

# A Theological Study on the Bema or the Tribunal of Christ

(The Doctrine of Rewards from [www.Bible.Org](http://www.Bible.Org))

(**bold and underline** added for emphasis by Art Barkley)

One of the prominent doctrines of the New Testament is the Doctrine of Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is a doctrine often ignored or, when taught, it is misrepresented because of the term "judgment" that is used in translating the Greek text.

Commenting on this Samuel Hoyt writes: Within the church today there exists **considerable confusion and debate** regarding the exact nature of the examination at the judgment seat of Christ. The expression "the judgment seat of Christ" in the English Bible has tended to cause some to draw the wrong conclusion about the nature and purpose of this evaluation. A **common misconception** which arises from this English translation is that **God will mete out a just retribution for sins** in the believer's life, and **some measure of retributive punishment for sins will result** (Bibliotheca Sacra, Article by Samuel Hoyt).

As it will be shown below, 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.

(Added Note: Maybe better stated, "Rewards will be based on the fruit that I have "allowed" the Holy Spirit to produce through my life, as I by faith in His promises, have abided in fellowship with Him." - Art Barkley)

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, 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 and becomes the primary subject of 2 Thessalonians. The Lord's return and what this means not only to the world but to us individually is a very prominent subject of the New Testament.

It is significant that among the final words of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we find these words of the Lord: "Look! I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to repay each person according to what he has done." (Rev. 22:12)

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**. But we need to understand the nature of these rewards to understand the nature of the motivation. Some people are troubled by the doctrine of rewards because **this seems to suggest "merit" instead of "grace,"** and because, it is pointed out, we should **only serve the Lord out of love and for God's glory**.

Of course we should serve the Lord out of love and for God's glory, and understanding the nature of rewards will help us do that. 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. **God graciously supplies the means** by which we may serve Him. Indeed, **He works in us** both to will and to do as we volitionally appropriate His grace (Phil. 2:12-13), but **the decision** to serve, and **the diligence** employed in doing so, are **our responsibility** and our contribution and God sees this as rewardable. Compare the following passages:

1 Cor. 15:10 *But by God's grace I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not ineffective. However, **I worked more** than any of them, **yet not I, but God's grace that was with me.***

Col. 1:29 **I labor** for this, **striving with His strength that works powerfully in me.**

**Key Verses:** Rom. 14:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:11-12.

## The Meaning of The Judgment (*Bema*) Seat

Both Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 speak of the "judgment seat." This is a translation of one Greek word, the word *bema*. While *bema* is used in the gospels and Acts of the raised platform where a Roman magistrate or ruler sat to make decisions and pass sentence (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13), its use in the epistles by Paul, because of his many allusions to the Greek athletic contests, is more in keeping with its original use among the Greeks.

This word was taken from 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 (cf. 2 Tim. 2:5).

The victor of a given event who participated according 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 (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-25).

In all of these passages, "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. The judge at the *bema* bestowed rewards to the victors. **He did not whip the losers**" (Samuel Hoyt, "*The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective*," Part 1, Bibliotheca Sacra, p. 37, January-March, 1980, *Electronic Media*). We might add, neither did he sentence them to hard labor.

In other words, it is a reward seat and portrays a time of rewards or loss of rewards following examination, but it is **not a time of punishment** where believers are judged for their sins. Such would be inconsistent with the finished work of Christ on the Cross because He **totally** paid the penalty for our sins. Chafer and Walvoord have an excellent word on this view:

With reference to sin, Scripture teaches that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32); in his standing before God, and on the ground that the penalty for all sin -- past, present, and future (Col. 2:13) -- has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed **beyond condemnation**, but being in Christ is accepted **in the perfection of Christ** (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10; Heb. 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23). (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes: 52 Vital Doctrines of the Scripture Simplified and Explained*, John F. Walvoord: Zondervan, 1974, p. 282.)

John 5:24 "I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and **will not come under judgment** but has passed from death to life."

Rom. 8:1 *Therefore, **no condemnation** now exists for those in Christ Jesus.*

Again, Chafer writes concerning the *bema*, "It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the judgment is **unrelated to the problem of sin**, that **it is more for the bestowing of rewards than the rejection of failure.**" (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 [Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], p. 406.)

## The Time of *The Bema*

This event will occur immediately following the rapture or resurrection of the church after it is caught up to be with the Lord in the air as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

### **Arguments or Reasons in Support of This View:**

In Luke 14:12-14, reward is associated with the resurrection and the rapture is when the church is resurrected.

In Revelation 19:8, 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.

In 2 Timothy 4:8 and 1 Corinthians 4:5, rewards are associated with "that day" and with the Lord's coming. Again, for the church this means the event of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

So the order of events will be:

1. the rapture which includes our glorification or resurrection bodies
2. exaltation into the heavens with the Lord
3. examination before the *bema*
4. compensation or rewards.

## The Place of *The Bema*

It will occur somewhere in the heavenlies in the presence of the Lord. This is evident from 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 4:2 and 19:8.

## The Participants at *The Bema*

**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. 3:12f; 2 Cor. 5:9f; 1 John 2:28; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; Tit. 2:12-14 [note the emphasis on good works]).

The resurrection program and thus 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 (cf. Rev. 19:8 with Dan. 12:1-2; Matt. 24).

All believers, regardless of their spiritual state, will be raptured and will stand before the *bema* to give an account of their lives and will either receive rewards or lose rewards. Some believe in a partial rapture theory which says that only those in fellowship with the Lord will be raptured as a form of punishment for their sin. As mentioned above, this is not only contrary to the finished work of Christ who **once and for all** paid the penalty for our sins, but it is contrary to the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.*

The context suggests that Paul has in mind the return of Christ for the church--the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The rapture is the means of our deliverance from the wrath he discusses in chapter 5:1-3.

Further, the words "awake or asleep" of verse 10 refer to a spiritual or moral condition, not whether one is alive or dead when Christ returns as in 4:13-14. This is clear from both the context of 5:4-8 and by the fact he changed the words he used for sleep. He used the Greek *katheudo* in 5:10 rather than *koimao*, the word he used metaphorically in 4:13-14 of physical death. Though *katheudo* was used of physical sleep and even death, it was also commonly used of spiritual apathy or carnal indifference to spiritual matters, and this is clearly the context of chapter 5. The point, then, is this: Because of the perfect and finished nature of Christ's death (note the words "who died for us" of verse 10), whether we are spiritually alert or not, we will live together with Him through the rapture to face the examination of the *bema*.

### The Examiner or Judge at *The Bema*

This is none other than the Lord Jesus who is even now examining our lives and will bring to light the true nature of our walk and works when we stand before Him at the *Bema* (Rev. 1-2; 1 Cor. 4:5f; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 John 2:28). In Romans 14:10 the apostle called this examining time the *Bema of God* while in 2 Corinthians 5:10 he called it the *Bema of Christ*. The Point: Jesus, who is God, is our Examiner and Rewarder.

### The Purpose and Basis of *The Bema*

The purpose and the basis is the most critical issue of all and brings us face to face with the practical aspects of the *Bema*. Some crucial questions are: Why are we brought before the *Bema*? Is it only for rewards or their loss? Will any punishment be meted out? Will there be great sorrow? What's the basis on which the *Bema* is conducted? Is it sin, good works, or just what?

The Problem: **Within the church, there exists a good deal of confusion and disagreement concerning the exact nature of the Bema. The use of the term "judgment seat" in most translations, ignorance of the historical and cultural background concerning the Bema, and foggy theology regarding the finished work of Christ have all contributed to several common misconceptions which, in one way or another, see God as giving out just retribution to believers for sin, or at least for our unconfessed sin.**

Three Views of the *Bema*:

- 1) For a summary of three major views, let me quote Samuel L. Hoyt from *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Some Bible teachers view the judgment seat as a place of intense sorrow, a place of terror, and a place where Christ displays all the believer's sins (or at least those unconfessed) before the entire resurrected and raptured church. Some go even further by stating that Christians must experience some sort of suffering for their sins at the time of this examination.
- 2) At the other end of the spectrum another group, which holds to the same eschatological chronology, views this event as an awards ceremony. Awards are handed out to every Christian. The result of this judgment will be that each Christian will be grateful for the reward which he receives, and he will have little or no shame.
- 3) Other Bible teachers espouse a mediating position. They maintain the seriousness of the examination and yet emphasize the commendation aspect of the judgment seat. They emphasize the importance and necessity of faithful living today but reject any thought of forensic punishment at the *bema*. Emphasis is placed on the fact that each Christian must give an account of his life before the omniscient and holy Christ. All that was done through the

energy of the flesh will be regarded as worthless for reward, while all that was done in the power of the Holy Spirit will be graciously rewarded. Those who hold this view believe that 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 forensic punishment, for Christ has forever borne all of God's wrath toward the believer's sins (*Hoyt, pp. 32-33*)

**This last view (#3) I believe to be the one that is in accord with Scripture.** Reasons for this will be set forth and developed as we study the nature, purpose, and basis for the Bema. But for now, lest we draw some wrong conclusions, we need to be ever mindful that God's Word clearly teaches there are specific and very serious consequences, both temporal and eternal, for sin or disobedience. Though we will not be judged in the sense of punished for sin at the Bema since the Lord has born that for us, we must never take sin lightly because there are many consequences.

### The Present Consequences of Sin or Disobedience

While the following is not exhaustive, it demonstrates that sin in the life of a believer is not a small issue.

- (1) Loss of fellowship with the Lord. Known sin in one's life causes a loss of intimate fellowship with the Lord with the consequent loss of His joy and peace (Ps. 32:3-4).
- (2) Divine Discipline From the Lord Here in Time. **We should not think of discipline as punishment.** Discipline from God is the gracious work of a Father to train and develop His children. Sometimes this comes in the form of various kinds of testing, trials, failure, and predicaments which He uses to correct us, to train us, and if we have been going our own stubborn way, to increase our misery. The goal, however, is always to bring us back to Him (Heb. 12:5-11). If the believer remains unrepentant, this can lead to the sin unto death as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and some of the believers at Corinth who were failing to confess their sin and get right with the Lord (1 Cor. 11:28f; cf. also 1 John 5:16-17).
- (3) Loss of Power and Production. When we fail to deal with our sinful ways through honest confession, we grieve the Holy Spirit and quench His power in our lives. This means that rather than operating by faith in God's provision, we end up operating in the energy of the flesh. We turn to our personal bag of tricks by which we seek to handle life (Gal. 3:1-5; 5:5-1-5; Jer. 2:12-13). This results in the works of the flesh and their fruitless consequences (Gal. 5:19-21, 26). Without the abiding life, the life of faith and obedience to the Savior, we can do nothing (John 15:1-7).
- (4) Loss of Opportunities. When we are in charge of our lives rather than the Lord, we become insensitive to people and opportunities of ministry--we lack vision. **Carnal believers have no vision other than their own personal agendas and selfish goals** (cf. Jn. 4:34f).
- (5) Loss of Desire and Motivation for Service. **Carnal believers are occupied and controlled by their own self-centered desires** (Gal. 5:16f). Perhaps this is a good place to discuss the concept of selfishness and rewards, for some see an appeal to rewards as selfish and therefore carnal.

Zane Hodges has some good thoughts on this concept: Scripture does not teach us to be uninterested in our own happiness or well-being. The very desire to escape eternal damnation is a legitimate and urgent self-interest. The instinct to preserve our lives is the same. Nor are pleasure and enjoyment illegitimate experiences. When God put Adam and Eve in the garden, He furnished them with "*every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food,...*" (Gen. 2:9).

They could enjoy themselves freely provided they abstained from eating from the one forbidden tree. Similarly, Paul tells rich people that " God, who richly provides us with all things to *enjoy*." (1 Tim. 6:17: italics added).

**Selfishness ought not to be defined simply as the pursuit of our own self-interest. Instead, it should be defined as the pursuit of our self-interest in our own way, rather than in God's way.** Since "love" is a preeminent virtue in Christianity, true selfishness often involves a pursuit of self-interest that violates the law of love (*Hodges, Journal of the Grace Evang. Society, Autumn, 1991, p. 7*).

**Self-interest in God's way is legitimate. Self-centeredness or selfishness is preoccupation with self at the expense of others and God's will in one's life.** When Adam and Eve chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they acted in **self-centered independence which was idolatry and sin**. When they enjoyed each other and the fruit trees and blessings of the garden, they acted in their self-interest but they did so in dependence on and in obedience to the Lord.

- (6) Broken relationships and disharmony. Carnality causes broken relationships and pain to those around us - our families, friends, associates, and co-workers in the body of Christ (Gal. 5:15; Heb. 12:15b).
- (7) Loss of Physical Health and Vitality. Of course all sickness, weakness, or suffering is not a product of sin, but it can be and often is (1 Cor. 11:29-30; 1 John 5:16-17; Prov. 17:22; 14:30).
- (8) Loss of Rewards at the Bema. 1 Cor. 3:13-15: ... *each one's work will become obvious, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work. If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. **If anyone's work is burned up, it will be lost**, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.*

### The Purpose of *The Bema*

It is **not punitive**. It is not to judge believers for sin of any kind, confessed or unconfessed. Scripture teaches that for the believer God's justice has already been **fully and forever satisfied at the Cross** in relation to the believer's sins. *If God were to punish the believer judicially for his sins for which Christ has already rendered payment, He would be requiring two payments for sin and would therefore be unjust.* Such a concept (punishment for sin) erroneously disparages the all-sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross" (Hoyt, pp. 33-34). Christ paid the penalty for the believer's pre- and post-conversion sins. The believer will **forfeit rewards which he could have received, but he will not be punished in the judicial sense of "paying" for his sins.**"

**Scripture teaches that all sins, both confessed and unconfessed, have been forgiven and taken care of by the work of Christ on the Cross so the Christian will never face those sins again at the judgment.**

**Key Scriptures:** The following verses demonstrate the basic principle of the **complete** and **finished** nature of Christ's Work:

Hebrews 10:14 *For by one offering He has **perfected forever** those who are sanctified.*

Romans 5:19 *For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made **righteous**.*

Colossians 2:10 *and you have been **filled** by Him, who is the head over every ruler and authority.*

These verses state the **complete** results or conclusion:

Hebrews 8:12 *"For I will be merciful to their wrongdoing, and I will **never again** remember their sins."*

Hebrews 10:17-18 *"I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts. Now where there is forgiveness of these, there is **no longer an offering** for sin."*

Isaiah 44:22 *"I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like a mist..."*

Psalms 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Micah 7:19 *He will again have compassion on us He will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

Isaiah 38:17 *"Indeed, it was for my own welfare that I had such great bitterness; but Your love has delivered me from the Pit of destruction, for You have thrown all my sins behind Your back."*

These verses show **we cannot come into judgment**. Why? **Because Christ has borne our judgment** by being made a curse in our place:

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been declared **righteous** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Romans 8:1 *Therefore, **no condemnation** now exists for those in Christ Jesus,*

John 3:18 *"Anyone who believes in Him is **not** condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God."*

John 5:24 *"I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and **will not come under judgment** but has passed from death to life."*

**Question:** Then why do we have to confess sin in this life? And why does God judge believers for unconfessed sin as with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 and some of the believers in Corinth in 1 Cor. 11:28f?

**Answer:** Because this is a completely different matter.

(1) Unconfessed sin relates to fellowship in this life, not one's relationship or standing with God. Unconfessed sin stands as a barrier to fellowship with the Lord and His control over one's life. As Amos 3:3 says, "can two walk together unless they be agreed?" Obviously the answer is no. Confession means we agree with God concerning our sin and want to get back under God's control. "Daily forgiveness of those who are within the family of God is distinguished from judicial and positional forgiveness which was applied forensically to all of a person's sins the moment he believed in the Lord Jesus Christ" (Hoyt, p. 38). We need to distinguish between fellowship forgiveness and legal or forensic forgiveness that justifies us and gives us a standing before God through Christ.

**Key Scriptures:** Heb. 12:5f and 1 Cor. 11:28-32.

These passages explain the nature of God's judgment of believers in this life. It is discipline designed to train and bring believers back to a walk with God. They teach us the basic cause of discipline is failure to examine and confess known sins because they hinder our fellowship with God. "*Condemned along with the world*" in 1 Cor. 11:32 most likely refers to the judgment of Rom. 1:24f, moral degeneration and the gradual breakdown in the moral fiber of men when they turn away from God. The same thing happens in the life of believers, but God brings discipline to stop the process.

- (2) God does not judge us for our sin in the sense of making us pay the penalty for that sin. Scripture teaches that Christ's death was all-sufficient, completely satisfying God's wrath toward sin in the believer. The question of sin in regard to God's justice has been forever satisfied in the mind of God by the all-sufficient sacrifice of His Son. The penalty for the believer's sins has been fully paid for by Christ, the believer's substitute. The Christian has been in court, condemned, sentenced, and executed in his substitute, Jesus Christ. God cannot exact payment for sins twice since payment has been **fully and forever paid**. The believer is seen by the Father as clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God can therefore find no cause for accusing the Christian judicially any more than He can find cause for accusing Jesus Christ. Therefore, at the judgment seat of Christ forensic punishment will not be meted out for the believer's sins (*Hoyt, p. 38*) Rather, God disciplines us as a father disciplines his sons to bring us back into fellowship that we might be conformed to His Son. It is a family matter.

### The Positive Aspects of *The Bema*

- 1) To evaluate the quality of every believer's work whether it is good or bad, i.e., acceptable and thus worthy of rewards, or unacceptable, to be rejected and unworthy of rewards. Actually an evaluation is going on every day by the Lord (cf. Rev. 2-3).
- 2) To destroy and remove unacceptable production portrayed in the symbols of wood, hay, and stubble. All sinful deeds, thoughts, and motives, as well as all good deeds done in the energy of the flesh will be consumed like wood, hay, and stubble before a fire because they are unworthy of reward. Why? This will be answered as we consider the basis on which rewards are given or lost.
- 3) To reward the believer for all the good he or she has done as portrayed by the symbols of gold, silver, and precious stones, that which is valuable and can stand the test of fire without being consumed.

### Scriptures:

1 Cor. 3:13-15 ... *each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.*

**"Evident"** is *phaneros* which means "known, plain, visible, revealed as to its nature." **"The day"** refers to a day well known and refers to the day of the *bema* after the rapture of the church. **"Declare it"** is *deloo* which means "to make evident, clear." **"Be revealed"** is *apokalupto* and means "to unveil." **"Test"** is *dokimazo* and means "to test for the sake of approval." **"The quality"** is *hopoion*, a correlative and qualitative pronoun meaning "of what sort or kind."

1 Cor. 4:5 *Therefore don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts. And then praise will come to each one from God.*

**"Bring to light"** is *photizo*, "to bring to light, make visible." **"Disclose"** is *phaneroo*, "to manifest, reveal." The issue should be extremely clear from these two verses: The Lord will evaluate the quality and nature of every person's work. Compare also:

2 Cor. 5:10 *For we must all appear before the tribunal of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or worthless.*

Rev. 22:12 *"Look! I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to repay each person according to what he has done."*

## The Negative Aspects of *The Bema*

There are a number of passages that refer to the negative aspects of the Bema which need to be mentioned and explained. In these passages we read such things as "give account of himself," "suffer loss," "shrink away from Him in shame," and "recompense for his deeds . . . whether good or bad." Will believers experience shame, grief, remorse at the Bema? If so, how do we reconcile this with passages like Revelation 7:17, "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*", and Revelation 21:4, "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away.*", or with Isaiah 65:17, "*For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind.*"?

The negative effects involve the following:

The loss suffered in 1 Corinthians 3:15 refers to the loss of rewards, not salvation as the verse goes on to make clear. Please note that the clause "*he shall suffer loss*" would be better rendered "*it (the reward) shall be forfeited*."

The disqualification mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:27 means **disqualified from rewards, not loss of salvation**. This is clear from the context and the analogy to the Greek athletic games.

The "recompense" (NASB) or the "receive back" (KJV) of 2 Corinthians 5:10 refers to the dispensing of rewards or their loss. The verb used is *komizo* and means "to carry off safe," "to carry off as booty." In the middle voice as here, it meant "to bear for oneself" (Abott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 252), or "to receive back what is one's own" (Rienecker, p. 468). Compare Matthew 25:27 and Ephesians 6:8.

That dispensing of rewards is in view is also evident from the Greek words in 2 Corinthians 5:10 translated "good" (*agathos*--valuable like good fruit) and "bad" (*phaulos*--**unacceptable like rotten or spoiled fruit**) (**flawed, imperfect** – Art). **The idea is not good in the sense of righteousness versus bad in the sense of evil or sinfulness.** For those ideas Paul would have most likely used *kalos*, "good," and *kakos*, "evil." For good works, those valuable like good fruit, we will receive back rewards, but for bad works, those rotten and **worthless**, we will receive no rewards or the loss of rewards.

Illustration: This is no more a punishment than when a student turns in a worthless assignment and receives an F or a D. His poor work results in a just grade or recompense. This is what his work deserves. There used to be a sign in the registrar's office at Dallas Seminary which read, "Salvation is by grace. . . Graduation is by works."

1 John 2:28 This verse undoubtedly refers to the Bema and shows there will be both boldness as a result of abiding, and shame before the Lord as a result of failing to abide.

**"And now little children."** John is writing to believers. This is his term of endearment for his readers as born again people.

**"Abide in Him."** "Abide" is a synonym for fellowship which is the subject of the book (1:3-7). It means to remain in Him from the standpoint of drawing on His life as **the source** of ours and then to obey Him out of that relationship of dependence. This is the basis of rewards or the cause of their loss, **the abiding, Christ dependent life**.

**"So that"** points us to the purpose, the return of the Savior and what it will mean.

**"When He appears."** Two things. (1) The "when" points to the immanency of the return of the Lord. It is literally "if He appears." The conditional clause does not question the reality of Christ's coming, only the time of it and thereby points to its immanency. (2) "Appears" refers to the rapture which leads quickly into the Bema.

**"We may have confidence."** "Confidence" is *parresia* and means "courage, boldness to speak." Point: Though none of us are perfect or ever will be, still, faithfulness to abide and obey the Lord will give confidence of rewards.

**"And not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming (presence)."** Please note several things here.

- (1) The verb is what we call in Greek an aorist subjunctive, and with the basic meaning of this verb, the grammar points to a future act, but not a continuous state. This in no way suggests a permanent condition.
- (2) The voice of the verb is passive. The subject receives the action, that is, he is made to feel shame. But how?
- (3) There are two views:
  - a. The non-abiding believer is made to feel shame by the Lord, i.e., the Lord puts him to shame. This would be somewhat punitive and does not fit the concept of the Bema nor the promises of the Lord that we will not come into judgment.
  - b. The non-abiding believer is made to feel shame by the revelatory nature of the event caused by his own awareness and realization of what his own failure and sin has caused him in terms of the loss of rewards and loss of glory to the Lord. But this will only be momentary or short lived at best in view of passages like Revelation 7:17; 21:4 and Isaiah 65:17.

*Hoyt* has a good summary of what this passage is talking about and involves: The Bible suggests that there will be shame at the judgment seat of Christ to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the measure of unfaithfulness of each individual believer. Therefore it should be each believer's impelling desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord in all things. Although Christians apparently will reflect on this earthly life with some regret, they will also realize what is ahead for them in the heavenly life. This latter realization will be the source of boundless joy.

*English* strikes a proper balance on this subject: Joy will indeed be the predominant emotion of life with the Lord; but I suspect that, when our works are made manifest at the tribunal, some grief will be mixed with the joy, and we shall know shame as we suffer loss. But we shall rejoice also as we realize that the rewards given will be another example of the grace of our Lord; for at best we are unprofitable servants" (E. Schuyler English, "The Church at the Tribunal," in *Prophetic Truth Unfolding Today* [Fleming H. Revell, 1968], p. 29)

The elements of remorse, regret, and shame cannot be avoided in an examination of the judgment seat of Christ. But this sorrow must be somewhat relative because even for the finest of Christians there will be some things worthy of unceasing remorse in the light of God's unapproachable holiness. This would mean that the finest of Christians could be sorrowful throughout eternity. However, this is not the picture that the New Testament gives of heaven. The overwhelming emotion is joyfulness and gratefulness. Although there is undeniably some measure of remorse or regret, this is not the overriding emotion to be experienced throughout the eternal state.

The emotional condition of the redeemed is that of complete and unending happiness. Emotion proceeds from the realization of facts in personal experience. Hope will at last become reality for all those who are delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:18-25). Elimination of the curse, pain and death will also remove sorrow, tears and crying. (Rev. 21:4)

The judgment seat of Christ might 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. **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.** (*Samuel Hoyt, "The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective," Part 2, p. 131, Bibliotheca Sacra, Electronic Media*).

## The Nature of the Rewards

What are they and how are they described in Scripture? They are described in terms of generalities. What we know about rewards is given in terms that are more general than specific. These are:

- The Promise of Crowns This seems to be used as a symbol of victory, authority and responsibility.
- The Promise of Heavenly Treasure (Matt. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:4). Stresses their eternal value and security.
- The Promise of Accolades or Commendations This is seen in those passages where a reward is administered in the form of something like "well done thou good and faithful servant . . ." (cf. Matt. 25:21; Lk. 19:17; 1 Cor. 4:5b).
- The Promises to Overcomers These could refer to special blessing of rewards to those believers who overcome special trials and tests rather than a general promise to all believers. (See Rev. 2:7; 2:11, 17, 26; etc).
- 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).

## Some Analogies to Consider

**A Thanksgiving Dinner** At a Thanksgiving dinner, each person eats a different amount, but each is satisfied. After our glorification, there will be no sinful nature to produce envy, or jealousy, or resentment, or feelings of dissatisfaction. We will each be enthralled with God and our glorified state.

**A Bat Boy at the World Series** Any young man who loves baseball would probably be thrilled to be a bat boy in the world series, but he would not be jealous or resentful because he was not one of the stars of the game. He would just be delighted to be there and do what he was doing.

**A Graduate at Commencement** All the graduates are there and excited about graduating, yet at the time of rewards, some sorrow might be experienced, but it is quickly overcome by the joy of the event.

Our Spiritual Gifts Our rewards may be likened to our spiritual gifts. Our rewards seem to be primarily a matter of responsibility and maybe opportunities, but they will not be like badges or medals we wear as in the military. Remember that all of our crowns will be cast at the feet of Christ, for only He is worthy (Rev. 4:10-11). Also, Matthew 25:21, 23 and Luke 19:17-19 show us our rewards consist of authority over either many things or many cities. They may include galaxies of the universe. All believers will live in the millennium and in eternity with the Lord. Some will reign with Him, but, because of loss of rewards, evidently some will not.

In Scripture, the church is viewed as the heavenly kingdom and a universal priesthood. This may indicate something of our authority. We may rule over galaxies, celestial bodies, the heavens, and definitely over angels, and the world (cf. 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 4:8)

Israel is the earthly kingdom and will undoubtedly have authority over portions and sections of the millennial kingdom and the eternal kingdom as emphasized in Matt. 25:21; Lk. 19:17-19; and Dan. 7:18, 22, 27.

## The Crowns of The New Testament

### The Words Used For Crowns

**Stephanos.** This was the victors crown, the wreath given to the victorious athlete before the judge at the Bema. It is the word used of the crowns promised to believers for faithfulness in the Christian life.

**Diadem.** This was the royal crown, the crown of a king. It is used of the seven diadems of the Beast in Revelation 12:3 and 13:1. But, to stress that Christ is King of kings, this word is also used of the many diadems the Lord will wear at His return (Rev. 19:12 ).

The Principle The Lord Jesus is the Victor, and our victory is really His victory which is appropriated by faith. Crowns are given as rewards for **faithfulness** to appropriate God's grace and Christ's victory in the Christian life. They remind us of our responsibility **to abide** in the vine.

## The Crowns and Their Significance

The Crown of Thorns (Matt. 27:29; Mk. 15:17; Jn. 19:2, 5) speaks of Christ's work on the cross and stands for His victory over sin, Satan, and death.

The Incorruptible Crown (1 Cor. 9:25). 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.

The Crown of Exultation or Rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1). This crown is a reward given for witnessing, follow-up, and ministry to others. In one sense, the Thessalonians will be Paul's crown, and the effect at the Bema and throughout eternity will be rejoicing or exultation over their presence in heaven. But what did Paul mean by this? In view of his use of "crown" (*stephanos*, the victor's wreath) in other places, and the fact believers will cast their crowns before the Lord (Rev. 4:10), Paul may also have in mind a personal crown or reward that he will receive because of their presence at the return of the Lord. Though, in this passage the apostle does not say he would receive a crown, this is suggested, if not here certainly in other passages. Though some of them were not living as they should, looking ahead and seeing them in glory brought joy and would bring great rejoicing.

The Crown of Life (Jam. 1:12; Rev. 2:10). This crown is given for enduring testings (trials) and temptation. The crown is not eternal life which is a gift through faith in Christ alone, (Jn. 4:10; Rom. 3:24; 5:15-17; 6:23; Eph. 2:8), but a reward for enduring trials and overcoming temptation.

The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8). This crown is a reward given for faithfulness to use our gifts and opportunities in the service of the Lord and for loving His appearing. Note that these two things go together. To love His appearing is to live in the light of it.

The Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5:4). This crown is a reward promised to Elders for faithfulness in the discharge of their responsibilities in shepherding the people.

The Casting of Crowns (Rev. 4:10-11). Because Christ alone is worthy and because we can only be fruitful when we abide in Him allowing His life to fill ours, we will all cast our crowns before Him in recognition that all we have done is by His grace.

The Many Crowns or Diadems (Rev. 19:12). The crowns of royalty which stand for Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords who alone has the right to rule and judge the world.

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