

**CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE**  
**HOW GOD DEALS**  
**WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS—**  
**THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR ENTERING**  
**INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS**

We have made it clear that the kingdom is the time when God will reward the Christians according to their works. In the kingdom, the faithful believers will be rewarded, and the unfaithful believers will be punished. Many people think that if a Christian is unfaithful, although he may have to occupy a lower position, he will nevertheless make it into the kingdom. Many who do not understand God's word and God's work think that they are guaranteed an entrance into the kingdom of the heavens. They think that when the Lord Jesus comes to rule, there will merely be a distinction between higher and lower positions in the kingdom; no one will lose the kingdom of the heavens altogether. However, in the kingdom of the heavens, there is not only a distinction between higher and lower positions, but also the distinction between being allowed to enter and being kept out. The Bible shows us that there is a clear distinction between ten cities and five cities, between a large crown and a small one, and between a greater glory and a lesser one. As one star differs from another star, so also are the positions in the kingdom different. Not only is there the difference of lower and higher positions in the kingdom; there is also the distinction of being able or not able to get in.

**DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER**

The Bible tells us of a very serious truth. Although someone may have eternal life, he may still be rejected from the kingdom of the heavens. One verse that speaks of this is Matthew 7:21: "Not every one who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." The persons in this verse all address the Lord as "Lord." The Lord will make a distinction between those disciples who can enter into the kingdom of the heavens and those who cannot. The Lord clearly shows us here that the condition for entering the kingdom of the heavens is doing the will of God. Although some have been saved and have called Him Lord, and although they have also done some works, without doing the will of God they nevertheless cannot enter into the kingdom of the heavens. The reward of the kingdom of the heavens is based on the obedience of man. If one is not faithful while living on the earth, though he will not lose eternal life, he will lose the kingdom of the heavens. When the time comes for the heavens to rule, that is, when the Lord Jesus comes the second time, some will not be able to enter the kingdom, but will lose it instead.

First, the Lord mentioned this matter in verse 21. Following this, in verses 22 and 23, He explained the matter to us in the way of a prophecy. There will be many, not only one or two, who will not do the will of God. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power? And then I will declare to them: I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." Here the Lord Jesus tells us what will happen before the judgment seat. He says, "In that day." Hence, this does not refer to today, but to the future. There are many who work hard but do not see the light of God

in their lives. When the time of the judgment seat comes, and when Christ begins to judge from the house of God, these Christians will have light for the first time. They will see that they are off in their standing and in their living.

In that day many will say before the Lord, "Was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?" Within one sentence, the phrase "in Your name" is mentioned three times. This proves that these ones are the Lord's. The fact that they say, "Lord, Lord," proves that their standing is that of a Christian. Not only do they say that they prophesy, cast out demons, and do many works of power; they do these in the Lord's name. The mentioning of "in Your name" three times tells us of their relationship with the Lord.

Amazingly, the Lord tells them, "And then I will declare to them: I never knew you." Because many do not understand the meaning of these words, they think that these surely are not saved ones. But if these are not saved ones, then the Lord's word here would be meaningless. Matthew 7 is a conclusion to the sermon on the mount following the Lord's word concerning the Beatitudes. These words on the mount were spoken by the Lord Jesus to the disciples. After the Lord went up the mountain, His disciples came before Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them from chapter five to chapter seven.

The Lord Jesus said that they should not call Him Lord with their mouth only. If they call Him Lord, they should do the will of the Father. Even if they have the outward works of prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power, these works must not replace the Father's will. Doing the Father's will is one thing, whereas prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power are another thing altogether. Sometimes, one can prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power without doing the will of the Father. We must remember that we should not only call Him Lord with our mouth, but we should do the Father's will in our walk as well. If the Lord were speaking about unsaved persons, this word would lose its meaning altogether, for if these are not saved ones, it would not matter much for the disciples to listen or not to listen to His word. The disciples may say that His word is for the unsaved ones, but they are the saved ones; therefore whether or not they do the Father's will, the Lord cannot deny knowing them. If this were the case, then all the unsaved ones would be those who do not do the will of God, and all the saved ones would be those who do the will of God. This would take away the highest meaning of these words.

The Lord Jesus must be warning the saved ones here by speaking about the saved ones. He cannot be warning the saved ones by speaking about the unsaved ones. Suppose one has a maid and two daughters, and suppose this one were to say to the younger daughter, "Do you see that maid? She is not born of me; I am beating her. You have to be obedient today. If you are not obedient, I will punish you in the same way I am punishing her." Is this word logical? A maid is not born of the family. If she becomes disobedient, she may be beaten. But the daughter of the family is not a maid. One cannot apply the way to deal with a maid to a daughter. The mother ought to say, "Last night I punished your sister because she was disobedient. Now be careful. If you are not obedient, I will punish you as well." The mother must take the sister as an example. The maid cannot be used for a comparison. There is no reason for the Lord to use unsaved ones as an example to show the disciples that they ought to do God's will. If He did, the disciples

would rise up and say, "They are the unsaved ones, but we are the saved ones." If they were to say this, no one could say anything further.

What the Lord Jesus is saying is this: "Many people are God's children. They are saved and are the same as you are. They call Me 'Lord,' and they have done many works. But they are nevertheless shut outside the kingdom. For this reason you must be careful. You have to do the will of God." Only in this way will the disciples know that though they do many works, if they do not do the will of God, they will receive the same punishment. If He were speaking to the unsaved ones, there would no longer be the piercing element to His word. The Lord was warning us that only those who do the will of God can enter the kingdom. If one were to rely on his own work to come before God, the Lord Jesus would tell him, "I never knew you."

Let me give you another example. Suppose a judge's son drives carelessly and hits another car. He is taken by the police to the court for a hearing. The judge would ask, "Young man, what is your name? How old are you? Where do you live?" The son down at the stand may think, "You should know all these things better than I do." He may answer the first few questions. But after a while, he may shout to the father, "Father, don't you know me?" What should the judge do then? He may bang his gavel and say, "I do not know you. In my home, I know you. But in the court, I never knew you." If one sees the matter of the kingdom, he will realize that in the kingdom, it is not a matter of whether or not a person is saved and whether he is a child of God; what really matters is his work after becoming a believer. Suppose after you are saved, you are very zealous. Although you have not carried out God's will, you nevertheless prophesy, cast out demons, and do works of power in the Lord's name. If you come before the Lord asking to be admitted into the kingdom because of these unprincipled works, the Lord will say that He never knew you.

Why did the Lord say, "I never knew you"? The next sentence explains: "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." Please remember that the Lord did not tell them to depart from eternal life. In the original Greek the meaning of workers of lawlessness is people who do not follow the rules, keep the law, or abide by the regulations. In the eyes of God, to do evil does not mean only to do bad things. It does not matter how much one has done; as long as he has not hearkened to God's demand, His judgment, and His sovereign arrangements, it is evil in God's eyes. If this word "lawlessness" were translated as "evil," as some versions have done, many would have the ground to argue. The problem here is not a matter of doing evil, but a matter of being unprincipled. What are the principles? The principles are God's word. But what is God's word? God's word is God's will. If you are not doing the will of God, no matter what you do, the Lord Jesus would say that you are lawless. Those who do things according to their own self will have no part in the kingdom of the heavens.

My purpose in saying these things is to show you the importance of a Christian's works. The Bible shows us clearly that after a person believes in the Lord, though he will never lose eternal life, he may lose his place and glory in the kingdom. If we do not do the will of God, but work according to our own will instead, we will be shut out of the kingdom. We may think that prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power are most important, because we think that if we can do these things, we will be a marvelous person. But these things can never replace the will of God. All those who have never learned not to work for God are not worthy to work for God. Those who do not know how to stop their own work surely know nothing about

God's will. Only those who know the will of God can stop working. God wants us first to obey His will and then to work. God does not want us to volunteer to work for Him. The more one knows about the will of the Lord, the more he will learn not to work carelessly. Thus, there is a big difference between working and doing the will of God. Today we may appreciate the works and may be interested in prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power. But one day, many will be awakened.

## **BUFFETING THE BODY TO PLEASE THE LORD**

Another passage which some misinterpret as referring to perdition actually refers to the losing of the kingdom and the losing of the reward. First Corinthians 9:23-27 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends, exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." Paul feared that, having preached to others, he himself might be disapproved. Here Paul was saying that he could also be disapproved. What is the meaning of being disapproved here? And of what is one being disapproved? In these messages, we have emphasized the fact that in reading the Bible, one should pay attention to the context. Here we must also consider the context.

In verse 24 Paul likens himself to one who is running in a race in which only one will get the prize. Therefore, the problem here is not a matter of salvation, but a matter of receiving the prize. Paul is talking about how a saved one can receive the prize; he is not talking about how an unsaved one can be saved. Only the ones who are saved, who have believed in the Lord Jesus, who are reborn, and who have become the children of God are qualified to enter the race. Only the children of God can run in the race and pursue the prize that God intends for us to gain. If someone is not a child of God, he will not be qualified even to enter the race. Nowhere does the Bible say that salvation is gained by our running the race. The Bible never says that if someone is able to run, he will be saved. If that were so, then very few could be saved, and salvation would be dependent on works. The Bible says that the prize comes from the running; God has placed us on a racecourse for us to run the race.

What is the prize? Verse 25 says, "And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." Here it says that the prize is a crown. We have mentioned that the crown signifies glory and the kingdom. Therefore, the word "disapproved" does not refer to the losing of salvation. The word "disapproved" means to fail to receive the crown and the prize. If Paul could be disapproved, then we all have the possibility of being disapproved. If Paul had the possibility of losing his prize and losing his crown, then each one of us also has the possibility of losing the prize and the crown.

Verse 26 indicates the reason for being disapproved: "I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air." Paul had a purpose and a direction. He was not beating the air. His goal and direction were what he said in 2 Corinthians 5, that he was ambitious to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Whether he would live or die on this earth,

his desire was to please the Lord. How did he run in the race? He did not run in a loose way. He had a definite direction and a definite goal. He was not beating the air. He did not simply do whatever others told him to do. Nor did he do something simply because the need was there. If he were to work according to the need, he would have to run day and night, for the need was too great. We are not for the work, but for pleasing the Lord.

If we want to receive the prize, what should we do? "But I buffet my body and make it my slave." Many would place their own bodies above the prize. Many would place their own bodies above the will of God. But Paul said that he subjected his body; he was able to control it. Paul could control the lust of his body, the excessive demands of his body, and the desires of his body. He did not let his body get on top. He said that he buffeted his body and made it his slave. Whether or not a Christian can please the Lord depends upon whether he can control his body. Many people cannot control their own bodies. Whenever a little stimulus comes to their body, all kinds of sins result. We must see that all those who cannot control their own bodies will lose their prize and their crown. Although they can preach the gospel to others, they themselves will be disapproved.

We believers are saved once and for all and will never lose our salvation. But when the Lord Jesus returns in His glory to rule the earth, He will not give crowns to everyone. In the new heaven and new earth, although every saved one will receive the same glory, when the Lord Jesus comes to rule on this earth for a thousand years, some will lose their prize, their authority, and their glory. Some will not be able to enter the kingdom and will not be able to receive a crown.

The Lord's word is very clear concerning the matters of salvation and eternal life: both are totally of grace. Moreover, whether or not one can enter into the kingdom of the heavens depends upon his works. We have just seen that we have to do the will of God. Here we see that we have to buffet our own body. We may do many works outwardly, but as long as we do not restrict our body, we will not be allowed into the kingdom.

In the Bible there seems to be a fixed number of crowns. Revelation 3:11 says, "I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown." Some who do not understand the Bible do not know the difference between a reward and a gift. Neither do they know the difference between the crown and God's salvation. They think that salvation can be taken away from them. The word "take" here does not refer to salvation but to the crown. One can be saved yet still lose the crown. There was a very sensational headline in the news recently. A certain king of a certain country had lost his crown. If a saved one does not hold fast to what he has, if he does not keep the words of endurance of the Lord Jesus, and if he forsakes the name of the Lord Jesus, he will lose his crown some day. If you are loose, and if you do not hold fast, you will lose your crown. Someone else might take away your crown from you.

Revelation 2:10 has a word similar to this: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." Here it does not say give life, but give the crown of life. Life is obtained through faith; it is not obtained through faithfulness. If a person does not have faith, he cannot have life. But if a person is unfaithful after he has life, he will lose the

crown of life. Hence, if a Christian does not have good works after being saved, though he will not lose life, he will nevertheless lose the crown.

### **BUILDING WITH GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES**

The clearest passage in the Bible about the reward is 1 Corinthians 3:14-15: "If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved." This shows us clearly what a Christian cannot lose and what he can lose. Once a person is saved, he is surely saved forever. But whether or not such a one will receive a reward cannot be decided today. A Christian's eternal salvation is settled already. But the future reward is a question that is still pending. It is decided by how one builds upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus. Our salvation does not depend on how we build. It depends only on how the Lord builds. If His work is perfect, we are surely saved. However, whether or not we will receive the reward or suffer loss depends on our own building work. If one builds with gold, silver, and precious stones, things with eternal value, upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, he will surely receive a reward. But if he builds with wood, hay, and stubble, he will not receive a reward before God. He may have much before man, yet he will not have much before God. This shows us that it is possible for a man to lose his reward and to have his work burned away.

Let me repeat this. Thank God that the matter of our eternal salvation was decided over nineteen hundred years ago. When the Son of God was hung on the cross, the question of our salvation was settled. But whether or not we will receive the reward depends on how we behave. The truth of the gospel is very balanced. Salvation rests totally with the Lord Jesus. The giving of salvation depends absolutely on the Lord Jesus. However, whether or not one can obtain his reward depends on his own building work. Man must believe, and he also must work. This work is not his own work, but what the Holy Spirit has worked out in him. Here we see that it is possible for us to lose our reward. It is also possible for us to be disapproved for the kingdom and to have our crown taken away. It seems that our position in the kingdom is never settled; it is subject to change and not assured.

### **HOLDING FAST THE BOAST OF HOPE**

Hebrews 3:6 gives us a similar word. "But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are if indeed we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end." Here it seems uncertain as to whether or not we are His house. The apostle said that we are His house if we hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end. What is this house and this hope? This blessed hope is nothing other than that of the Lord Jesus returning in glory to set up His kingdom on the earth. If a Christian has such a hope, knowing that the Lord Jesus will come again to set up His kingdom in glory, and knowing that all those faithful ones who do the will of God will reign with the Lord, if such a one holds fast to this, he will be His house. Today we are His house already. We are all living stones built into a spiritual house. This is what Peter has told us (1 Pet. 2:5). But how we will fare in the future kingdom depends on how we hold fast. This matter cannot be decided once and for all. There are many verses in the Bible concerning this, and all are very clear. The problem of eternity is totally settled, but the matter of position and reward in the kingdom depends on how we hold fast today.

## **BEING THE MORE DILIGENT TO MAKE THE CALLING AND SELECTION FIRM**

We come to 2 Peter 1:10: "Therefore, brothers, be the more diligent to make your calling and selection firm, for doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." If one does not know the truth about selection, he will not see that this refers to the hope of the kingdom being firm. Here it says that a person's selection and calling is not necessarily firm. Does this mean that a person will become unsaved again? No, it does not, because Romans 11 clearly tells us that the calling of God is irrevocable (11:29). Here it is not talking only about calling, but selection as well. Peter put calling and selection together. The Bible says many times that many are called, but few are chosen. Except for one place which I am not absolutely sure about, all the other places refer to many being saved and few obtaining a reward. Hence, the selection here refers to the position in the kingdom.

Peter said, "For doing these things you shall by no means ever stumble." These are the things mentioned in verses 5-7, such as faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, and love. If we do these things, we will never stumble. This is the same as saying that if we are the more diligent, our calling and selection will be firm. These are parallel expressions. The first of these parallel expressions says that we should be diligent to make our calling and selection firm. The second of these parallel expressions says that by doing these, we will never stumble.

Verse 11 says, "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly and bountifully supplied to you." The Bible shows us that the kingdom of Christ is eternal. But some will enter it only in eternity future, whereas others will enter it during the millennium. The ruling of Christ begins with the millennial kingdom. Therefore, Revelation 11:15 says, "And the seventh angel trumpeted; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." This verse shows us that the kingdom of Christ is linked to eternity future; it lasts forever and ever. However, it begins at the trumpeting of the seventh angel, that is, at the beginning of the tribulation. When Christ begins His reign, some will enter the kingdom. They will not only enter in, but will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance. Therefore, to make our calling and selection firm is to be richly and bountifully supplied with an entrance into this eternal kingdom.

One can see that salvation has been settled, but that the entrance into the kingdom has not yet been settled. Once a Christian believes in the Lord Jesus, he can immediately praise the Lord because he knows that the question of eternal life or death is settled. However, after one believes, there are experiences ahead of him; he still has the kingdom before him and a future glory waiting for him. Some will obtain these things: the kingdom, the crown, the glory, and the reward; whereas others will not obtain them. Some will enter into the kingdom of Christ; others will not be able to enter in. Some will not only enter in, but will be richly and bountifully supplied an entrance into the kingdom of Christ. This does not mean that those who cannot enter the kingdom of Christ are not saved. But it does mean that their reward and glory are taken away. Hence,



we need to run and strive. Our being able to reign with Jesus the Nazarene in the future depends on how we strive today.

## **ENTERING THE KINGDOM TO SHARE IN CHRIST'S GLORY**

I wonder if you have ever thought of the kind of glory with which God will reward Christ in the millennium for what He suffered nineteen hundred years ago. A reward must match a suffering. If a man is brought to the lowest position, his reward must be the greatest. Suppose your house is burned or you have encountered a grave danger, and a servant in your house risked everything and nearly lost his life trying to save you. How would you reward him? Would you say, "I reward you with twenty cents"? No one would do this. The reward has to match the suffering. Christ has glorified God in such a way and has died such a death on the cross. How shall God reward Christ in the future? And how shall He glorify Christ?

The kingdom is the time when Christ and the Christians will receive glory together. The kingdom is the time when God will reward Christ. At that time, we will have a portion there as well. Whether or not we would be counted worthy to receive the Lord's glory depends absolutely on the results of our personal walk and work. There is no question of worthiness in the new heaven and new earth. But in the kingdom only those who are worthy will receive the glory. The Lord has suffered persecution, difficulties, and shame. If we suffer persecution, difficulties, and shame today in the same way, we will share a portion with Him in the coming kingdom.