

# THE BEMA

## (bringing to light the things now hidden in darkness)

### Key question

What is the nature of the believer's judgment in the after life?

### Key text

### I Corinthians 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.”

### Key Definition

### The Judgment Seat of Christ

Every believer will face a judgment after death that is not related to the eternal destiny of the believer but rather to the rewards or loss of rewards that are commensurate with ministry works in this life.

### Introduction

1. Every person will be judged by God.
2. The “bema” (meaning “steps”) was the seat of civil judgment in ancient cities like Corinth (Acts 12:21; 18:12-17). Paul used it as a metaphor in teaching the church about the accounting that every believer would have to give to Christ at the end of the age.
3. There are two distinct judgments in the Bible.
  - a. **The Great White Throne.**
    1. It is for nonbelievers and is concerned with eternal destiny (heaven or hell).
    2. Rev.20:11-13
    3. “The books” containing a record of works will be evaluated. Rev.20:12
    4. “The goats” of Matt.25 are the focus.
  - b. **The Bema**

1. It is for believers and is concerned with disclosure of ministry fruit.
2. Rom.5:10-11, I Cor.3:11-15, II Cor.5:10-11
3. “The book of life” is in view.
4. “The sheep” of Matt.25 are the focus.

**A. How does the Bema relate to justification by faith?**

1. **Every person is responsible to give an account to God of his or her moral conduct in this life.** Rom.2:3-10
  - a. This accounting will include a person’s thoughts, words, and deeds in this life. Rom.2:16
  - b. The standard of judgment will be God’s holiness, not man’s relative righteousness.
2. **Every person is guilty and cannot give a good accounting to God.** Rom.3:9-18
  - a. Eternal life is available (hypothetically) to anyone who is righteous.
  - b. All have sinned, however, and fall short of God’s glory. Rom.3:23
3. **The gospel included the fact that Christ has received the wrath of God’s judgment on Himself in the place of many.** Rom.5:6-11
  - a. The cross was an act of divine judgment. Col.2:13-15
  - b. Christ’s death was a substitutionary sacrifice. Gal.3:13; I Pet.2:24; 3:18; II Cor.5:21
4. **All who are “in Christ” receive the benefits of His suffering and thus escape the day of judgment.** Rom.8:1-2
  - a. All who believe on Christ Jesus are “in Him”. Rom.3:21-26
  - b. True believers will never have to face the judgment of heaven and hell because Christ has faced it for them. Jn.5:24; Rom.8:1; 5:9
5. **All who are not “in Christ” will face the day of judgment.** Rev.20:11-15
  - a. They will be judged on the basis of their own merits. Matt.16:27; Rev.22:12
  - b. They will be judged also on their attitude toward Christ. Jn.3:18; 12:48; Heb.10:26-31
  - c. This judgment will take place at the end of time. Rev.20:11-15
6. **Although it is true that those “in Christ” will never face God’s wrath because of Christ’s sacrifice, it is not to be concluded that they will escape other aspects of God’s DISCIPLINE or DISCLOSURE.**
  - a. There is a judgment that is temporal (in this life) that represents a form of discipline. **Gal.6:8** “For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.”
    - 1) Individually
      - a) A form of discipline for growth. **Heb.12:3-15**; Jn.15:1-3; II Cor.12:1-10
      - b) It can be a removal from usefulness. Jn.15:5-9; Matt.5:13; Lk.8:18; **I Cor.5:5**; Heb.6:7-8
      - c) It can mean physical death. I Jn.5:16; I Cor.11:32; **Acts 5:1-11**
    - 2) Corporately **Rev.2:1-7**
  - b. There is also a reckoning for believers that will reveal the nature of their faithfulness. We will look at this more fully below.

NOTE: It is perhaps helpful to make a distinction between

**DAMNATION-Judgment** (heaven or hell),  
**DISCLOSURE-Judgment** (truth or error) and  
**DISCIPLINE-Judgment** (love or neglect).

The book of Romans chapter 2-3 deals with DAMNATION-Judgment.

7. The following are a number of points which naturally follow if there is indeed a distinction between eternal salvation and eternal rewards: (Bob Wilkin)
  - Believers can and sometimes do fall away.
  - All will not have an equal experience in the kingdom. Some will have more abundant lives than others.
  - Salvation is a gift, but rewards are earned.
  - Salvation can't be lost, but rewards can be.
  - Assurance of salvation is absolute, but assurance of rewards is not absolute.
  - There is no future judgment of believers to determine their eternal destiny. There is a future judgment of believers to determine the quality of their eternal experience.
  - Salvation (justification) is a present reality. Rewards are a future promise.

**B. Four central texts.**

1. **Rom.14:10-12** “10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For **we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God.** 11 For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ 12 So then **each one of us shall give account of himself to God.**”
  - a. **“the judgment-seat of God”** is not a “damnation-judgment” situation, but rather a “disclosure-judgment” situation. The issue is not God’s rejection or acceptance of the person, but rather the person’s faithfulness being made “manifest to God” or revealed for what it really was “in the body” (not positionally “in Christ”).
  - b. **“every tongue shall give praise to God”** My sense is that for those works which were according to the flesh, there will be a great appreciation for God’s grace in forgiving, and for those works that were according to the Spirit, there will be a great appreciation for God’s grace in enabling. But the truth will be made manifest.
2. **II Cor.5:10-11** 10“For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may be **recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done**, whether good or bad. 11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”
  - a. **“we must all appear before”** — Here again we read that every believer will stand before (not beside) God to be judged. The structure and content of these verses resist any attempt to avoid the fact that we will be judged. We need not conclude that the judgment involved will be one that leaves us feeling rejected or proud, but rather in awe of God’s grace.
  - b. **“recompensed”** or receiving that which is “according to” what was practiced in this life (whether good or bad). This will involve gifts that will magnify God’s power in us or His mercy toward us.

3. **I Cor.3:11-15** 11“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 **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.** 14 If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall **receive a reward.** 15 If any man’s work is burned up, **he shall suffer loss;** but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.”
  - a. **“work”** can refer to the EFFORT of the minister or the FRUIT of the ministry. If the latter, then we could say that “in time, the trials of life will indicate whether or not one’s disciples were grounded in eternal truth or something less. However, verses 14-15 seem to indicate that EFFORT is in view here, as “suffering loss yet being saved . . . through fire” does not easily fit with the idea that one’s disciples might not pan out.
  - a. **“rewards”** and **“loss”** may refer to “crowns” or something else — it is not clear.
  - b. My personal sense (a theory) is that our “wood, hay, and stubble” (works of the flesh) will be exposed as our loss but to God’s praise as we see the full impact of the cross on our sin. Like wise our “good works” (gold, silver, precious stones) will be trophies of the power of God’s Spirit and grace working through us. We will worship from both the ashes of our failures and from the triumphs of our victories. In this way, the judgment is real and so is heaven.
4. **I Cor.4:3-6** “But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both **bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts;** and then each man’s praise will come to him from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive: But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”
  - a. Here it is clear that although we cannot clearly know the motives behind another’s actions, God does know and one day will judge motives.
  - b. We also see here that one day all deeds and motives will be exposed.

#### C. **Will there be varying rewards in heaven?**

1. No one will be disappointed or experience sorrow in heaven — Rev.21:4.
2. I Cor.3:12-15 suggests that there will be degrees of reward or blessing but we do not believe there will be a spiritual class system in heaven where some will be thankful and proud of their faithfulness in this life while others will be ashamed and mourn the fact that they were not.
3. The nature of rewards in heaven. (Note that we do not know a lot about what this might mean in terms that find parallels in this life.)
  - a. Revelation suggests **special privileges** - to eat of the tree of life (2:7), given some of the hidden manna (2:17), authority over the nations (2:26), be a pillar in the temple of God (3:12).
  - b. **Special honors** - crowns that we will lay at the feet of Jesus (Rev.4:10-11)

1. The crown of rejoicing = for those who bring converts to the faith. I Thess.2:19-20
  2. The crown of glory = for those who serve as faithful elders. I Pet. 5:1-4; Jn.17:22; Heb.2:9
  3. The crown of righteousness = for those who eagerly await Christ's appearing. II Tim.4:6-8
  4. The crown of life = for those who endure sufferings associated with temptation. Jas.1:12; Rev.2:10
  5. The crown of mastery = for those who run the race successfully. I Cor.9:25
- c. **Special responsibilities** - rule over the earth in the millennial kingdom and beyond. I Cor.6:2-3
4. Although we do not have a clear picture explaining the nature and experience of believer's rewards in heaven, we might conclude that the rewards will not result in a class system but rather consist of differing experiences and expressions of God's grace.
  5. For the faithfulness that we have expressed in this life by the power of Christ's Spirit we will receive rewards (crowns) that we will present to God as an expression of awe and worship for his power through us. For the faithlessness that we have expressed in this life we will suffer loss (in that it will be removed) but will nonetheless be in awe of God's grace in covering our sins. We will have differing perspectives from which we worship based on our experiences in this life.
  6. We do not work for rewards in this life so as to selfishly be better off or better than others in heaven. We work for rewards as an expression of love for God, understanding that the rewards or loss of rewards will be laid at the feet of Christ in worship of His power and grace.
  7. Note that John 10:10 suggests that it is possible to experience differing degrees of "eternal life." This may help us understand the meaning of "sowing to the spirit" so as to reap "eternal life" in Gal.6:8.

The Judgment Seat of Christ  
**The Bema of Christ**  
 2 Cor. 5.10, 1 Cor. 3.11-15  
**Five Crowns**



**Endure**  
The Crown of Life  
 (Rev 2.10)  
 Awarded to those  
 who are faithful  
 unto death.  
 The Martyr's Crown



**Disciple**  
The Crown of Glory  
 (1 Pet 5.2-4)  
 Awarded for feeding  
 and being an example  
 to the Flock.



**Expect**  
The Crown of Righteousness  
 (2 Timothy 4.8)  
 Awarded to those who  
 love His appearing.



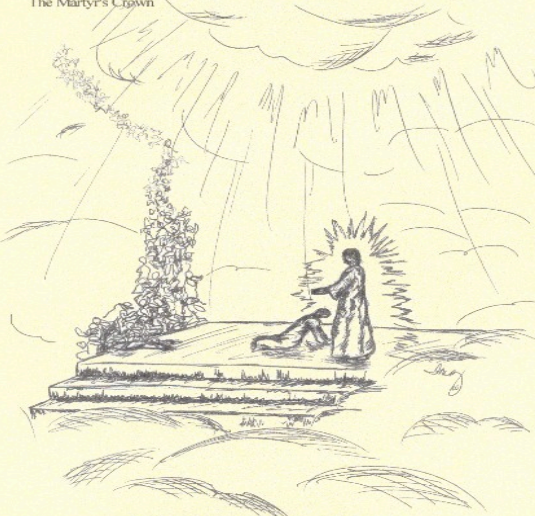
**Discipline**  
The Incorruptable Crown  
 (1 Cor 9.25-27)  
 Awarded for striving for  
 the Mastery.  
 The Victor's Crown



**Evangelize**  
The Crown of Rejoicing  
 (1 Thes. 2.19-20)  
 Awarded to those who  
 Win the lost to Christ  
 The Soul-winners Crown

**Some will  
 suffer loss.**

**Some will  
 earn rewards.**



**Personal**  
To eat of the  
 Tree of Life  
 (Rev 2.7)  
 The result of  
 a heart full of  
 love for Christ



**Passion**  
A Throne Given  
 (Rev 3.21)  
 The result of a  
 fervent and  
 pure heart.



**Persevere**  
Not hurt of the  
 Second Death  
 (Rev 2.11)  
 The result of a  
 sound witness.



**Prove**  
A New Name Given  
 (Rev 3.12)  
 The result of  
 holding to the  
 things of God.

**Seven Privileges**



**Persist**  
The Stone with  
 a New Name  
 (Rev 2.17)  
 The result of holding  
 to an equal Body.



**Protect**  
The Morning Star  
 and Authority  
 (Rev 2.26-29)  
 The result of avoiding  
 the world's lies.



**Pure**  
Divine Identification  
 (Rev 3.5)  
 The result of a  
 pure walk.





The Bema at ancient Corinth

### **Questions that you should be able to answer.**

#### **1. Specific facts you should know.**

- a. What is the Bema?
- b. How will the judgment of believers differ from that of nonbelievers?

#### **2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.**

- a. How are we to understand the judgment of believers in light of justification by faith?
- b. What is the meaning of rewards in I Cor.3:13-15?

#### **3. Questions you should wrestle with.**

- a. In what sense is this judgment a motivation for faithfulness in this life?
- b. What is the significance of the crowns that are prepared for faithful believers?