

# **Refuting the False Doctrine that Christians Can Suffer Loss of Rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ**

**By: Edward Hendrie**

What does God mean in 2 Corinthians 5:10, where he states:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10 AV)

Some say that the passage in 2 Corinthians 5:10 means that God will assess the good and bad things a Christian has done during his life on earth and use that assessment to assign his position and rewards in heaven. The theory of that doctrine is that if a Christian sins or has insufficient good works, Christ will withhold rewards that would otherwise be given to that Christian in heaven. The doctrine specifies that Christians who fail to perform sufficient good works will not lose their salvation, however, they will lose their rewards. Is that theory supported by scripture?

The “loss of rewards” theologians are quick to point out that a Christian will not be punished at the judgment seat of Christ. The “loss of rewards” theologians engage in pure sophistry when they try to perform the impossible task of alleging that God withholds rewards, but not salvation, from Christians at the judgment seat of Christ. These theologians subtly twist God’s words to mean that Christians will lose rewards if they sin. They cannot say that Christians will be punished at the judgment, because the would be so clearly contrary to what the bible says. So they must make a distinction between losing rewards and punishment. They claim that losing rewards is not really a punishment at all.

The “loss of rewards” theologians do not adequately explain the difference between losing rewards that one would ordinarily receive and being punished. Wouldn’t suffering a loss based upon your conduct be a punishment? Of course it would. However, according to the apostate theologians, the loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ is not a punishment. If it is not a punishment, then why would these theologians argue that a Christian should work so that he doesn’t suffer remorse, regret, and shame?

The Way of Life website, which advertises itself as a fundamental Baptist information service, is typical of the “loss of rewards” advocates:

[T]he judgment seat of Christ is not for punishment but for rewards or loss of rewards. The believer’s punishment fell upon Christ! The judgment seat of Christ is like an athlete completing for the Olympics. If he loses the race, he is not

punished but he loses the crown that he could have earned, and all of his effort was expended for nothing.<sup>1</sup>

Hampton Keathley, III, Th.M., who is now deceased, advocated the “loss of rewards” doctrine. Keathley was a 1966 graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary and a pastor for 28 years. He wrote for the Biblical Studies Foundation and taught New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, Northwest Extension for External Studies in Spokane, Washington. Keathley stated the following in his article titled *The Doctrine of Rewards: The Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ*:

[T]hough it is tremendously serious with eternal ramifications, the judgment seat of Christ is not a place and time when the Lord will mete out punishment for sins committed by the child of God. Rather, it is a place where rewards will be given or lost depending on how one has used his or her life for the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

The following quote from Keathley, indicates that he realizes that the loss of rewards doctrine seems to be a works doctrine, which is contrary to the gospel of grace.

While salvation is a gift, there are rewards given for faithfulness in the Christian life and loss of rewards for unfaithfulness. Rewards become one of the great motives of the Christian’s life or should. But we need to understand the nature of these rewards to understand the nature of the motivation. Some people are troubled by the doctrine of rewards because this seems to suggest “merit” instead of “grace,” and because, it is pointed out, we should only serve the Lord out of love and for God’s glory.<sup>3</sup>

How does Keathley resolve this conflict with the gospel? In order to prop up the loss of rewards artifice, the true gospel of grace must be watered down. Otherwise there would be no basis for withholding rewards from a Christian. Man’s free will must be elevated above the sovereign will of God. Keathley, and indeed all loss of rewards theologians, ever so subtly undermine the gospel of grace and the sovereignty of God. In order to have loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ, the rewards must be based upon the merits due to man’s own efforts, born of his own will.

Of course we should serve the Lord out of love and for God’s glory, and understanding the nature of rewards will help us do that. But the fact still remains that the Bible promises us rewards. God gives us salvation. It is a gift through faith, but He rewards us for good works. God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him. Indeed, **He works in us both to will and to do as we volitionally appropriate His grace (Phil. 2:12-13), but the decision to serve, and the diligence employed in doing so, are our responsibility and our contribution and God sees this as rewardable.**<sup>4</sup>

Notice the subtle twist made by Keathley. He seems to preach the gospel of Grace, but then, almost imperceptibly, he drops in the poison of man's free will. Keathley cites Philippians 2:12-13, however, in order to accomplish his twisting of the gospel, he mischaracterizes the meaning of the passage by stating: "He works in us both to will and to do as we volitionally appropriate His grace." On the contrary, Philippians 2:13 actually states: "**For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.**" There is a world of difference between willing and doing of "his good pleasure," as stated in the bible, and willing and doing as "we volitionally appropriate his grace," as stated by Keathley. The passage in Philippians makes clear that good works of Christians are the work of God, who works in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

The good works of a Christian are not, as claimed by Keathley, our own volitional acts, for which we take responsibility and receive rewards. As I will prove below from the bible itself, the good works of Christians are not the result of our volitional acts. They are the result of God's sovereign will working in us. Consequently, God cannot withhold rewards for our failure to perform that which we most certainly will perform, because it is his will and pleasure that we do so. God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10.

There can be no compromise on the grace of the gospel. The grace of the gospel is grace that comes totally from God. There is no merit that comes from man. Any watering down of the grace of the gospel is no longer the grace of God. Any amount of works that are accounted as merits establishes a false hybrid gospel of works. There can be no mixing of grace and works. "**And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then *is it* no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.**" (Romans 11:6 AV)

Read further in 2 Corinthians 5 and one can see clearly that the doctrinal theory of a Christian losing rewards at the judgment seat of Christ is not only completely unsupportable by the scriptures, it contradicts the promises in the gospel.

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that **God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;** and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that **we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**" (2 Corinthians 5:17-21 AV)

2 Corinthians 5 makes it clear that Christians are imputed with the righteousness of God! That means that we are perfectly righteous in his sight. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin and gave us his righteousness in place of our sin. All sin is forgiven. One might ask, "what if a Christian doesn't sin, instead he just doesn't do good, won't God hold a Christian accountable

for his failure to do good?” Failure to do good is not some in-between category of action between sin and righteousness. Failure to do good, when one knows to do good, is a sin!

The key passage that completely refutes the theory that Christians will suffer loss in heaven for a lack of good works, is found in James 4:17. In that passage, God make it clear that it is a sin for those who are given an opportunity to do good and knowingly do not do it. **“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”** (James 4:17 AV)

Violating God’s commandments (which is God’s law) is a sin. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for **sin is the transgression of the law**. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” (1 John 3:4-5 AV)

The bottom line is that all unrighteousness of whatever sort is a sin. **“All unrighteousness is sin.”** (1John 5:17 AV) Any time we do not show charity toward another, it is a sin. It is not a suggestion by God that we love one another, it is a command.

Then one of them, *which was a lawyer*, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.** (Matthew 22:35-40 AV)

Jesus commanded us to love one another as he has loved us. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:34 AV) Anytime we fall short of that standard, we are in violation of his command, which is a sin, because sin is the transgression of God’s law.

Why is that important? Because if it is a sin not to do good when it is within a Christians power, a Christian cannot suffer any loss, because God has forgiven all of the Christians sins and imputed the righteousness of Christ to him. 1 John 3:4-5 makes it clear that Jesus came to “take away our sins.” When Jesus takes away our sins, they are gone and replaced with the righteousness of Christ. “Even the **righteousness of God** *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ **unto all and upon all them that believe**: for there is **no difference**.” (Romans 3:22 AV) All sins of all Christians are forgiven and are replaced with the righteousness of Christ - “there is no difference!” Romans 3:22. We are justified by the grace of God. “Being **justified** freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” (Romans 3:24 AV)

Since we have been justified in his sight, God will not examine what we have done on earth in our physical bodies in order to find whether we have failed to meet his expectations. Anything unacceptable to God is a sin, and all sins committed by Christians are completely blotted out from his memory.

**And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.** (Hebrews 10:17-18 AV)

If God forgets our sin how then can a believers' sins ever come to account before God at the judgment seat? They cannot, all their sins are forgiven and forgotten.

All the sins of Christians are covered by the blood of Jesus. God imputes the righteousness of Christ in place of that sin. If we have the righteousness of Christ, what blessing could God withhold from a Christian? He withholds no blessing from his children.

Now to him that worketh is the **reward** not reckoned of **grace**, but of **debt**. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, **his faith is counted for righteousness**. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom **God imputeth righteousness without works**, Saying, **Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.** Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (Romans 4:4-8 AV)

The bible states that our trespasses are not imputed unto us once we believe in Jesus. What does that mean? It means that God will not remember our sins anymore.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and **I will remember their sin no more.** (Jeremiah 31:34 AV)

God has stated that he will be merciful to our unrighteousness and he will therefore remember our sin no more.

**For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.** (Hebrews 8:12 AV)

Because the sins are remitted, there is no more offering that can be made for sin. If there is no offering that can be made for sin and the sin is forgotten then the sin is irrelevant to those that are saved when they stand before God at the judgment seat. God has washed us clean, no matter how deep red our sins are, they are white as snow in God's eyes.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: **though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.** (Isaiah 1:18 AV)

To suggest that somehow God is going to deal with believers on the basis of the bad things that we have done and remove from us rewards that we would ordinarily receive is contrary to the word of God. He makes clear that he will not reward us according to our

iniquities. Our transgressions are removed from us as far as the east is from the west.

**He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.** For as the heaven is high above the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him. **As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.** (Psalms 103:10-12 AV)

In fact, Christians appear before Christ at the judgment seat of Christ, we will appear without spot and blameless. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, **without spot, and blameless.**” (2 Peter 3:14 AV) If we appear without spot and blameless, that means that God will not hold us accountable for any unrighteousness.

Christians will commit sin, but those sins are not held to their account. Once a person is saved, his attitude toward sin changes. Paul explains in Romans 7:22-8:1 how his flesh tempts him to sin, however, his mind has been changed to delight in the law of God. His ultimate point cannot be missed. That is that while a Christian sins, he faces “no condemnation” from Christ for those sins. Paul makes another important point that those who are saved from their sins walk after the spirit not after the flesh. It is the spiritual walk that bears fruit that Christ will see at his judgment seat. Christ will not see the sin committed in the flesh, because once a person is in Christ, he will face no condemnation.

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. *There is* therefore now **no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 7:22-8:1.

We are saved to bear fruit. If God is willing that we bear fruit we will bear fruit. In fact he has ordained that we bear fruit. If you are saved, you will bear fruit, because God has willed it. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and **ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit**, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:16 AV)

That fruit will be manifested in the good works that spring from the new charitable heart God has given those who believe. Faith without works is dead!

**Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead**, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, **that**

**faith without works is dead?** (James 2:17-20 AV)

God prunes us so that we will bear fruit: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” (John 15:2 AV)

In fact, God orders the steps of all men and controls their very tongue. “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue are from the Lord.” Prov. 16:1. In God’s sight, the works of those whom he has saved are “perfect.” How can a Christian’s works be perfect? Because God made his elect to do good works, which God ordained ahead of time according to his perfect will. If the works are ordained by God, they are perfect, because he is perfect. When God sees our good works at the judgment seat of Christ, he sees the perfect works of Christ himself.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, **Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ;** to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21 AV)

God himself changes our minds through repentance so that we turn from dead works to serving the living God. Our hearts are created anew to live in obedience to his will, to love our neighbor as he has loved us. All that are called to the service of Christ will receive the promise of eternal life, which is our inheritance as children of God. We do good works, not to attain the inheritance, but rather because God has changed our hearts to desire to serve him. Our inheritance in heaven is not based upon what we do, but rather who we are, children of God.

How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, **purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?** And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, **they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.** (Hebrews 9:14-15 AV)

God does what he pleases in heaven and on earth. **“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.”** (Psalms 135:6 AV)

God revealed to David that he not only watched David’s every step, he also compassed him about, laid his hand upon him, lead him by the hand, and indeed held David in his right hand. There is no doubt that God does the same for all of his elect.

<<To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.>> O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known *me*. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou

understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted *with* all my ways. For *there is* not a word in my tongue, *but*, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. **Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.** *Such knowledge is* too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot *attain* unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there*. *If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; **Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.** (Psalms 139:1-10 AV)

God states that even the heart of the king is under the control of the Lord's will. "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." (Proverbs 21:1 AV) Sinful men do not understand the simple fact that even their goings are under the control of God. "Man's goings *are* of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24 AV)

God is not a passive observer of his elect. He preserves his elect for ever. "The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." (Psalms 121:8 AV)

All those that are saved will bear the fruit of good works and that is all that God will see of the believer on judgment day. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15:8 AV) There are not two judgements, there is one judgment where both the saved (sheep) and unsaved (goats) both appear before God's judgment seat.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the **sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.** Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, **inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, **Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.** Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in

prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, **Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.** And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:31-46 AV)

Christians who appear before the throne of Christ, will find it to be a throne of mercy, not judgment. “Let us therefore come boldly unto **the throne of grace**, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16 AV) How the judgement seat of Christ be a throne of grace, if God will judge all (saved and unsaved) according to their works, and the bible makes it clear that we cannot be saved by works? The answer is found in the bible. In Ephesians 2 God states that Christians are saved by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ and are pre-ordained to walk in good works. We are spiritual creations of God for the purpose of walking in good works. Those good works are prepared by God in advance for us to perform.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.** (Ephesians 2:8-10 AV)

If his will is that we will do good works, then we will do good works; his will is done on earth just as his will is done in heaven. “Thy kingdom come. **Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.**” (Matthew 6:10 AV) God acts in accordance with his will and no one can stay the hand of God!

And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and **he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand**, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:35 AV)

Notice in Matthew 25:31-46 on judgment day, Jesus only sees the good works of the sheep (saved Christians) and he only sees the bad works of the goats (unsaved heathen). Why is that? Because aside from Jesus no man can do any good. “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. **A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.** Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” (Matthew 7:17-19 AV) Only those who are in Jesus will have any good works on judgment day. Without Jesus a person can do no good works by God’s standard. “I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: **He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.**” (John 15:5 AV) All those who are saved will bear fruit. The very idea that his children will not bear fruit contradicts the word of God. Just as without Christ no man can bear fruit, so also with Christ no man can be fruitless.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10, Paul confirms that without Christ he cannot bring forth fruit from his labor. His labor bore abundant fruit not by his own merit, but rather by God's grace.

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: **yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.** (1 Corinthians 15:10 AV)

What are the fruits of salvation bestowed upon us by Christ? They include faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8 AV)

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells his sheep in "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." He has made all Christians to inherit his kingdom. We are God's children and his heirs. "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (Re 1:6 AV) What blessing is he going to withhold from his children? "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1Co 2:9 AV)

Notice also in Revelation 20 the great and small stand before God and there are "books" that are opened. One of the books is the book of life. The dead are judged according to what was in the books. Only those that are not found in the book of life were cast into the lake of fire. Just as in Matthew 25 all are judged according to their works.

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; **and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books,** according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And **whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.** (Re 20:11-15 AV)

Only those that are saved have done any good works, and they are the only ones found in the book of life. "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither

*whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but **they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.**" (Re 21:27 AV)

So we see from Matthew 25 that in 2 Corinthians 5:10 when all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, those who receive according to the good they have done are saved Christians (sheep on his right hand) and those who receive the bad are unsaved heathen (goats on his left hand). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10 AV)

Without Jesus Christ, a person is unsaved and can do no good: "I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for **without me ye can do nothing.**" (John 15:5 AV) All the supposed good and righteous works of the heathen are worthless to the Lord. "But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and **all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;** and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6 AV)

With Jesus Christ, a Christian bears much fruit and God sees no bad in him and forgets all his sins: "**For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.**" (Hebrews 8:12 AV)

There is no "in between" where God sees the good and bad of Christians and the good and bad of the unbelieving heathen. It is all or nothing with God. One is either perfectly holy in his kingdom by the imputed righteousness of Christ or he is evil according to man's fallen nature. With regard to the unregenerate man, God's view is: "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; **there is none that doeth good, no, not one.**" (Romans 3:12 AV) However, the believer is "justified:" "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; **Being justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" (Romans 3:23-24 AV)

Works are a manifestation of our salvation they do not earn salvation nor any rewards. Any Christian who relies on rewards in heaven for his works on earth has abandoned God's grace and instead is looking for God to pay a debt instead of relying on the mercy of God. "Now to him that worketh is the reward **not reckoned of grace, but of debt.** But to him that **worketh not, but believeth** on him that justifieth the ungodly, his **faith is counted for righteousness.**" (Ro 4:4-5 AV)

When Jesus saved us, he made us to be zealous to do good works. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, **zealous of good works.**" (Titus 2:14 AV) It is God makes Christians zealous to do good works. Good works flow from the zeal given to us by Christ. Good works are not to earn salvation or rewards in heaven. They are the fruits of salvation ordained by God. Read Titus 3:4-8 and you will see clearly that we are saved not according to our works of righteousness but rather

according to God's mercy. Read verse 8, where Paul explains that Christians should be careful to do good works. Why? Not to gain rewards in heaven, but rather because they are "good and profitable unto men."

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, **Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us**, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.* (Titus 3:4-8 AV)

The very idea of a second class Christian in heavenly glory is not supported anywhere in scripture. In simplest terms: good = sheep and bad = goats. There is no middle category. There is heaven and there is hell. There is no category of person who walks around sad in heaven because he did not get all of the crowns he could have had, but failed to achieve because he didn't quite meet some standard of godliness.

Despite the above passages that clearly prove that loss of rewards for Christians at the judgment seat of Christ cannot be true, theologians (so called) persist in arguing that in fact there will be loss of rewards for Christians. For example, Hampton Keathley, III, Th.M., in reference to the Christians standing before the Judgment seat of Christ, stated: "[W]e need to be ever mindful that God's Word clearly teaches there are specific and very serious consequences, both temporal and eternal, for sin or disobedience."<sup>5</sup> What are the eternal consequences according to Keathley? He claims: "The believer will forfeit rewards which he could have received, but he will not be punished in the judicial sense of 'paying' for his sins."<sup>6</sup> Keathley's argument is pure sophistry. It makes absolutely no sense to claim that forfeiting eternal rewards is not a punishment. The loss of rewards doctrine is unbiblical nonsense, which is evidenced in Keathley's writings. Keathley states that the bible suggests there will be shame for the believer at the judgment seat of Christ. The only passages that support such a claim are those that are wrongly divided from their context, and then misinterpreted contrary to the scores of passages that refute that claim.

The Bible suggests that there will be shame at the judgment seat of Christ to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the measure of unfaithfulness of each individual believer. Therefore it should be each believer's impelling desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord in all things. Although Christians apparently will reflect on this earthly life with some regret, they will also realize what is ahead for them in the heavenly life. This latter realization will be the source of boundless joy.<sup>7</sup>

Keathley states that there will be unavoidable remorse, regret, and shame for the Christian

at the judgment seat of Christ. That position is so completely without biblical support, he is forced to admit in the next sentence that the New Testament does not support that view. However, Keathly continues with this hogwash by contradicting what he states is revealed in the bible:

The elements of remorse, regret, and shame cannot be avoided in an examination of the judgment seat of Christ. But this sorrow must be somewhat relative because even for the finest of Christians there will be some things worthy of unceasing remorse in the light of God's unapproachable holiness. This would mean that the finest of Christians could be sorrowful throughout eternity. However, this is not the picture that the New Testament gives of heaven. The overwhelming emotion is joyfulness and gratefulness. Although there is undeniably some measure of remorse or regret, this is not the overriding emotion to be experienced throughout the eternal state.<sup>8</sup>

Not satisfied to with the complete confusion he has wrought, Keathly continues his onslaught on the gospel by comparing the judgment seat of Christ to a commencement ceremony. He is quick to point out that he does not want to overdue the "sorrow aspect" of the judgment seat of Christ, because he admits that would make heaven into hell (which is precisely my point). However, he is equally quick to remind his readers that faithfulness of ones own efforts is the basis of rewards, and the failure of our own efforts will be the source of eternal sorrow.

The judgment seat of Christ might be compared to a commencement ceremony. At graduation there is some measure of disappointment and remorse that one did not do better and work harder. However, at such an event the overwhelming emotion is joy, not remorse. The graduates do not leave the auditorium weeping because they did not earn better grades. Rather, they are thankful that they have been graduated, and they are grateful for what they did achieve. To overdo the sorrow aspect of the judgment seat of Christ is to make heaven hell. To underdo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.<sup>9</sup>

Keathly does not want to "underdo" the "sorrow aspect" of what Christians will feel in heaven. He has one insurmountable obstacle in this, and that is God. God has not only underdone the sorrow aspect, he has removed all sorrow from Christians in heaven. God states in Revelation 21:4 that there will be no more sorrow or pain or tears for Christians in heaven. God states that the former things have passed away. If God states that the former things have passed away, who is Keathly to contradict God and allege that the former things will always be before the Christian, who will then suffer loss and feel sorrow, remorse, regret, and shame? **"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."** (Revelation 21:4 AV) In the very next verse God has promised to make all things new. **"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.** And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful." (Revelation 21:5 AV) I believe God and

his promises, because his words are “true and faithful;” I therefore reject the false loss of rewards doctrine.

Where is Keathly’s writing on the loss of rewards found? It is found on a website at [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org). Why is that significant? Because those that run [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) have tampered with the very word of God. They have created their own bible version called the New English Translation (NET). In Revelation 20:12 the small and great stand before God, who is seated on a great white throne. In the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible we read: “And I saw the dead, small and great, **stand before God**; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” (Revelation 20:12 AV) However, in the NET, and other corrupted versions of the bible, Satan accomplishes his ultimate goal of taking God from his throne; in those new versions all mention of God sitting on the throne is deleted. The small and great are simply standing before “the throne.”

Oh how Satan is subtle. He creates a mythology that Christians suffer loss of rewards before the Judgment seat of Christ. He then creates a bible version where Christ removed from that judgment seat. And who do you think it is that is the real accuser of the saints? It is not God, as the loss of rewards purveyors would have you believe, it is the devil himself. The only way that a Christian can lose rewards would be if Satan was on the throne accusing them. How convenient for the devilish NET translation that God is removed from the throne. The NET makes room for Satan to accuse the saints. It fits nicely with his loss of rewards mythology where the blessings and joy of salvation are turned into sorrow and shame. The same Satan who stands before God accusing Christians day and night, is the source of the loss of rewards heresy.

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for **the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.**” (Revelation 12:10 AV)

God has made the point in the Holy Bible that **every word** of God is important. “And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, **but by every word of God.**” (Luke 4:4 AV) Incidentally, the doctrine of Luke 4:4 is missing in the NET and other new bible versions. The NET, for example leaves out the last clause and simply states: “It is written, ‘Man does not live by bread alone.’” (Luke 4:4 NET) The NET and new versions leave the reader in ignorance as to what it is other than bread by which man lives.

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but **by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.** (Deuteronomy 8:3 AV)

**Every word of God is pure:** he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

(Proverbs 30:5 AV)

**Every** word of God is important, but the NET translators don't want that to be known because they have changed God's words and are pawning their counterfeit bible as the real thing.

God takes the misuse of his name very seriously, but it is even more serious to tamper with God's word.

God's name is so exalted that one should not even say his name unless one is talking about him or praying to him.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. (Exodus 20:7 AV)

God's name is so precious that the biblical penalty for blaspheming his name is death.

And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, *and* all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name *of the LORD*, shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24:16 AV)

The NET publishers should take note that God holds his word in even higher esteem than his name.

**[T]hou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.** (Psalms 138:2 AV)

God has warned us not to tamper with his Holy word.

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2 AV)

What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32 AV)

Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6 AV)

If the penalty for blaspheming God's name is death, what do you suppose the penalty for altering God's word would be? The Bible tells us that it is eternal damnation in hell.

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If

any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19 AV)

The writers and promoters of the NET should reflect on what God has said in the above passage, their eternal souls are at stake. They seem to comfortable with promoting the idea that Christians can lose their rewards at the judgment seat of Christ. The loss of rewards for Christians is a myth. It is not a myth, however, that tampering with God's word brings with it an eternal curse from God.

This loss of rewards heresy is contrary to the gospel of God's grace. In the parable of the penny paid to workers, Jesus made it clear that our heavenly blessings are not based upon what we do, but rather on God's perfect grace.

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. **Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?** So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. (Matthew 20:1-16 AV)

In heaven believers will have the imputed righteousness of Christ and all that goes with it. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2 AV) To suggest that somehow a saved Christian will have less glory than is promised in the

bible, because he did not have enough good works, calls into question the promise that “we shall be like him.”

What does it mean to be like Christ? All saved Christians are one with Christ. “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are all of one*: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,” (Hebrews 2:11 AV) Jesus made that point in John 14:20, where he said: “At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.” (John 14:20 AV) The prayers of Jesus are always answered by the Father. He prayed to the Father the following prayer:

**That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.** (John 17:21-23 AV)

You see that all Christians are one with Christ. He is in us and we are in him. In John 17, Jesus states that the glory that the Father has given him he has given to those who believe in him. We are one with Jesus in glory. That means that when we go to heaven we will have the very glory of Jesus Christ. How then can any Christian forfeit blessings at the judgment seat of Christ? It is impossible. Jesus himself states in John 17, that we will be “**made perfect in one.**” What is the one with whom Christians are made perfect? Christians are made perfect in one with God!

What does it mean to be perfect? Open a dictionary and read the definition. Perfect means to conform absolutely to the definition or description of the ideal type; to be excellent or complete beyond practical or theoretical improvement; to be entirely without any flaws, defects or shortcomings; to be correct in every detail; to be pure and unmixed.  
(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/perfect>)

A Christian who is heaven and in glory cannot lack anything by virtue of having blessings taken away, because God has stated that Christians will be “perfect!” That is, we will be complete, beyond any improvement, without any flaws and not having any shortcomings. To claim that a Christian must work to establish his perfection in heaven is to attempt to do that which God has admonished against. “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3 AV) God, in Colossians 1, explains that Christians are saved to be presented “perfect **in** Christ Jesus.” We are not perfected by works, we are perfected by our being one “in” Jesus. The works that are done by Christians, are in fact orchestrated by Jesus. The labors of Christians are “according to his working.”

To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach,

warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man **perfect in Christ Jesus**: Whereunto I also labour, striving **according to his working, which worketh in me mightily**. (Colossians 1:27-29 AV)

Christians are part of the spiritual assembly in heaven made up of those who have been made perfect by Christ.

But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the **spirits of just men made perfect**, (Hebrews 12:22-23 AV)

If we are made perfect in one with God and share in his glory, what is there lacking? The answer is nothing. Jesus states emphatically in his prayer that God has loved us as he has loved Jesus. We share in the same love, blessing and glory with Jesus when we enter heaven. We know this because Jesus says so in John 17:22: “**the glory which thou gavest me I have given them.**” This is the very same glory that Christ had with the Father before he was manifest in the flesh on earth. “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” (John 17:5 AV)

We are not partially saved, we are saved to the uttermost, that is completely. “Wherefore he is able also to **save them to the uttermost** that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:25 AV) Uttermost salvation means that we are completely saved to the greatest extent possible. Being saved to the uttermost means that there is no blessing that we will lack and there will be no loss of rewards due to our unrighteousness.

We need not work to add to what is already perfect. We are saved perfectly by the one offering of Jesus Christ. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:14 AV) To attempt to add to his one offering is to doubt the sufficiency of his offering, and his promise that we are completely and perfectly saved.

Notice how in Revelation 21 God gives of the water of life “freely” and those that overcome the world inherit “all things.” God give to us “freely” and we will inherit “all things,” not some things.

And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. **I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things;** and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. (Re 21:6-8 AV)

In 1 Peter 1 God states that our perfect inheritance in heaven is “incorruptible.” If God says our inheritance is incorruptible, who is man to contradict him and say “oh yes it is, it can be corrupted by your failure to do good works”? We cannot by our own misdeeds in the flesh corrupt our rewards in heaven. Our inheritance is not based upon the merits of what we have done, but rather on the perfect righteousness of Jesus imputed to us, and so we cannot lose our eternal gifts. We did nothing to earn them and therefore we can do nothing to lose them.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an **inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled**, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,” (1Peter 1:3-4 AV)

Christians will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away at the judgment seat of Christ. “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1Peter 5:4 AV) The reason a Christian inheritance is incorruptible and cannot fade away is that Christians are in Christ and Christ is in them. We are one with Christ and are partakers of the divine nature of Christ. “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” (2Peter 1:4 AV)

Some cite 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 in an effort to support the unbiblical view that one will lose blessings at the judgment seat of Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 states:

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 AV)

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 does not support the proposition that the believer loses eternal blessings. If we read the passage in context we see that it addresses the building of the temple of God, which is made up of believers. The verse following the verse on works being burned up states: “**Know ye not that ye are the temple of God**, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16 AV) The verses that lead into the description of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble state: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:10-11 AV) The entire passage is an allegory that addresses the building of the temple of believers - the church of Christ.

In Hebrews 3, God states that Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of the house worthy of more glory than the house itself. He is equating Jesus as the

builder with the house, being Moses. God then states that Christ is the son over his house and that we Christians are his house, just as Moses is his house. The house, like the temple in 1 Corinthians 3, is an allegory for Christ's church of believers. Where Christ, who is the chief corner stone is the builder of that house, made up of believers. We are one with Christ, his "holy brethren."

Wherefore, **holy brethren**, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses *was faithful* in all his house. For this *man* was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he **who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house**. For every house is builded by some *man*; but **he that built all things is God**. And Moses verily *was faithful* in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But **Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we**, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (Hebrews 3:1-6 AV)

1 Corinthians 3 states that the "day" declares the works of men and it is revealed by fire. What is the day to which God refers? It is a reference to the open revelation in this temporal world. Jesus explained in John 9: "I must work the works of him that sent me, **while it is day**: the night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9:4 AV) Notice that Jesus was talking about working the works of God in present tense "while it is day." He meant right then and there on earth. The day to which he was referring was the opportunity to put faith, love, and hope into action then and there. He set the example for all Christians by being perfectly righteous while it was day. We are his "children of the day."

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the **children of the day**: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are **of the day**, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 AV)

What does 1 Corinthians 3:13 mean when it says that works will be revealed by fire? John the Baptist explained in Matthew 3:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: **he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire**: Whose fan *is* in his hand, **and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**. (Matthew 3:11-12 AV)

John the Baptist stated that Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire.” So the fire that is referred to in 1 Corinthians 3:13 must be a baptism of fire. What does that mean? 1 Peter 4:12-19 helps explain what this baptism of fire means.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning **the fiery trial which is to try you**, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as **ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings**; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. **For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?** And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore **let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.** (1 Peter 4:12-19 AV)

Notice that the baptism of fire is a fiery trial of persecution of Christians. 1 Peter 4:12-19 makes it clear that this persecution is a “judgment” that begins at the “house of God.” Christians suffer according to the “will of God.” Jesus himself refers to the baptism by fire in Luke 12:50. This reference to another baptism is obviously not a reference to a baptism of water, but rather a baptism of fire, his crucifixion. He first states that he has come to send fire on the earth and then refers to his baptism of fire (crucifixion), which will be the catalyst for the subsequent persecutions of his church. **“I am come to send fire on the earth;** and what will I, if it be already kindled? **But I have a baptism to be baptized with;** and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:49-50 AV) In fact Jesus tells James and John, the sons of Zebedee that they will in fact be baptized with the baptism with which Jesus would be baptized.

They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, **Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:** But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared.” (Mark 10:37-40 AV)

We are partakers of the sufferings of Christ. Why must we endure the fiery trials of suffering? He stated that we would be persecuted for our faith in him. Jesus explained in John 15:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. **Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.** Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. **If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.** If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. **Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.** These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, **The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;** if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." (John 15:1-21 AV)

Jesus purges the branches through suffering so that they will bear fruit. However there are those branches that bear no fruit. They are the branches that wither under the fire of Christian trials. Jesus explains this point in the parable of the sower:

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: **for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.** He also that received seed among the thorns is

he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” (Matthew 13:18-23 AV)

The apostle Paul saw this very thing happen, and he named names:

**This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me;** of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found *me*. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well. (2 Timothy 1:15-18 AV)

Did Paul suffer loss? Yes, the three years he spent in Asia being beaten and falsely accused resulted in all turning away from him. Not only were Phygellus and Hermogenes losses to him but also Demas. “For **Demas hath forsaken me**, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.” (2 Timothy 4:10 AV) Demas was earlier described by Paul as his fellow laborer in Christ. “Marcus, Aristarchus, **Demas**, Lucas, **my fellowlabourers**.” (Philemon 1:24 AV) Paul’s loss was according to God’s will. Paul explains earlier in 2 Timothy:

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but **be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,** (2 Timothy 1:8-9 AV)

The persecution and loss that he suffered was according to the will of God, who purposed it before the world was created. Paul made the important point that he was called to a holy calling of spreading the gospel not according to his works but according to God’s “own purpose and grace.”

Some people seem to have lost sight of the fact that not all references to rewards and losses in the bible are references to eternal rewards and losses. Some of the rewards and losses are rewards and losses during our temporal life on earth. For example: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall **reward thee openly**.” (Matthew 6:6 AV) The open reward is a clear reference to a reward during our temporal existence on earth.

We saw how Paul suffered loss. However, what does Paul say is his reward? In 1

Corinthians 9 he tells us what is his reward. First, he states that he has no reason to Glory. Second, he states that his reward is preaching the gospel without charge. He states that the preaching of the gospel without charge is its own reward!

**For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of:** for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! **For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward:** but if against my will, a dispensation *of the gospel* is committed unto me. **What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.**" (1 Corinthians 9:16-19 AV)

How could the preaching itself be a reward! Because it is Christ who determines the increase. Whether someone comes to the knowledge of Christ is not up to Paul, it is up to Christ. Therefore, the only thing of which Paul can make certain is that he preaches faithfully the word of God. If he preaches the word faithfully and accurately then the preaching will bear fruit. However, as Jesus pointed out in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, not all who seem to follow Christ have the true faith of Christ. Christ is not only the object of our faith he is the very source of our faith. We are dead in trespasses and sin such that Jesus must supply the faith for our salvation. "And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins;" (Ephesians 2:1 AV) Everything for our salvation is supplied by and through Christ. **Our faith in Christ is the faith of Christ.** See e.g., Romans 3:22; Galatians 3:22; Revelation 14:12.

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the **faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the **faith of Christ**, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16 AV)

Our salvation is all of Christ. Jesus is the "**author and finisher of our faith.**" Hebrews 12:2. That means he originates, creates, and establishes our faith. He does not then leave us to our own devices. Jesus then preserves us in him forever. Our salvation is truly by his grace through faith, it is none of our own, it is all of Christ.

**But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)** And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. **For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:** Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10 AV) (emphasis added)

Our calling by Christ is not according to any merit or works we have done. “Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace**, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,” (2 Timothy 1:9 AV) As with our salvation, so also our very calling is not based upon some merits through works we have done on earth. Our calling to preach the gospel is according to his purpose and grace. In fact, Paul states clearly in 2 Timothy that we all receive the a crown of righteousness. How then can some lose any of their heavenly blessings if we all receive a crown of righteousness that is from Christ? “Henceforth there is laid up for me a **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: **and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**” (2 Timothy 4:8 AV)

Let us take a closer look at 1 Corinthians 3 in context. We see that the topic is the church. Early in the chapter Paul makes the point that the laborers in preaching the gospel and building the are laborers with God! Not only that, the laborers are also the plants upon which God is husbanding. That is, the members of the church (gold, silver, precious stones) are also working to add more gold, silver, precious stones. “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” (1John 4:6 AV) However, without Christ the workers can do nothing and so Christ is right alongside them guiding the work. Christians are laboring with God, and Jesus is the good shepherd, shepherding us along.

As explained in Ephesians 2, whatever good we do is preordained by God. We have no reason to boast and there is no eternal reward for any of our good works because our salvation is not by works but by the grace of God. Even our very faith is from God. That is why Paul stated that he had nothing to glory about. “For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” 1 Corinthians 9:16. Jesus drove home the point when he stated: “So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” (Luke 17:10 AV)

Consequently, if persons come to the knowledge of Christ and are saved due to the preaching of the gospel, that is a reward to the preacher. It is a reward that they receive on earth. There is not, however, some added blessing to be received by the preacher in heaven because the gospel they preached was effectual. The glory for saving the soul goes to God and God alone. “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:7 AV) Our blessing in heaven is not based upon some debt owed to us for works done on earth. Our blessing in heaven is based completely on the mercy and grace of God. Read again what God states: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: ***it is the gift of God: Not of works***, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 AV)

The topic of 1 Corinthians 3 is the church, and the foundation of the church is Christ. The issue in 1 Corinthians 3 is whether the spiritual building being built is made up of true

Christians. The wood, hay, and stubble seems to be those who fall away during the fiery trials Peter mentioned in 1 Peter 4. The preachers of the Gospel will suffer loss of those as members of the church, but the preachers themselves (gold, silver, precious stones) will be saved. However, they will go through the same fiery trials that caused the false Christians to fall away, but the true Christians will be saved as gold, silver, precious stones. The passage makes clear that fire will try every man's work. What work is that? It is the body of the church, the foundation of which is Christ. The product of the work of preaching the gospel will be gold, silver, and precious stones (true Christians) and wood, hay, and stubble (ersatz Christians). The true Christians will persevere through the fiery trials of the persecutions suffered by Christians, however, the ersatz Christians will wilt under the heat and fall away. The loss mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3 has nothing to do with loss of eternal blessings in heaven, it is the loss of the false brethren (the wood, hay, stubble).

I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then **neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one**; and every man shall receive his own reward **according to his own labour**. For **we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building**.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For **other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ**. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because **it shall be revealed by fire**; and the **fire shall try every man's work** of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but **he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire**.

**Know ye not that ye are the temple of God**, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for **the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are**. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. **Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.** (1 Corinthians 3:6-23 AV)

1 Corinthians 3:6-23 clearly refers to the temple of the Lord. The wood, hay, and stubble are those who do not truly belong as part of the temple, whereas the gold, silver, and precious stones are the true Christians who make up the body of Christ. All Christians corporately are the temple of the Lord. **"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."** (1Peter 2:5 AV) The fiery

trials suffered by Christians ultimately ends with glory at the judgment seat of Christ. “That the **trial of your faith**, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be **tried with fire**, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:” (1Peter 1:7 AV)

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.** (Ephesians 2:19-22 AV)

The wood, hay, and stubble do not weather the fiery trials and persecutions and are burned up. This brings us right back to Matthew 3:11-12. Where John the Baptist makes clear that the baptism of fire will be the way in which God will separate his wheat from the chaff. The persecutions suffered for Christ are the means by which God separates the wheat from the chaff. The chaff shall be gathered and burned up with unquenchable fire, while the wheat will be gathered and preserved in his garner.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: **he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire**: Whose fan *is* in his hand, **and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.** (Matthew 3:11-12 AV)

Why would God allow persecution to come to his own chosen children? Because his strength is made perfect through our weakness. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for **my strength is made perfect in weakness**. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10 AV)

Those who would follow Christ and live the gospel will suffer persecution, just as did Paul. “Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and **all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.**” (2 Timothy 3:11-12 AV) We must rely totally on Christ for our strength and to deliver us if it is his will. We are children of God and heirs of

his glory. The sufferings of this world do not compare to the glory that will be revealed in us.

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:17-18 AV)

We look forward, beyond our sufferings, to the perfection that God has awaiting us in eternal glory. If we are “perfect” in heavenly glory, then we will not lack any rewards, because being perfect by definition means we will be completely pure, correct in every detail, and entirely without any shortcomings. This is done, not by our works, but rather by God imputing the perfection of Christ to us.

Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath **called us unto his eternal glory** by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, **make you perfect**, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. (1 Peter 5:9-10 AV)

## Endnotes

1. Advanced Bible Studies Series volume on First Corinthians, Way of Life Literature, <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/judgment-seat-of-christ.html>, website last visited on September 8, 2007.
2. J. Hampton Keathley, III, Th.M., The Doctrine of Rewards: The Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ, [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=407](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=407), website visited on September 8, 2007.
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