costly:

Revelation 3:18: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Hebrews 11:26: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

7. Saving faith secures a home in heaven:

1 Peter 1:3-6: Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶ In this you greatly rejoice,

8. Living faith secures authority in heaven:

2 Timothy 2:10-12: Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

¹¹ *This is* a faithful saying: For if we died with *Him*, We shall also live with *Him*.

¹² If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*. If we deny *Him*, He also will deny us.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Revelation 2:26, 27: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations --

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' -- as I also have received from My Father;

CHAPTER 4

WHO ARE THE OVERCOMERS?

PART 1

An overcomer is someone who so diligently prioritizes his life to take advantage of God's grace that he grows to have victory over worldliness in his life. The world offers much to believers: security, riches, entertainment, etc. An overcomer is someone who has so grown in the word and so gained discernment that he recognizes the great distraction which the world can cause in his walk with the Lord and has consistently learned to judge those distractions out of his life.

1 John 2:14b: I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

Notice the relationship here between a person's abiding in the word of God and his ability to judge the devil's priorities out of his life, thus becoming an overcomer. Here is another verse on overcoming:

Revelation 12:11: And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Once again, we see in this verse that being an overcomer is more than just being saved. What is needed to be victorious over the allurements that the devil presents to the believer is three-fold:

1. He needs to be saved by the blood of the Lamb.
2. The word of his testimony needs to create an opportunity for ministry.
3. He needs to exhibit a love for others greater than his love for his own creature comforts.

From the above verses, we can see that an overcomer is someone who has diligently walked in grace, and has thus gained the spiritual discernment to have a powerful witness for the Lord. Such diligence and transformation of character will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. Moreover, that reward will include greater authority to rule and reign with Christ in the age to come.

Contrary to popular belief, not everyone in heaven will have the same privileges. Some people in heaven will receive more rewards than others; and those same faithful will have greater access to special places

with special privileges. Truly, the degree to which you glorified the Lord in this life is the degree to which He will glorify you in the next. Moreover, while it is true that every born again believer will dwell in the kingdom of heaven, not every born again believer will have the same privileges and responsibilities.

Faithful believers will have greater access to the inner workings of the heavenly administration due to the fact that their governmental responsibilities will require such access. Probably some of the best passages which demonstrate this greater access are the promises to those who overcome, which we find at the closings to each of the seven letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation.

Let us first of all define what it means to be an overcomer in the book of Revelation. An overcomer is a person who, in addition to being genuinely born again, has, in this life, pressed on to maturity and fruitfulness, thereby overcoming the lurings and attractions of this present evil age. An overcomer is a person who, in spite of the external pressures of this devil's present evil age and his definition of success and, in spite of the internal impulsive lusts of one's sinful heart, has pressed on to maturity. An overcomer is a person who is fully engaged in this world, and yet, fully and consistently manifesting the character of Christ. Such believers will constitute the Lord's inner governing circle in the age to come.

Truly, we can see from the book of Revelation, that there are degrees to which an individual will overcome this present evil age. Even though all believers overcome by the blood of the Lamb and, thus, have an eternal home in heaven, not all will overcome the allurements of this present evil age in a substantial aspect of their walk.

Let us look now at several of these promises to overcomers in the book of Revelation.

The Promise to the Church of Ephesus

Revelation 2:7: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.””

As we look at these promises to the overcomers, we will note that they all have one thing in common: greater access to the center of the heavenly city. Picture, if you will, the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. In the center of the city will be the throne of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus. Also in the center of this New Jerusalem will be the inner workings of the heavenly administration, along with those items which would embellish such a heavenly throne. One of those items close to the throne is the tree of life. Those who overcome will be granted access to

that tree. The above verse states that this tree is located in the “midst” of the Paradise of God.

The Promise to the Church in Pergamos

Revelation 2:17: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*." "

Now what is the purpose of this white stone which contains a name to which only the person who receives it is privy? What could possibly be the purpose of such a stone? One can only speculate because the information we have about this stone is limited, but could this possibly be some sort of pass which gives the person who possesses this stone access to the inner workings of the Heavenly administration? Think about items such as these that people carry on their person today. What is the purpose of an item which people carry on their person of which only they hold the knowledge, of which only they know the passcode? Without exception, such tokens give us access to our personal treasures and special privileges.

Don't forget that the Apostle John here may be describing 21st century and beyond technology with only 1st century perception. What

may be an access card to us, may have, to him, looked simply like a white stone with a secret name on it. Whatever this token represents, it is apparent that it is a secret name to which only the Lord and the possessor of this token are privy.

By the way, it is interesting to note that it appears that the Lord holds the master “administrative list” of these tokens. The verse below is taken from the Majority Greek New Testament, which comprises 95 percent of extant Greek manuscripts. It is interesting to say the least:

Revelation 19:12b: He had many names written and a name written that no one knew except Himself.

So, the Lord hands out a “stone” to each overcomer with a name (passcode?) on it that only He and the one who receives the “stone” knows. And the Lord has the master list of those “names” and His own “name” (passcode?) which only He knows. Moreover, with the addition of “names written” it could also be that the word “many” modifies the word “names” instead of the word “crowns”.

For those of us, like me, who come from an information technology background, the Lord’s being in possession of the list of “names” and in possession of the “name” that nobody else knows sounds a lot like the master administrator of an enterprise network, in possession of the administrative password which is over and above all

other passwords. He holds the master name list (passwords?) while, at the same time, has the name (password?) which nobody else knows. To say that this sounds like the head administrator of an enterprise network would be an understatement.

Such thoughts, I know, are speculation on my part; but, as you consider the promises to the overcomers, the cumulative evidence of these promises to the overcomers suggests greater access to the inner workings of the heavenly administration. Since the overcomers will be helping the Lord call the shots in the age to come, it would stand to reason that such citizens would possess special access.

Do not forget, the heavenly city in the age to come will not only be accessible to glorified saints; flesh and blood kings, with carnal minds, will also have access to this city, which will be on top of Mount Zion. A single context should suffice to make this point.

Revelation 21:24-26: And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it, [that they may enter in] (Majority Text).

Since, in the age to come, flesh and blood kings will be entering the New Jerusalem, then it would stand to reason that some places would be off limits to these, perhaps curious, mortal beings. It would stand to reason that such access to these places could be granted with token cards similar to what we use today.

From the perspective of a person, like myself, having worked in information technology, it is fascinating how many contexts of Scripture actually do make more sense, when interpreted in the light of 21st century technology: decrypting the number of Beast (Rev. 13:18), the host of heaven crashing to the earth (military satellites? Isaiah 34:4), many going quickly to and fro and knowledge increasing (air transportation and the information super highway; Daniel 12:4), the heavens being rolled up as a scroll (holographic universe theory; Revelation 6:14). The more technology advances, the more many Scriptures, which once held enigmas, are now beginning to make more sense. In a very real sense, technology is catching up to the ancient prophecies of the Bible.

Okay, let's get back to the promises to the overcomers.

The Promise to the Church in Philadelphia

A similar promise to overcomers is found in in the closing to the letter to the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:12, which reads:

Revelation 3:12: He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more.

Notice that it says he will be a pillar in the temple. Now, we all know what it means to be a pillar of the community; it means to be an influential person in your community. Well, since several passages in the New Testament tell us that the temple of the living God is not made of brick or mortar, but believers, it is not hard to see what a special privilege it will one day be for an overcoming believer to be considered a pillar in the temple of the New Jerusalem. This verse goes onto to say, "and he shall go out no more." Could this mean that these pillars of the temple will be making laws, and others of less rank will go out of the city and execute those laws upon the nations, outside the heavenly city? Once again, when the cumulative evidence is collectively considered concerning the promise to the overcomers, what these promises all have in common is greater access to the center of the Heavenly administration in the age to come.

The Promise to the Church in Sardis

Revelation 3:4, 5: "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

⁵ “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

This is a promise to those who, as this passage says, have “not defiled their garments.” The garment is the heavenly representation of the quality of one’s post conversion life which he lived on this earth. The garment of which this passage speaks is a cloak which is worn over the shoulders as an outer garment. According to this passage, the believer whose walk with the Lord is consistently not what it ought to have been is said to be in possession of a defiled garment. Apparently, those believers who have not walked with the Lord, as they ought to have, will, at the judgment seat of Christ, be given a defiled garment which will be something which they would not want to wear -- and, indeed, they won't wear -- because those garments will be cast into the fire which will be present at the judgment seat of Christ.

Scriptures teach us in I Corinthians 3 that, at the judgment seat of Christ, the works of many believers which were done in the flesh will be burnt up; and, in this way, they will be saved, yet so as by fire. In other words, at the judgment seat of Christ, the only thing in which some believers will have to rejoice is the fact that their cloak, which is representative of their works on earth, were burnt up at the judgment. They themselves will be spared from the fire, but their works won't. Their cloak, which is the visible representation of their works, will be

burnt up so that they, throughout eternity, are not wearing a defiled garment.

Believers whose cloaks are defiled by worldliness, and therefore, burnt up at the judgment seat of Christ, will not be given another cloak. Several scriptures indicate that these believers will experience a degree of shame and nakedness. Consider Revelation 16:15:

Revelation 16:15: “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

According to this passage, the person who has not been watchful in his walk with the Lord, has not kept his garment. Such a person will experience a degree of shame over his lack of proper attire. The Bible refers to this as nakedness. Incidentally, nakedness in this passage is not nudity like one would think of nudity today; nakedness, in this context, means clad only with the inner garment, the outer garments having been laid aside. It would be like man attending a formal dinner, spilling spaghetti on his suit coat and laying it aside, rather than wearing spaghetti on his coat for the rest of the evening. Thus, those believers who defile their garments with worldliness in this life will choose not to wear them in eternity but will have them incinerated, and thus forgotten, at the judgment seat of Christ.

Another passage which warns believers to prepare their garments for eternity is found in the Lord's warning to the church of Laodicea, which reads as follows:

Revelation 3:17-18: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked --

¹⁸ "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

Notice that the Lord here exhorts His hearers to buy white garments that they may be clothed, in order that the shame of their nakedness may not be revealed. Once again, this white garment is the outer cloak which the Lord here exhorts believers to buy. Wait a minute... how do you now, in this life, buy an outer garment? By investing your time, talent and treasure in that which is of eternal importance. Instead of setting your affections on things of this life, invest your heart in that which matters to the Lord. In this way, you buy a white garment; and, in this way, you will not be ashamed of your attire at and after the judgment seat of Christ.

By the way, notice that in this passage the Lord is exhorting believers to BUY gold refined in the fire and white garments. This is the language of rewards, not of gifts. As we study this subject matter, we need to be very sure that we are distinguishing between the freeness of eternal life and the costliness of rewards. A home in heaven is a gift, which we receive freely with no strings attached, by believing on Christ as our Savior. Rewards in heaven, on the other hand, are costly, which are purchased by a careful investment of our lives in that which is near and dear to the heart of God.

So, what will the person who has not been careful to keep his garment be wearing in heaven? That person, in the New Jerusalem, will be wearing the robe of righteousness, which is the universal covering of every blood-washed believer. This robe is a long, flowing garment which will fully cover every believer, and is indicative of the imputed righteousness of Christ upon every born again believer.

Revelation 7:9: After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, **clothed with white robes**, with palm branches in their hands, (emphasis added.)

Later on in verse 14 of this same passage, one of the elders around the throne of God explained to John where, all of a sudden, from whence these believers came:

Revelation 7:14, 15: he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them.”

This universal assembly can be none other than the church. These believers are wearing robes which they have made white in the blood of the Lamb. Every believer will be happy in the heavenly city because of the undiminished love of Christ shown to all of us because we are His. We will all be clothed in a robe of righteousness which represents Christ’s imputed righteousness; but, in addition to that, believers who, in this life, made those things which are important to God important to them, will also enjoy a special garment with special privileges in that heavenly city of God.

Okay, so back to the overcomers of Sardis:

Revelation 3:4-5: “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.

⁵ “He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but

I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”

This passage speaks of people’s being worthy of these garments, being worthy of walking with Christ clothed in these garments, and having their names confessed to the Father and His angels. Once again, these are special privileges which are granted according to our faithfulness and are not to be confused with the gift of eternal life and a home in heaven, which are guaranteed to all who believe in Christ. Let us examine each concept individually:

1. **“not blot out his name from the Book of Life”**

Let us now address what, to many, is a troubling concept in Revelation 3:5: having one’s name blotted out of the book of life.

The verb, “blotted out,” is one of four future tense verbs in this context. These are all future verbs because they describe the results of a future event, the judgment seat of Christ. In this context, those emerging victorious from the judgment seat of Christ will have bestowed upon them at least four special privileges:

1. They shall walk with Christ in white.
2. They shall have a white cloak thrown around them.
3. They shall not be blotted out of the book of life.

4. They shall have their name confessed before the Father and His angels.

The very fact that not having one's name blotted out of the book of life is a result of the judgment seat of Christ should tell us that at least the person in question made it to the judgment seat of Christ. Moreover, anyone at the judgment seat of Christ is already among the saved. Whatever loss having one's name blotted out of the book of life might suggest; it does not suggest a forfeiture of an eternal home in heaven. The person at the judgment seat of Christ has already made it there.

If the possibility of having one's name blotted out of the book of life as a result of the judgment seat of Christ is not a threat of forfeiture of eternal life, then what might it forebode to the believer with defiled garments? How about a loss of privileges in the age to come?

One thing that needs to be pointed out in this passage is that it presents for us a contrast between having one's name blotted out of the book of life and having one's name confessed before the Father and His angels. So what might be the purpose of having one's name confessed before the Father and angels as a result of the judgment seat of Christ? As in keeping with the other promises to the overcomers in the seven letters to the churches, the promises all appear to have to do with access to the center of the administration in the age to come.

The angels are the divine bouncers, so to speak, in the age to come. Having one's name confessed before the angels as the result of the judgment seat of Christ is, in effect, the Lord saying to the angels, "This

guy will be helping me call the shots; he is part of the divine cabinet; he is granted special access.”

This, by the way, is also in keeping with the three other promises of the context in question. For example, walking with the Lord in white might suggest walking with Christ in the midst of brilliant luminance, which one would expect to experience when conferring with Christ in the presence of His unveiled glory.

Notice also the phrase at the end of verse 4: “for they are worthy.” This cannot possibly be a reference to results of being saved, because being saved is not a reward for obedience. No one is worthy of being saved; salvation is a gift bestowed upon the sinner who has embraced the work of Christ as that which merits his eternal standing before God. Being “worthy” is not the language of the gift of righteousness; it is, however, the language of rewards for faithfulness.

2. “clothed in white garments”

Notice, also, the second promise to the overcomers which is found in verse 5: They shall have a white garment cast around them. This is the garment of authority, similar to a kingly robe. Like walking in white in the presence of the Lord, it speaks of promotion to leadership capacity in the age to come.

In keeping with the promises of promotion in the age to come, not having one’s name blotted out of the book of life must, by association, also anticipate a promoted status in the age to come.

That is precisely what we see in one other context which mentions the book of life. Consider this following passage:

Revelation 21:24-27: And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

²⁵ Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

²⁶ And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

²⁷ But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

This passage grants the privilege of entering into the holy city only to those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. It appears that not having one's name blotted out of the book of life also equates to special privileges in the age to come.

Consider also this, the righteous kings of the nations which are bringing their tribute, thus enabling them to enter into the New Jerusalem, will still be in possession of flesh and blood bodies with old sin natures. As such, they will need to be restricted from certain places in that New Jerusalem. It is only fitting that angels would be commissioned as the divine bouncers in that heavenly city. Having one's

name confessed before the angels confers upon that person the glorified status which those co-reigning with Christ would need.

Having our names confessed before the angels is for the purpose of positive angelic attention being afforded to the person whose name is confessed. Be it an earthly saint serving the Lord, or a glorified saint serving in the kingdom, special angelic attention is to be afforded the one who experiences his name being confessed before the angels.

Let us now approach this passage from another perspective mentioned in this context: the concept of being worthy of walking with the Lord in white and having one's name confessed before the Father and His angels.

To walk with the Lord in white, I believe, is to be able to stroll and confer with the Lord in His temple. It is interesting to note that, the majority of time in the New Testament this word "white" is used, it is used in the context of the radiance of a supernatural being. In other words, the white of which this context speaks is probably the glow of the abode of Christ in the midst of His Millennial temple. We see a similar promise made to Old Testament saints who maintained a consistency in their walk:

Zechariah 3:1-7: Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him.

² And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! *Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?”*

³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

⁴ Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.”

⁵ And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

⁶ Then the Angel of the LORD admonished Joshua, saying,

⁷ “Thus says the LORD of hosts:

‘If you will walk in My ways,

And if you will keep My command,

Then you shall also judge My house,

And likewise have charge of My courts;

I will give you places to walk Among these who stand here;’”

By the way, if we are to safely assume that the events occurring immediately prior to this exhortation are a foreshadowing of the imputation of the gift of righteousness, then notice it is after the imputation of righteousness that the Lord makes this above exhortation. In other words, “Now that you are saved, Joshua, if you will do something with My salvation, I will reward you in the age to come with access to My throne room.”

3. **“for they are worthy”**

Notice also the promise to the church in Sardis, in Revelation 3:5, includes the concept of worthiness. Once again, this is not the language of the freeness of imputed righteousness; but, rather, the language of an earned privilege: a privilege earned by a self-denying, Christ-honoring deportment enabled by His grace.

4. **“confess his name before the Father and His Angels”**

One purpose of the angels is that they minister to those who will be the heirs of salvation in the age to come:

Hebrews 1:14: Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

From the above verse, we can see that one of the ministries of angels is to minister in behalf of those who will inherit salvation. So, how is it determined who is to be a recipient of angelic attention and who is not? Consider the following verse:

Matthew 10:32: “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”

This passage occurs in a context of The Lord's promise to divinely protect those who speak in His name. In Matthew 10, the Lord is instructing His twelve apostles before sending them out into Israel proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. The confession of their names before the Father is for the purpose of angelic watchcare over their lives.

This passage concludes a context which begins in verse 28, in which the Lord is instructing the disciples not to fear the retribution of the Jews because He is going to divinely protect them as He sends them out.

Matthew 10:28-32: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

²⁹ “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

³⁰ “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

³¹ “Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”

He concludes His assurance of protection in verse 32: “whoever confesses me before men, Him I will confess before my Father who is in heaven.”

A mistaken assumption which is also made concerning this verse is that Jesus is confessing these witnesses to the Father; that is not what this context says. The word in the Greek is the word before, “ἐμπροσθεν,” which is an adverb of place. This confession is not for the ears of the Father but rather for the ears of those who are present around His throne: the angels.

A similar verse to this is found in Luke 12:8. In this passage, however, we see the Lord is trying to instruct His disciples in the midst of a chaotic assembly. His words here are not only being heard by the twelve; but also by a mixed assembly who were at different stages of attentiveness to the things of God, to whom He is warning against the

doctrine of the Pharisees. Nevertheless, we once again see His instruction to His apostles concerning the divine protection at the hand of the angels which God will afford to those speaking in His name.

Luke 12:4-9: “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

⁵ “But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

⁶ “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

⁷ “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

⁸ “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God.

⁹ “But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

It is the angels who are the intended recipient of this information.

Why is it important that the angels receive this information? The angels are the divine protectors of those who speak for the Lord. Angels are commissioned to provide physical protection to those whom the Lord decrees be protected, and it is before the throne of God where they receive their marching orders. Angels are ministering spirits; that is, they render favorable service, according to the will of God, to those whose service renders them to be heirs of the kingdom (Heb. 1:14).

Angels are also the protectors of the sanctuary of God; they are the Lord's divine bouncers so to speak. I mean, I don't think those four living creatures flying around the throne of God are just for aesthetics.

Revelation 4:8: *The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*

So, the benefits of having your name proclaimed to the angels of God are twofold.

1. An extra degree of protection for those now speaking in behalf of God and,
2. Permission to enter the center of the heavenly administration of Christ in the age to come.

If having your name blotted out of book of life is the opposite of having your name confessed to the Father and to his angels, then having your name blotted out of the book of life not only would impact your access to the center of the heavenly administration in the age to come, but it could also impact the degree of angelic protection you will be afforded at this time.

It is important to notice that those who are fulfilling the purpose of God in their lives are aware of this angelic protection. I can't tell you how many times, while ministering in behalf of the Lord, I have experienced some sort of deliverance from a harmful event.

On a wintery day many years ago, I was driving our family to conduct a monthly church service to residents of a nursing home in a nearby city. As we approached an intersection, a pickup truck sat waiting ahead in the oncoming lane to turn left, with multiple vehicles passing him on the berm to his right. Several seconds elapsed until, just before we reached the intersection, the driver of the truck decided to proceed and turned in front of my car. I slammed on my brakes and we began skidding sideways on the icy pavement, my wife's side of the car heading directly toward the rear fender of the truck. Mere inches before the collision, my car straightened out, with no logical explanation, and thus we avoided a horrific accident.

In this and many more incidents, God made it clear that the deliverance I had just experienced was truly due to a supernatural intervention. In fact, it has happened so often in my life that, even though I take note and thank the Lord for His intervention, it no longer surprises me.

Before leaving the consideration of the promise to the overcomers at Sardis, I would like to make one final observation concerning being expunged from the book of life.

I think that the anxiety concerning having one's name blotted out of the book of life is that, for years, we believers have just assumed that, since Revelation 20:15 tells us that whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire, the book of life contains a list of all of the saved.

Quite honestly, Revelation 20:15 deserves a second look. Here is the verse in our English translation, immediately followed by the Greek:

Revelation 20:15: And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15 καὶ εἴ τις οὐχ εὐρέθη ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς γεγραμμένος ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός

The key to understanding this verse is to observe the tense of the participle which is translated “written.” In the Greek it is a perfect passive participle. A basic rule of Greek syntax (as well as English) relates to how the tense of the participle relates to the main verb of the sentence. For example, if a participle is in the aorist (past) tense, it puts the action of the participle antecedent (or before) to the action of the principle verb of the sentence. Likewise, if a participle is a present participle, then the action of the participle is simultaneous with the principle action of the verb. To make a long story short, the translation before us in our English Bibles would demand a present tense participle. However, the word “written” is a perfect tense participle which places the timing of the participle as having been initiated before the verb “found” which is the principle verb of the sentence. Any translation of this verse needs to account for the fact that the word “written” is a perfect passive participle. A more accurate translation to Revelation 20:15 would probably be as follows:

And if anyone was not found HAVING BEEN written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

In other words, it doesn't matter if his name has been blotted out. What matters to the person in question is this: was his name EVER THERE? The practical implication of this truth is that Revelation 3:5 becomes for us, not a threat of forfeiture of eternal life, but rather a threat of forfeiture of privileges that might accrue to the faithful believer

whose name remains written in the book after the judgment seat of Christ.

In conclusion, we can see from what we have considered in this section of our book that believers will be doing much more in the age to come than sitting on clouds and playing harps. Faithful believers will be helping the Lord govern over this world. Many in this world will not enjoy being subjugated to the rule of Christ and His saints; but, unlike the political landscape of today, those on the side of God will prevail in every challenge to Godly government.

CHAPTER 5

WHO ARE THE OVERCOMERS?

PART 2

In this chapter, we will examine two more promises to the overcomers at the end of two more of the letters to the churches in the book of Revelation.

The Promise to the Church of Thyatira

Revelation 2:26-29: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations –

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'

-- as I also have received from My Father;

²⁸ "and I will give him the morning star.

²⁹ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

This promise to the overcomer grants authority and power in the age to come. Of course, to the person who possesses only an ethereal concept of heaven -- that is, that heaven is a place where we will be sitting on cloud and playing harps in the presence of the Lord -- the above verse indeed presents a very puzzling concept. “Dashing the nations to pieces??? I thought I was going to spend eternity worshiping at the feet of Jesus?”

What most believers are never taught is that there is a thousand year period of time on this earth after this present age of the church, during which the Lord will be ruling over this world with a rod of iron and believers who were faithful to the Lord in this present church age, as well as Jewish saints, will be elevated to leadership status with the Lord in the age to come. We have already pointed out this concept previously in this book so I will not labor again to make that point.

However, that there will be a thousand year period of time after this church age can be demonstrated by the following verses:

Revelation 20:4: And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6: Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Here we see two verses promising that many church age saints will be reigning with Christ for a thousand years. So, the next question is: reigning over whom or what?

What also needs to be understood about this age to come is that, contrary to what many teach, there will be lots of people still in this world who would rather govern their own nations. The paradise of which many imagine the world is going to be in the age to come is actually limited only to the boundaries of the earthly kingdom of Christ, which will be centered on top of Mount Zion in the city of the New Jerusalem.

Isaiah 65:25: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,

The lion shall eat straw like the ox,

And dust *shall be* the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,

Says the LORD.

The nations outside of Christ's kingdom will have blessing, or lack thereof, based upon their subjugation to the government of Christ. Several verses can be brought to bear to demonstrate this point.

Zechariah 14:16-18: And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

¹⁷ And it shall be *that* whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain.

¹⁸ If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they *shall have* no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Micah 4:3: He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war any more.

It can also be demonstrated that many of these nations will need to be subjugated against their will. Psalms 2 is a record of the rebellious attitude of certain nations during this coming one-thousand year reign of Christ:

Psalm 2:1-12: Why do the nations rage,

And the people plot a vain thing?

² The kings of the earth set themselves,

And the rulers take counsel together,

Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,

³ "Let us break Their bonds in pieces

And cast away Their cords from us."

⁴ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;

The LORD shall hold them in derision.

⁵ Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,

And distress them in His deep displeasure:

⁶ "Yet I have set My King

On My holy hill of Zion."

⁷ "I will declare the decree:

The LORD has said to Me,

'You *are* My Son,

Today I have begotten You.

⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give *You*

The nations *for* Your inheritance,

And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.

⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron;

You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

¹⁰ Now therefore, be wise, O kings;

Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear,

And rejoice with trembling.

¹² Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,

And you perish *in* the way,

When His wrath is kindled but a little.

Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

Notice verse 9 of our above Psalm. “You shall break them with a rod of iron.” This is precisely the same promise that we see the Lord making to the overcoming church age saint at the end of the letter to the church of Thyatira:

Revelation 2:26, 27: "And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations –

²⁷ 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'

–as I also have received from My Father;

We can very clearly see that, contrary to popular belief, this world will not be a utopia of love and grace enjoying the blessings of the Lord in the age to come. On the contrary, many will rather not be subjugated to Christ at all and must be subjugated with a rod of iron. We can see from this above promise to the overcomers that faithful believers will be helping the Lord do just that.

The age to come will be filled with political rancor. As we see in Psalms 2:2, some kings of the earth are going to be plotting together to overthrow the Lord who will be reigning on top of His very high mountain. Here is another such Millennial Psalm which records another such plot:

Psalm 48:1-5: A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised

In the city of our God,

In His holy mountain.

² Beautiful in elevation,

The joy of the whole earth,

Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,

The city of the great King.

³ God *is* in her palaces;

He is known as her refuge.

⁴ For behold, the kings assembled,

They passed by together.

⁵ They saw *it, and* so they marveled;

They were troubled, they hastened away.

This context is the record of a future coup attempt against the Lord in the age to come. As certain kings approach mount Zion to carry out their coup, and see the immensity of that mountain, they will have second thoughts and hasten away.

In the age to come, glorified church age believers will always be in the presence of the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:17: Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Moreover, since the Lord will be ruling and reigning from the top of mount Zion in the age to come, believers will be there as well. Believers will be dwelling in the New Jerusalem located on top of Mount Zion, where believers who were faithful in this age will be helping Him call the shots in the next. We can also see this in the following verse:

1 Corinthians 6:2: Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

As it is today, there will be many rebellious people on the earth; however, unlike today, in the age to come, a standard of righteousness will be imposed upon them.

Jeremiah 23:5: “Behold, *the* days are coming,” says the LORD,
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper,
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.”

Truly, the age to come will be an exciting time for the one ruling and reigning with Christ. Having suffered persecution and ridicule for his faith in this present evil age, he will then be at the top of the political hierarchy of the world. During the earthly reign of Christ the faithful of this age will be wielding righteous, political authority over this earth, and winning. Moreover, while many may resent their authority, these insurgents will not prevail over the saints. The saints will impose righteousness, with a rod of iron if need be.

One final point before we leave this promise: There are those who would attempt to say that the promise to the overcomers in Revelation 2:26-27 is a promise to all believers; however, as we have seen elsewhere, the promise of being able to rule and reign with Christ is to those who, during their post conversion life in this age, and through occupation with truth and trials, experienced the transformation of their character in the direction of Christ likeness.

2 Timothy 2:11, 12: *This is a faithful saying:*

For if we died with *Him*,

We shall also live with *Him*.

¹² If we endure,

We shall also reign with *Him*.

An additional attestation to this fact concerning the overcomers can be seen in the incidence that Revelation 2:26 begins with the conjunction “and”, indicating that the subject content of verse 26 is a continuation of the narrative of verse 25. Verse 25 is an exhortation to hold fast, until Christ returns, to what they have already obtained; AND, if they do so, then Christ promises to those overcomers power over the nations in the age to come.

The Promise to the Church of the Laodiceans

Revelation 3:21: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

As we have seen thus far concerning the promises made to the overcomers, this promise is also one of co-regency with Christ.

This verse, on the surface, may create a confusing mental image. Suffice it to say, I do not believe that the Lord and the faithful believer are going to be squeezing onto Christ’s throne at the same time. A more likely scenario is that the throne that is being mentioned is a tribunal bench of saints over which the Lord will be the chief justice. Much as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States sits with associate judges surrounding him on the bench of the court, such a court

of judgment will exist near the throne of Christ. This tribunal of associate judges might each have their own cases which they will hear.

That this throne of Christ does not always refer to a place of a singular seating accommodation can be demonstrated by the following verses:

Revelation 4:6: Before the throne *there was* a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

Revelation 5:6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Revelation 7:17 "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The fact that the three above verses speak of activity occurring in “the midst of the throne” should demonstrate that the throne is not always the single seating accommodation of the Lord; but, rather, can also be a reference to the seat of the government of the heavenly administration in the center of which the faithful believer will have a position.

An equally plausible translation of the above verse might be a promise of the faithful to sit with the Lord “at” his throne, the Greek preposition “en” supporting a variety of meanings. It could also be translated “in” if we understand the word “throne” to be the seat of world government during the age to come.

We see a similar promise being made to faithful Jewish saints concerning their governmental responsibilities:

Zechariah 3:7: "Thus says the LORD of hosts:

'If you will walk in My ways,
And if you will keep My command,
Then you shall also judge My house,
And likewise have charge of My courts;
I will give you places to walk
Among these who stand here.

Luke 22:28-30: "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials.

²⁹ "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me,

³⁰ "that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Whether a Jewish saint walking with the Lord under the Law of Moses, a church age saint faithfully occupying himself with grace and truth, or a saint living during the Great Tribulation who remains faithful during the persecution of that time, the saint whose occupation with God's truth produces a life lived above the world will share with the Lord in His governance in the age to come.

CHAPTER 6

WHO ARE THE OVERCOMERS?

PART 3: THE FIRE BEFORE THE THRONE

The Promise to the Church of Smyrna

Revelation 2:11: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

I deliberately did not comment on this verse in the sequence in which these promises occur in the Book of Revelation because, on the surface, it looks like a promise that the one who overcomes will not suffer eternal condemnation. That would redefine for us the use of the word “overcome” in the book of Revelation to be equivalent to being “saved.” Moreover, while it is not necessary to assign one singular definition to a word in Scripture, but to let the context determine the final definition, I do find that John uses the term consistently in his epistles to refer to a person who has, through truth and trials, risen above the allurements of the world and lusts of the flesh to experience a degree of victory in God’s grace. While the purpose of this book is not to explore all the occurrences of the word “overcome” in John’s epistles, I

do believe the above definition can account for all of the usages of the word by the Apostle John.

It is necessary that the word “overcome” have the same meaning for each of the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. It would not make sense for the Lord to switch definitions of that word from one church to another. So, an overcomer is either equivalent to a person being saved, or it is a person who is saved and has lived a laudable post conversion life before the Lord. I believe the latter is the correct view.

The problem with taking the position that the term “overcomer” is equivalent to a person’s being a child of God is that it does not flow well in the contexts of each of the seven letters. The exhortations to the seven churches are exhortations to overcome the present situations with which those churches are being challenged. To simply assign the meaning of the overcomer as those who are merely saved is to disengage the promise to the overcomers from the rest of the context of each of the letters.

So, with this mind, and with a desire to consistently interpret the concept of the “overcomer” in the book of Revelation, let us now more closely examine this promise to the church of Smyrna.

Revelation 2:11: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." '

What does the Lord mean when He says he who overcomes shall not be **hurt** by the second death? Notice that it does not say, "shall not be **destroyed** by the second death," but, rather, "shall not be **hurt** by the second death." What is the second death? And what does it mean to not be "hurt" by it?

The question is this: Is the second death a place of burning or is it the action of being forever consigned to that place of that burning? The confusion is as follows: If it is the action of being forever consigned to the lake of fire, then there is confusion and an inconsistent interpretation as to who the overcomers are in the book of Revelation. Are Christ's promises to the overcomers to be taken out of their immediate context and to be taken as general promises to those who are merely saved, or are His promises to be taken to apply to those who gain victory over the present spiritual challenges in each of the seven churches?

It is my assertion that the lake of fire is used for more than just eternally consigning the unsaved to a place of unending torment; the lake of fire will also be the source of the fire at the judgment seat of Christ. To not be "hurt" by the second death would be to emerge victorious at the judgment seat of Christ because there were laudable accomplishments which remained after the wood, hay and stubble were

consumed by the fire before the throne of Christ. I offer the following evidence for this position:

The terms “Second Death” and “Lake of Fire” stand in apposition in the following context:

Revelation 20:14: And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, *even* the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:14” καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾅδης ἐβλήθησαν εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερός ἐστὶν ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός

The above verse is translated from the Majority Greek New Testament as well as the United Bible Society Greek New Testament. Whether you follow the Alexandrian or the Byzantine manuscripts, they are in agreement in this text. In other words, approximately 99.9 percent of the extant Greek manuscripts place the words “the lake of fire” in apposition to the second death. Therefore, this verse confirms the understanding that the second death is to be considered a place as much as it is to be considered an event. In fact, the NIV translates this, “the lake of fire is the second death.” The nominative case existing in both the subject and the predicate make this a predicate nominative, in which the subject stands in apposition to the predicate.

The second death is the place of everlasting judgment for those confirmed in a state of everlasting unrighteousness. It is a place of unending fire from which there will be no escape. At some time in the future, the contents of hell will be emptied into this place, most likely because the fundamental structure of the earth will be changed after the Millennium at the transition into the eternal state.

Let us now discuss the fire in proximity to the throne of Christ. Quite often, we do not consider what is beneath and before the throne of Christ. I think it can be demonstrated by comparing Scripture with Scripture that, before and below the throne of Christ, is the entryway to the lake of fire.

Revelation 14:9-11: Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand,

¹⁰ "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

¹¹ "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

How could it be that these people are tormented forever and ever in the presence of the Lamb? Could it be that the entrance to the lake of fire is before and below the throne of Christ? It would be difficult to contemplate the idea that part of the glorified saints' experience in the presence of the Lord could consist of standing next to people in the presence of the Lord who were being tormented forever and ever in flames like the above passage suggests. However, it would make more sense if the Lord's enemies were being tormented in a place whose entrance was before and below the throne of Christ. Could this be what the Father meant when seven times in Scripture He says to the Lord the following:

Hebrews 1:13b: "Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"

Could this also be why the area surrounding the throne of Christ in the book of Revelation is described as a sea of glass mingled with fire?

Revelation 15:2: And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

If the entrance to the lake of fire was immediately before and below the throne of Christ, one could imagine seeing the flames underneath the transparent glass upon which the saints were walking. What a frightening sight that would be!

If the second death is the lake of fire and the entrance to that lake of fire is immediately before and below the throne of Christ, then it would not be too difficult to imagine that the source of the flames at the judgment seat of Christ could be the Lord's opening the entrance to the lake of fire.

We know for a fact that fire will be utilized in our judgment at the judgment seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15: each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The book of Hebrews likewise teaches that those works of the believer which are to be rejected will be burned up at the judgment:

Hebrews 6:7-8: For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God;

⁸but if it bears thorns and briars, [it is] rejected and near to being cursed, whose end [is] to be burned.

So, if the entrance to the lake of fire – or, as it is also called in Scripture, the second death – is immediately before and below the throne of Christ, then how possible is it that these same flames could be used to burn up the good for nothing works of our flesh at the judgment seat of Christ? Those whose works endure that fiery trial would emerge from that judgment unscathed. They would suffer no loss by the fires of the second death.

Revelation 2:11: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

Revelation 2:11 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῇ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου

What does it mean to not be hurt by the second death? The Greek preposition “ek” which occurs in the sentence would most likely render our translation, “He who overcomes shall not be hurt **out of** the second death,” as if the second death was the source of the possible harm. Once again, if the lake of fire is the source of flames used at the judgment seat of Christ, and the second death, as we see in Revelation 20:14, is the lake of fire, then it stands to reason that to not be hurt out of the second death means that the flames of the lake of fire at the judgment seat of Christ will not disqualify you from ruling and reigning with Christ for a thousand years.

If the above verse was a threat of everlasting consignment to the lake of fire, would not a word harsher in tone than “hurt” be used of that event? Would not a phrase like “cast into the lake of fire” be more appropriate if this event resulted in such an everlasting consignment?

It is important to note one additional interesting construction in the above verse: the employment of the double negative at the beginning of the sentence. The employment of the double negative in the Greek strengthens the denial of the assertion. Literally, the one overcoming will absolutely not be hurt by the second death. The NIV translates this most accurately this way:

Revelation 2:11: He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

It is interesting to note that Paul, in Colossians 3:15, also contemplates negative consequences as a result of the judgment seat of Christ:

Colossians 3:23: And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

²⁵ But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

We are not told in these verses what those negative consequences are. However, from other contexts we can conclude that it is most likely the shame of emerging from the judgment seat of Christ forever without a garment of reward and, thus, ashamed of your lack of accomplishment for the Lord.

Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.

Revelation 3:18: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that

you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Many believers have the attitude, “Hey, as long as I make it there, that’s all I’m worried about.” However, when one considers the fact that rewards granted at the judgment seat of Christ last forever, the distinction to be received there is worth an investment of our time, talent and treasure into that which the Lord considers important. He who lacks the overcomer’s garment will be forever reminded that he should have prioritized that which the Lord values. Those who made God’s priorities their priorities, will forever be honored for making and living that choice:

Daniel 12:3: Those who are wise shall shine

Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

One final observation about the fire before the throne of Christ including the entrance to the lake of fire: This view might also address the tension of the following context:

Revelation 21:7, 8: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

⁸ "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The tension created by this context is that it appears that there is no room for the untransformed believer in this context. You are either an overcomer or you are destined to be cast into the lake of fire. Of course, those who interpret being an overcomer as being equivalent to being born again have no trouble with this. They would say that, because a person is born again, at the core of his being, he does not commit any of the vices contained in verse 8. Moreover, while that understanding does keep the untransformed believer out of the lake of fire, that interpretation also obliterates all of the promises which the book of Revelation makes to the overcomers who emerge victorious from the judgment seat of Christ. While viewing the child of God from the perspective of the sinlessness of his new man is a valid approach in many passages of Scripture, in this context we should consider another perspective.

While Revelation 21:8 could be a reference to unbelievers, it could also contain a reference to the carnal child of God's destruction of his defiled garment, while he is still wearing it, at the judgment seat of Christ. Having HIS "part" in the lake of fire could be the Lord opening

the entrance to the lake of fire and incinerating the defiled garment while still on the believer. What a frightening experience that would be! Of course the Greek preposition “en” (translated “in”) as in “have his part **in** the lake of fire” could also be translated as “near”, “by”, “before” or “with”, so the precise translation of that phrase would be up for discussion as well.

The language of the act of forever consigning a person to the flames of everlasting condemnation is “cast” into hell or “cast” into the lake of fire. Twelve times in the New Testament the eternally condemned are said to be “cast” into the flames of eternal condemnation. The above verse does not speak with such harsh language.

One thing we do know for certain is that fire will be used to judge believers at the judgment seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15: each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Here, we see that the integrity of the believer's post-conversion works shall be evaluated with fire at the judgment seat of Christ. We also see that the under-transformed child of God will be delivered from an eternity of shamefully wearing the defiled garment he forged in his post-conversion life. His neglect of the priorities of the Lord will not be forever on display. He will be saved from that shame by the fire of Christ's judgment burning up his worthless works.

As we have already mentioned, a similar discussion evaluating our post-conversion activities is also mentioned in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 6:7-9: For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God;

⁸ but if it bears thorns and briars, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.

⁹ But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

Notice, as in our passage in I Corinthians, the above context is not questioning a person's eternal salvation. The author of Hebrews is, rather, questioning those post-conversion works, that is, things which “**accompany**” salvation. It is the good for nothing thorns and briars

produced by the world-conformed child of God which will be rejected and burned at the judgment seat of Christ.

The believer living his post-conversion life for that which is important to God will carry everlasting honor and distinction in the age to come. Likewise, those who remained conformed to this world, untransformed by the word of truth, will forever live without those crowns and garments which characterize the wardrobe of the victorious believer. In this way, they will be reminded that their brief lives on this earth could have counted for so much more.

CHAPTER 7

THE PURIFYING HOPE

The purifying hope of the believer is the knowledge that the rewards and distinctions which will be distributed to faithful believers at the judgment seat of Christ last forever. Those rewards will result in leadership authority in the age to come and distinction into eternity. The ridicule that the believer suffers now—the disdain, the mocking, the contempt, the belittling that the world heaps upon the faithful—will be forever corrected when those of the world acknowledge the saint and his integrity in the age to come. No more will the saints be mocked; their integrity will be acknowledged and their righteousness will be vindicated when they are elevated to positions of stature and leadership in the age to come. Moreover, while revenge should certainly never be in the mind of the faithful believer, since God expects him to forgive and forget, it is, nevertheless, an issue with God to even the score as we can see in the following context:

2 Thessalonians 1:4-8: so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,
⁵ *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;
⁶ since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

⁷ and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,
⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice in the above verses, one purpose of our present suffering is that we might be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. In the age to come, the Lord is going to appoint to leadership positions people who, in this life, exhibited integrity of character. A primary indicator revealing the character of the child of God is his ability to overlook the persecutions which he suffered at the hands of the unrighteous.

Another indicator of proven character is the believer's ability to continue to function as an ambassador of God in the midst of such persecution. Those children of God who can overlook the venomous attacks of the unrighteous upon their own person and still hold forth the word of life will be counted worthy to hold positions of leadership in the age to come.

It is important to note that to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God is not a condition of gaining an eternal home in heaven. Rather, being worthy of the kingdom is to be elevated to leadership status in the age to come. It would be a sham for the Lord to promote to leadership status those who, in this present age, were not exemplary persons.

Today, we may elect less than honorable leaders, but in the age to come, the Lord will not appoint any.

The Lord will not promote an untransformed believer in the age to come; that is, a believer who lived a shameful life here on the earth. Only believers who are now perfecting a Christ-like character in their lives will be promoted in the age to come. This truth can be seen in the conclusion of our passage in the first chapter of II Thessalonians:

II Thessalonians 1:11, 12: Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power,
¹² that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The calling of which the above passage speaks is not a home in heaven but, rather, co-regency with Christ. Everybody who has been born again by faith in the sacrifice of Christ will have a home in heaven. But the calling of which this verse speaks is more than that; it is that we may be glorified with, or alongside of, Christ in the age to come. The glorification of Christ by the believer in this life is going to be reciprocated by the glorification of the faithful believer by Christ in the next. This is the message of verse twelve of the above context.

The relationship that now exists between the Lord and His children will be acknowledged by all in the age to come. Even though the context below addresses the Jews' persecution of the church during the

first century, there is no reason to believe that the Lord will not make all the persecutors of the saints one day acknowledge our relationship with the Lord.

Revelation 3:9: "Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie – indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Peter speaks about the motivation of the child of God in this way:

1 Peter 1:13-16: Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
¹⁴ as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance;
¹⁵ but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct,
¹⁶ because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Here, Peter tells believers to set their hope fully on the grace which is to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. He is to be motivated by the distinctions that faithful believers will receive at the judgment seat of Christ. A believer's Christ-like character will be honored with a distinction which will last forever.

It is the goal of the Spirit of God, who indwells every born again believer, to guide the believer into a perspective and lifestyle which will one day be found to the praise and honor of the Lord when He is revealed to gather together His saints. This activity of the Spirit sometimes includes the believer's going through some trials.

The purpose of trials for the child of God is to cause him to be so consistently receptive to divine truth that that truth becomes his functional frame of reference. Until that becomes a normal reality for the child of God, if need be, the Lord will continue to allow trials in a person's life. More often than not, most all believers need trials.

The believer, if left to himself, will eventually be overcome by the prioritization of other things in his life until, unperceptively, the assimilation of life-changing truth will take a back seat. The believer, if left alone, will most likely succumb to his own deceitful lusts. He will unperceptively be drawn away by his own selfish ambitions, his own hobbies, his own entertainment schedule, until those distractions choke out of his life the only thing which can lead him into conformity with Christ: consistent reflection upon grace-oriented Bible truth. The believer is always to be conducting his life in the light this priority of God for his life. When that occupation is snuffed out of his heart by other priorities, the purpose of God for his life is thwarted.

When the purpose of God is sidetracked by wrong affections, a disciplinary response from God may be in order. Peter says it this way:

1 Peter 1:6, 7: In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,
⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

WHAT WILL BE JUDGED?

So let's work backward. What life characteristics of the believer will be found to the praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ?

1. We will be judged according to degree to which we bear the image of Christ.

1 John 4:17: Love has been perfected among us in this:
that we may have boldness in the day of judgment;
because as He is, so are we in this world.

From the above verse, we can see that one of the criteria by which the believer will be judged is the degree to which he has, in this age, been transformed towards the image of Christ. The degree to which the believer now, in this world, becomes as HE IS, is the degree to which the child of God can, with boldness, anticipate the judgment seat of Christ.

James 2:13: For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

One of the character traits for which the Lord is looking in His saints is mercy. Mercy is the ability to look beyond the offenses of another and treat them with kindness. It is the ability to look past the transgressions of others against us and still continue to love those transgressors. According to the above verse, those who perfect this ability of the Lord in their own lives can expect that this trait will contribute to a positive outcome at the Lord's judgment.

We can also see in the following verse that godliness accrues benefits in the age to come:

1 Timothy 4:8: For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

2. We will be judged according to the consistency and purity of our perspective.

1 Peter 1:7: that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Faith is having a handle on divine perspective. The believer's faith is tried in order that it might be purified. The purifying of our faith

means that the believer's operational perspective becomes consistent with the will of God. Those whose operational perspective has become consistent with God's priorities will receive praise, honor and glory at the judgment seat of Christ.

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

3. We will be judged according to our priorities.

1 Corinthians 9:25: And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*.

In the above verse, those who will receive this reward exercise temperance in all things. Temperance is not allowing the impulses of the flesh to direct the course of one's life. The temperate believer does not allow his entertainment schedule to direct his life. Rather, he abstains from such temporal gratifications in order that he might perfect in his life a set of priorities which will one day be rewarded. This same criteria of judgment can be seen in the verse below:

2 Timothy 2:4, 5: No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

⁵ And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Once again, we can see that the child of God who neglects personal ambitions in favor of advancing the Lord's priorities will receive a positive assessment in that area of his life.

4. We will be rewarded for enduring trials.

James 1:12: Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Enduring temptation means choosing and continuing in a Biblical response to a test when an "of this world" solution could easily be accessed. Consider, for example, one's purchase of a house. Is a person, in his home purchase, buying the biggest home he can afford so that others will think him to be successful because of his wealth? Or does he buy only the home he needs and spend the abundance on that which is important to the Lord? The former is committing the sin of the pride of life (I John 2:16); the latter is having an abundance for every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Or, when a person becomes anxious, does he try to spend, smoke, drink, gamble, medicate or self-entertain himself out of his anxiety? Or will he take the steps in his life to reestablish his fellowship with the Lord; and, in the process, regain the joy and peace which the Lord guarantees to every genuine child of God who is plugged into His grace?

5. We will be rewarded according to how much our activities contributed to the harvest.

1 Corinthians 3:7, 8: So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

1 Thessalonians 2:19: For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

Here, Paul states that there will be a direct association between the disciple and his mentor which will bring the mentor joy at the judgment seat of Christ. It appears that there will be something like a spiritual family tree at that event in which obedience will be celebrated when that obedience has contributed to another coming to faith.

Daniel 12:3: Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

The above quote takes the classic form of Hebrew poetry where a parallelism is created by the two clauses of the statement. In other words, the above verse is saying that wise people, that is, those whose leadership causes many to be united to the Lord in righteousness, will possess a distinction which lasts forever.

6. We will be judged according to the degree to which we helped others advance in grace.

1 Peter 5:1-4: The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:
² Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;
³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;
⁴ and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Notice here the delicate balancing act upon which the pastor of the church is called to perform. He is to shepherd; not by compulsion, but, rather, in teaching, exhortation and example. The faithful pastor teaches, exhorts, provides an example, but does not coerce God's children to follow. As we will state in the next chapter of this book, God is not glorified by coerced obedience. The pastor of the church is not to intimidate people into submission. He is not to suggest that disobedient children of God are more than likely not saved if they are not following the decrees of the pastor. He is not to muddy the gospel by suggesting that genuine children of God WILL live a life of obedience. He is to preach a gospel of free grace with no strings attached.

Notice, also, that the above Scripture tell us that these crowns do not fade away. There are many who teach that believers will throw their crowns at the feet of Jesus and forever leave them there. Nothing could

be further from the truth. The visible manifestation of those rewards bestowed by the Lord will forever distinguish and honor that believer's earthly obedience. We can also see the eternal duration of bestowed rewards in the following verse:

1 Corinthians 9:25: And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*.

7. We will be rewarded for consistent service.

2 Timothy 4:7, 8: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Hebrews 10:35: Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

It is not clear here whether the reward in the above verse is reaped in this life or in the life to come. Much of the reward mentioned in the book of Hebrews is present rest from chaos. A consistent walk with the Lord will result in blessings now and in the age to come.

1 Timothy 4:8: For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

8. Rewards can be diminished or recalled.

As long as we are considering rewards, we also have warnings in Scripture that rewards can be diminished or forfeited, if the child of God falls from his steadfastness.

John 1:8: Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

Colossians 2:18: Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

Revelation 3:11: "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

It is interesting to note that these last two statements concerning loss of rewards seem to suggest that an individual may be involved in preventing the child of God from realizing a full reward. This individual is most likely the devil. The devil does not want others to achieve the glory that he once possessed. He wants to deny to the Lord leadership

companions in the age to come. Every child of God who advances and matures in grace is a victory for the salvation of the Lord. The devil wants to deny the Lord that victory.

9. We may also experience negative consequences as a result of the judgment seat of Christ.

Colossians 3:25: But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

As we saw in a previous chapter, the fire before the throne of Christ which will be used in the burning up of our good for nothing works will most likely be a frightening experience. The child of God receiving a negative assessment from this experience will suffer the loss of promotion in the age to come. He will also emerge from the judgment with a shameful nakedness of rewards which all will see.

Revelation 3:18: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Revelation 16:15: "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

These negative outcomes of that judgment day will be eternal in their duration. The believer, even though he will have joy forever in the presence of the Father and Christ, will also forever know that his status in eternity could have been so much more. These are the losses which will be realized as a result of a negative assessment at the judgment seat of Christ. So, the judgment seat of Christ results in both positive and negative consequences for the saints.

2 Corinthians 5:10: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Because eternity is forever, and honor and promotion in the age to come is also of everlasting consequence, God's children need to, in earnest, pursue that which God says is important.

One life to live;

'Twill soon be past.

Only what's done in Christ shall last.

CHAPTER 8

THE IMPORTANCE TO GOD OF UNCOERCED GROWTH

God originally created us for His fellowship. It was the eternal desire of God to create others, made in His image, for the purpose of enjoying communion with Himself, just as the members of the Godhead enjoy communion with each other.

In order for a relationship with God to be meaningful to Him, and to us, it must contain a component of free will. Just as it would not glorify my marriage if I had to threaten my wife if she did not daily show me that she loves me, thus it is not meaningful to God if He has to intimidate us to love Him.

Thus, it does not and will not glorify God if, when it is all said and done, any being in the universe could point to the throne room of God and disparage God's eternal company of saints by saying, "Well, sure you've got a company of eternal companions around your throne, they were too scared not to worship you!" Even if God is not concerned about the opinion of any other being in the universe, He would still be

aware that his relationship with his companions could still contain a degree of coercion.

This above understanding was really at the heart of the experience of Job. After God pointed out to the devil the righteousness of Job, the devil disparaged the relationship that God had with Job by accusing it of being a quid pro quo relationship. The devil said, "Well, of course Job is worshiping you; of course he is kissing up to ya, God, he's doing it for all the goodies! Job knows what side his bread is buttered on, you're his eternal sugar daddy! Take away the sweets and bennies and watch Job curse you to his face!" This was basically the retort of the devil when God pointed out to him the integrity of Job.

Job 1:6-12: Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them.

⁷And the LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

⁸Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

⁹So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

¹⁰ "Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land.

¹¹ "But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

¹² And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has *is* in your power; only do not lay a hand on his *person*." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

It is of extreme importance to God to have a company of saints who, in addition to being saved, in an uncoerced fashion have chosen to seek His communion and likeness. Such an uncoerced relationship with God cannot be disparaged by any being in the universe. Such a relationship, free from intimidation, is the only relationship which can truly bring glory to God and His plan of salvation.

Understand this: To a large degree, the reason most of us got saved is because we were afraid of the consequences of passing into eternity without a relationship with God. It was the FEAR of spending eternity in a nasty place which drove us to seek the light. So, in a very real sense, we were saved because of a fear of judgment. Moreover, while fear certainly is a valid motive to become a child of God, fear is not an honorable motive upon which to base a relationship.

This is why it is necessary for there to be two tiers of a relationship that a person can have with the Lord. There must be a first tier of existence consisting of being saved and assured that one is on their way to heaven without regard to any additional achievement in that person's life. In addition, for this new born child of God, there is also an invitation (calling) to progress in a second tier of existence, that tier being a transformation of that person towards the image of Christ.

Yes, a person can be saved, but not growing towards the image of Christ, and still have guaranteed to him a home in heaven... with no strings attached. Not only is being saved, but not growing, a possibility in the life of the child of God, it is a truth that needs to be understood by the new believer. The new believer needs to understand that not only is he saved and saved forever, but he is saved forever even if he never progresses past infancy for the rest of his life. The new believer needs to be taught and to understand that, even if he never responds to the chastening of the Lord in a positive way, his citizenship in heaven is still secure. Moreover, while most theologians have a big problem with this reality, it is necessary if there is to exist with God a coercion-free relationship. Only such a relationship can bring God glory.

The greatest victory of grace that God can achieve is to be forever in the company of likeminded beings who, under absolutely no degree of intimidation, chose to continue in progression towards Christ-likeness, for no other reason than that they enjoyed communing with God and partnering with the Lord in accomplishing His will upon this earth. This is the greatest everlasting testimony to the power of His grace that will

exist into eternity, and He will NOT allow that relationship to be tainted with the possibility that the person enjoying that relationship was coerced into that life of companionship.

Becoming a child of God through faith in Christ does involve an element of fear: fear of eternal condemnation. If the only tier of relationship that a person could have with the Lord was “saved,” then there is a sense that that relationship could be disparaged. After all, what sort of a relationship is it if I either have to warm up to God or go to hell? That is not at all a relationship which would be above criticism. However, if I am saved, and assured I am on my way to heaven, and nothing can ever change that; if, from that point of absolute assurance, in an uncoerced manner, I choose anyway to press on in my relationship with God, NOW that IS a victory for God’s grace.

This is why absolute assurance of salvation is a necessity in a person’s life before he can begin growing in grace. God does not want His child being browbeat into Christ-likeness. Such a coerced maturation experience would, in the end, not be a laudable achievement for the grace of God. Such a relationship based upon intimidation could be disparaged.

This is why we see in Scripture passages which indicate that genuine growth in grace cannot take place until assurance of salvation is gained. Before the believer can start pressing on to maturity where the

fruit of righteousness abounds, the believer must first be rooted and grounded in assurance. Consider the following passage:

Hebrews 6:1-3: Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

² of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

³ And this we will do if God permits.

And this we will do if God permits?

Why would God not permit one of His children to press on to maturity? If the child of God is still apprehensive about the certainty of his relationship with God; if the child of God is still struggling with assurance, then God is not going to release that child to begin down the path to maturity because God is not glorified by a fear-based relationship of service. Coerced obedience does not glorify God. It is a relationship with God that, when it is all said and done, would be less than laudable. If, at the end of this life, you had served God on the basis of fear and not of grace, the devil could point at your service to God and say, “Well, of course he served you! He was scared not to!”

This is why the first truth that the child of God needs to be established in is the absolute assurance of his salvation. No growth towards Christ-likeness can occur in the believer's life until his relationship with the Lord in his own mind is certain.

Peter said it this way:

1 Peter 2:1-3: Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,

² as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Notice the caveat of verse three, "If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." Once again, growth is not possible until the child of God has experienced that grace-based assurance.

Paul stated:

Ephesians 3:17-19: that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height –

¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Read this passage again. Paul says that the path to conformity to Christ (being filled with all the fullness of God), begins with being rooted and grounded in the love, or grace, of God.

A literal translation from the Greek would read as follows:

That Christ should dwell in your hearts through the faith rooted and grounded in love, in order that you may be able to fully comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, in order that ye might be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Notice in the original Greek, the conjunction “in order that” occurs after the mention of being rooted and grounded in love. In other words, maturity towards the fullness of God has, as its prerequisite, being rooted and grounded in love.

Once again, God is not interested in fear-based maturation. Such a relationship would be subject to ridicule. Just as a husband who intimidates his wife into submission brings public ridicule to a marriage, thus, God’s being surrounded by people who were intimidated into obedience would be a less than honorable testimony for the grace of God.

Our journey down the path to conformity to Christ MUST begin with the assurance of salvation.

There is a very real sense in which coming to saving faith in Christ is coming to assurance. We are born again because we have arrived at a place in our contemplation of the gospel of grace that we are assured of the fact that we can be established in an eternally right relationship with God on the basis of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. We received Christ because we were assured that His perfect sacrifice could serve as our sole basis of a perfect standing with God. So, in a very real sense, the assurance of salvation is bound up in the gospel. The saving response to the gospel is an assurance that what Christ has accomplished on the cross for us can indeed serve as the basis of our righteous standing before the Father. Saving faith is an act of the will through which we appropriate the value of the finished work of Christ to ourselves. Saving faith is acting upon a persuasion that the offering of Christ can establish us in an everlasting right relationship with the Father. As we read in Hebrews 10:14:

Hebrews 10:14: For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

Far too many of the Lord's little ones spend their entire lives trying to become rooted, grounded and established in grace but are never able to do so because of the confusion created by preachers who fail to proclaim a clear and consistent grace-based gospel message. While

many people are genuinely born again under such sloppy gospel presentations, they are never able to become rooted and grounded in grace. From one week to the next, they hear the terms upon which God grants eternal life articulated differently than the week before. One week, a free grace message may indeed be presented; but, the next week, that salvation is called into question because the preacher interjects works as a requirement for the child of God to be assured he is secure in Christ. Such a believer will remain in a perpetual state of infancy until he is delivered from such a confusing preaching environment and sits under the teaching of a pastor who consistently articulates the free grace message.

It is impossible for a child of God to arrive at a place of settled assurance when, from one week to the next, he is prompted to second-guess the genuineness of his conversion experience because of the sloppy gospel presentation which interjects works into the saving response to God. Paul makes mention of such children of God in the following context:

Ephesians 4:13, 14: till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Many a so-called itinerate evangelist justifies his ministry by seeing how many converts he can snag from a particular congregation. More often than not, he will do so by tricking the unsuspecting and immature child of God to become introspective in regards to assurance, insisting that the insecure follower needs to do a self-reassessment of his fruit. When the immature believer does such a self-reassessment, he will almost certainly come up short, without enough fruit to be self-assured that his relationship with God is genuine. Through this process, the baby believer is led to completely discount the genuineness of his conversion experience. Even though the so-called evangelist can notch his Bible with more conversion statistics, what he has really done is hamstringing the baby Christian with a terribly ungodly trick, getting the baby believer to look to himself for assurance. This is the type of trickery most likely referred to in Ephesians 4:14. Whenever anybody gets a baby believer to look to anything else but the cross of Christ for assurance, that baby believer has just been spiritually arrested from any possible growth in grace.

Growth and genuine fruit cannot take place in the heart of the believer who is uncertain concerning his standing with the Father. Quite frankly, genuine gospel preaching should not produce doubt, but an assurance that Christ crucified is all that a sinner needs to stand eternally secure before the Father. Moreover, the conviction which such gospel preaching produces in the sinner is the need to immediately receive the gift of righteousness, bought and paid for by the blood of Christ.

John 16:8, 9: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

⁹ "of sin, because they do not believe in Me;

Not only can the baby Christian not mature in the absence of assurance, but the stable believer, who is later dissuaded from free grace, also loses his ability to bear fruit to the Glory of God. We can see this at least three times in the Scriptures.

Paul, to the Galatians, states that, while they were firmly founded on grace, their love had become so selfless that, if possible, they would have plucked their own eyes out and given them to Paul (Galatians 4:15).

Likewise, apparently, the Hebrew believers had enjoyed a previous fruitful state of service as is mentioned in Hebrews 6:10:

Hebrews 6:10: For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Likewise, many of the believers in gentile churches, who had been established in grace, became unsettled when certain preachers came from Jerusalem and attempted to teach them that grace was not enough.

Acts 15:24: Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "*You must* be circumcised and keep the law" -- to whom we gave no *such* commandment --

It appears that there have always been and will always be grace-denying preachers. These preachers, rather than establishing believers in grace, actually hamstringing these immature children of God, permanently idling them from maturity and the fruit of righteousness until such a time as His children can be delivered from grace-denying preachers.

It is high time in America that church goers abandon grace-denying churches and find a pastor who is able to establish people in the absolute assurance of salvation. Believers who insist on tolerating an environment where the gospel is muddled from one week to the next only contribute to the confusion by their very presence in such an environment. Attendance in such an assembly only contributes to the confusion and aids the devil in hamstringing others of God's little children, children who will never grow past infancy because they are never grounded in grace. Because of believers' compromise concerning a consistent free grace message presentation and their presence in such churches, God is denied the full and mature fellowship of millions of His children in America, because those millions can never mature past infancy.

As Paul exhorted the Corinthian church concerning the unequal yoke:

2 Corinthians 6:14: Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

Now, granted, the pastor who is presenting an inconsistent gospel message may not be an unbeliever (but he may be as well), he certainly has no business occupying a pulpit! His inconsistent presentation concerning the free grace gospel message permanently hamstringing all who receive his teaching, until the pastor himself can be delivered from his miserable error. Grace-believers should stop partnering with such ministries and find, or start, a church where free grace is unapologetically proclaimed and practiced.

Is chastening Coercion?

One question that can arise from this teaching is this: what about the disciplinary hand of God? Is not God's chastening directed towards one of his straying children a form of coercion? The context in the book of Hebrews, which makes mention of this chastening, begins with an exhortation to not despise the chastening of the Lord.

Hebrews 12:5b: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

If a child of God has to be exhorted not to regard lightly the chastening of the Lord, then it is safe to assume that such a child can despise it. God's children despise the chastening of the Lord when they quench that conviction of the Holy Spirit through occupation with other distractions.

Understand this: God is a gentleman. While His Holy Spirit will remind you when you have strayed from the path of conformity to Christ, he will not force you to remain on that path. The child of God who ignores the urgings of the Holy Spirit will lose his joy and peace. He can persist outside of the encapsulation of God's grace if he wants it that way. He can experience the consequences of his flesh once again dominating his choices. He can experience the loneliness of the break in fellowship with the Holy Spirit who dwells within his soul, that spirit who yearns jealously for the backslider to return to a life of fellowship. He can reap the destruction of his earthly experience caused by an unchecked flesh directing the course of his life. It happens. Sadly, very sadly, it happens more often than not.

Only uncoerced growth can bring glory to God. Only as a child of God is established in the absolute assurance of his salvation in Christ, can uncoerced growth take place. It is the desire of the Father that every one of His children, after they are established in assurance, choose the path of conformity to Christ.

As far as the purposes of God and His integrity are concerned, it is not necessary that every born again saint achieve full assurance and gets on the path of conformity to Christ. While it is God's fervent desire that every believer travel that path, for the purposes of the His integrity, what is important is that such an option is available to the child of God. If only ten people in the history of the saints decided to continue down the path of uncoerced maturity, that, nevertheless, demonstrates that the path was available to all. Just as not every couple has a wonderful marriage, the fact that wonderful marriages exist is a testimony to the blessedness of the institution. Thus, also, just because not every child of God is enjoying the path of conformity to Christ, the path is available to all. Because of this, God's institution of salvation forever exists beyond reproach. The coercion-free existence of a few saints before the throne of God glorifies the entire institution of salvation, even if only a few saints decide to avail themselves of it.

CONCLUSION

As with most of my books, this book is also written to defend the free grace gospel of Christ; free grace, because the plan of God through which we sinners are reconciled to God involves no merit on the sinner's part; it involves only the merits of the sacrifice which Christ has made in our behalf. We stand complete before God in Christ, because we, by faith, have received the sacrifice of Christ as that which can alone commend us to an eternally right relationship before the Father. Even though the sinner brings no personal merits to the table when entering into that relationship with God, the Scriptures do speak of merit and worthiness in the area of rewards.

It is vitally important that the child of God not conflate these two concepts in his or her thinking. An eternally right relationship with God in Christ is free; rewards, or promotion in the age to come, require a diligent prioritization of the believer concerning those issues which the Lord says is important. Rewards involve the child of God's saying "no" to the treasures of this world and investing his time, talent and treasure in that which is of eternal significance.

To fail to properly discern these two areas of truth is to corrupt the gospel of grace and to rob the child of God of the most powerful motive he has in order to press on to maturity. It is hoped that this book has helped to establish the believer more deeply in grace and has motivated him to press on to maturity.

-Dan Lash,

-May, 2020

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