

The Judgment (Bema) Seat of the Lord Jesus Christ  
Believers' Day of Rewards

Three Key Verses:

**2 Corinthians 5: 9-10** Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him. 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.

**1 Corinthians 3:12-15** 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.

**1 Corinthians 4:1-5** Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet I am not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

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## The Judgment (Bema) Seat of the Lord Jesus Christ Believers' Day of Rewards

Introduction The judgment (Bema) seat of Christ follows immediately after the Rapture and is the climactic event of a believer's life. At this judgment, we as believers will give an account to Jesus, our heavenly Master, for the things we did during this earthly life. We will give an account of the stewardship of our time, treasure and talents. This is not a time of condemnation but one of commendation. The Apostle Paul provides the longest passage on the judgment seat in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (read it). Here he finishes with the most reassuring words: "and then shall every man have praise of God".

Many believers anticipate the rapture with fear and trepidation, not because they do not wish to meet their Lord, but because of their dread of the Bema which follows the rapture. They fear that their sins will be exposed and that they will be made a public spectacle in heaven. However, this is a time of glory rather than gloom and rejoicing rather than remorse. It is a time when the servants of the Lord will give an account of their faithfulness and receive the appropriate rewards. The Bema is the culmination of a life of service.

A Greek Word The word Bema is a Greek word referring to a judgment seat that is in a high or lifted up position. Paul (read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27) illustrates the believer's future accountability with the simile of an athlete involved in an athletic event such as running a race. In this case, the judgment or bema seat was an elevated platform at an athletic arena, such as the one near the city of Corinth, where the Isthmian games were held. From their Bema or elevated seat the judges watched the athletes and awarded them prizes. As ancient athletes received a corruptible crown, the believer strives for an incorruptible crown. Thus, when employing the term Bema, Paul is not describing a courtroom scene when referring to "judgment seat", as might be implied, but that of an Olympic arena, with judges, athletes and awards. Again, the concept here is not the condemnation of a criminal but the commendation of an athlete.

The Issues of the Judgment Seat Not surprisingly, a great deal of confusion exists concerning the nature of the Bema. The context of our major passage (2 Cor. 5:10) makes it clear that the Bema pertains only to believers. It is not a test or judgment for entrance into heaven. In the first eight verses of 2 Corinthians 5, the believer is already in his or her glorified state in the presence of the Lord (read this). Furthermore, the Bema is not a judgment of believers' sins, whether confessed or unconfessed, committed after salvation. Bible passages abound which speak of the total removal of sin from the believer at the point of salvation. As some examples we have from the OT and NT:

Is. 44:22 “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee”

Jer. 31:34 “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”

Heb. 8:12 “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”

The Three Judgments The Holy Scriptures distinguish between three judgments for the believer. He or she is judged as a sinner at the cross (Rom. 8:1). At the moment of salvation his or her sins are totally removed: “as far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). This is the big one. Secondly, the believer is judged as a son during his life. Every genuine child of God is disciplined for persistent and unconfessed sin (read Heb. 12:5-7). And finally, as we have been emphasizing in this discussion, the believer is judged as a servant at the Bema. He or she will give an account for the use of their time, talents and treasures entrusted to them by their heavenly Master. Judgment as to what is good or bad here does not pertain to morally good as opposed to morally evil but to that which is useful as opposed to that which is useless or worthless and burned as useless stubble in a fire (1 Cor. 3:15).

Obviously, the Bema judgment should never be confused with the Judgment of the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15) where only unbelievers will stand. If you are a believer, your name is written in the Book of Life, and you obviously have eternal life.

Three Major Areas of Displaying Good Works There appear to be three major areas found in Scripture which reveal or dictate the nature of the believer’s rewards at the Bema seat of Christ.

Every Christian will have to render account to God as a worthy trustee or steward. Everything a Christian has in life is a gift from God. These might be intellectual capacity, natural gifts, physical health, spiritual gifts, or wealth. The more that is entrusted to him or her, the more for which he or she will have to give an account. As pointed out in 1 Cor. 6:19-20, “Ye are not your own … ye are bought with a price”. As stewards of all that God has given to us we will give an account at the Judgment Seat of Christ and will not be held responsible for that which was given to others. We will be responsible for only that which was given to us. The key to this judgment is not success

or public acclaim, but rather faithfulness in using what God has committed to us. In the illustration of the talents used by Christ in Mt. 25:14-30, you may recall that the man receiving the five talents and the man receiving the two talents doubled what they had been given by their lord. They were then told in verses 21-23 : “Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord”. While this judgment does not seem to deal directly with the Church, the principle may apply to all believers of all ages who are rewarded in eternity.

The second major area is found in 1 Cor. 3:9-15 (read this). Here the believer’s life is viewed as a building built upon Christ as the foundation. The personal pronouns we and ye include only those who are saved. The word man (e.g. verse 13) refers only to the one who is building on the Rock which is Jesus Christ Himself. In verse 10, Paul likens himself to a wise master-builder who has laid the foundation, but in strong contrast to this, he indicates that each believer is building for himself the superstructure upon the one Foundation which is provided through the grace of God. As a result, each man should take careful note or heed how he builds thereon. What this all really means is that the believer is represented as a superstructure of service or works, which is to be tested by fire (eyes of the fire of Lord, Rev. 1:14).

The “work” which the Christian is building upon Christ Jesus may be of wood, hay or stubble, which fire will destroy; or it may be of gold, silver and precious stone which fire does not destroy. In the case of gold and silver, it is purified by the fire.

To the one whose “work” shall abide which he hath built on Christ, a reward shall be given. But the one whose “work” shall be burned shall suffer loss – not of his salvation which is secured through faith in Christ, but of his reward. Even when passing through the fire and even when suffering loss of his reward, he himself shall still be saved (yet so as by fire).

And finally, in 1 Cor. 9:16-27 and especially in verses 24-27, the picture of a race and winning the prize is used to reveal the quality of Christian life and service. As Paul illustrates here, in a similar fashion as the well-trained (disciplined athlete), the believer in his service should exert all his strength that he may obtain his full reward – run as it were to win. As the athlete is temperate (self-control) in all things to obtain a corruptible (perishable) crown, so the Christian should be temperate in all things that he may obtain an incorruptible crown. Paul’s exercise of self-control is seen in the fact that he kept his own body under subjection lest through some unworthy and half-hearted service for others he himself should be disapproved by our Lord.

Crowns in General Various rewards or awards are mentioned as incentives for believers to live consistent and godly lives in the service of their divine Master. In the remainder of this discussion we will only take a look at the category of crowns or wreaths as rewards. Peter, Paul, James and John speak of the believer's rewards as crowns or stephanos (victor's garlands) derived from the more general word stephoo – to wrap around the head. This type of crown is to be distinguished from diadeema or kingly, imperial crowns. Unger notes the word crown conveys the idea of reward, gracious reward, victory and public award.

The Five Crowns (Wreaths) The New testament mentions five crowns or, literally, victor's garlands or wreaths. These wreaths were well-known to the readers of the New Testament, for they were given as prizes to the victors at the Isthmian and Olympic games. The five different wreaths possibly describe five different fields and spheres of Christian service and achievement for which rewards will be given to the faithful servant.

a. The Wreath of Life

This is sometimes referred to as the martyr's crown. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life" (Jas. 1:12). The reward is given to those who are willing to suffer for their Lord, even unto death. The believers in Smyrna (one of the seven churches of Rev.) faced martyrdom and were comforted with these words: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2:20). This crown seems to refer to the quality of life or a reward consisting in life consummated (ending) in glory and exaltation, as was the life of Jesus who was obedient unto death and consequently highly exalted (Phil. 2:5-11).

b. The Wreath of Glory

This is the elder's or shepherd's crown, bestowed by the Chief Shepherd. "And when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). This award is given to those who faithfully and sacrificially minister to God's flock. Primarily these consist of pastors of local churches who minister in godliness and humility. However, the application may be expanded to include others who are responsible for a flock of God's people – principals, presidents or deans of Christian schools, directors of Christian camps, and even your quiet, dedicated and usually unnoticed Sunday school teacher. They will especially enjoy the glory and splendor of Jesus' earthly and eternal reign.

c. The Wreath of Rejoicing

This reward is the soul winner's crown. Those whom the believer has led to Christ will be his "crown of rejoicing" at the rapture. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of

rejoicing ? Are not even ye, in the presence our Lord Jesus at his coming ?" (1 Thess. 2:19).

Furthermore, in Philippians 1:4, Paul refers to his converts at Philippi as "my joy and crown". It will be total and complete joy for the believer to meet those whom he has had the privilege to introduce to the Savior. Obviously, the reference here is primarily to believers who directly won others to the Lord. However, it can also be expanded to include those saints who through their prayers and gifts support the work of the Lord, enabling others (e.g. missionaries) to win the lost. These praying and giving believers would then also participate in the joy of meeting these converts when Christ returns.

#### d. The Incorruptible Wreath

This is the victor's award for those who win the race lawfully and who exercise temperance and self-control. The Isthmian games in ancient Greece furnished the figure or simile of the foot race. If the Greek athletes exerted themselves to the limit of their endurance for a fading victor's garland, woven of evergreen leaves or parsley, how much more should the Christian athlete strive for the never-fading wreath ! "And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control (temperance) in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown but we an incorruptible" (1 Cor. 9:25).

#### e. The Wreath of Righteousness

This is the award for those who "love His appearing". The reference is to those who hold and cherish the blessed hope of the Lord's any-moment-return (Tit. 2:13). They live and work in an atmosphere of eager expectancy of the arrival of their now absent Lord. The conviction that their Lord could come back at any moment produces a strong desire for right and holy living, for which a future reward is promised. It follows that those who deny this any-moment return of Christ or are indifferent to the believer's fondest hope will forfeit this reward. The Apostle Paul certainly expressed this fervent expectancy of the rapture in 2 Tim. 4:8: ""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 to all them also that love His appearing".

Individual and Universal Rewards There are also rewards that are described in a more general sense – given to individuals. These can recognize any action. The most routine of the believer's life will either receive a reward or forfeit a reward. Even "eating and drinking" if done for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31) will be rewarded. Paul encourages both bond slaves and free servant (Eph. 6:8c) with the prospect that every good activity will be rewarded. While the recognition itself in this life may be minimal, the Lord will grant every good action – the reward of an inheritance. Any action is worthwhile in God's eyes and suitable for reward if it is done from the heart (Col. 3:22), with the whole being (Col. 3:23) and with the proper attitude (Eph. 6:7).

The most routine matters of life take on a new meaning for the believer who realizes that every action may be – if done properly – rewarded by God. A bitter spirit and complaining attitude will forfeit a reward. If we give it our all, even housework and homework, not just “holy” work, will someday receive “the reward of the inheritance”.

Some rewards are more universal in nature in that they are promised to every believer by virtue of the gracious provision of Christ in the atonement itself. Even carnal believers are blood-bought and may anticipate certain rewards. These rewards are not bestowed because of faithfulness in life but in response to God’s gracious salvation. They belong to every Church age believer.

## **References**

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  - b. Are There different Rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ ?
  - c. What are Some of the Additional Rewards at the Judgment Seat ?  
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## The Judgment (Bema) Seat of the Lord Jesus Christ Believers" Day of Rewards

In Section V (3 Major Areas of Displaying Good Works) we presented a more or less general discussion which covered three categories of displaying good (bad) works:

1. As a faithful steward
2. By building upon the Rock (Lord Jesus Christ) as our foundation
3. Exercising temperance/ self-control as an athlete would

During the Sunday School discussion on 6-1-08 at Sunrise we had the class do an exercise whereby they listed some very practical life examples of displaying works. The results of this exercise are summarized below:

<u>Faithful Steward</u>	<u>Building upon the LJC as our Foundation</u>		<u>Temperance/ Self-control “the athlete”</u>
	<u>G/S*</u>	<u>H/W/S*</u>	
Prayer (intercession)	Discipleship	Hollow prayer	Care of bodies
Obedience	Witnessing	Build up	Spiritual and
Witnessing	Prayer	ourselves	moral discip.
Stewardship (applic. of spiritual gifts)	Church activ.	Prideful	Spir. Armour
Service		activity	(Eph. 6)
Good parenting		Motives	Endurance
Finances (giving)		Monetary gain	Right food-
Health		Boasting	applic to the.
Intelligence		How spiritual	body/spirit
Time		I am !	Obed. to
Intimacy with God		Church activ.	authority

\* G/S refers to works that are good works that are like precious metals (gold and silver) which the fire does not destroy but purifies. H/W/S represents works that are hay, wood or stubble which the fire burns up or destroys because they are worthless.

## The Judgment (Bema) Seat of the Lord Jesus Christ Believers' Day of Rewards

During the class, a question arose as to the issue of casting the believers' crowns (rewards) at the feet of our Savior in Heaven. This issue is described in Rev. 4:10,11

"The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Chafer and Walvoord (Reference 1) provide the following comments concerning this casting of the crowns at His feet. "Although the rewards of the believer are symbolized by crowns (wreaths), according to Rev. 4:10 crowns as a symbol of reward will be cast at the feet of the Savior in heaven. What then will be the reward for faithful service on the part of the individual believer? The probability is that faithful service on earth will be rewarded by a privileged place of service in heaven. According to Rev. 22:3 His servants shall serve Him. Believers will find their highest fulfillment in loving service for the Savior who loved them and gave Himself for them. In the illustration of the talents used by Christ in Mt. 25:14-30, the man receiving the five talents and the man receiving the two talents (both of whom doubled what they had been given by their lord) were told: Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

## Rewards for the Old Testament Saints/Prophets and the Tribulation (Martyred) Saints

There is one last area regarding God's reward system that was not discussed in the text. The BEMA judgment seat basically pertained to the body of believers that constitute the New Testament church which will be raptured at the incipient point or beginning of the seven-year Tribulation period. However, there is another group that is to be rewarded, and they are described below.

In Revelation 11:15-18 we have the blowing of the Seventh Trumpet (KJV):

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

"And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,"

"Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned."

"And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, **and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great;** and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth".

In these verses the seventh angel sounds and the 24 elders (NT Body of Christ or the Church) which fell on their faces before Him earlier (See Rev. 4:10, 5:8, 5:14) began to speak of the Lord's judgment of the unjust dead and also of the rewards of His servants, the prophets and to the saints and them that fear His name, both small and great.

The Church (Rev. 4) has already gone into the presence of the Lord, and these believers have already been rewarded at the BEMA seat. This event is indicated or symbolized by the crowns possessed by the 24 elders.

The later group (servant prophets and (martyred) saints), spoken of at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, refer to the Old Testament saints and tribulation martyred saints, who are included in the First Resurrection. They will no doubt receive their rewards during the beginning of the Millenial age, whereas the "Church" has previously received their rewards at the beginning or early part (first 3 1/2 years) of the Tribulation period.