

EXPOSITION OF REVELATION

“The Bema Seat Judgment of Believers”

When we do a wedding, typically we block off a room where the Bride may change into her wedding gown. She typically gets to the church with her hair in rollers, carrying her gown into this room. Usually she is not trying to look like a gorgeous bride at this point, but when she comes out of that room- she looks beautiful. Now let's suppose for a moment that the Bride arrives to the wedding and goes into the room to change. It now comes time for the wedding march to be played and out she comes- hair in curlers, no make-up, wearing jeans with holes in them and a “T” shirt. Every one turns and looks and is taken back. They expected to see a beautiful bride, but instead they look at a person who doesn't look lovely.

This very scene will occur when believers are judged at the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ. When God first saved a sinner, he did so with the idea of transforming that sinner into becoming a beautiful bride that reflects His glory. But it won't work that way for every believer. Some believers will live their lives for God and be rewarded at this judgment. Others believers will not live their lives for God and will not be rewarded. This will be a very real judgment with some very real consequences.

Since we are in Revelation and we are at the point where John is caught up to heaven, it would be well for us to pause and reflect on this judgment from a Biblical perspective. It is somewhere near this point in Revelation 4, where this judgment occurs.

QUESTION #1- What is the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ?

The Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ is a judgment of a believer's works to determine whether or not one gains eternal reward or loses eternal reward. This is not a judgment about heaven or hell because all who are at this judgment are believers in Jesus Christ and because of that they have been guaranteed everlasting life- John 3:16,18,36.

There are at least seven main differences between salvation offered to an unbeliever and rewards offered to a believer:

- (Difference #1)-** What is offered to an unbeliever is eternal **life**. John 3:16; 4:14
What is offered to the believer are eternal **rewards**. I Cor.4:5
- (Difference #2)-** Salvation is because of **God's** choice. Eph.1:4; James 1:18
Rewards are because of a **believer's** choice. I Cor.9:26-27
- (Difference #3)-** Salvation is a gift of God **apart** from any works. Rom.4:5; Eph.2:8-9
Rewards are gifts of God **solely based** on works. I Cor.3:13-15
- (Difference #4)-** Salvation presupposes all unbelievers are worthy of **wrath**.
Rewards presupposes all believers may be worthy of **rewards**.
- (Difference #5)-** Salvation offers a state of **equality** for all- heavenly citizenship
Rewards offer a state of **inequality** for some- honorable or dishonorable.
- (Difference #6)-** Salvation is given to every unbeliever who **believes**.
Rewards are given only to believers who **behave**.
- (Difference #7)-** Salvation is a **present** possession to everyone who believes in Christ.
Rewards are a **future** remuneration to believers who behave for Christ.

QUESTION #2- What passages in Scripture refer to this judgment?

There are at least twelve passages of Scripture that refer or allude to this judgment:

- 1) **Rom.14:10-** “for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God”
- 2) **I Cor.3:10-15-** believer’s works can be gold, silver, precious stones or wood, hay, straw
- 3) **I Cor.4:1-5-** when the Lord comes He will judge a believer’s work and motives for it
- 4) **I Cor.9:24-27-** run in such a way that you may win the prize and not be disqualified from it
- 5) **II Cor.5:10-** “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...”.
- 6) **I Thess.2:19-** crowns will be given when the Lord returns for N.T. believers
- 7) **II Tim.4:8-** crowns given to believers who love Christ’s appearing
- 8) **Heb.13:17-** An account will be given of a believer’s life that may be profitable or unprofitable
- 9) **James 1:12-** crowns will be given for those who persevere through trials loving Jesus Christ
- 10) **I Pet.5:4-** crowns will be given to those who were good examples when Christ appears
- 11) **II Pet.1:10-11-** one may have an abundant entrance into heaven by developing in godliness
- 12) **II John 8-** One may lose full reward if one does not stay close to the Word of God

QUESTION #3- When does this judgment of New Testament believers take place?

Although it is not specifically stated, the most logical conclusion is that it will occur **just after the Rapture.**

In Revelation 22:12, a text specifically addressed to the “churches”(22:16), it is stated that when Christ returns He will give rewards to “every” man.

We also know from Hebrew 13:17 that there will be some form of leadership assessment concerning the flock, which would indicate the entire flock is present.

We conclude this judgment will occur shortly after Christ raptures His church. It is assumed that because the 24 Elders of Revelation 4:4 have golden crowns on their heads- “stephanos”(crowns of victory), not “diadems”(crowns of royalty), that the judgment has already taken place, which would mean it occurred just after the command to “come up here.”

QUESTION #4- Where does this judgment of N.T. believers take place?

The specific place for this judgment is said to be in Romans 14:10 “the judgment seat of God” and in II Corinthians 5:10 it is called “the judgment seat of Christ.”

The Greek word for “judgment seat” is “Bema”(literally βημα pronounced “bay-ma). This particular word was used to describe a raised place or platform on which a ruler or judge sat when making important judicial speeches or decisions(Acts 12:21; 18:12-17).

Those who have traveled to ancient Corinth and seen the archaeological excavations, have all seen the famous “judgment seat” which was located in the town square. It was a place where public rewards were given for victory at the Isthmian games, and also a place where public punishments were administered.

We may assume that Jesus Christ will judge every believer from His perched enthroned position in heaven. This will be a very sacred, serious, intimidating and judicial judgment.

QUESTION #5- Who is at this Bema Seat Judgment?

This judgment is only for New Testament believers. The Apostle Paul is very clear to point out that this judgment only relates to **those who have built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ**(I Cor.3:11-12).

QUESTION #6- What is being judged at this judgment?

What is specifically being judged at this judgment is the nature of a believer's life **after** salvation. The purpose of this judgment is to determine whether or not the believer invested himself in a life that God would deem as worthy or worthless. This will be a review of everything the believer was involved with during his/her Christian life. Those who deserve praise will receive it and those who don't deserve praise won't get it.

QUESTION #7- What measurements will the Lord use in evaluating our works at His Judgment Seat?

Another way to ask this question is what works will be judged to determine whether we receive or lose rewards? Paul says every believer should examine his own works in view of judgment- Gal.6:4, so a logical question is what works are we to examine?

(Work Judgment Area #1)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **works**.

This fact is plainly stated in different passages that have to do with a judgment of the believer- I Corinthians 3:13; II Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 2:23. There are two prerequisites for works that will be rewarded by Jesus Christ.

Prerequisite #1- The works must be in accordance with revealed **Scripture**. II Tim.2:5
The more one knows, the more accountable one is.

Prerequisite #2- The works must be done with the motive of **honoring** God. I Cor.4:5; 10:31
Mt.6:1-4; Col.3:22-25. This was even Jesus' goal-Jn.12:28; 14:13; 17:4.

(Work Judgment Area #2)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **words**.

There are many texts that indicate Jesus Christ will hold a person accountable for what he/she said about others and to others and about Him and His word(Mt.12:36-37; Lk.12:2-3; Gal.5:19-20; Eph.4:29-32; James 3:1).

(Work Judgment Area #3)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **worship**.

The writer of Hebrews really zeroes in on the fact that in order for one to earn rewards, there cannot be a forsaking of fellowship with God's people at church(Heb.10:25)and there will be some leadership assessment that will be given concerning one's faithfulness(Heb.13:17). No one will be highly rewarded who did not take God's church seriously. Worship must be decent, orderly, reverent. We will be held accountable for our place and performance in worship.

(Work Judgment Area #4)- A believer will be judged on the basis of conformity to God's **will**.

How a believer responded to God's will determines whether one receives or loses rewards.

There are two aspects to the will of God:

Aspect #1- God's will is specifically revealed in **writing**, I Thess.4:3 "this is the will of God"

Aspect #2- God's will is personally revealed in **Spirit leading**.

Various personal situations arise in which we may either yield to the

Holy Spirit or we may grieve Him(Eph.4:30) or quench Him(I Thess.5:19).

Certainly our response to God's will in these situations will be a basis for judgment.

The next time the Spirit is at war with your flesh, remind yourself that you can earn rewards by yielding to the Spirit or lose rewards by yielding to your flesh.

(Work Judgment Area #5)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **witnessing**

Certainly our willingness to witness for Jesus Christ will be a basis for reward or loss. In fact, Jesus told the Philadelphian church that they would be rewarded because they did not deny His name- **Rev.3:8**. Those who testify Jesus is God, Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and Jesus is the only Savior will never regret it the day they get before Him.

(Work Judgment Area #6)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **thoughts**.

There are many texts of Scripture which instruct us that Jesus Christ does examine our thoughts- **Heb.4:12-13; Rev.2:23**. This is precisely why the Apostle Paul was continually seeking to bring every thought into captivity in his own life(II Cor.10:5) and why he challenged believers to let their minds think on good things(Philippians 4:8). This will be a critical area of judgment for the believer. Award winners will focus their minds on things right, pure, lovely, good, any thing praise worthy.

(Work Judgment Area #7)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **conscience**.

Paul used his own conscience as a basis for judging himself, but still realized God would judge this area- **I Cor.4:4; II Cor.5:11**.

Every believer has a conscience and a determining factor of rewards will be how that believer responded to his/her conscience when under conviction. If one made adjustments and lived life with a good, clean, true conscience, he will be rewarded. If one lived life with a conscience that continually convicted him, he will lose rewards.

(Work Judgment Area #8)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **self-discipline**.

Paul discusses this very issue in I Corinthians 9:27 concerning himself. He says that he kept himself disciplined in the things of God so that he would not forfeit his rewards. Those who choose to live an undisciplined life and continually yield to the flesh, will forfeit rewards.

(Work Judgment Area #9)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **money**.

What we did for God and how we gave to God will in part determine treasures in heaven. Those who sacrificially gave to God's work will gain reward- I Tim.6:17-19; Gal.6:6-10. God not only keeps track of what was given, but the sacrifice behind what was given(Mark 12:41-44; Lk.21:1-4).

(Work Judgment Area #10)- A believer will be judged on the basis of his/her **faithfulness** until the end of one's Christian life.

There are many texts that instruct us that one's faithfulness will be assessed one day- Mt.24:45; Mt.25:23; Lk.16:10; I Cor.4:2. What is also revealed is that **in order to qualify for rewards one must be faithful until the end of one's Christian life**- Rev.1:10; I Cor.9:24; II Tim.4:7.

One who was at one time faithful and then now no longer is, will forfeit rewards. In a marathon, in order to receive the medal, one must finish. If you start and quit, you do not get the medal. So it will be with the rewards for believers- they must finish faithful to the Lord to qualify for awards. Frankly, many former S.S. teachers, board members, church workers will lose rewards because they quit.

These are ten areas of judgment that will show up at our Bema Seat Judgment.

QUESTION #8- What will be the outcome of the judgment of the New Testament believers?

As we have already said, one will either gain or lose rewards at this judgment. In logistically analyzing this, there are at least **six losses for the unfaithful believer** and **seven rewards for one faithful**:

(Category #1)- The losses for unfaithful believers at the Bema Seat:

Loss #1- There will be a loss of verbal praise and there will be some verbal reprimand from Jesus Christ. Mt.25:24-30; I John 2:28; Heb.13:17

For one faithful, there is the expectation of verbal praise and honor from Jesus Christ- I Cor.4:5; I Pet.1:6-7; Jn.12:26. For one not faithful there is no such expectation.

Loss #2- There will be a loss of confidence when one faces Jesus Christ and a real shame and disgrace before Jesus Christ. I John 2:28

This will be a time when one will remember opportunities wasted, admonitions rejected and the word of God blatantly disobeyed. In fact, the writer of Hebrews referred to this moment and said one could throw away confidence and great reward(Heb.10:26-35).

Loss #3- There will be a loss of responsibility during the Millennium. Mt.25:21,23

There is a promise for faithful believers that they will share in the co-reign of Jesus Christ in some form of management capacity- I Cor.6:1-3; Mt.19:27-29; 25:20-30; Lk.19:17-24; 22:27-30. It will not be so for one unfaithful(Mt.5:19). He will not be highly ranked in the Millennium.

Loss #4- There will be a loss of full joy of the Millennium. Mt.25:21,23

The millennium will be a joyous time on earth- Romans 14:17. Jesus Christ will be reigning in Jerusalem and Israel will flourish. The believer who is not faithful will not experience this at the ultimate joyful level.

Loss #5- There will be a loss of abundance of an inheritance in the Millennium. II Pet.1:5-11*

The unfaithful believer will not have an abundance of treasures in heaven nor crowns of victory(Mt.6:19-21).

Loss #6- There will be a loss of ability to fellowship with Jesus Christ and perhaps even to see Him personally during the Millennium. Heb.12:13-17

(Category #2)- The rewards for faithful believers at the Bema Seat.

Reward #1- A reward of verbal praise from Jesus Christ. I Cor.4:5; I Pet.1:7

Reward #2- A reward of legitimate confidence when one appears before Jesus Christ. I Jn.2:28

Reward #3- A reward of great management responsibility during the Millennium. Rev.2:26; Mt.25:21,23; Lk.19:12-19; Rev.20:4a

Reward #4- A reward of experiencing full joy during the Millennium. Mt.25:21,23; Rev.2:17

Reward #5- A reward of an abundant inheritance in the Millennium. II Pet.1:11

Reward #6- A reward of having personal fellowship and visibility of Jesus Christ during the Millennium. Heb.12:13-17

Reward #7- A reward of various victor's crowns that display honor for various things:

- 1) Incorruptible or Imperishable Crown= one disciplined I Cor.9:25
- 2) Influence Crown= given for influencing others for God Phil.4:1
- 3) Rejoicing Crown= given for evangelistic work- I Thess.2:2,13-14, 19*
- 4) Righteous Crown= given to one pursuing Biblical righteousness-II Tim.4:8
- 5) Life Crown= given to one faithful through severe trials-James 1:12; Rev.2:10
- 6) Glory Crown= given to faithful leaders of a flock- I Pet.5:4
- 7) Revelation Crown= give to one who carefully guarded God's word- Rev.3:11

The Bema Seat Judgment will feature all of this. We who know the Lord will face this judgment and it is coming soon. Wise are those who examine their lives to remain faithful until the end. When our name is called we will be summoned to the Bema Seat, how will we look?