

Seeking My King & His Kingdom
Lesson #11 Judgment Seat Of Christ - Part I - 4 False Assumptions

Imagine staring into the face of Christ! Just the two of you! Attendance is compulsory! II Cor. 5:9-11a *Therefore we labor [make it our aim, ambition], whether present or absent, we may be accepted [well pleasing] of Him. For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ; that each one may receive [be recompensed] the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror [fear] of the Lord, we persuade men;...*

One of the prominent doctrines of the New Testament is the Doctrine of Rewards and the Judgment Seat of Christ which is also one of the most misunderstood concepts by many Christians. A proper Biblical understanding of this event will motivate Christians to pursue holiness and serve our Lord in the limited time we have left.

Doctrine of Rewards is virtually ignored in Christian circles. Several factors have caused this doctrine to lose its significance. Examining Scripture will bring to light the significance of this doctrine which has the ability to transform us and impact our daily lives.

The Meaning Of The Judgment (*Bema*) Seat

Both Romans 14:10 and II Corinthians 5:9 speak of the "judgment seat." This is a translation of the Greek word *bema* which 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 Paul's epistles is more in keeping with its original use among the Greeks because of his many allusions to the Greek athletic contests.

Bema 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.

II Tim. 2:5 *Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize 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* where the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory [I Cor. 9:24-25].

In the above 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, nor 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.

This view would be inconsistent with the finished work of Christ on the Cross because He Totally Paid The Penalty for our sins.

Four false assumptions have given rise to the insignificance of the Doctrine of Rewards.

False Assumption #1: There cannot be a serious evaluation of our lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ because > God has forgiven ALL our sins and cast them into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

Agreed: We are NOT judged for sin. Judgment Seat DOES NOT determine Salvation.

Key Point We Are Not Judged For Sin

A. Although it is tremendously serious with eternal ramifications, the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place or time when the Lord will dole out punishment for sins committed by His child.

1. It is important to emphasize that the Judgment Seat Of Christ Does Not Determine Salvation; that was determined by Christ's sacrifice on behalf of the blood bought believer and the believer's faith in Him.

2. Our salvation is a free gift.

I John 2:2 *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

John 3:16 *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

3. All sins are forgiven and believers will never be condemned for them [Romans 8:1].

To say otherwise would deny the completeness of the death of Jesus Christ, and nullify God's promise that "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17).

Eph. 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

False Assumption #2: It is not really a judgment; all will receive the same rewards.

Suggestion: Some believers will experience deep regret along with lost privileges.

Listen to Paul: II Corinthians 5:9-10 *Therefore we make it our goal (aim) to be well-pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

Consider: "Whether good or bad" - Dispels a hope that our failures will not matter -

It reminds us our Father judges us even though we are SECURE we are His children forever.

Biblical Examples of God Judging Believers

1. Consider Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. They lied regarding the price of a sold property so they could withhold a percentage while pretending to give all the money to the church.

Truth: They were Christians smitten by God and instantly died for their dishonesty.

Powerful Reminder: God judges JUSTIFIED believers for unconfessed sins.

Question to Ponder: If God judges believers on earth, is it reasonable to believe He will judge us in heaven for the way we lived on earth?

Jim Elliff: "Such warnings virtually bleed from the pores of Scripture."

2. II Sam. 12 - Consider King David who committed the sins of adultery and murder.

II Sam. 12:13-14 - *"The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.*

However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

Note: God judged him for his sin even after he had confessed it and was assured of God's forgiveness.

Powerful Reminder: God judges believers for sins that have been confessed and forgiven.

Assumption #3: A false belief that after we are justified our works have no merit before God.

a. Some teach there will be no difference among believers in heaven.

Argument: If some believers have a different status, it would imply that works had some merit that God accepted. This would be contrary to His grace.

Examine the Scripture:

Strongly agree: When we put our faith in Christ we are declared righteous by God because of Christ and NOT because of our works.

Our deeds BEFORE our conversion are of NO MERIT in the sight of God.

Eph. 2:8-9 *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."*

Consider: Works done AFTER our justification are special to God.

Eph. 2:10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

a. These works are sought by God and honor Him.

b. We should strive to please Him. These works will be rewarded.

Luke 14:14 *You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*

Christ promised those who performed sacrificial acts would be "repaid."

Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Luther's confident and a theologian: "We teach that good works are meritorious - not for the forgiveness of sins, grace, nor justification (for we obtain these only by faith) but for other physical and spiritual rewards in this life and in that which is to come, as Paul says in I Cor. 3:8 - *"Each shall receive his wages according to his labor."*

Therefore, there will be different rewards for different labors...There will be distinctions in the glory of the saints."

Consider: Some people think rewards suggest "merit" instead of "grace."

Truth: God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him.

He works in us both to will and to do as we volitionally appropriate His grace.

Phil. 2:12-13 *Therefore, my dear ones, just as you have always obeyed, not only when I was with you but even more now that I am absent, continue to work out (cultivate, carry out to the goal) your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever*

might offend God and discredit the name of Christ).¹³ [Not in your own strength] for it is God who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight.

Truth: The decision to serve and the diligence are our responsibility as we yield to the Holy Spirit. God sees this as "rewardable."

I Cor. 15:10 *But by the grace (the unmerited favor and blessing) of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not [found to be] for nothing (fruitless and without effect). In fact, I worked harder than all of them [the apostles], though it was not really I, but the grace (the unmerited favor and blessing) of God which was with me.*

Col. 1:29 *For this purpose I labor [unto weariness], striving with all the superhuman energy [His power] which He so mightily enkindles and works within me.*

Truth: The works after our justification only have merit if we are abiding in Christ. Our good deeds are done only because God gives us the desire and ability to do them.

Truth: These works are a gift of His grace to us.

It is not possible that we could "earn" all that our Father desires to give us.

Important: The Father tests us to prove us worthy. He uses that which is least to see if the believer can be trusted with a greater share of the inheritance.

Ponder: Dependability on earth translates into greater responsibility in His Kingdom.

Truth: God has placed Himself under a loving obligation to reward us. His Grace!

Consider: If He didn't reward us, Hebrews says God would be "unjust."

Heb. 6:10 *For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.*

Truth: God has chosen to give us what we have no right to demand or expect.

Factor #4: False belief > It is selfish to think of rewards as a proper motivation to serve Christ. We should serve God out of love alone.

Argument: I'm just going to cast my crowns before Him anyway. I'll be giving them up.

False Assumption: Rewards are nothing more than crowns.

a. Scripture is clear there are levels of responsibility that will be given in His Kingdom.

b. Scripture tells us He desires to share His inheritance with us.

Luke 12:32 *Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.*

c. He wants us to win the right to rule with Him in His Kingdom.

Therefore, it should be our passionate yearning.

Remember Paul's Connection between pleasing Christ and doing well at the Bema Seat?

Do you long to hear...Matt. 25:21 Well done, thou good and faithful servant.

A. Rewards are one of the great motives of the Christian's life.

In I Thess. 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 II Thessalonians.

For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

Question: Did Jesus motivate the disciples with the prospect of rewards?

Matt. 6:20 *Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.*

Luke 6:35 *He promised them if they were sacrificially obedient their "reward would be great." But love your enemies and be kind and do good [doing favors so that someone derives benefit from them] and lend, expecting and hoping for nothing in return but considering nothing as lost and despairing of no one; and then your recompense (your reward) will be great (rich, strong, intense, and abundant), and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind and charitable and good to the ungrateful and the selfish and wicked.*

Biblical saints: Driven to serve God because of the prospect of a reward.

1. Abraham - Willing to leave Ur and live in tents. Heb. 11:10 - *He was looking for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* He died without receiving the promise, but it was the promise that motivated him to obey God. Rewarded in the future

2. Moses - Willing to leave the treasures of Egypt. Heb. 11:25-26 - *Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.* I will give up the visible earthly reward for the invisible future reward.

Swindoll: Fix your eyes on your heavenly reward instead of earthly allurements.

3. Apostle Paul - He feared that he might fail and thus be disqualified in the race of life.

I Cor. 9:27 *But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. [castaway]* Paul urged believers in

Phil. 2:16 - *Prove yourselves to be blameless in this perverse generation, "holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain or toil in vain."*

A.J. Gordon: "I cannot think of a final divine reckoning which shall assign the same rank in glory, the same degree of joy to a lazy, indolent and unfruitful Christian as to an ardent, devoted, self-denying Christian. If this life is a training ground for greater responsibilities, believers will be thoroughly judged."

It is significant that among the final words of Revelation, 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.*