

## Reward or Loss? (Part 2)

Sadly, the expectation of multitudes of Christians is that the Judgment Seat of Christ will essentially be an awards ceremony, where all will be rewarded in some degree. Phrases like “suffer loss” ([1 Cor. 3:15](#)) and “receive for the wrong ... done” ([Col. 3:25](#)) are ignored or re-interpreted to mean there will be a moment of regret, but all will be quickly forgotten as Christians enter the Millennium and live happily-ever-after. Nothing could be further from the truth!

In Luke 12 Jesus uses a parable to illustrate the prospect of either reward or punishment for believers, based on whether they are faithfully awaiting their Lord’s return. Those whom Jesus deems faithful stewards at the Judgment Seat will be rewarded with ruling in the millennial kingdom. See Part 1 for more detail.

Those who are unfaithful in how they live here and now will be surprised at the Lord’s sudden return – like a thief in the night – and will be punished, to some degree, at the Judgment Seat. We now turn our attention to the punishment aspect in this parable.

*But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. ([Luke 12:45-48](#))*

The reader is reminded of two important facts. First, parables are intended to be metaphorical in nature. Some Christians react rather violently to the prospect of a child of God being “cut asunder” or “beaten with many stripes,” concluding that such harsh treatment could never be the lot of a saved person. Thus, they instantly assume the unfaithful servants in the parable must be referring to those who are unsaved. As we shall see, the entire parable applies to the saved, and one of the keys to interpretation is understanding that parabolic language is figurative.

Second, throughout the parable Jesus repeatedly refers to “that servant” and “his lord” (master) – see v.42, 43, 45, 46, 47. The Lord is obviously Christ and the servant is a saved person. Unsaved people are never referred to as servants of Christ. Furthermore, the repeated use of the phrase “that servant” clearly indicates that Jesus is not referring to four different

people (one saved, three unsaved, or some other combination). Instead, this is one servant, who has four possible lifestyle choices.

## The Rebellious Servant

The second possible lifestyle a Christian can choose is rebellion to the Lord in some degree. In this particular parable Jesus describes an extreme servant who mistreats those under his care (beats them) and indulges himself (becomes drunken). The parable is clear that this servant behaves thusly because he rationalizes, "my lord delayeth his coming." In other words, he is not convinced that Jesus is coming any time soon. He doesn't take seriously the eternal realm. He is more focused on the here and now.

Some may wonder, "How could this be a Christian? No Christian would do this kind of thing!" Oh really? Do you know any Christians that get drunk or abuse drugs? Do you know any Christians who are abusive? Do you know any Christians who live in adultery? Do you know any Christians who have major outbursts of anger? Do you know any Christians who, because of continued selfishness, have destroyed their marriage and family? Do you know any Christians who live like the devil? Do you know any Christians that deny their Lord? In a Bible sense, think Lot, think Peter, think Ananias and Sapphira, to name a few.

Yes, even Christians can live carnally for a period of time or even a lifetime. That is why God disciplines His children who are living rebelliously. *Whom the Lord loves He chastens (Heb. 12:6)*. Incidentally, those being disciplined do not always respond favorably – and so we are given strong warnings in *Heb. 12:25, see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh, and Heb. 12:29, our God is a consuming fire.*

If God disciplines (i.e., judges) now, why wouldn't He do so at the Judgment Seat, of all places? *Judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17)*. Indeed, the very idea of a Judgment Seat suggests that some will not live as they should on earth and so they will give an account to Jesus.

How do we explain the awful punishment of the rebellious servant, who is "cut asunder?" Remember, this is a parable. God doesn't literally hack him in pieces. Even if that punishment were literal, it would be inconsistent with the crime of abusiveness and drunkenness. It would not be an eye for an eye-type punishment.

Arndt and Gingrich say that the Greek word (dichotomeo) translated "cut asunder" is "metaphorical in *Luke 12:46*, 'to punish with utmost severity,' like the modern threat 'I will tan your hide.'" To be "cut asunder" is a metaphor for the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which severely rebukes, *dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12)*.

Why would God want to divide asunder one of His rebellious children in this manner? Think of it. The spirit of even a rebellious child of God is righteous. But the soul (mind, will, emotions) of a saint who is not submitting to ongoing sanctification is far from righteous. Perhaps God divides apart the righteous spirit from the corrupt soul in order to fully

make manifest to His rebellious child the awfulness of his heart. *Every man's work shall be made manifest (1 Cor. 3:13). The Lord ... will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4:5).*

Imagine the horror of standing at the Judgment Seat and hearing Jesus, the living Word of God divide between your soul and spirit so you can see your innermost being. Then imagine the awfulness of the verdict as the fire of God's judgment burns away all that is corrupt, leaving nothing. If that were all of the punishment, it would be horrid enough, but that is not all.

The rebellious servant is also appointed a *portion with the unbelievers (Luke 12:46)*. This punishment, at face value, has prompted many an unwitting interpreter – despite the many textual evidences to the contrary – to conclude that the rebellious servant is consigned to an eternity in hell. But the passage does not say that. In fact, the word translated *unbelievers* here is often translated *faithless* elsewhere in the New Testament. So it doesn't have to mean an unsaved person. It can legitimately refer to an unbelieving Christian, and context determines the usage. When Jesus met Thomas on the day of his resurrection, and Thomas doubted, Jesus used this very Greek word to describe Thomas, calling him *faithless (Jn. 20:27)*.

In the context of Luke 12, we must interpret this usage as an unbelieving Christian; in other words, a Christian who is not depending on God for victory. He is faithless, like Thomas, living in defeat. He is saved, but he is not trusting God to live a holy life. Thus, his life is displeasing to his master, and he will be punished at the Judgment Seat. This servant is the opposite of the faithful servant in v.42.

Incidentally, the faithless servant is appointed a *portion*. The same word is used in v.42 of the faithful servant. A *portion* is an allotment or share. Unlike the faithful servant, whose portion is blessing and ruling and reigning with Christ, the portion of the faithless servant is no opportunity to rule or reign, a very mundane form of existence in the millennium, and no blessing.

According to the parallel passage in Matt. 24, the rebellious servant's punishment results in weeping and gnashing of teeth. Unfortunately, many Bible teachers have relegated that phrase to suffering in hell. However, in oriental thinking, gnashing of teeth is simply conscious regret. That's all it means! A person could gnash his teeth because he is in hell, and consciously regretting it, or a person could gnash his teeth because he receives punishment at the Judgment Seat and it affects his entire millennial existence – and he consciously regrets it! It is unwise to let a phrase determine the interpretation of an entire passage. Rather, one should let the passage dictate the way the phrase is being used.

Imagine being harshly rebuked by Jesus at the Judgment Seat, seeing your soul for what it really is, not receiving any rewards, and having to live throughout the millennium without an inheritance, constantly weeping and regretting the fact that you did not live for God in this life! This is serious! Thankfully, after the Millennium Jesus will wipe all tears from the

eyes and presumably erase all painful memories as we all prepare to enter heaven, but that does not occur until after the millennium.

### **The Indifferent Servant**

Perhaps you are relieved that your lifestyle is not represented by the rebellious servant, but are you acting as an indifferent servant, focusing on self and forgetting about the return of Christ and the world to come?

According to v.47, this servant knows His Lord's will but does not live accordingly. I personally think this servant describes the vast majority of fundamentalism. We know what God expects of us. We are well-taught people. But many dispensational Christians have been taught that the Judgment Seat will involve a few moments of pain, then it will be over and all will be joyful in the Millennium. Not so!

Those who do not have an eternal focus will be beaten with many stripes. Again, this is a parable and the stripes are figurative. In [Heb. 12](#) we are told that whom the Lord loves He scourges. Have you ever been literally flogged by God? No, "scourging" is a metaphor for God's divine discipline in your life. He sends appropriate punishments when you are living unto yourself, in order that He might get your attention and your heart be turned completely to Him. Sometimes those punishments continue on for a lengthy period of time, perhaps even years.

The punishments dispensed at the Judgment Seat are even more consequential, and apparently continue on for the entire Millennium. Then they are wiped away after the millennium so that heaven will be glorious for all saints.

Are you indifferent to your Lord's return? Are you living for yourself? Are you materialistic? Are you bearing fruit for the Master? Have you left your first love? Do you have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof? Will you be punished at His judgment seat?

### **The Ignorant Servant**

We find one final type of servant in v.48. This servant is also beaten, but not as intensely as the indifferent servant, because this particular servant is ignorant. I personally do not think this last punishment will apply to anyone reading this article. Because you have been warned. Indeed, I think fundamentalism has been warned, even if it has unwittingly arrived at incorrect interpretations of many passages, such as this very parable. To whom much is given, much is required. I cannot fathom that ignorance will be a valid excuse for western Christians at the Judgment Seat.

Will you be rewarded at the Judgment Seat or will you be punished? If punished, do you realize what that means? It means forfeiture of millennial inheritance, a portion with the faithless or "scourging" of some sort. It means you will not take full possession of the glories and blessings of the millennial kingdom as you could have. It means you will not glow with the brightness of the Savior. It's time that Christians awake to righteousness! Jesus is coming soon!