

**PREFACE**

Last week, in regard to the judgment of believers, I stated the following:

This evaluation Paul speaks of will presumably take place at the final judgment, before the “great white throne” (Revelation 20:11-12), the “judgment seat of Christ.” (By the way, don’t miss how I hedged my bets by including the word “presumably.”)

At the end of the class, a member of our class raised an important point about when this would take place—and I appreciate his doing this, for it caused me to dig deeper for the answer. His position was that Christians would *not* be judged before the “great white throne”—or the “Final Judgment”—but that there would be a *separate* time of judgment for them.

Now, I confess freely that I have a hard time keeping straight the details of the end times. For me this is one of those topics I am incapable of storing permanently in my aging brain, but must repeatedly return to my reference books, or even my own notes, to refresh my memory. Making matters more challenging is the fact that not every one agrees on these details; perfectly reputable, honorable scholars will take differing positions on some of these details. Thus it should not be surprising that the answer to the question which of us was correct is... Yes.

Since we are currently in this passage that speaks of a time of evaluation for every believer, in which each Christian’s work will be judged, it is important that we sort this out before we move on. And we should not lose sight of the fact that there *is*, indeed, one correct answer; the Great Judge Himself knows precisely when this will take place (*not the date*). It is just that different groups within Christendom hold to different opinions—all backed up by Scripture, of course—about the details and the timing.

***The “Classical Premillennialism” Position***

When I traced back to the source on which I based my remark last week I discovered that it was Wayne Grudem’s massive and laudable, *Systematic Theology*. Grudem, while respectfully including explanations for other positions, espouses what he refers to as the “Classical Premillennialism” position. For our purposes here there are principally two elements of this position that pertain:

1. Christians alive when the church age comes to an end *will* go through the Tribulation.
2. All “judgments” take place during the Final Judgment (great white throne, Revelation 20:11-15).

In preparing for last week’s class I momentarily forgot that Grudem held this position, and simply cited his statement (p. 1140) that “there will be a great final judgment of believers and unbelievers. They will stand before the judgment seat of Christ in resurrected bodies and hear His proclamation of their eternal destiny.” And then he cites the Revelation 20 passage.

## ***The “Pretributational Premillennialism” (or “Dispensational Premillennialism”) Position***

The stated position of this church in its *Articles of Faith* is the “Pretributational Premillennialism” (or “Dispensational Premillennialism”) position. That is, we believe, again based on Scripture, that:

1. The church will be “raptured” (i.e., removed from earth by Christ Jesus) prior to the Tribulation; this event will mark the end of the church age.
2. There will be *several* judgments taking place at different times, and that only the unregenerate will be judged at the Final Judgment (Rev 20).

**Sidebar** (excerpted from our *Articles of Faith*):

### ARTICLE XIV: THE BLESSED HOPE

We believe that **the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remaining unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus**, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in the Scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking (John 14:1-3; I Corinthians 15:51-52; Philippians 3:20; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14).

### ARTICLE XV: THE TRIBULATION

We believe **a time of great tribulation will be loosed upon the earth following the rapture of the church**. It will last for seven years and will serve to purify Israel as a nation and bring judgment upon the Gentiles (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 6:1-19:21).

### ARTICLE XVI: THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

We believe **the tribulation period will be climaxed by the personal, visible return of Christ** to the earthly scene to defeat His enemies, to abolish Gentile authority, to bind Satan, **to judge Israel, and to institute the millennial kingdom**, (Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Isaiah 11:9; Ezekiel 20:33-44, 37:21-28; Matthew 24:15-25,46; Revelation 20:1-3).

### ARTICLE XVII: THE MILLENNIAL PERIOD

We believe **a literal, earthly millennial period will be established upon the earth following the tribulation period**. This 1,000 year period has as its foundation in the great unconditional covenants of the Old Testament – Abrahamic (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17, 15:9-18, 17:1-9), the Palestinian (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), the Davidic (2 Samuel 7:10-16; Psalm 89), and the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Christ will be the king of this millennial or Davidic Kingdom with **the nation Israel occupying an exalted position within the kingdom** (Isaiah 11:1-10).

### ARTICLE XVIII: THE ETERNAL STATE

We believe **Christ will deliver His millennial kingdom up to the Father** (I Corinthians 15:24), **and thereby will the eternal state begin**. All the just will be taken into eternal bliss, but all the unjust will be ushered to their just reward in the everlasting lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). The eternal state will be the fulfillment of God’s purpose and plan which has its goal the glory of God (Ephesians 1:6,12,14; Philippians 1:23). **(emphasis added)**

Thus at this point I would conclude that, depending on the position one holds about the end times, *both* the class member and I were correct. However, *in the context of our local body of believers*, he was the one *more* correct. Now, just a word about that third fifty-cent word, dispensational. It does not really pertain to our immediate discussion, but we should include it to be thorough.

### ***Dispensationalism***

The term “dispensational” refers to the view that God’s dealings with men have proceeded through “well-defined time-periods,” or *dispensations* (*New Dictionary of Theology*, 1988). This theology includes a number of other criteria, but in the context of the end times it means that, as dispensationalists, we hold to the view that there has and will remain a clear distinction between the church and Israel.

*Wayne Grudem*: Since [according to dispensational theology] the church is taken out of the world before the widespread conversion of the Jewish people, [they] remain a distinct group from the church... Those who hold this view argue that those prophecies of God’s future blessing to Israel will yet be fulfilled among the Jewish people themselves; they are not to be “spiritualized” by finding their fulfillment in the church.

### ***Conclusion***

All that being said, we should not lose sight of the most important truth in all this. No matter when or where one believes this will take place, the fact is, it *will* take place. Every believer will stand before his or her Lord for an examination of the work they have turned in. Some of the works will survive the trial, and a reward will be rendered; other works will *not* survive, but be consumed by fire, and no reward for them will be forthcoming.

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.**

Yet none of this will threaten the believer’s eternity with Christ.

### **v13**

### **Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-13.**

*each man’s work will become evident... and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.*

In the remaining time we have before our extended hiatus, and before we even finish the paragraph, I want to cut to the chase on the most important lesson we are to learn from this passage.

It is easy to lose one’s way when trying to discern Paul’s primary point, because he packs so much imagery into this paragraph:

- laying a foundation
- building *on* a foundation
- the choice of *building materials*
- *revealing* fire and *testing* fire
- work
- *wages* for the work (“reward”)

Where in all this imagery is the principal take-away for us?

Imagine an empty lot in the middle of a city. Now imagine that a large concrete slab has been poured on that lot. It has been perfectly poured, perfectly level, with deep footings all around. It is as strong and dependable as living granite.

Now imagine, off to the side, a large stack of lumber—everything required to frame the new building—and other stacks of materials such as nails and screws, drywall, plaster, shingles and felt—everything needed to complete the building. Last, there is a collection of tools organized near all the building materials.

We now have everything in place for erecting the new church—except for the workers. So now imagine a large group of people—men, women, youth and children—all ready to begin work.

What component in all this is the point of our passage? Is it the foundation? Yes, that is *one* important point, as Paul states in v11:

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Christ *must* be the foundation of every church; that is important, but it is not the lesson of the overall passage.

Is it the lumber, the framing materials? No.

Is it the other building materials? No

Is it the tools the workers will use? No.

Is it the people themselves? No

The fact is, we have not yet seen the most important component in this scene, and the principal lesson of the passage. What do those materials represent in v12:

“gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw”? They look like building materials, but that is not what they represent. Look again at the end of v13: “...**and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work**” (emphasis added).

When each of us stands before the throne of Christ—whenever it is—we will not be judged for the quality of the building materials we have used, nor for the quality of tools we have used in building the church. We will be judged for the *work* we have turned in for Christ.

Were you earnest and sincere in the work you did in His name?

Did you work for the benefit of Christ’s kingdom—or for your own benefit?

Were you serving others—or were you serving yourself?

Were you working for the glory of God—or for your own glory?

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives us three examples of behavior that have an immediate, but not eternal value.

**Read Matthew 6:2, 5, 16.**

In v1 Jesus summarizes His point: **Read v1**. That is the negative side. In his letter to the Colossians Paul gives us the positive.

**Read Colossians 3:23-24.**

Whatever we do *from our very soul* for the Lord will survive the future testing by fire, and be rewarded.