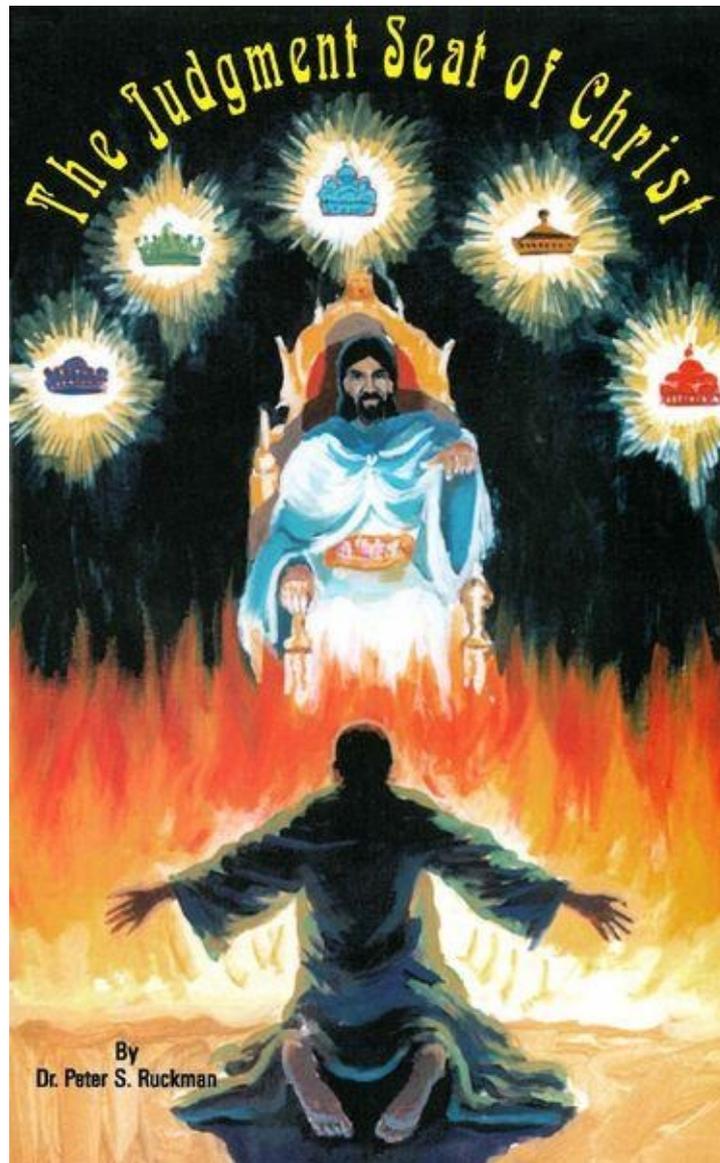


The Judgment Seat of Christ



By
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THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,” (Rom. 14:10). **“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 Cor. 5:10).

Those references are talking to a Christian. The Bible says, **“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”** (Heb. 9:27). Even a saved person doesn't get out of judgment. If you are unsaved, you will die and face the White Throne Judgment; if you are saved, you will die and face the Judgment Seat of Christ. The judgment in 1 Corinthians 3 is for Christians, so, if you are saved—a child of God—this is where you are headed.

If you see me do some things sometimes that you think are crazy and that don't make sense, nine times out of ten, I will have in the back of my mind somewhere the fact that I'm going to give account of myself to God and have to give account for how I handle what God has given me. That is what I am headed for. I don't have time to particularly keep my eye on you; I have to keep my eye on the judgment. I'll give account of myself.

“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” (1Cor. 3:11-15).

Notice in the passage that the *man* doesn't burn; the *works* burn. Notice also in that passage that the fire is going to try every man's work of what *sort* it is. What the Lord is interested in is quality—what *sort* it is.

Let's get something clear on the Judgment Seat of Christ. First of all, if you are a child of God, you've trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour. You are saved if you are trusting nothing but the shed blood of Christ to get you to heaven...and I want to make myself clear. The term “Christian,” these days, can mean just about anything. Jack Van Impe wrote an article for *American Review* and apologized to the body of Christ. Van Impe's point (and I think he is a fine fellow personally, and I appreciate him) was that Christians had no business fighting among themselves. He felt that every Christian should abandon the term Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Fundamentalist, or Neo-Orthodox, and just call himself “Christian.” That would be fine except that the term doesn't mean anything. The term “Christian” is what you call the editor of pornographic magazines, Larry Flynt.

Jimmy Carter's mother was a "Christian." Michael Luther King Jr. was a "Christian." H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael were "Christians." The greatest Communists in America are "Christians." They called Gandhi a "Christian," when he was a practical atheist. The reason that you very rarely hear me call myself a "Christian" is because the term doesn't mean anything. I don't call myself a "Baptist." I call myself a Bible-believing Baptist. That's why we have that Book stuck in everything around this ministry. We have the Pensacola *Bible* Institute. We have the *Bible* Baptist Bookstore. We have the *Bible* Baptist Church. We have the *Bible Believers' Bulletin*. We are not going to let them forget that Book. When you say "Christian," it doesn't mean much any more.

When I say "Christian" in the context of our study, I mean a sinner who is trusting nothing but the merits of Jesus Christ to get him to heaven. That's what I am talking about. Did you notice that I didn't mention church membership? Did you notice that I didn't mention baptism? I'm not even interested. A "Christian" in that Book is someone who has trusted what Jesus Christ did for them—dying on the cross. To be technical, it is a saved sinner who has forsaken all to follow Christ as a disciple. Now, when I say "Christian," I mean this: If you dropped dead right this minute, what are you counting on to justify you and get you to heaven? You say, "My good life." Well, then, this message isn't for you. This message is for those of you who are trusting the blood of Christ to get you to heaven.

If you are saved, a child of God, there is one thing that is not going to happen to you. There are all kinds of things that can happen to you, but there is one thing that will never happen to you. *You will never burn in hell*. Now, you may have a rough time going: you may lose your wife; you may lose your children; your home could break up just like the home of any unsaved person; you could wind up in jail just like any unsaved person. I have known of Christians who were guilty of everything that I ever heard of unsaved people committing. Incest? Drugs? Adultery? Fornication? You say, "They weren't saved!" Yes, they were. I examined them real close. They were just as saved as any of you. Anything can happen to a child of God if he doesn't watch his step, but there is one thing he doesn't have to worry about. He never has to worry about going to hell. Once you trust Jesus Christ, you are safe and secure, and God is going to get you home, if He has to boot you all of the way. That is called the *eternal security* of the believer. It simply means that although God may burn your *works*, you are never going to burn.

Don't you know of a man in the Bible whose works all burned up in a fire, yet he didn't burn? It was Lot. Lot lost all that he had in a fire. Everything that he had was burned up, but the fire didn't touch him. The smell of smoke never even passed on him. That is a picture of a carnal Christian at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Did you ever stop to think how hypocritical the average church is—standing up and singing songs about folks going to heaven, and they don't even know they, themselves, are going to heaven? Why, you take the American people: they are some of the dumbest people on the face of the earth. Every Sunday across this country, there are probably thirty thousand churches where people are going in, passing a collection plate, and putting money in that plate just to hear a preacher tell them how to get to heaven, and the rascal doesn't even *know* where he is going! I'll bet some of you do that. I'll bet some of you actually pay the priest to tell you how to get to heaven. If you sat that priest down in your living room, *he couldn't tell you for sure where he is going when he dies*. Aren't you a

bright one? You have the brains, don't you, boy? There are people in this country who make sixty thousand dollars a year, and they don't have the spiritual sense that God gave to a blind mosquito.

You don't have to worry about losing salvation. You may have to worry about losing your life. You may have to worry about losing your health. But you do not have to worry about losing your salvation, because it isn't yours—it's His. I am eternally secure in Christ. What could be more hypocritical than a Salt Lake City Mormon Tabernacle Choir standing and singing, "We shall sing on that beautiful shore, the melodious songs of the blessed"? Why, they don't even know where they're going when they die. What could be more hypocritical than a bunch of Campbellites (Church of Christ) singing, "Life is so sweet, and my joy is complete for I *think* I'm saved, I *hope* I'm saved, I *guess* I'm saved"? Why don't they sing, "We have heard the joyful sound, water saves, *water saves*"? I mean, they do believe that water saves, don't they? Do you think that I'm being hard on people? If you do, it's because you are narrow-minded and stupid. That is what they profess. You don't believe it? Go talk to them. The trouble with some of you folks is that you don't get around. You hide like a little bunny in your burrow, and when something comes up, you say, "What's that?" It's what you miss when you sleep in front of the television. I know what Campbellites believe. They believe that water saves.

Now, the Christian is going to face judgment. The nature of this judgment is that his works are put into the fire and are burned. I read back there in Revelation 1:14 that Jesus Christ's eyes are like "**a flame of fire,**" which means our works are someday going to be subjected to the scrutinizing eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ. These holy eyes are going to pierce down through our soul and try our works, and I suppose, in type, ignite what we have done. Then, whatever has not been done through love will not last through the fire. It is the *sort*. It is the *motive*. Paul said that if he gave his body to be burned and had not love, it was nothing (1 Cor. 13:3). When people read that passage, they always read it humanistically: they read it as loving your fellow man. Don't you bet any money on that. The first commandment is, "**Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind**" (Matt. 22:37).

Once I was talking to a fellow in Bangor, Maine, and I led him to Christ. He was about ninety years old and was the oldest person I have ever led to Christ. I talked to him for about twenty minutes and was getting nowhere with him; I got no response; I just kept on praying about what to say. Finally, I said to him, "Let me ask you a question. How old are you?" He told me. I said, "What have you ever done just because you love Jesus Christ?" He said, "Well, I've raised my children right." I answered, "You told me that you thought a man ought to raise his children right. You did that out of a sense of duty. You didn't do that for Jesus Christ." He said, "Well. I told you I believed in right living." I said, "Yeah, but you told me you believed in right living because a man ought to live right." After about fifteen minutes of that, he began to cry and said, "You know, I guess I've never done anything for Jesus Christ." In about five minutes he was on his knees and was born again.

If you had to sit down, take a sheet of paper, and write down on that sheet of paper what you have done just for Jesus Christ, would it come to a great deal? Folks say, "What about your preaching?" I get paid for preaching, and I enjoy preaching. I don't believe I will get any particular reward for that. But, let me ask you, "What have you given up that

would have benefited you and that no one else noticed; you received no blessing from giving it, but you gave it up just for Him?” Let me ask you this: “What did you do that you didn’t have to do? Nobody would have known differently. You could have gotten away with it, but you did it just because it would please Him?” That’s the business. That is what they don’t talk about in Christian schools and never even bring up. They just give you a bunch of rules and regulations and say, “That’s how a Christian ought to live.” Your foot! Let me tell you something: *“Only one life, ’twill soon be past; Only what’s done for Christ will last.”* Why, if I had to take out a sheet of paper, as God is my witness, I don’t think I could write down more than ten things in over thirty years. Isn’t that a sorry profession? That is pretty sorry. It ought to be ten a month, but in thirty years I can only think of about ten things I’ve ever done just because He wanted me to, it was right, I should do it, I got no blessing, profit, or praise from it, and I got no benefits from it. It was just something he wanted me to do. About ten is a pretty small pile of stuff.

There is something else about that Judgment Seat of Christ that people don’t think about. They say, “Well, I’ll just be glad to get to heaven, and if I can just get there, I’ll be happy enough.” No, you won’t. If you went home tonight and found your home burned to the ground, all of the sheets and linen burned, all of the furniture and Tupperware burned to the ground, the television lying there in ashes, and no insurance—you wouldn’t be too happy about it. There are going to be millions of Christians who will face the judgment seat of Christ and will see their lives go up in flames—nothing to cover it. I think that most Christians will find that. They will see their life just go up in smoke.

There is another negative aspect of this judgment. I’m not too sure about what I’m about to say, but the Bible seems to intimate it. It seems to intimate that a Christian will appear naked at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Revelation 19:8 says, **“fine linen is the righteousness of saints.”** Revelation 16:15 tells you, **“Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”** John says, **“abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming”** (1 John 2:28). If I read those passages right, then the child of God, when he is saved, begins to sew and to make clothes for himself. He does not say that fine linen is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but of the saints. That is righteousness for which you are responsible yourself; that is what you do for the Lord after you are saved.

Let’s be clear—there are no works that will save you. **“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us”** (Titus 3:5). But after you are saved, you are supposed to be a people **“created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”** (Eph. 2:10). So, when you’re saved, there are some things for which you’ll work, and the Bible seems to indicate that those things will comprise clothing. I don’t know what all of that means, but if it means literally what it says, some Christians are going to stand there in a G-string.

Now, I’ll tell you. I’ve had a lot of things happen to me, but thank God, I’ve never had to walk right down Palafox Street in downtown Pensacola at noon as naked as a jaybird. I’ve been spared that one. Would you like that? Would you want to be walking right downtown at noon in your birthday suit with everyone looking at you? Folks say,

“Streakers do it.” But, did you notice that they *run*? They don’t walk. They run.

Now, there are some positive aspects to this passage. Speaking positively, Paul says this: **“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...”** (1 Cor. 3:12-14). What is that?

Gold. What is gold? Gold in the Bible stands for Deity. All of the furniture in the tabernacle was overlaid with gold. Gold represents the highest thing up there because it is the highest thing down here. How do you know that is so? The streets of New Jerusalem are gold, and it is a golden city, like pure gold. Gold stands for Deity. Take the word “gold” and remove the “L”: you have the word. Every time that you worship Christ like He was God, and every time you magnify Jesus Christ like He was God, and every time you praise Him as God, then you lay up gold in heaven. Listen, when you are in trouble, that is the time to really praise God, because that is a sacrifice. That is called **“the sacrifice of praise”** (Heb. 13:15). **“They that worship him [God] must worship him in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24). Let me tell you something—when you come into the church and raise the roof singing about Jesus Christ and bragging about Jesus Christ with your mouth when your heart is broken, you will lay up something that will go through the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Silver. What is silver? Silver in the Bible is the price of redemption. When Jesus Christ was sold, He was sold for thirty pieces of silver. When the Jews went into battle, they had to give every man so much silver as an atonement for their souls. Every time you tell a man how to be saved, you lay up silver in heaven. **“Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven....For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (Matt. 6:20-21). Do you know what is going to happen to a lot of Christians? They are going to get home to heaven and find out that they are dead broke at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Precious stones. What are precious stones? Malachi 3:17-18 says, **“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”** He said his people are like jewels, precious jewels. Didn’t you ever read, **“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies”** (Prov. 31:10)? Didn’t you ever read, **“As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion”** (Prov. 11:22)? Didn’t you ever read in 1 Peter 2 about living stones? First Peter 2:5 says, **“lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.”** Saved people are likened unto precious stones. Didn’t you ever read, **“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine”** (Matt. 7:6)? Those are your converts. You don’t take your converts and turn them over to dogs and swine. What are dogs and swine? Peter says that they are false teachers and prophets (2 Peter 2:1, 22).

That stuff is all through there—English with English, Scripture with Scripture. It’s in there. You can get it. The thing is folks just don’t read it.

The precious stones are the people that you have led to Christ. In Zechariah 9:16, the

saved people are said to be “**as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.**” When the prodigal son came home, the old man said, “Put a ring on his finger”—a birthstone. When you are born again, you have a birthday, and you are like a precious stone in God’s sight. What does that mean? That means that the people that you lead to Christ are your stones, and they are precious stones in a crown. That is why the old-time Christians used to sing, “Will there be any stars in my crown, at evening when the sun goeth down?”

Now, that isn’t all. You have some crowns. You see little cartoons in the newspapers that always show the Christian sitting up in heaven playing a harp with a crown on his head. Some joke about it as though *that* were the deal. That is not the deal. The deal is this—look *Who* gives you the crown. Do you see that? A fellow said to me, “I just don’t want to spend time in heaven sitting around on a silly old throne with a little crown on my head.” Well, you say that because you don’t know Jesus Christ. What would you say if Jesus Christ stepped forward, took a crown, placed it on your head, and said, “**Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord**” (Matt. 25:21)? That wouldn’t be worth anything? Come on, now, think-think. Do you know a higher honor than that? You ambitious people—you self-centered people who like attention and who want praise and compliments—*how about that?* How about a sinless Creator, who made your body and gave you your soul, patting you on the back before the universe? How about that? I’ll tell you. I’ve seen a lot of things in my day, but I’ve never seen anything that will match that. You say, “Well, I’m not that hard up for compl....” Oh, yes, you are. Don’t kid me. I know people.

I’ve watched people for years. There are only about three or four kinds people in this world that are immune to flattery, and even they are not *completely* immune. You take infantry-men; they are hard to flatter—they will suspect you as soon as you move. Take construction men and commercial fishermen—they are rough. You won’t pat much of that bunch on the back. They won’t buy much of whatever you say. Most people, though, like to be flattered. Women say, “Flattery will get you everywhere.” If you get to be sixty or sixty-five years old, and your husband puts his arm around you and says, “Honey, you’re still the best looking woman in town!” then you giggle. You know that he’s lying like a dog, but you like it. That’s how people are. Now, when your husband compliments you, he might mean it, and he might not. You never can tell about people, you know? He might be just trying to get you to get up and fix breakfast for him before he goes fishing. I mean, you don’t know about people. When your wife says, “I sure am glad I married you. I married a real man!” You like to hear that. But you never know what her motive is. She might be getting a new hat, or she might want to get off one night and have you take care of the kids. People are funny. You pick up a high school annual and see the “Most Beautiful,” the “Best Sportsman,” the “Most Artistic,” the “Most Talented,” and the “Most Likely to Succeed.” Well, maybe...maybe. They might have their picture in there because their old man gave more money to the school than anybody else. Do you know what I mean, jelly bean? You never can tell about people. They have front-and-center, and the guy goes down front to get his Silver Star or Purple Heart. You stand back there in the ranks and kind of wish that it was you. That’s how people are. Surely some of you have lain in your bed at night and imagined situations where you were the center of attraction and getting your due publicly. Surely. When a man goes forward to get his Silver Star, he

may have earned it or he may not have earned it; I don't know. Back in World War II, they gave the Purple Heart to some men for cutting their fingers on a C-ration can. Sometimes you can't tell about people.

However, when a sinless Saviour compliments you on your fidelity and faithfulness before the universe, no one can say that He was bribed. No one can say that He is prejudiced. No one can say that you didn't earn it. If Jesus Christ ever plants a crown on your head and says, **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord,”** all heaven from the capstone to the foundation will have to say, “Amen!” If you can think of an honor higher than that, tell me about it. Tell me about some honor higher than having your sinless Saviour publicly compliment you before the cherubim and seraphim and the saints and the Trinity. I've seen plenty in my day, and I've never seen anything like that.

Imagine some big, overgrown baby running down a football field of the Super Bowl, with a pigskin under his arm during the last few minutes of the game, and scoring a touchdown. That's kid stuff. Wait until you get up to heaven, and Cassius Clay steps up at the judgment. The Lord says, “What did you do, Cassius?” He'll reply, “Oh, I wuz de greatest. I wuz de king. I wuz de greatest boxer fo' ten years.” Michael looks at Gabriel. Gabriel looks at Michael. Some of the angels yawn. Someone says, “Well, ain't we got something important to talk about? Bring on Wurmbrand, and let's hear something. Never mind the kiddies. Never mind the pro linebackers and all of the star centers. Bring some men in here. Get Popov in. Get Lester Roloff in. Let's get this show going!” All of that is so different than down here. There will be rewards passed out, and they will be in the form of crowns.

1. *The Crown of Righteousness*

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 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 Tim. 4:1-8).

The first crown is called the *crown of righteousness*, and it is given to people who love His appearing. Paul said, **“Not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”** Now, let's see how well you stand in receiving that crown. How many of you want the Lord Jesus Christ to come back, and you would like to see Him come back tonight? If so, you have a crown. Jesus said, **“Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”** (Rev. 3:11). Don't ever let the second coming of Christ get to be a

commonplace thing to you. Don't ever let it get to the place that you don't look forward to seeing Him. I don't know what kind of a church that you go to, and I wouldn't tell you what kind of a church to go to, and I wouldn't tell you that Bible Baptist here in Pensacola is the only church in the world; but if you are hanging around a church where the preacher doesn't talk about the second coming of Christ, and doesn't love the second coming, and doesn't want Christ to come back, I wouldn't stay around that dump long enough to hang my hat on a hook. There's a fellow going all over the world with a half of a grapefruit on his head not saying one word about the second coming of Christ. He'll steal your crown. **"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."**

2. *The Crown of Life*

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10).

Do you see what He said? He didn't say to be faithful unto death, and He'd give you eternal life. Eternal life is conditioned upon the blood of Christ. He said, **"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."** If it is, **"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,"** I learned something from the passage. I learned that if a Christian will resist temptation, God will give him the same crown that He gives to a martyr. They are mentioned in both places. He will give the crown of life to those who are faithful unto death. **"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."** *Them that love him*; that's the business. Jesus Christ promised a crown of life to someone who will put up with temptation and resist it for His sake.

3. *The Incorruptible Crown*

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain....I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:24, 26-27).

This particular passage has nothing to do with going to hell. When Paul said, **"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection,"** he is not saying, "Lest I should go to hell." He is saying, "Lest, when I finish preaching, the Lord will put me on a shelf because I am no longer in physical condition to preach." The passage has to do with staying in physical condition. In the passage, he says of those people out in the world, **"Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"** (1 Cor. 9:25). So, there is an *incorruptible*

crown that the child of God can win. Paul said that we are to **“lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us”** (Heb. 12:1) You fellows that run track, do you have pockets in your suits? I used to swim for the Big Six and the Big Ten. They gave us a one-piece nylon suit with a hoop round the neck, since just having shorts would slow you down. That suit didn’t have any pockets in it. Do you know why? Pockets are for carrying weights. He said, **“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.”** What is the weight in your life? I wonder what it is.

He said, **“Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.”** You ought to keep the rules. He said that unless a man obeys the rules, he isn’t crowned. A man is not crowned unless he strives lawfully. That’s the business. Do you know what Christians are like (I’ve watched them for years, and they’ve watched me)? They are like a bunch of fellows running around a track waving at the grandstand. “How am I doing? Hey, Mom. Hey, Dad. Watch me go.” They don’t run to win; they have inferior standards; they don’t aim to win. They aim to run fourth, fifth, or sixth; not to win, place, or show. Listen—imperative—commandment—**“So run, that ye may obtain.”** Obtain what? Obtain a crown. You’re to run to break the tape.

Some folks start running and begin to watch the other runners. “He isn’t doing so well. I’m doing better than he is. Oh, he stumbled. Ha. Ha. Did you see that? Did you see him stumble? Ha. Ha. Look here. He stumbled. Ha. Ha. Ha.” You fool, you’re going to lose your race. You’re going to lose it. You have a course to run. Paul said, **“I have finished my course”** (2 Tim. 4:7). **“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross”** (Heb. 12:2). **“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us”** (Heb. 12:1). I have a course to run. I am to run to win. God’s people don’t do it.

Do you know what some people are? They’re experts in everyone else’s business. There are some people on earth who could sit down at a table and tell you everything that you wanted to know about someone they were interested in. Do you know what these people are? They are people who sit around on their dead cans doing nothing about ten hours a day. I’ve seen God take those people, pick them up, bottle them up, place them on a shelf, and leave them there for twenty-five years. Every one of the people that I have seen that happen to have had their eye on someone and tried to become an expert on that person’s affairs, so that people would have to come to *them* for information about that person. I have never known one exception in over thirty years—not one exception. They weren’t people who committed adultery or got drunk; they specialized in other people’s business. The Lord just put them on the shelf. You’ll disbelieve me at the risk of your crown. **“Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”**

4. The Crown of Glory

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that

fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

There is a *crown of glory* given to the faithful shepherd who feeds the flock the word of God. I’m sure that can apply to a woman missionary in some cases, and to a Sunday School teacher in some cases. If a man is a shepherd and has been given a flock to take care of, he is supposed to feed them. No one would know that any more than Simon Peter. When Christ rose from the dead and got hold of Simon Peter, He said, “**Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?**” Peter answered, “**Thou knowest that I love thee.**” Jesus said, “**Feed my sheep,**” (John 21:16). He told him that three times.

Old Simon Peter got that doctrine down. “**Feed my sheep.**” I got it down, too. I’ve learned that if you feed the sheep, they’ll feed you. Of course, you’ll always have billy goats that will butt you around. Not all of the sheep will feed you, but in every town, there will be someone who loves that Book. In every church, there will be someone who loves that Book. If you will feed them, they will feed you. After all, you don’t find many preachers who are in the full-time ministry that are skinny. Did you ever notice that? Have you ever seen preachers that have been in the ministry for ten or fifteen years at a convention? They don’t look like Slim Jim and Step-N-Fetch-It. They look like Hardy and Costello. Those fellows come in slapping their bellies saying, “Well, bless God, Brother. Bring all of the tithes into the storehouse.”

You feed the sheep, and they will feed you. I’ve had Christians threaten to sue me, and some of them have. I’ve had that happen four or five times. But at the same time, someone went to the back of my house while I was gone and built a book shelf for me. They even rotated the tires on my car because I didn’t have the time to do it. You feed the sheep, and they will feed you. I’ve had Christians threaten to burn down my house and beat me up. I’ve had them threaten to cut off my head. I’ve also had them take care of my family and feed them two or three times a week for ten years too.

Back in the old days, when I didn’t have a wife and I didn’t have my kids with me sometimes in the winter for a while, I’d get back home on a plane, and there would be no one to pick me up at the airport. There would be nothing to eat at home, and I would call a cab. On the way home I would have the cab stop at Church’s Fried Chicken so that I could take something home to eat. I’d really be feeling sorry for myself. When I would get home, I would go back into the kitchen, and there would be five covered plates there of corn-on-the-cob, fried chicken, okra, black-eyed peas, pecan pie, and iced tea. I would kick myself around the house for a while. Do you know what that was? That’s some Christian that had me in mind.

I got a check in the mail once for three hundred dollars from a guy I had never heard from or seen in my life. I opened the letter, and it started, “Dear Brother Ruckman, I got saved here, and heard you here, and got your tapes here, and you got me over this hump here, and straightened me out there. I would have been tangled up here if it hadn’t been for the tapes. I am on the radio now teaching the Bible. I have a ministry here and a ministry there. I just wanted to say thanks.” *Three hundred dollars.* Praise God, man. Do you know what I did? I fed that sheep, and he fed me.

A lady once said to J. Harold Smith out in Portsmouth, Arkansas, “You are supposed to feed the sheep, Brother Smith. Feed the sheep.” He answered, “Well, I know that, but I

found out a long time ago that the only thing you can do with a dead sheep is skin it.” Someone in his church said one time, “Brother Smith, would you preach on love? Just a little bit of love, okay? I mean, every time I come here, it is hell this and hell that and hell the other thing. You’ve preached on hell so long that I can smell the smoke every time I come into this building. Would you preach a little love?” He said, “Okay.” So the first Sunday, he preached on “Love God with all your heart and soul.” The second Sunday, he preached on “Loving your neighbor as yourself.” The third Sunday, he preached on “Loving your own wife and leaving everybody else’s alone.” The fourth Sunday, he preached on “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.” The fifth Sunday, that deacon met him at the door and said, “Get to preaching on hell again.” You will have sheep that don’t appreciate the feed you give them, but the average Christian will appreciate it.

A fellow once had a parakeet, kept it for about three weeks, and it died. He phoned the guy at the store and said, “You guaranteed that that parakeet could talk. He never did talk.” The man asked, “He didn’t say anything?” The owner said, “The day before he died he said something.” The fellow at the store said, “What did he say?” The man replied, “Food! Food! Food!” That’s the trouble with a lot of the Lord’s people—they’re starving.

In Bay Minette, Alabama, I held a meeting in a little mission, sort of in the slum area. The meetings lasted about two weeks, and when they were over, two well-dressed ladies came up to me and said, “Brother Ruckman, we have had such a blessing this past two weeks. We just enjoyed coming down here to hear you preach. We have a fine pastor, but sometimes we just need to be fed.” What a confession. He said, “**Lovest thou me?...Feed my sheep.**”

5. *Crown of Rejoicing*

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (1 Thess. 2: 19-20).

What is our crown? Our crown is *people*. When? At the second coming of Christ. That is a soul winner’s crown. Why is this called a *crown of rejoicing*? Why, don’t you know? Didn’t you ever read where it says, “**I say unto you...joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance**” (Luke 15:7)? The reason it is called a crown of rejoicing is because every time a sinner gets saved, there’s joy in heaven. How much joy have you caused in heaven in the last year? Are you winning people to Christ? Are you trying to win people to Christ? I’m not a great one for beating the drum for soul winning, but I believe in it. I thank God that when I go home, it won’t be empty-handed. I don’t win a whole lot of them. Some guys win more souls in a year than I do in five years. Maybe I’m a little bit jealous of men like Jack Hyles and Billy Graham sometimes. I led maybe four thousand to Christ in over thirty years. That isn’t a lot. Some guys claim to have won a thousand a year. However many you have, you ought to win *someone* to Christ.

My ministry has not so much been soul winning. The Lord has called me to be a burr under the saddle of Fundamentalism: that’s my calling. My calling is to irritate

Fundamentalists. I mean, really, that's what the Lord has called me to do. I don't particularly appreciate it. If I had my way, I would like to take chalk talk pictures and draw them on television so that souls would be saved. The Lord doesn't want me just to do that. He says, "Just go back to the typewriter. Sit down at the typewriter. Be as vitriolic and mean as you can. Be as hard and vicious as you can without going to jail. Type, boy." Do you know what God wants? He wants this stuff said, and by His grace, I'll say it. I do witness to people, though, and I try to win them to Christ. I try to do what I can to get the word of God out and pass out tracts to as many people as I can. I'm not going home empty-handed. As a young man, God only knows how many young people I destroyed. I don't even know. Tell me how many young men does a man destroy by being a dance band drummer, a bartender, a disc jockey, and an Army officer? How many young men under my charge that heard me and watched me and talked with me? My God, what an influence! At the White Throne Judgment, I may see a thousand lives that I ruined before they were twenty-five years old.

Are you going home empty-handed? Folks say, "I don't have much talent, you know? I can't..." That's the trouble with folks. They're always lying and alibiing their way out. I never have had much ability as a soul winner, but I've done it. When I was first saved, I did it all of the time—night and day and day and night. Duties have come along, however, and they take up time. Other things come up, and you get bottled in. I'll tell you what I can *do* that God can have—I can draw. *God has it*. If I can play a tuba and make a fool out of myself for Christ, *I'll do it*. If I can blow my harmonica before a bunch of children, *I'll do it*. I don't care what you or your grandmother thinks. What I have, God has, though it may not be much. I've told you many times, I can preach, paint, draw, write, and teach. That's about all I can do. You say, "That's a lot." No, not too much. Some of you folks can fix motors. Do you fix them for the glory of God? Some of you ladies can cook. Do you cook for God's glory? "Oh, well, Brother Ruckman, that isn't anything." That's the trouble with you folks. The trouble is *God doesn't have what you have*. You think it isn't a talent to be able to cook. Why don't you talk to some guy married to a woman who can't cook; see if it's a talent! Do you think there is no talent in being able to fix motors and electrical and gasoline appliances? You don't have good sense if you don't think that it's a talent to fix them. When I draw, I can see the whole picture before I draw anything—including the details. I see the whole picture before it starts. You say, "How do you do that?" It beats the fire out of me. I don't know. There's some weird characters in this world, aren't there? I can draw, but the other stuff—?

When the car breaks down, I'm just like a woman. I think they ought to run, and if they don't, sell them. That is all I know about them. It might be out of gas for all I know. I was in Andalusia, Alabama once when my car broke down. I took it to a man named Shorty Butler. Shorty took one look at it and said, "I'll fix it for you. It needs the carburetor adjusted." It might have been the generator or alternator, but I think he said carburetor. I can't tell one from the other. He got into it and messed around with something and said, "There." I said, "Where?" He said, "There. Twenty thousandths of an inch." I said, "What's twenty thousandths of an inch?" He said, "What I just fixed." I said, "Man, how can you estimate twenty thousandths of an inch?" He picked up some gauges and ran them under the points—twenty thousandths of an inch. I'd like to see you draw one sixty-fourth of an inch on a piece of paper...that's getting down there. I said, "How do

you know that stuff ?” He said, “Well, you just get a feel for it after a while.” Do you know what that is to me? That is a miracle. It’s like crossing the Red Sea to me. I don’t understand that stuff at all.

The trouble is that you don’t take the talent that you have and give it to God. I’m going to park here for a while. You might as well relax. I’ve put my foot down, and I’m going to rub it in real good. Take some of you: you meet people easily; you’re sociable and friendly; you’re not suspicious; you make friends easily; you make a good first impression. You have all of the advantages that I don’t have. Don’t sit there and blink your eyes at me. “Well, I can’t sing. I can’t draw. I can’t preach.” That may be, but you can do *something*, and *you won’t do it for the Lord*. I don’t make a good first impression. I never have in my life. I meet a stranger, and it’s like a carload of pigs hitting a carload of empty milk cans—it’s a mess all over the road. It takes all kinds; so if I can put up with you, you can put up with me.

Take some of you: you don’t have any trouble meeting people, shaking their hand, smiling, being friendly, and being sociable. What are you doing with it? *Nothing*. I’ve heard these old Southern boys say, “Well, preacher, I just don’t believe in talking about it. I believe in livin’ it.” You sure talk about what you’re interested in. You sit around and talk about that baby-faced dog, that open-faced reel, that six pound test line, how it got wrapped around the lily pad, it nearly broke off, out there in the dove field, take the plug out of the gun....You talk about what you’re interested in. Southerners sit around for hours and talk about hunting and fishing and say, “Well, I just ain’t very good at talking about it.” Listen, boy, **“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh”** (Matt. 12:34). The reason you don’t talk about Jesus Christ is that there is no abundance of Jesus Christ down in your heart.

Don’t you want to be a soul winner? Do you want to go home empty-handed? Do you want to get up to heaven and find that there are no friends waiting for whom you were responsible in leading them to Christ? Do you really want that? Wouldn’t it be something to be standing there in heaven with the shouting and rejoicing going on when folks are united to those who told them about Christ? And you stand over there with the one who led you to Christ but have no converts of your own? A dead end. How about that? A dead end. Not me—not me.

I’m not going home empty-handed, brother. I know how they look at things up there. Up there they look at soul winning as a time of rejoicing and celebration—joy in heaven. Why, if you were to be saved tonight, there wouldn’t be one newspaper in your town that would even mention it in the third section. Not one of them. If some fornicating jackass like Belushi kicks off with too much dope in his head, they have a front page spread. “Will Cheryl Tiegs play the Queen of Monaco?” The poor, old, deceived woman died ahead of her time, and the devil got all of her kids, and her husband wound up with liquor. What a fool! That is how the world looks at it, but up in heaven, they don’t buy that stuff.

Let me illustrate how it goes. Here’s a teenager who picks up the football, and a linebacker comes through the line and “red dogs” him—nearly breaking his neck. They take the kid out of the stadium on a stretcher while the crowd is oohing and ahing. He goes out on the stretcher flat on his back, looks up in the air, and says to himself, “Well, I made a god out of football, and I should have been saved a long time ago. I never should

have made a god out of football. Football can't save me now. I'd better get right now, or I'm a goner if my back's broken. Oh, God, be merciful to me a sinner and save my soul for Christ's sake." That crowd is out there groaning, and up in heaven they're going, "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!" There is a difference.

If war broke out tomorrow somewhere for the United States, you would have big headlines. Do you know what they would do in heaven? They'd say, "Ah, here we go again. Ho hum." They've seen wars up there. Do you know what hits the headlines up there? Folks being saved. If you're lost and were to ask the Lord Jesus Christ to save you right now, the presses would roll in heaven: "Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Another one just got saved!" That's what is going on. It's a different emphasis.

Years ago, a Liberal, modernistic preacher came down from a very restless night and sat down in the breakfast nook at the table. His wife fixed him a cup of coffee as he sat there pale and shaken. She asked, "What's wrong?" He said, "I had a terrible dream last night. I dreamed I died and came up to a cloud. There was someone on that cloud who pointed his finger at me, and it looked like he had a hole in his hand. This one who was standing on the cloud pointed his finger at me and said, 'Preacher, where are the souls of your wife and children?' I said, 'Souls? What souls?' He pointed his finger at me and said, 'Preacher, where are the souls of your mailman and your TV repairman and your newspaper boy?' I said, 'I don't understand what you mean by souls. I don't know where they are.' Then I dreamed that the bottom dropped out of the cloud, and it felt like I fell a million miles down into a lake of fire. In that fire were you, the children, the TV repairman, the grocer, the mailman, and the newspaper boy; and all of you were pointing your fingers at me and cursing me." His wife said, "Well, honey, you probably just had something bad to eat last night." He stirred his coffee, picked up the cup, and dropped dead of a heart attack. Now, don't you go that way. If you are saved, don't go home empty-handed. Win someone to Christ.