

Bema Seat

1 Corinthians 3:9-15

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What do you think of when you consider the judgment seat of Christ?

Though 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.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 – *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*

The Apostle Paul drew courage and was motivated by the fact of rewards at the return of the Lord for the church which he mentions in every chapter in this epistle.

- It is significant that among the final words of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we find these words of the Lord:
Rev. 22:12 – Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

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.

Why are Christians uncomfortable when the subject of rewards is discussed?

Because the topic of rewards seems to suggest "merit" instead of "grace," and because we should only serve the Lord out of love and for God's glory.

- 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.

Where do we get the term judgment or *bema* seat?

2 Corinthians 5:9 – *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may*

receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The term "judgment seat" is a translation of one Greek word, *bema*.

- This word was taken from the Greek Isthmian games where the contestants would compete for the prize under the careful scrutiny of judges who would make sure that every rule of the contest was obeyed...

2 Tim. 2:5 – *if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*

The victor of a given event who participated according to the rules was led by the judge to the platform called the *Bema*. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory...

1 Cor. 9:24-25 – *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵ And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*

Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the *Bema* to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's *Bema* to receive his imperishable award.

What do these verses have to say about when the *Bema* will occur?

Luke 14:13-14 – *when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just*

Our reward is associated with the resurrection and the rapture is when the church is resurrected.

Revelation 19:8 – *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*

When the Lord returns with His bride at the end of the tribulation, she is seen already rewarded. Her reward is described as fine linen, the righteous acts of the saints—undoubtedly the result of rewards.

2 Timothy 4:8 – *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Rewards are associated with “that day” of the Lord’s coming for the Church at the rapture.

1 Corinthians 4:5 – *Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.*

The Lord Jesus will be our judge who at the rapture will give us resurrection bodies, take us to heaven, examine us before the *Bema*, and give us our rewards.

What does this verse have to say about the location of the Bema?

1 Thessalonians 4:17 – *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

The Bema seat judgment will occur somewhere in the heavenlies in the presence of the Lord.

Who goes before the Bema seat?

All the passages dealing with the *Bema* or rewards are addressed to believers or pertain to believers of the church (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12; 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 John 2:28; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; Tit. 2:12-14 [note the emphasis on good works]).

When will Old Testament saints receive their reward?

Dan. 12:1-2 – *At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Some say the reward of Old Testament saints occurs after the tribulation, after church age saints are already seen in heaven and rewarded and returning with the Lord to judge the earth.

- However, all this passage says is that the Old Testament saints receive their reward in the time-frame of the Tribulation so it could be that it happens along with the church. This idea is reinforced by the presence of the 24 elders of Revelation who represents both Israel and the church being in heaven during the Tribulation.

Let’s take a look at the key passage that reveals a lot about our going before Jesus at the Bema seat:

1 Corinthians 3:9-15

⁹ *For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building.* ¹⁰ *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.* ¹¹ *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ¹² *Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,* ¹³ *each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.* ¹⁴ *If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.* ¹⁵ *If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

How are we God’s field and building?

- We are His field in that we are being cultivated by Him
- We are His building in that each of us constitute a part of the house God is building... we all have a purpose and a role to play in making the building happen.

What role did Paul have in construction of God’s building?

He laid the foundation... he was one of the tools God used to give us the Scriptures revealing critical aspects of Jesus Christ.

How should we build on the foundation Paul laid?

Our part should be well tied to the foundation which is Jesus Christ Himself, the Word. And the materials we use is important as well as we shall see.

What is important on the building materials we use in the construction of God's house of followers?

- *gold, silver, precious stones* – materials that are more valuable and will stand the test of fire
- *wood, hay, straw* – materials with no lasting value that will not stand the test of fire

What is the test of fire?

The judgment of Christ... that which merits eternal rewards versus that which had value only in this world.

What sort of works will stand the test of fire?

Those things done motivated to please God. Having an attitude of gratitude for what Jesus did for us.

- All that was done in the power of the Holy Spirit will be graciously rewarded.

What sort of works will be burned up at the Bema seat?

Things done to only please men without considering their eternal value. As Jesus said, "*you have your reward.*"

- All that was done through the energy of the flesh will be regarded as worthless for eternal reward.

How do we do things in the power of the Spirit?

It starts by getting God involved through prayer. But it is also necessary to listen to and follow the Spirit. And that comes by knowing God and His will through study of His Word and applying His principles in what we do.

What happens to those Christians whose works are burned up at the bema seat?

They will lose rewards that they could have otherwise received but they will still get to spend eternity with Christ... their only reward is salvation.

Who will be in heaven but not receive any rewards?

There will likely be a lot of folks who had death bed conversions. Better late than never.

What should be emphasized about the bema seat, the receiving or the loss of rewards?

The examination is serious yet the commendation aspect of the judgment seat should be emphasized.

- Thus, it is important to exercise faithful living today.

Will there be any punishment at the Bema?

The Christian will stand glorified before Christ without his old sin nature. He will, likewise, be without guilt because he has been declared righteous. There will be no need for punishment, for Christ has forever borne all of God's wrath toward the believer's sins.

So, does that mean there is no punishment for the sins of believers?

No, there are loss of rewards in eternity and consequences for sin in the here and now...

1. Loss of Fellowship with the Lord. (Ps. 32:3-4)
2. Divine Discipline (Heb. 12:5-11)
3. Loss of Power and Production (Galatians 3:1-5; 5:5-15; Jer. 2:12-13)
4. Loss of Opportunities (Jn. 4:34f).
5. Loss of Desire and Motivation for Service (Galatians 5:16f)
6. Broken Relationships and Disharmony (Gal. 5:15; Heb. 12:15b)
7. Loss of Physical Health and Vitality (1 Cor. 11:29-30; 1 John 5:16-17; Prov. 17:22; 14:30).

How might the bema seat judgment of Christ 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.

What perspective should we have about the loss of rewards at the bema seat judgment?

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.

What kinds of rewards can we expect at the bema seat judgment?

1. The Promise of Crowns. This seems to be used as a symbol of victory, authority, and responsibility.
2. The Promise of Heavenly Treasure (Matt. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:4). Stresses their eternal value and security.
3. The Promise of Accolades or Commendations. “*well done thou good and faithful servant*” (cf. Matt. 25:21; Lk. 19:17; 1 Cor. 4:5b).
4. The Promises to Overcomers. These could refer to special blessing of rewards to those believers who overcame special trials and tests rather than a general promise to all believers. See Rev. 2:7; 2:11, 17, 26.
5. The Promise of Special Responsibilities and Authority of the Lord’s Possessions (cf. Matt. 19:28; 24:45-47; 25:21, 23; Lk. 19:17-19; 22:29-30; Rev. 2:26).

What crowns are mentioned in the New Testament?

1 Cor. 9:25 – *everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*

The Incorruptible Crown. Two things: (a) This describes all the crowns. It contrasts our crowns with the temporal and temporary treasure of this life. (b) It is also a special crown given for faithfulness in running the race and exercising self-control in order to serve the Lord and finish the race.

1 Thess. 2:19 – *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?*

The Crown of Exultation or Rejoicing. This crown is a reward given for witnessing, follow-up, and ministry to others.

James 1:12 – *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

The Crown of Life. This crown is given for enduring testings (trials and temptation).

2 Tim. 4:8 – *there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

The Crown of Righteousness. This crown is a reward given for loving the appearing of Jesus when He comes for the church. Note that to love His appearing is to live in the light of it.

1 Peter 5:1-4 – *The elders who are among you I exhort... Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*

The Crown of Glory. This crown is a reward promised to Elders for faithfulness in the discharge of their responsibilities in shepherding the people.

What applications for us come to mind in this study of the judgment of believers by Christ at the bema seat?

- Check our motivations as to why we do what we do... is it truly for the glory of the Lord or is it to be seen by men?
- We should get on with whatever the Lord is calling us to do... there will come a time when there will be an accounting of our faithfulness.

Inspiration for this Bible study is taken from:
<https://bible.org/article/doctrine-rewards-judgment-seat-bema-christ>