

The Judgment Seat of Christ



Fall Lecture Series 2011

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BBTS Fall Lecture Series

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I. Introduction

The doctrine of the Judgment Seat of Christ is one of the most neglected teachings of eschatology.

Most commentaries which deal with its three main verses (Ro 14:10; 1 Co 3:9-15; 2 Co 5:10), offer very little insight or exegetical advantage. A search through the issues of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, a quarterly published by Dallas Theological Seminary, from 1934 to 1980 resulted in a total of only three articles in almost 70 decades of writing.

Dr. John Walvoord commented on this very fact saying: "There is no more practical prophetic truth than this simple pointed doctrine of the judgment seat of Christ."¹

The practical teaching of its truth is a most needed present injunction for the believer to avoid future indictment.

II. The General character of the Judgment Seat of Christ

Is this a positive experience, negative experience or a combination of both? Is this a place where our virtues and works will be extolled or is it an accounting and verdict for deeds un-commendable?

There are two words for judgment seat in Scripture. The one used in Ja 2:6 and 1 Co 6:2,4 is *criterion*. It can mean either the rule by which one makes a judgment or the place where that judgment is pronounced. The second word is *bema* and was used of the raised platform which sat upon a huge pavement foundation. This raised platform was mounted by steps and was the official seat of judgment for both the Greek and Roman authorities.²

III. What the Judgment Seat of Christ is not

a. The Judgment for Sin

1 John 2:12 tells us our sins "are forgiven you for his name's sake." In **Psalm 103:12** uses a physical phenomenon to describe our sins removal. In saying "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." **Romans 8:1** assures us that "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." The strongest grammatical injunction can be found in **Hebrews 10:17** which states "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Revelation 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and *I will write upon him* my new name.

The mere fact that one stands at the Judgment Seat of Christ testifies to their salvation

¹ John F. Walvoord. *The Return of the Lord*. (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1955), p. 119.

² Herod Agrippa I sat on his throne (BEMA) located in Caesarea in Ac 12:20-21 when he addressed those of Tyre and Sidon. The Lord Jesus appeared before Pontius Pilate in his judgment hall at his BEMA – Jn 19:13.

- It is not the Great White Throne Judgment which is for unbelievers only³

The Great White Throne Judgment is an event which follows the *bema* of Christ (Re 20:11-15). It is significant to note that this is not a throne to determine guilt or innocence for those who appear before it. There will be no accounts given, no questions asked, the evidence and facts have all been presented. This throne judgments only purpose is to determine the sentence of those who have already been found guilty in regard to their sin.

John 3:18⁸ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

IV. What the Judgment Seat of Christ is

The *bema* is an event much like a review board. Every aspect of the believer's life from the point of salvation to this judgment will be under review. It is a time of accountability where we will each give an accounting to God for how we have lived our lives for Him after we became believers. It will reveal the TRUE HEART of the believer and the MOTIVES behind each of our actions. Our works will be tried and we will receive REWARDS or SUFFER LOSS.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

V. Reasons for the Judgment Seat?

The *bema* will try every man's work and make each manifest if they were done unto the glory of the Lord and worthy of reward. Even as the deeds which were done can be good or bad, likewise the appropriate recompense will be good or bad. The believer will receive a crown or suffer loss. As a result, it is meant to be a future encouragement to faithfulness in there here and now. The believer's life shall be evaluated and proportional eternal rewards and assignments shall result.

VI. Who will be at the judgment seat of Christ?

There are only 4 choices, OT Saints, NT Saints, Tribulation Saints and Millennial saints.

It cannot be the OT saints based on 1 Co 3:11. The foundation upon which a man must build to be judged at the *bema* is the foundation of Christ. This foundation was laid by the Apostles. The Tribulation and Millennial Saints will be ruled out as the *bema* will follow the rapture and commence before the Tribulation. This leaves the NT saints.

³ The Bible does not teach a general judgment. In Ryrie's Theology he delineates 7 different judgments for dispensations. Charles C. Ryrie. *Basic Theology. A Popular systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth.* (Colorado Springs: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1999), p.516.

The judgment seat of Christ is a judgment upon Christian service. We cannot be judged unless we are servants of the Lord. We cannot be servants of the Lord unless we have been saved from sin, only those who are saved will stand before the *bema*.⁴

VII. Who is the Judge?

Joh 5:22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

All judgment is given to the Lord Jesus. This includes judgment for both penal (sin) offences and judgment at the *bema*. The reason He is the judge is so that He will be universally recognized as co-equal with the Father. Also that it may be a total COMFORT to us.

- As God He is qualified to judge.

John 2:24-25²⁴ But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*,²⁵ And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

- As man He is qualified to judge as He gave His life for us.
 - Who else's hand could we receive more loving treatment or be shown more consideration by?
 - He is a sympathetic high priest (He 4:14-16)

VIII. When will it occur?

THE LATEST possible time BEMA could occur

- Before the marriage of the bridegroom and just before the Millennium

Revelation 19:7-8⁷ Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.⁸ And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Salvation is entirely of grace apart from works, yet she has done something to be ready. When the wife made herself ready she prepared herself to be united with Christ. That preparation afforded her the giving of a wedding garment which was "clean" **καθαρός** *katharos* {kath-ar-os'}, which is used of purification by fire, and "white" **λαμπρός** *lampros* {lam-pros'} meaning shining or brilliant. This garment also described as "fine linen" **βύσσινος** *bussinos* {boos'-see-nos} which is a linen that was known to be very costly, delicate, soft, and white. It was made from a species of Egyptian flax called byssus. These fine linens are then referred to as the "righteousness of saints". This righteousness is that which refers to the favorable judgment of God by which he acquits man and declares them acceptable to Him. This righteousness **δικαιώματα** {dia-kai-o-mata'} is a neuter plural. It is referring to things not people. Thus we see the wife made herself ready in preparation at the judgment seat of Christ. It was here her life was evaluated, tried by fire and that which was found to be acceptable was that righteousness she would now be clothed with. She now is fit to appear with the Lord

⁴ In both Ro 14:10 and 2 Co 15:10 the Lord is speaking to believers. The first personal pronoun "we" is used 26 times in 2 Co 5 and always refers to believers "in Christ".

wearing the other reflection of her clean, white, fine righteousness which was only accomplished through obedience and the grace of God.

EARLIEST possible time BEMA could occur

- just immediately following the rapture of believers

In Jesus' parables when he speaks of giving talents \ pounds or what we know as stewardship responsibilities to His servants, he speaks of 'going away'. When He comes back He holds those stewards accountable. This is a *bema* reference of judgment for our current dispensation. (Lk 14:12-14; Re 22: 12)

The time of evaluation, reward, and recompense is to be when He returns. It is in proximity to that event. When the house holder comes to take account of the stewardship of His servants, it is always when he comes back, upon his return.

Christ will judge the living and dead 'at His appearing' (2 Tim 4:1; cf. Mt 16:27; Lk 14:14; 1 Cor 15:23; Rev 22:12).

Based on this we can conclude that the BEMA will conclude during the TRIBULATION (where we will not be on earth) and begin shortly after the RAPTURE. It occurs during the interim between the Rapture of the saints (1 Th 4:13-18) and the descent of the Lord Jesus in glory (Rev 19:11-21).

IX. What will be tried?

1 Corinthians 3:9-12 tells us there is only one foundation which exists whereupon we must build our lives, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “buildeth” and “buildeth thereupon” [ἐποικοδομῶ ep-o-y-kod-om-eh'-o}] requires us to finish the structure upon the foundation which has already been laid. As we make choices in how we live our lives they must be based on the foundation of the living Word so that we live according to His Word. The choices we make and the actions we take will either be based upon Scriptural truths and mandates or they will not. As these choices are made, Paul likens them to varying kinds of building materials.

Contrast the materials, gold, silver, precious stones in opposition to wood, hay and stubble. The first grouping speaks figuratively of that which is permanent which is in contrast to those which perish. It contrasts worthiness to worthlessness, quality to quantity, the Spirit to the flesh, living for eternity to living for a time, that which is done in the will of God to that done in the will of man, and that done for the glory of God versus that done for the glory of man.

Materials Used	Gold, Silver, Precious Stones	Wood, Hay, Stubble
	Permanent	Perishable
	Worthiness	Worthlessness
	Quality	Quantity
	Power of the Spirit	Power of the flesh
	Living for eternity	Living for a time
	In the will of God	In the will of man
	Done for the glory of God	Done for the glory of man

FIG 1.1

3 General areas

1. Our Words – We will be judged even for every idle word
2. Our Works - We will be judged for the Validity and Quality of our works
3. Our Heart – concerning our motives, how and why we did things

5 Specific Areas

1. Faithfulness
2. Acts of Kindness for His people
3. Real Sacrifice
4. Relationship(s) to other believers in the assembly
5. Endurance

Mat 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle **word** that men shall **speak**, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy **words** thou shalt be **justified**, and by thy **words** thou shalt be **condemned**.

- Every word we speak

Object Characterized	Characterization 1	Characterization 2	Reference
Word (3), speak	Justified	Condemned	Mat 12:36
Tongue	Death	Life	Proverbs 18:21
Mouth	Blessing	Cursing	James 3:10
Tongue	Wholesome	Perverseness	Proverbs 15:4
Mouth (2)	Righteous-Life	Violence-Wicked	Proverbs 10:11
Tongue, heart, lips	Choice silver (tongue)	Little worth (heart)	Proverbs 10:20-21

FIG 1:2

1. Faithfulness

Jesus Christ is primarily concerned with our faithfulness. There are three areas singled out:

1. Our respective **positions** in the work of God (1Co 12:4 -6⁵; 1Co 12:11)

⁵ (1)"gifts" given by the Holy Spirit (12:4 **χάρισμα**): descended from *cari*", *grace* which indicates they are bestowed through no merit of our own (see verse 11, 18; 15:10; Ac 20:24; I Pe. 4:10; Rom. 12:5-6)

(2)"administrations" or ministries given by the Lord Jesus (12:5 **διακονία** English *deacon*): The gift is a *service*, a *ministry*. The purpose of the gift is to serve (I Pe. 4:10a, 11a) – not to engage in self-edification (as some propose, as in private worship). The greatest illustration of this gift (AS FOR ALL GIFTS) is Christ, Mt. 20:26-28; Lk. 22:27; Archipus Col 4:17.)

(3)"operations" supplied by God the Father (12:6 **ἐνέργημα** English *energy*): These gifts are energized by the Holy Spirit. These gifts cannot be exercised properly apart from the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, we abuse the gifts.

2. Our **possessions he has afforded us** (Deu 10:14; 1Ch 29:11; Psa 50:10; Joh 1:11; 1 Ti 6:17-19)
3. Our **knowledge of God** through the scriptures **and His will** (Lk 12:41-43; 47-48).

2. Acts of Kindness for His people

This appears to be something that Jesus takes specific and special delight in. Much of the Olivet Discourse is to the Jews. In Mt 25:35-40 Jesus comments that when the following are done to His people it is as if they were done to His person. The Lord takes extreme delight when we do things for folks who cannot do anything back to us in return.

3. Real Sacrifice

That we make as Christians for His name. Not out of our abundance, but out of what we ourselves may need. (Mt 19:29-30). Even to the giving up our rights (1Co 9:1 ff.)

4. Relationship(s) to other believers in the assembly

The greatest amount of scripture is written in this area. Ja 5:9 speaks of groaning against other believers, always complaining, always backstabbing other Christians. This is part of the General Accountability of words. This would also include the way we receive other believers as in Mt 10:40-42. Additionally how we take it upon ourselves to judge others works (Ja 2:13; 4:11-12).

What is the one verse every unbeliever knows? **Matthew 7:1-5** Judge not, that ye be not judged.

5. Endurance

The final area the Lord is interested in is our endurance or our *hupomone*. This is the anchor in the love chapter in 1 Co 13. Love hangs in there, it endures. We are to endure specifically in the areas of Persecution (**Mt 5:12**) and Temptation (**Ja 1:12**).

X. How will the trial be administered?

Our works shall be made manifest, declared and revealed. They shall then be tried by fire (1 Co 3:13-15). When God tests our works and service, only those which have been done according to the Word of God and in the Power of His spirit will be approved and rewarded. We shall then “receive back” reward or loss based upon how we lived the life afforded us and bought with a price. (Col 3:22-24).

Though this is rarely preached and even less frequently received it is nevertheless a *foundational axiom* for Christian living. At the judgment seat of Christ, the one who has done wrong shall “receive back” that service which he improperly ministered.

a. The Account Which We Must Give

We shall stand before the Lord and verbally give an account for our lives. (Ro 14:10-12; He 4:12-13)

b. The Account Which He will Give

Concomitant with the account we must give, the Lord gives his own on our lives and service (2 Co 5:10).

XI. The Loss of Rewards

Loss of Crowns

During the trying process Scripture tells us there will be loss suffered. Initially it may be experienced in the loss of crowns (1 Co 3:15 Re 3:11; 2 Jo 1:8; 2 Ti 2:15). Having no crowns bestowed for unprofitable works is surely a suffering of loss. When we are before our Lord and Savior and we see an opportunity to glorify the Lord for eternity consumed, surely the anguish will be great.

Loss of Authority

In Lk 19-12-27 the parable of the pounds discusses how the believer had his pound taken away from him. This demonstrates how unfaithful believers will be judged and assigned positions with no authority. Having no authority but being present at Christ's rule is a form of tremendous loss.

Loss of Eternal Profit or Advantage

He 13 :17 says it shall be unprofitable for those believers whose spiritual leaders must give an account of them "with grief".

XII. The Administering of Rewards

The Lord's Commendation

Personal commendation and recognition for faithful service (1 Co 4:3-5; 1Pe 1:7; Mt 25:21,23)

Administrative Responsibility

There also exists the possibility of governing authority being granted if one has been found faithful (Lk 19:11-27; 2Ti 2:11-12; Re 2:26-27; 5:10)

The Reaping of Souls

The reward of seeing the souls saved through our ministering of the Great Commission also awaits (Ph 2:16; 1 Th 2:19)

The Crowns

1. The Crown Imperishable (1 Corin. 9:24-27)
2. The Crown of Rejoicing aka The Soulwinners Crown (1 Thes. 2:19-20)
3. The Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:5-8)
4. The Crown of Life aka the Martyrs Crown (James 1:12; Re 2:10)
5. The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:2-4)

The imperishable crown (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

It is given to those who master the old nature. Paul presented this crown as one to be gained only by the successful runner, not by all in the race. It is awarded on the basis of self-control, especially the keeping in control the body from which sin so easily emanates (Rom. 6:6). When Paul wrote First Corinthians, he had still not finished his “race”, which lasts our lifetime. His gaining of the crown was still uncertain; he still risked being disqualified. It was only shortly before his martyrdom that he could declare: “I have finished my course” (2 Tim. 4:7). This crown is given to those who do not look back and allow things to impede their progress (Ph 3:12-14; Lk 9:62; Ep 6:12; Pr 6:6; 1 Peter 1:13)

To live one’s life in self-control, with victory over the sinful passions of the flesh, is surely a great accomplishment worthy of a certain honor being bestowed by God. Let us be spurred by this prospect and not give in to our passions, but instead put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13).

The crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19-20)

This crown is awarded on the basis of fruitful labor for the Lord in the lives of others. According to the context of First Thessalonians Chapter Two, this labor includes the sharing of the gospel (vs. 2,4) and is given to soul winners. Our joy in the next age will be especially magnified if we are those who help others to know the Lord and to grow in Him.

The crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:5-8).

This crown is given to those who love His appearing. Do you yearn for the Lord’s appearing, or are you indifferent? Do you watch for the Lord’s appearing or is His coming just a doctrinal matter to you? Also, in context the matter of the Lord’s appearing was an incentive to Paul for righteous living and proper service (2 Tim. 4:1), and, therefore, he fought the good fight, finished the course and kept the faith (4:7). Based upon Paul’s righteous living, motivated by his love of the Lord’s appearing, he was assured of being awarded a crown of *righteousness* by a *righteous* Judge. All who are living righteously in anticipation of His return will be awarded special position and responsibility in Jesus’ Kingdom.

The crown of life (Jas. 1:12 Rev. 2:10)

This crown is given to those who successfully endure temptation. This age is an age filled with trials and tribulations (Jn. 16:33). We are best by all kinds of difficulties, trials and temptations. We may experience sickness, the death of loved ones, financial challenges, our dealings with difficult people and situations of all types, and even persecution for our faith. The experience of these trials could cause us to lose heart and wane in our love for the Lord and our service to Him. But, amazingly, some believers grow in their love and single-minded devotion to Him in spite of all these things. There is a coming day of reward when Christ will reward all these suffering ones who have remained steadfast. What an encouragement and incentive this should be for believers undergoing tribulation!

This crown is promised to the believer who remains faithful under trial and does not succumb to it. He loves the Lord in spite of his trial and does not become bitter. And it is his love for his Lord that keeps him faithful. It is given to those who master the old nature. (Ja 1:2-4).

The crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

The crown of glory is a reward presented to the genuine, faithful, godly and pure shepherds of the flock. They have a pure desire to see others grow in the Lord. They sacrifice their time, their resources, their energy and even their lives to see believers progress with Christ. They do this out of love, and out of the Lord's will, not out of selfish desires. A special reward of glory awaits them for such a caring life. But, all of those who have claimed to be shepherds, yet do not meet these exacting requirements, will be disqualified.

The Morning Star

The greatest treasure of eternity is to enter into the joy of the Lord where we shall be with Him evermore. (Mt 25:21,23; Re 2:26-28; 22:16; 2Pe 1:19)

XIII. Review: What will be the order of events when the day comes?

1. The resurrection of the dead in Christ in this dispensation (1 Th 4:16-18)
2. The rapture of living saints
3. The entire transformation of our physical bodies and characters concomitant with the rapture or the resurrection of the dead in Christ. (1 Co 15:51-53; 1 Jo 3:2)
4. The summoning of each individual before the seated Christ (1 Co 3:13)
5. We are going to give an account (Mt 12:36-37; Ro 14:12; He 13:17)
6. Simultaneous with our account the lord Jesus is going to give His own account (1 Co 4:5)
7. The application of fire to our works (1 Co 3:13-15)
8. The verdict that Christ will render (Mt 25:21; 1 Co 4:5)
9. The receiving of rewards (Ja 1:12; 1 Co 3:13-15, 4:5; Col 3:22-24)

FIG 1.3

XIV. Practical Application and Sanctification

The *bema* is help for today and hope for tomorrow. The reality of the judgment seat of Christ should be a powerful incentive for believers. Every occasion of life should be lived as if one were standing before the judgment seat at that very moment. Scripture is clear that beginning from the time of our salvation until we are caught up we shall be held accountable for how we used the very breath that was afforded us. (Co 3:23; Lu 12:1-3; Mt 6:3-4, 6, 17:18; 1 Co 3:

2 Peter 3:11-14 ¹¹ Seeing then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, ¹² Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. ¹⁴ Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

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