

2 Cor 5:6-10 Being Confident, Either Here or in Heaven, part 2

All of us who are saved are on our way to heaven, but we are not there yet. I trust that all of us want to live a long and productive life here on earth, and when our time is done, we can be confident that we'll go to heaven and enjoy eternity there.

2 Cor 5:6-10 gives us some advice about what to do while we are still at home in the body. What do we do while we await the transition from this “tent” into a “building of God eternal in the heavens”?

Last week, we saw that in vs. 6 and 8, that we should be confident of our eternal home. We live with assurance that heaven is our ultimate/final destination.

In vs. 7, he tells us to “walk by faith.” That means that we are committed to living with confidence in God and his word. We believe what God has said is true, and we behave accordingly. We don't live by appearances or feelings; we live by faith in God's promises.

In vs. 9, Paul suggests what one of our goals ought to be—“to be well pleasing to [God].” Our aim should be, not just that God would tolerate us, but that our behavior would be well-pleasing to him. We live in such a way that God considers us to be good and faithful servants.

The last piece of advice in this passage is:

I. .10 Live in the light of future judgment.

Here's something else that should motivate us toward pleasing God—God will hold us accountable for what we've done. A great day of reckoning is coming. Why do we want to please God? Because we'll stand before him for judgment.

Quote: [Our] constant ambition to gain Christ's approval (v. 9) [is] prompted by two facts relating to the future—[our] destiny of dwelling with the Lord (v. 8) and [our] coming accountability to Christ (v. 10).¹

A. The future judgment Paul has in mind here is the JSOX. We could do a whole series of messages just on this one future event.

Read Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:11-15

¹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 405.

“Judgment seat” metaphorically refers to the place where the Lord will sit to evaluate believers’ lives for the purpose of giving them eternal rewards. It is translated from the Gr. word *bēma*, which was an elevated platform where victorious athletes (e.g., during the Olympics) went to receive their crowns.² Corinth had such a platform where both athletic rewards and legal justice were dispensed (Ac 18:12–16), so the Corinthians understood Paul’s reference.³

Christ will sit on the bema/judgment seat to hold us accountable for what we’ve done.

B. Some quick facts about the JSOX:

1. It will immediately follow the rapture of the church. While the world is experiencing the Great Tribulation, Christians will be experiencing the JSOX.
2. It will be in heaven.
3. It will be only for church-age saints.
 - a) He says “we must all appear...,” but in the context, he’s talking about Christians, those who are “in Christ.” Non-Christians will not be at this judgment.
 - b) My understanding is that OT saints will also not be part of this judgment; only for NT church saints, i.e., people saved after the death and resurrection of Jesus. OT saints will face judgment a bit later, at the end of the Tribulation.
4. It will reveal our true motives and actions.
 - a) The word “appear” (φανερῶω) means “to make manifest, to show, to reveal.” The JSOX will reveal what is hidden and make known what is secret.

Quote: [the word means] to be laid bare, stripped of every outward façade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one’s character. All... will be open to the scrutiny of Christ.⁴

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 2 Co 5:10.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 2 Co 5:10.

⁴ Philip E. Hughes, *NICNT*, 180.

Heb 4:13 *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*

- b) The text tells us that “each one may receive the things done in the body...” We all appear, and each one receives a just reward. We don’t know the exact procedure of this judgment, but it seems to be an individual judgment. Will we all stand in line and stand before Jesus individually? The Bible does not reveal many details about this.
5. It will be based on post-salvation works. Paul asserts that we’ll receive a reward based on “things done in the body, whether good or bad.”
- a) The fact that we’ll be judged for our works does *not* imply that we are *saved* by works. The Bible explicitly denies that works have anything to do with salvation (cf. Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9).
 - b) The word “receive” (κομίζω) means “to receive what is your own.” It refers to just desserts; what you deserve. God will justly pay you back for what you did. What was your behavior worth? What was the eternal value of your works?—that’s what this judgment will determine.
 - c) Our behavior has both *moral* significance and *eternal* consequences. The things we do in/with our bodies is either good or bad. And we stand to gain or lose rewards because of what we’ve done while here on earth.
- Quote:** Everyone who is mindful of their *mortality* must therefore be mindful of their *morality*. ... If we hope to be conformed to Christ’s glorious body in the *next* life, we must be conformed to his character in *this* life.⁵
6. It will result in rewards for God-honoring service.

⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 266.

- a) The rewards that we receive at the JSOX will be a measure of how well we served the Lord and his church. Our goal should be that God approves of and is well-pleased by our service while we were “at home” in the body.
- b) Good works are those that please God, the kind of works that are done rightly, for the right purpose, and with the right attitude. Actions that stem from faith, done in the right way and for the right purposes, are rewardable.
- c) Some people wonder if these rewards are the “crowns” the Bible mentions (cf. 2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4). The crowns are probably representative of our rewards.
- d) The rewards we receive also include various responsibilities in the kingdom and in the eternal state.

Cf. the parable of the talents (Lk 19:11f)—those who were faithful receive greater responsibilities and privileges. Eternal rewards will be based on how faithful you were in this life.

- e) Hopefully we have done some things that are rewardable. E.g., proclaiming the Gospel, handing out a Gospel tract, inviting someone to church, sacrificial giving to the work of the ministry, prayer, faithful church attendance, teaching a class, raising godly children, reading the Bible, etc. Whatever you do for God, for his purposes, for his glory, and in obedience to his word is rewardable.
- f) Rewards will vary from person to person depending on factors like faithfulness, diligence, and motivations. Some people have great opportunities and make use of them; they are prolific and productive in their service for God. Others don't have the same opportunities or privileges, so they don't produce as much.

Some people, sadly, have great privileges and opportunities but squander them; they are lazy or unproductive. They do little or nothing rewardable.

- 7. It will result in loss for unrewardable works.

- a) Bad works are those done wrongly, for the wrong reasons, and with the wrong attitude. I.e., things that were not well-pleasing to God.

The word “bad” in this context (φαῦλον) means “worthless.” So he’s not talking about sinful works; he’s talking about works that have no spiritual value, works that deserve no reward.

God is not going to bring up our sins at this judgment, but we will find out whether our works were acceptable and rewardable.

- b) We all know that we can do the *right* things for the *wrong* reasons, i.e., with wrong motives or bad attitudes. Jesus described the Pharisees as those who did their works for the praise of men, not for the glory of God (cf. Mt 6:2, 5, 16). If our good works are done for wrong reasons, we forfeit any rewards that we might have had.

- c) 1 Cor 3:11f tells us that these unrewardable works will be “burned up” like chaff or straw. That is, they’ll come to nothing. We will in some sense “suffer loss” because we could have done something worthwhile instead of what we did. We might have done something rewardable, but instead we spent our time on worthless activities. I think we’ll regret that.

Quote: Some believers will suffer a “loss” of reward because their post-salvation works were unrewardable, or because sin and selfishness corrupted their motives, or because outright disobedience caused the chastening of God. They will have reduced or diminished capacity for service and blessing in the Kingdom of God.⁶

- d) 1 Cor 3 also tells us that some will be “saved so as by fire.” In other words, they are saved, but did little or nothing rewardable. Virtually everything they did burns up; they have nothing that endures through the flames.

⁶ Rolland McCune, Systematic Theology III notes, DBTS.

They didn't really serve Christ or his people. For such believers, the JSOX will not be a very pleasant experience. Some will be very remorseful if not ashamed for their lack of service, their failure to please God.

They won't be punished for their sins at the JSOX; they'll regret their failure to be a good and faithful servant.

Quote: The judge at the bema bestowed rewards to the victors. He did not whip the losers.⁷

Our desire should be that we have few regrets and nothing to be ashamed of when we stand before the Lord.

Our hope should be that the rewards we receive will far surpass the regret or disappointment that we might feel.

My understanding is that this event will be kind of like a graduation ceremony: all the graduates get a diploma, but some receive special honors. Those not receiving the honors may be disappointed or even ashamed that they didn't work as hard as they could have. But the overall feeling of the ceremony is rejoicing in the completion of your course. Everyone will have some good works that the Lord can reward. Some will receive more and some less, but everyone will be glad to graduate.⁸

8. Our works, either good ones or worthless ones, have an eternal impact/result. Your good works store up treasures in heaven; they are like gold, silver, and precious stones. Your worthless works do nothing for you; they'll burn up like wood, hay, and stubble. God doesn't hold them against you; they just have no value.

⁷ Samuel L Hoyt, quoted in Kent, 86.

⁸ Thanks to Dr. Bruce Compton, DBTS, for this illustration.

One more quote: Only God in Christ can untangle all of the intertwining factors of one's life and works. Only He can truly assess the long range effects of both sinful and righteous acts. Only He can comprehend the big picture and reward that which is truly rewardable and withhold it from that which is not. It is not necessarily the case that one sin or scandal completely wipes out all reward for a past life of service, soulwinning, teaching, or preaching. The living God will be absolutely fair and equitable in the distribution of rewards at the Judgment Seat.⁹

9. It is not a judgment to determine if you are saved or lost. The JSOX is to determine rewards for service, not the status or destiny of your soul.
 - a) The judgment of whether you are saved or lost was made long before this event. Salvation occurs the moment you repent of your sin and believe in Jesus. You are put right with God at the moment of your conversion. After that, there is no danger of condemnation (Rom 8:1).
 - b) Unsaved people will be at a different judgment—the GWT—and at a different time. There will be a whole different set of “rewards” handed out at that occasion.
10. Wise people test themselves before standing before God for the ultimate test.
 - a) This is a warning—all of us will stand before the judgment bar of God. We'd better be prepared for that great judgment day.
 - b) This is a stimulus/motivation toward godly living. The prospects of this future judgment should motivate us toward living in a way that is well-pleasing to God (cf. vs. 9). Do you want to hear Christ say to you, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” or will you hear something like “Oh ye of little faith”?
 - c) If you knew that the JSOX would be happening one year from today, how would that change your life?

⁹ McCune.

- (1) We should be striving to serve God so that we have some gold, silver, and precious stones as rewards for service. We serve God, primarily, by serving God's people and by obeying his word.
- (2) We should consider whether all our works going to go up in smoke—we did nothing rewardable.
- (3) The motivation and stimulus here is to start living in a way that pleases God so that you have something at the JSOX for which God can reward you. Or at least, live in a way that you won't be ashamed of or regret. I think you'd be rather ashamed of yourself if everything you did is burned up, revealing that you didn't do anything of eternal value. Imagine finding that out at the end of your life—nothing you did had any eternal value.
- (4) As Paul says in 1 Cor 3, be careful how you build on the foundation that Jesus had laid. You'll be judged for the structure you build on that foundation.
- (5) You don't want to be the kind of person "saved, yet so as by fire." You want to hear the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

On that great judgment day, we'll find out if we've done anything rewardable. We'll find out if we've been good and faithful servants of God or if we've squandered the resources and opportunities God gave us.

What are you doing to store up for yourself gold, silver, and precious stones? What have you done that will withstand the fire of God's judgment? We want that great graduation ceremony to be one of rejoicing and gladness, not shame and regret. The prospect of the JSOX should motivate us toward faithfully serving God, serving his people, and obeying his word.