

THE BEMA SEAT JUDGEMENT OF BELIEVERS

The Place of the *Bema*

Paul was familiar with Greek sports and makes several references to them. He used the term *The Bema Seat of Christ* to speak of the *Judgement of Christ* where believers will be judged. In the *Isthmian Games* 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

*An athlete is not crowned **unless he competes according to the rules.***

The victor who competed according to the rules was led to an elevated platform called the *Bema* to be crowned with a laurel wreath.

1 Cor. 9:24-25

²⁴*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but **only one receives the prize?** So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. **They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.***

The Bema Seat was not a place for *condemnation* but *rewards*. The word *judge* can be used to either mean *condemn*, or for the giving of *rewards*. The Bible teaches about *The Final Judgement* when *unbelievers* will be *judged* for eternal *condemnation* but, at *The Bema Seat*, *believers* will be *judged* for *rewards*.

Rom. 14:10

*Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? **For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God***

2 Cor. 5:10

*For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

The Bible gives us a lot of teaching on the *Judgement of Believers* and therefore this subject must be *studied* and *understood*. It will bring much *encouragement* and *motivation* to live circumspectly, lives pleasing to God.

Who Will be Judged?

Believers are those who have trusted Christ as Lord and Saviour and are therefore members of the Church. All those who have believed, from the Day of Pentecost, until the coming of Christ for His Church, at the Rapture, are the Church. We are all saved by grace and equal in our standing before God in salvation but not in rewards. There are different kinds of Christians – the *faithful* and the *unfaithful*; the *spiritually mature* and the *worldly-fleshly-immature* who behave in a human rather than spiritual way; and the *diligent* and *careless*. Each will be evaluated and rewarded or suffer loss, not condemnation.

Mt. 25:21

*His master said to him, ‘**Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.**’*

1 Cor. 3:1-4

¹*But I, brothers, **could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants** in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready; ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and **behaving only in a human way?** ⁴For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” **are you not being merely human?***

Eph. 5:15-17

¹⁵***Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.***

Most believers forget that *it matters* what *kind* of Christian we are. When the Lord comes again we shall ALL be caught up to Him, and, we shall ALL give an account of our whole life to Him. We shall be given rewards and crowns by Him as we enter heaven or suffer the loss of rewards. While there will be no punishment there might be shame and tears which He will wipe away. It will be a day of examination and we must live and serve Christ in the light of that day. It makes a tremendous difference what kind of Christians we are.

2 Jn. 1:8

Watch yourselves, *so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.*

Our Works Will be Judged

The Bible says that God will reward *the actions* of believers. We should be prepared for a thorough scrutiny and evaluation of all our works, *in service* as well as *behaviour* and *relationships* with others. Our whole life will be exposed to us by God.

Mt. 16:27

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father; and then *he will repay each person according to what he has done.*

1 Cor. 4:5

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, *who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

Eph. 6:8

knowing that whatever good anyone does, this *he will receive back from the Lord*, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

What God desires from each of us is reality, not superficiality, casual or fake living. At the Judgment Seat of Christ He will make manifest our motives and reward us accordingly.

The Timing of the Judgement of Believers

Before the Second Coming of Christ to earth He will return to take His Church to be with Him forever. This event is called the Rapture. Jesus told this to His disciples before the Crucifixion.

Jn. 14:1-3

¹Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that *I go to prepare a place for you?* ³And *if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

Paul further explains this truth.

1 Thess. 4:13-18

¹³But *we do not want you to be uninformed*, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, *that we who are alive*, who are left until the coming of the Lord, *will not precede those who have fallen asleep.* ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And *the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷*Then we who are alive*, who are left, *will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

Believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to be evaluated to receive their rewards AFTER the Rapture and before entering heaven to be with Christ forever.

Not Condemnation but Rewards

The Scriptures clearly explain that this is not a judgment to determine the believers entry into heaven. Those who have trusted Christ for salvation stand before Him justified from the guilt and penalty of sin. They are clothed in His righteousness. Their sins are not the issue at the judgment seat of Christ. Christ took our condemnation on Himself when He died on the Cross. Jn. 5:24

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Ps. 103:10-12

¹⁰*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.* ¹¹*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;* ¹²*as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

Mic. 7:19

He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. *You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

Rom. 8:1

There is therefore now *no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

This is *all* and *only* because the Lord Jesus Christ paid in full the price, or wages of sin, on our behalf. He is the propitiation for our sins and we are redeemed from the slavery and bondage to sin as well as delivered from the wrath of God forever.

Is. 53:4-6

⁴Surely **he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows**; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But **he was pierced for our transgressions**; he was **crushed for our iniquities**; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶**All we like sheep have gone astray**; we have turned—every one—to his own way; **and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

Jn. 1:29

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, **the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**”

1 Pet. 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. **By his wounds you have been healed.**

Turn to two more references that must encourage you, by His love not the fear of condemnation, to stay true to Christ.

Heb. 9:28

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, **will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.**

2 Cor. 5:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

The Believers’ Judgement is not regarding sin and punishment for sin as that has been dealt with when the sinner turns from sin to trust in the finished work of Christ on the Cross. Believers however should not take sin lightly so we consider briefly how sin affects believer in this present life.

The Present Consequences of Sin and Disobedience

The Bema Seat Judgement is not for dealing with our sins but our works AFTER Salvation. However, sin in the life of a believer is serious. There are at least two main consequences.

- **Loss of Fellowship With God.** Known sin result in a loss of the joy and peace of salvation and the Lord will not hear my prayers for other things before I repent of my sins.

Ps. 51:8, 12

⁸Let me hear **joy and gladness**; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

¹²**Restore to me the joy of your salvation**, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Ps. 66:18

If I had **cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.**

- **Discipline From the Lord.** *Discipline is not punishment.* God our gracious Father because He loves us, discipline us in the form of testing, trials, failure, or serious calamities to turn us back to Him. God can let us die like He did with Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5**) and others mentioned in the New Testament, if we continue in sin.

Heb. 12:5-11

⁵And have you forgotten the exhortation that **addresses you as sons**? “My son, **do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.** ⁶**For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**” ⁷It is for **discipline** that you have to endure. **God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?** ⁸If you are left without **discipline**, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had **earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?** ¹⁰For they **disciplined** us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he **disciplines** us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all **discipline** seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the **peaceful fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained by it.

1 Cor. 11:29-30

²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many of you are weak and ill, and **some have died.**

1 Jn. 5:16

If anyone sees his brother committing **a sin not leading to death**, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. **There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.**

The Fire & Shame of Judgement

Fire is used in Scripture as a symbol of judgment. God’s holy fire will burn up all the works of believers that are flammable. The Bible teaches that the judgement is about **how** we serve, with our spiritual gifts, talents and resources, in the building up of the Church. Any work of

an **unspiritual quality** or **motive** will be burned up. On earth we are never seen by others as we really are. Only God can see our hearts.

1 Sam. 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, “**Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature**, because I have rejected him. **For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.**”

1 Cor. 3:10-15

¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. **Let each one take care how he builds upon it.** ¹¹For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now **if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—** ¹³each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and **the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.** ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned up, **he will suffer loss**, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

1 Jn. 2:28

And now, little children, abide in him, **so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.**

Believers want to appear without shame before the Judgement Seat of Christ. The fire will **test** the **kind** of work we have rendered to the Lord – **not the appearance** of that work. This provides great motivation to serve in God's Church with works that last the test of fire. **There will be a loss** for some, not in terms of punishment, but of rewards. The life we live and the way we serve is one of two kinds. That which will stand the test of fire, or that which will not!

Notice the two kinds of material:

- **That which passes the test** of fire – gold, silver, costly stones.
- **That which is easily burned up** – wood, hay, straw.

CONCLUSION

When we appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, it will be too late then to wish that we had been more faithful, more zealous or more careful in our work and witness.