

## **Will Christians Be Judged for Their Sins at the Judgment Seat of Christ?**

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Leonard Ravenhill gave this illustration of his boyhood days: "I want to tell you a story about when I was a young boy going to school. You know, I didn't mind school too much, but in those days I was very envious of the school Captain. His name was Renton, and he sat just across the aisle from me. He was the best soccer player in the school and that's what I wanted to be. He was the best at cricket, and I liked cricket. He was the best runner we had, and I liked running. He was not only an excellent athlete, but a very good artist as well. And on top of all that, he was the smartest guy in the whole school.

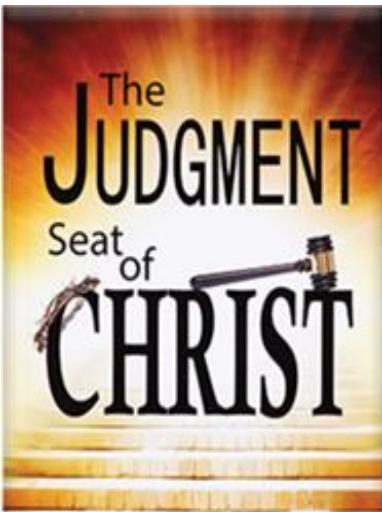
"If I could ever save up my stomachaches, I'd save them until the day before the final exam. But my mother was smart. She knew I was saving them up. I don't know how she knew, but she always did. I'd get up that morning and say, "Oh mother, I don't feel good at all. I think I should stay home today." But she'd always say, "You can stay home tomorrow - but not today." But staying home tomorrow wouldn't do me any good because today was the day of the final exam. Today was the day of judgment!

"I know Renton never felt like that because whenever we had a test, as soon as the questions were put down on the board, he would get his paper and dash through them. He was through the first two or three subjects before I'd even gotten the thing read. He and another fellow used to say, "Oh boy, exams!" They knew they'd be first and second in the class when the grades came out, and so they were excited about taking the test. Final exams didn't scare them. These boys were always at the top. They were not afraid of the Day of Judgment. They were not afraid - because they were prepared for it."

The Bible speaks of a coming final exam and how we need to be prepared for this day as God's saints. This is the day of the Judgment Seat of Christ which is also referred to as the Bema Seat of Christ. The Greek word "bema" comes from the word translated "judgement" in 2 Corinthians 5:10. The Bema was a raised platform in Greek towns where formal speeches were made, or decisions handed down by rulers (Matt. 25:10; 27:19; Acts 12:21; 18:12). It was also the place where the awards were given out to the

winners in the annual Olympic Games. Since this was a "rewards platform" in sporting contests, some claim the "bema" is only a place for rewards and not of judgment. But this denies what the Bible teaches and the very meaning of the word.

When both meanings of this word are taken together, we discover that the Bema or Judgment Seat of Christ will be a tribunal of judgment, examination, and reward. Jesus will decide how a child of God has lived and what kind of reward he will receive.



The Judgment Seat of Christ occurs in three places: Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10--4:5; and 2 Corinthians 5:10. We do know that only Church-age saints will appear at this judgment, as shown in 2 Corinthians 5:10, which states: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." It is Church saints who have the unique position of being "in Christ" (1 Thess. 4:16) which are resurrected and raptured to this Judgment Seat. Paul was addressing the Church saints in the epistles and therefore this is a judgment designed for us who are part of the

Church. The Judgment Seat of Christ is a family matter that pertains only to God's saints. It has nothing to do with unbelievers.

This "judgment seat" is separate event from the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) as we will see in our next point. Only unbelievers appear before the Great Throne Judgment or tribunal while only believers appear before the Bema. The fact that we will all "appear" (2 Cor. 5:10) before this judgment (bema) means that not one of God's children can opt out of this time of inspection or judgment.

Actually, it is not just a matter of appearing there (being present), but of being made manifest. The word "appear" means to make manifest or become visibly known and envisions the time when our entire lives will be examined as to their words and deeds.

Philip E. Hughes writes:

"To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward façade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one's character"

Not only is the Judgment Seat of Christ motivational, it is also a revelation, which means that it will reveal the true character of the believer's life and service. Appearing before this Bema Seat means that a general sweep of our lives will be taken into consideration and that we will gain or lose reward based upon the performance of our Christian living. The judgment seat of Christ is a time of revelation.

In this future day, the full truth about our lives, character, and deeds will be made clear to each individual believer. The phrase "that every one may receive the things done in his body" (2 Cor. 5:10) stresses the personal nature of the believer's judgment. It boils down to an individual judgment. It will not be a collective, general, and generic judgment of all God's people. In this day, we will discover the real verdict of our personal living, ministry and motives in serving the Lord. All hypocrisy and pretense will be stripped away at this time and all the fleshly and temporal things we have did which have no eternal significance will vanish like wood, hay, and stubble (1 Cor. 3:12). Only those things which we have done that have eternal value and significance will remain and result in reward. We will study about this later.

Within the church today there exists considerable confusion and debate regarding the exact nature of the examination at the Judgment Seat of Christ which is the time when God's New Testament saints (Christians) stand before Jesus Christ as their Judge. What will be the nature of this judgment and how will Christians be judged? Will this examination be a time of legal judgment for our sins, a time of punishment, fear, and confession of our sins? Will it be a time of remorse and regret for our sins? Or might it be only a time of joy and reward without any allusion to our past sins and failures.

Some will tell you that Christians will come under the scrutiny of Christ's judgment for the sins they have committed throughout their entire Christian lives. Others will tell you that it's only our unconfessed sins that will be brought before us on this judgment day. In other words, Christians will have their sins appear before them and they will need to give an account for these particular sins on this day of judgment. Many Christians seem to think that some type of giant screen will be made visible at this examination and all of our sins will be paraded before our memories and we will see our sins visibly laid out before us.

Here is my general conclusion which will be explained in this study:

- Since Christ paid the full penalty of judgment for our sins, we can never face our sins in judgment (Rom. 8:1). This means the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place that determines our salvation. It also means that our grace relationship with Christ (Eph. 2:8-9) is not affected in any way by this judgment. We will never be banished from Christ temporarily or eternally to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ paid the total penalty on the cross (John 19:30) experiencing separation from the Father, so that in the next life we will never be separated from His presence. This separation is reserved only for unbelievers (Matt. 8:12; 22:14; 25:30, 46; Rev. 20:11-15).
- The focus and primary purpose of this judgment is to distribute rewards to God's saints (1 Cor. 3:8; 9:27; Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 John 2:8). It involves the expression of Christ's love and goodness toward His Church in rewarding them for eternity (Ps. 34:8). For this reason, the focus and experience will not be upon confession of sins, Christ's rebuke, verbal disciplinary judgment, and chastisement for a misspent life.
- The loss of reward is the payment that we receive for not being a faithful servant and steward (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:15). This loss of reward will be heart-wrenching and difficult to pass through, knowing that we could have gained more reward, which would have enabled us to glorify Christ in a greater way throughout eternity (1 Pet. 5:4; Col. 3:4; Dan. 12:3).
- There will be a mixture of sorrow and joy, regret and rejoicing, sadness and gladness. But any sorrow will quickly be turned into joy when we see Jesus in our glorified bodies and begin to enjoy our eternal state, a time when there will be no more tears and when all the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

“We shall see His lovely face some bright golden morning,  
When the clouds have rifted and the shades have flown;  
Sorrow will be turned to joy, heartaches gone forever;  
No more night, only light, when we see His face.

God shall wipe away all tears some bright golden morning,  
When the journey's ended, and the course is run;  
No more crying, pain or death in that home of gladness,  
Trials cease, all is peace, when we see His face."

What do the Scriptures teach about the nature of this future judgment? Let's begin by reflecting on the righteous Judge, Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ will be front and center at this time of judgment, a judgment that all Christians will pass through someday.

2 Timothy 4:8 declares:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

When Andrew Bonar made his first and only visit to America, they gave him a farewell meeting in New York. Several men eulogized him, and one man in closing said, "Think of the 'crown of righteousness,' which is laid up for Andrew Bonar, 'which the Lord, the righteous judge,' shall give him in that day." Dear old Andrew Bonar walked to the front of the platform and held up his hands toward Heaven and completed Paul's saying to Timothy: "and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

When our lives are in order at Christ's return, we will have a special love for Christ's appearing for we will be ready for our day of review and reward. It would seem that if this is a judgment seat, then there are both losses and joys. The losses will result in a certain amount of sorrow and regret, but the rewards will certainly bring joy and gladness to our hearts. This examination will be a time of mixed emotions.

Before getting into the details of this judgment, we can conclude that Jesus Christ, as the righteous Judge, will accurately assess our earthly lives and bring the correct judgment regarding our Christian life, as it relates to faithful versus unfaithful service and stewardship living.

Paul Benware correctly observes:

"The evaluation will be absolutely fair, accurate, and complete ... No believer will be able to say on that day, 'Oh Lord, if only I had known what you wanted me to do and how you wanted me to live!' If the believer has lived and served according to the Word of God, he will be given reward by

the Lord. If he has not lived and served according to the Word, he will experience the loss of reward.”

Jesus Christ will be the righteous Judge of this tribunal and reward ceremony. This means His decisions will be unbiased, perfect, and in accordance with His righteous character.

In this study we will discover one primary conclusion. Believers will not be judged as sinners but as servants at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This truth is revealed by several Biblical facts.

### **I. Christ was judged in the believer’s place.**

There are three major truths that we must understand in order to establish a starting ground for this study. First, Christ already bore the judgment for our sins (1 Peter 3:18, 4:1; Gal. 3:10,13). Christ already took our sins upon Himself and suffered the judicial and righteous judgment of God on our behalf because of these very sins. For this reason, we will never be judged for our sins at any time in the future.

Second, Christ took all of our sins away through His death on the cross (Heb. 9:26; 1 John 3:5). As our substitute and sacrifice for sin, Jesus has erased all our sins before God’s presence providing us with complete acquittal or forgiveness in His presence. If God declares that Christ took away all our sins and then declares us legally acquitted and righteous in His presence. then there can be no sins brought against us at the Bema Seat of Christ (Romans 8:33-34). We stand before God as people who are cleared of all charges (Romans 8:1).

Third, and in summary, the believer stands forgiven forever (Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, 1 John 1:7); faultless forever before God’s throne (Jude 24) and righteous forever in God’s sight (2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Cor. 1:30, Rom. 4:1-5) through the work of Jesus Christ.

This means that the legal side of our judgment has been settled in the courtroom of God’s presence. The verdict of the believer’s sinful case is, “Not guilty!” Thank the Lord for such amazing and wonderful grace!

“And now for me He stands  
Before the Father's throne  
He shows His wounded hands  
And names me as His own!”

How very wonderful and reassuring! But how does the believer's state of forgiveness and acquittal before God relate to the Judgment Seat of Christ? In this coming day of judgment (the Bema), the believer will not be judicially sentenced by God as a sinner and cannot suffer spiritual separation from God for his sins. There will be no weighing scale exposing the amount of our wicked deeds in order to determine who is saved and who will be condemned for their sins in judgment. This judgment has nothing to do with our salvation, since the question of our salvation was settled upon the cross, when Jesus was judged in our place. In dying for us, He provided the legal ground of our eternal acquittal and justification before God (a legal declaration of righteousness in God's presence) and gave us the promise of eternal life (Romans 3:24; 6:23).

How can God bring us into a time of actual judgment for our sins and failures in life, with the prospect of being separated from His presence, when God said that He will remember our sins no more (Heb. 10:17) and bury them in the deepest depths of the sea (Micah 7:19)?

“You ask me why I'm happy so I'll just tell you why,  
Because my sins are gone;  
And when I meet the scoffers who ask me where they are,  
I say, "My sins are gone.

They're underneath the blood on the cross of Calvary,  
As far removed as darkness is from dawn;  
In the sea of God's forgetfulness, that's good enough for me,  
Praise God, my sins are gone!”

Since Christ faced our sins in judgment and erased all our sins, we will never face them in actual judgment and fear God's wrath to be meted out upon our lives. No legal or judicial records of our sins are kept by God in order to expose us as a sinner worthy of judgment. Never again will our sins be brought against us to condemn us to God's eternal wrath and judgment (John 5:24). Never again will we face our sins in a future tribunal of judgment to determine our eternal destiny. Never could we face our sins in

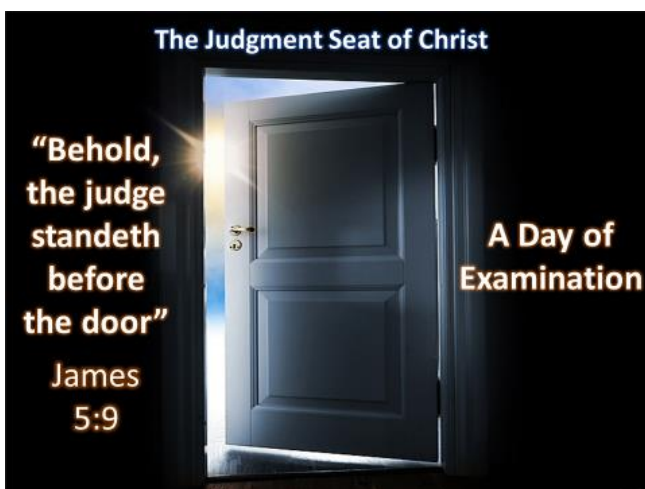
judgment since Christ faced them in judgment for us and paid the penalty in full on our behalf (John 19:30).

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not be judicially punished, disciplined, or condemned because of our sins. The Bema is not a judgment associated with God's wrath but His goodness. It is not a judgment to determine our regeneration but our reward. It's not a time of retribution but recompense.

We must remember that the overall tenor of this judgment is not one of condemnation but commendation for a life of service and living rendered unto God (1 Cor. 3:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:10). Many Christians agree that we will not face eternal condemnation for our sins at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but they maintain that we will need to confess all of our sins before Christ which have been revealed to us at this time of this examination (2 Cor. 5:10). However, this conclusion misses the stated purpose of this judgment which is one of reward (1 Cor. 3:8; 9:27; Phil. 3:14; 2 Tim. 4:8; 2 John 2:8; Rev. 22:12). The inward revelation that is given to us of our record of service and overall life of stewardship (the good and the bad) is not designed to evoke a sudden confession of untold billions of Christians, and it certainly will not include the fear of disciplinary judgments and other forms of chastening from God.

James 5:9 declares:

"Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door."



Yes, there will be a judgment and assessment of our lives that results in God's sentence or verdict of how we have actually lived as His servant and steward. The mention of "lest ye be condemned" (James 5:9) does not refer to our sentence to hell and damnation for our sins (John 3:18; 5:24). It refers to God's righteous judgment regarding our life as a steward.



It's Christ's final assessment of our earthly life as a Christian (James 3:1). If we are caught grumbling, complaining, and holding grudges against God's people, then we will be found and judged as living in an unfaithful manner at the time of His return. This type of unfaithful living will result in a loss of reward and will be part of the general assessment that Jesus makes of our Christian lives. This once again reminds us to live faithfully, doing what we know is pleasing to God, in light of this future examination. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a day of *reckoning* in relation to our sins but a day of *reward* for serving the Lord. Dear friend, get busy, get living, get going, get serving, get unretired, get spiritual, get real, get awake, get on fire, get moving, get looking, get loving, get running, get fueled up, get out of your chair, get motivated, get excited, get smart and whatever you do – get started today in doing it! For Jesus is coming!

James reminds us of the old saying: "Here comes the judge!" Yes, Jesus will be our Judge on this day, but our condemnation is not that of a sinner waiting to face God's wrath and punishment because of our sins but a servant awaiting Christ's assessment of the level of our faithfulness. Christ will properly evaluate our lifelong performance as a Christian and this will result in loss of reward (2 Cor. 5:10; 2 John 2:8). What we "receive" (2 Cor. 5:10) when we are judged and sentenced at the Bema is not God's wrath, judgment, punishment, disfavor, and discipline, but loss of reward.

This will be what we have earned, and it will be something that we cause a certain amount of remorse and sadness for the Bible says we will "suffer loss" (1 Cor. 3:15). The suffering does not result from Christ's verbal abuse, punishment, and discipline but from our loss of reward and the deep regret it will bring to our hearts. Remorse, regret, and the realization of lost opportunities will be the hardship associated with this future judgment and assessment of our lives.

We can be sure that this "condemnation" (James 5:19) is not a judgment that centers around the fear of God's wrath, reprisal, and chastisement for our sins, but a judgment and sentence related to our degree of faithfulness as God's child. Again, this event will primarily be a time of evaluation to determine our reward for the good things we have done. The evaluation of our lives is the means to the end. The negatives will be known by us but in the end the positives are what will remain and matter to us forever.

In this day (the Bema), Christians will not answer to God for all their sins that they have committed within their past Christian lives upon earth. They will not experience discipline and punishment for their sins. Nor will they have to stand before God in some giant confessional booth within the sky, confess their sins, and be reprimanded for their sins which they have failed to confess throughout their lifetime on earth. Jesus is not going to say to us, "Remember back in 1969 when you yelled at your wife and never asked me for forgiveness?"

The overall purpose of this judgment would exclude this type of occurrence at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The primary purpose of this future judgment is not to bring out the bad but to determine the good. It is not to punish us for our past life, but to prepare us for the future, by presenting us with our eternal reward. Hence, the whole tenor of this judgment is not one of terror and God's chastisement, but an event of joy and great anticipation for the rewards that we do receive (2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12).

Yes, there will be some tears and general acknowledgement for our past failures and lack of faithfulness to God ("Every tongue shall confess to God" - Rom. 14:11-12), but this is not the ultimate and underlying purpose for this judgment. This is because the Bema is designed to reward God's saints and not rebuke and terrorize them for all of their failures they have committed in this life. It is not a time when Christ will require detailed confessions for all the sins committed in the lives of Christians, whether confessed or unconfessed. This is an absurdity! What was done on earth is done. It will not be resurfaced in a way to create some kind of climactic End Time confessional booth in the sky. This is an unwarranted conclusion that misses the purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ and the nature of meeting our loving Savior in the air. Once again, this is a place of commendation and not condemnation for our sins.

In speaking of the Judgment Seat of Christ, John Walvoord states:  
"Although some have attempted to make this a Protestant Purgatory, i.e., a time of punishment for unconfessed sin, it seems clear from the general doctrine of justification by faith that no condemnation is possible for one who is in Christ. Discipline such as is administered in this life will be of no value to those already made perfect in heaven."

This evaluation is not a time of confession to make sure we are going to enter Heaven. A detailed confession of all the sins of our past Christian life

will not be part of this future experience with the Lord. We must remember that confession for sin does not involve our judicial forgiveness, approval, and legal acceptance before God in Heaven. It revolves around the aspect of our fellowship with God while living on earth. Therefore, we will not be expected to answer for our sins in order to receive some kind of approval before the Lord and be validated to enter eternity with Him.

In fact, there is no place in Scripture that confirms that Christians will confess all their known sins before God at the Bema seat and be brought under God's verbal, disciplinary, and chastising judgment for these sins. There will be no giant heavenly screen revealing and exposing our sins so God can judge us accordingly. Why? It's because this evaluation is not designed to rebuke us but reward us (1 Cor. 3:8, 14; 2 John 8). Rebuking God's saints for their sins and requiring billions of Christians to confess all of their known sins is not what is going to happen on this day.

Imagine this for a moment. A Christian has died some seventeen hundred years ago during the Church Age. They have been enjoying the presence of Jesus in Heaven for seventeen hundred years. Now, when Jesus finally returns, they will be bodily resurrected to stand before the Bema or Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Does this mean that they will now have to answer for unconfessed sins, which they have committed seventeen hundred years ago, prior to their death? Will they come under Christ's scrutiny for a misspent life and find themselves confessing their sins they have committed hundreds, if not thousands of years ago, prior to their deaths? Of course, this is not the case.

Believers will not have to give an intricate account of their sins before God, whether confessed or unconfessed sins, and be brought under the scrutiny of judgment for these sins at the Bema. Yes, we will agree with Christ's conclusions about the record of our lives on earth (Rom. 14:11), as a redeemed and forgiven Church, and then, just like that, it will all be over. We will dry away any tears that may have run down our cheeks and be rewarded for the good that we have done. Tears will be quickly turned into joy! At this point, endless days and endless praise will begin!

In the coming day, God's saints will not be evaluated as a sinner or be judged as a sinner. However, the fact that we are not judged as a sinner who will experience God's wrath and punishment for our sins, or that we won't confess our sins before God and experience His disfavor and

discipline, does not mean that Christ will not take our fleshly deeds into account on this day of evaluation. Any serious review of our lives cannot dismiss the sinful departures and failures of our lives. An panoramic evaluation of our lives does not mean God is judging us for our sins.

The reasoning that concludes: “Christ couldn’t bring up our sins if He wanted to, for He no longer is aware they even exist” or that “Forgiveness means no future accountability concerning bad deeds” or “God cannot judge justified sinners” or “Calvary Covers It All” does not negate the fact that there will be a serious review of our lives at the Bema. The RECORD of our sins is erased (Eph. 1:7) but the RESULTS of our sins and fleshly deeds (loss of reward) will be on the table at the Bema. From the perspective of God’s judicial and legal records, our sins are forgiven. However, this does not necessitate that He cannot review our past lives and reward us accordingly. In fact, this is exactly what Christ will do at the Bema Seat (2 Cor. 5:10).

A review of our lives is not the same thing as being judged for our sins. A sweeping review of our lives on earth does not mean we will be chastised and terrorized for our sins. We are not facing our sins and failures at the Judgment Seat of Christ, as a sinner but as a servant, so that we might know the record of our lives and receive the just payment (reward) that we deserve, which the righteous Judge will give to us on this day (2 Tim. 4:8).

The good news is this! Christ taking our sins and judgment upon Himself and God declaring us forgiving of all our sins necessitates that we will not be judged as a sinner at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Since from God’s perspective He views us as forgiven, pardoned, righteousness, and possessing a peaceful standing before His presence (Rom. 5:1-2), we will not face the record of our sins, with the prospect of being punished for our sins, banished from God’s presence, and losing our salvation. Only unregenerate people will be banished from God’s presence (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17). In fact, only the devil’s children are disciplined in the next life – not God’s children (Matt. 25:46).

Let me reiterate this. The Judgment Seat of Christ is focused on our grace relationship with Christ (Rom. 5:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:12). This means that we will not be judged as a sinner who must face God’s wrath. In addition, this judgment is also designed to reward God’s saints – not harass them for their sinful past. This means that we will not confess our sins, be chastised

and disciplined for our sins, feel threatened, and hope that we are good enough to enter Heaven. This kind of reasoning defies the nature of free grace and salvation (Rom. 3:24; Rev. 22:17). It also denies the nature of this judgment which is to reward His saints – not rebuke and condemn them for all their wrongdoing.

All of the blessed truths of positional forgiveness before God through His amazing grace, and Christ's desire to bless our lives with reward, must be taken into account as it relates to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Nevertheless, this time of inspection is still a judgment seat where our lack of performance will be considered by Christ and where rewards are handed out in accordance with the kind of life we have lived on earth.

1 Corinthians 3:8

“Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.”

We must understand that Christ can examine us without threatening us, disciplining us, and sentencing us to hell. He can judge us without condemning us and severing our grace standing and relationship with Him. Our standing in Christ is not questioned at the Bema Seat. What is questioned is our service and stewardship. Furthermore, a review of our lives does not invalidate our grace relationship with Christ. An overview of our lives does not change God's view of us as His children (Rom. 8:34-39). When Christians look into the eyes of Jesus (Luke 22:61; Rev. 1:14), they will know that this review of their lives is performed out of love, not on the basis of wrath and condemnation, and that it will be done to reward them, not to rebuke, discipline, threaten, and condemn them. More on this later.

## **II. Only the unsaved are judged as sinners.**



Revelation 20:11-12 is a revelation of the Great White Throne Judgment of unregenerate or unsaved people. “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (their sinful deeds).

It is noteworthy that at the Great White Throne Judgment “the books” or scrolls are opened which contain the sinful records of man’s deeds and it’s only the unsaved that appear before this judgment and who are judged on this basis. This is because their wicked deeds (sins) have not been forgiven and erased through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is not the case with the believer. His or her sins have been completely erased and forgiven forever. This is why no books or scrolls of wicked deeds are seen to be opened at the Judgment Seat of Christ for Christians (2 Cor. 5:10). It’s because Christ has forgiven us of all our sins; therefore, we will not experience any of God’s wrath and judgment because of our sinful works or deeds. The record of them is gone forever.

God makes an amazing promise to anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Based upon the New Covenant work of Jesus Christ, His finished work on the cross, our sins are forever erased from God’s memory and will never appear before

Hebrews 10:17

“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

Psalms 103:12 gives this beautiful description of forgiveness:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

This means that all of our sinful and lawful deeds will never be brought against us again. We will not face any of our sins from God’s perspective of judgment and wrath against sin and sinners. Why? It’s because our sins have been forgiven and erased in the legal records of Heaven and in the courtroom of God’s perfect justice.

Our sin debt of judgment before God has been taken out of the way (Col. 2:13-14) since Jesus paid the debt in full when He died on the cross in our place. Furthermore, we stand in Christ's perfect righteousness and therefore can never be judged as a sinner for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21). This means we will never face our sins as sinners and experience God's wrath and judgment for our sins. So nothing like this is going to occur at the Bema Seat when Christians are judged. Our judgment has nothing to do with being a sinner, facing the record of our sins, and experiencing the fear of God's wrath.

God does not reckon us as sinners any longer but as saints who have been given a gracious position of acquittal, perfect righteousness, and a peaceful standing before God's throne (Rom. 5:1-2). So, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is only for believers, no books or records of sins will be opened. This is not true at the Great White Throne Judgment for the unbelievers of all the ages, since their sins have not been erased in the legal records before God (Rev. 20:12). In view of the believer's forgiveness and acquittal in Heaven, no such books or scrolls (Rev. 20:12) will be opened at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

This is an important reminder that the Church is not being judged as sinners when facing Jesus Christ as their Judge at the Bema. It certainly means that God's saints are not going to be judged or evaluated as a sinner to see whether or not they get into Heaven. In addition, since no books of sins will be opened at the judgment, it would also suggest that our sins are not going to be brought against us to incriminate us, bring Christ's discipline and chastisement against us, or cause us to fear His reprisal and disfavor.

Although sins committed after salvation or conversion will have an effect on our service and reward, a believer's sins, as such, will not be brought against them with the prospect of Christians facing God's wrath and judgment. This is because the judgment for our sins took place over 1900 years ago, when the Lord Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree. Jesus Christ fully paid the debt of judgment that our sins deserved, and God will never bring those sins into judgment again. Glory hallelujah, Christ has set me free!

John 5:24

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

How very wonderful this is! We will never be judicially condemned for our sins and experience hell and damnation. We will not answer for the sins in judgment since Jesus Christ was God’s answer for our sins in providing the adequate sacrifice He required to remove our sins forever. Furthermore, since the basic tenor of this judgment focuses on God blessing us and rewarding us by His grace, we will not confess all of our sins before the Lord, experience Christ’s chastisement, discipline, or verbal displeasure before this tribunal.

Although we will not be judged for our sins at this future judgment, we will know the remorse for living a Christian life of defeat and lose reward because of our sins and repeated failures to live for Jesus Christ. We will not be judged as a sinner but as a saint and steward who is examined for his service and faithfulness to God.

In Chicago, Joseph Kratzle, a service elevator operator in an apartment house, recovered two checks for \$114,000 which had been lost by a tenant in the apartment house where he works. The checks were in envelopes, which had been placed by error with a bundle of letters to be discarded. His reward was a fifteen cent tip and an offer to put iodine on the cuts on his hands which he had received while searching through fourteen trash bags and garbage cans. The job took three hours, he said. Mr. Kratzle accepted the fifteen cents but declined the offer of first aid. He administered his own treatment when he returned to the basement from the tenant's apartment.

It was not Mr. Kratzle's first experience at finding valuables. In 1926, when he was employed as a window cleaner, he was working in the Federal Reserve Bank, and found a package on the floor. It contained \$83,000 in cash. That adventure was more profitable. The president of the bank gave Mr. Kratzle twenty-five dollars.

I read once where a cab driver found a purse containing seven thousand dollars which was left by a woman passenger on the back seat - seven thousand dollars in one-hundred-dollar bills! He found her address in the



purse, drove five miles to return it to her. The woman so graciously and generously gave him five dollars!

As we study the Scriptures, we see that it's God's desire to give us great reward when we stand before Jesus Christ someday. He does not want to be stingy in handing out reward to His beloved saints. This is because the Judgment Seat of Christ is a time of commendation and not commendation. The overall emphasis is a time of reward – not punishment and harassment for our sins. This brings us to our next point.

### **III. We will be judged as a servant at the Judgment Seat of Christ.**

Once again, although the RECORD of our sins is erased and gone forever (Eph. 1:7), the RESULTS of our sins and wayward living in our Christian life will still be on the table and considered at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). In other words, the selfish and carnal aspects of our Christian life will in a broad way be reviewed at the Bema Seat of Christ. This review is not the judgment of a sinner waiting a verdict of “guilty or not guilty” but the judgment of a saint waiting the review of his life and being rewarded accordingly.

In this day, Christians will be reviewed as a servant and steward. We will be judged in relation to how we conducted ourselves in this life and lived for the Lord. As we have already confirmed, this coming day will be a time of commendation for our godly works and not one of condemnation for our godless works. The primary focus will be a time of reward; it will not be focused on retribution. However, the fact that we are not being judged as a sinner does not mean we will not have a serious review of our lives. Knowing where we have failed as a servant is not the same thing as being condemned for our sins and experiencing God's punishment and wrath for our sins. From God's perspective, we will not be judged as sinners, since we are positionally at peace before God (Rom. 5:1), but from our perspective we will have an awareness of the performance of our lives, which can bring sadness and remorse when we face the record of how we lived.

Some expositors suggest that no remorse will be experienced at this time since this is not the nature of the judgment. It's a judgment related to rewards. Others swing the pendulum too far in the other direction by downplaying the joy and gladness of this event and paint this prophetic judgment as a place of condemnation, intense weeping and wailing,

confession of all known sins, and incredible remorse and sorrow. The Biblical position regarding the Judgment Seat of Christ is a mediating position between sorrow and shame versus joy and gladness. We must maintain the serious nature of the examination and yet emphasize the commendation aspect of the judgment seat. We must emphasize the absolute importance and necessity of faithful living today in light of the Bema, but reject any thought of forensic punishment at this judgment seat. We must remember that the purpose of this judgment is to give reward.

At the Bema, we will not be judged as a sinner facing God's wrath and judgment, but reviewed as a forgiven and acquitted saint. Our record of living will be taken into account (Rom. 14:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10) and we will be rewarded appropriately. Yes, when we stand before God as His people we are definitely cleared of all charges (Romans 8:1). It is very clear that Christians will not be judged as a sinner at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

But what does this really mean? It means that a Christian will be judged on the basis of their grace relationship with Christ. This means they will never face God's punishment, wrath, or retribution for their sins, since Jesus already suffered the penalty for them (Gal. 3:10). It also means that a Christian will not suffer rebuke because of his sinful past. Christians will not be disciplined in any way for their sins. Nor will they need to confess their sins before God at this judgment. The Christian will not be harassed by Jesus, hounded of his past, and be fearful of ending up in hell because of his sins. None of this will take place at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Why? It's because we are not "paying" for our sins at this judgment but being "rewarded" for our faithfulness. It's because we are being judged as a servant – not as a sinner. It's because Christ is rewarding us and not rebuking us.

Of course, just because we won't face our sins in judgment on this day does not mean we will have no awareness of the dismal performance of our lives (1 John 2:28), which can bring sadness and remorse when we face the record of how we lived. Not facing our sins in judgment is one thing, but accountability is another thing. Accountability is not some kind of psychological nightmare. It is needful in this life and produces godliness in our Christian lives (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 John 2:28; Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:3). Accountability will be fully realized at the Bema Seat of Christ.

We will not be judged as a sinner facing God's wrath and judgment but reviewed as a forgiven and acquitted saint in this coming day. Our record of living will be taken into account (Rom. 14:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:10) and we will be rewarded appropriately. Yes, when we stand before God, as His people, we are definitely cleared of all charges (John 3:18). Nevertheless, when we die, there is the matter of unfinished business. This is why God intends to evaluate our lives as Christians and in some general way share the information with us so that we will know His reward is fair.

### ➤ Explaining 2 Corinthians 5:10

Once again, the term "judgment seat" (2 Corinthians 5:10) refers to the place where the Lord will sit to evaluate the lives of believers for the purpose of giving them eternal rewards. It is translated from the Greek word "bema" which was an elevated platform where judges would hand out their decisions and victorious athletes went to receive their crowns.



2 Corinthians 5:10 states that each believer will "receive" (receive payment – receiving back what we deserve) for the things done in his body (a reference to the way we have used our bodies in relationship to our earthly living and service to God) according (in relation or respect) to that he that done, whether it

be good ("agathos" – WORTHY or useful, advantageous, and of good constitution) or bad" ("kakos" - WORTHLESS actions which are depraved and of a bad nature). In other words, we will be recompensed for the deeds we have done, whether good or bad.

Those who wish to see no negatives at the Judgment Seat of Christ will claim that the word for "bad" is not "kakos" (used for bad and evil in the New Testament – things that are worthless because they are intrinsically bad in nature). Instead, it's assumed that another Greek word is used for "bad" which appears in only a few manuscripts ("phaulon").

Frederick Tatford argues:

“The examination at the judgment seat will determine what is acceptable and what is worthless. (The word phaulos, translated ‘bad’ in 2 Corinthians 5:10, does not imply what is ethically or morally evil, but rather what is worthless).”

I disagree with this oft repeated argument. This interpretation makes no sense for several reasons.

First, “kakos” (bad) is found in the majority of manuscripts. Furthermore, when “phaulon” is used in contrast with “good” it always connotes evil. In fact, in all of its occurrences elsewhere it is given a wicked and evil connotation (John 3:20; 5:29; Rom. 9:11; Titus 2:8; James 3:16). But Tatford and some other expositors claim the contrast between good and bad is not between moral good and moral evil since we are not being judged as sinners. They teach that the bad or worthless things are morally neutral things that we do, such as pursuing an advanced degree, moving up the corporate ladder, painting pictures, or writing poetry, which are not done with a motive to glorify God and that are pursued for selfish interests.

Second, anything we do that does not glorify God and which we selfishly pursue without God’s favor is sin. It really is bad. Wrong motives are themselves sinful. Greed, jealousy, envy, covetousness, and the like are all motivating factors and all are sin. You just cannot get away from the fact that those things which are “bad” are really bad because they are sinful. Remember that even unfaithful stewardship is a sin (1 John 4:17).

The good, the bad, and the ugly will on some grand scale be revealed and known to us. Not every detail of our lives will be recounted, nor will Christ make us retrace every wrong thing we have done in our Christian life. But the Lord knows how to impress our entire life of service and stewardship upon our hearts without creating a scene of terror, verbal punishment, confession for every sin that we have ever committed, and bringing fear into our hearts. Here is the point, there will be plenty of bad that will result in wood, hay, and stubble on this day. Bad is bad. Trying to explain it away does an injustice to this passage and what will occur at the Bema.

Third, the fact that we are not being judged as sinners does not mean that our life cannot be reviewed as a servant, along with our fleshly and worthless pursuits in life. Think of it like this. If Christ’s finished and

gracious work on the cross does not keep a believer from experiencing some negative repercussions from God in this life, what prohibits us from experiencing some negative effects when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? We must be careful that we do not explain away what will occur at the Judgment Seat of Christ out of a fear that we might undermine our grace relationship with Christ.

Being judged as a servant (not a sinner) means we will never be condemned to hell for our sins at the Bema, we will not experience God's wrath or retribution for our sins, we will not be rebuked, hounded, or be punished and severely disciplined for our sins, nor will we in any way have to answer for our sins in judgment. At the same time, we must remember that forgiveness does not overlook responsibility. We cannot dismiss the reality that there will be accountability at the Judgment Seat of Christ for our sinful past and we can lose reward because of our failures and sins.

It's certain that the "good" is a reference to acts of living and service that have honored God and the "bad" references those actions and decisions that were sinful and fleshly and even those services done for the Lord which might have been selfish, prideful, and carnal in nature. The word "bad" would include all that is worthless and displeasing to the judge. This examination will be a broad and sweeping view of our lives. The purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ is to examine a Christian's total life. The terminology used here refers to a summing up and entire estimation of the pattern of a believer's life.

This overall focus and broad examination of our lives should keep us from worrying about every stupid thing we've done in our lives that was wrong, or every thoughtless sin we have committed, the time we had an argument with our wife. The focus of this time of judgment is upon rewards and not punishment for our sins. Lewis Sperry Chafer argues that this judgment "is more for the bestowing of rewards than the rejection of failure." I agree with him on this point. Nevertheless, the examination of our lives as Christians does mean that we will be accountable before the Lord on this day of examination. Just because we are not being judged as a sinner does not mean there is no accountability of the way we have lived.

We will be rewarded "according" to the way we have lived (2 Cor. 5:10) and actually suffer the loss of reward which we otherwise could have gained had we been more faithful in living the Christian life and serving the Lord.

As there are degrees of punishment in hell so there are degrees of reward for Heaven. We cannot lose our salvation at this coming judgment, but we can lose reward. There is much to gain at the judgment seat of Christ but there is also much to lose!

Of course, the righteous deeds that we have done for the Lord will bring reward in this future day. However, all of our sinful deeds, thoughts, and doings will be consumed instantaneously as works of the flesh which are unworthy of reward. When 2 Corinthians 5:10 says that each person will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” it is talking about receiving a payment (receiving back) what we have earned and deserve. Receiving reward for the “good” things would necessitate that receiving payment for the “bad” things would be the opposite (loss of reward).

This loss will be real and heart-wrenching. It means that receiving loss of reward will be very difficult to pass through. The nature of the Christian judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ is loss of reward, which will for a brief time bring regret and sorrow to our hearts, knowing that our life was not fully pleasing to the Lord and that we will be limited in our ability to glorify God throughout eternity with the little reward that we do receive (1 Pet. 5:4; Dan. 12:2).

The purpose of the Bema seat is not condemnation but commendation. It is not a time of retribution but reward. If we remember this, it will keep us from viewing the Bema Seat as a place of terror and horror. Yes, the elements of remorse, regret, and shame cannot be avoided at this examination of the Judgment Seat of Christ in the light of God’s unapproachable holiness. But this sorrow must be somewhat relative and short-lived (Rev. 21:4). The overwhelming emotion in meeting Jesus Christ will be joyfulness and gratefulness. Although there is undeniably some measure of remorse or regret, this is not the overriding emotion to be experienced at this judgment and throughout the eternal state.

The experience of losing reward will be the negative aspect of this particular judgment for Christians. What we receive for our worthless deeds is loss of reward (2 Cor. 5:10) and the hurt and disappointment that goes along with this. We can also experience the shame that goes along with loss of reward and not being in fellowship with Christ at His return (1 John 2:28). I mention these things because the nature of the Judgment Seat

of Christ is not one of punishment, answering for all of our sins, confessing our sins, being verbally chastised by Christ, etc.

The emphasis is upon reward. Christ wants to impress upon our hearts the rewards that we have earned. To get to this point we will need to pass through the fire of His righteous and omniscient judgment (1 Cor. 3:13). This means we will experience a certain amount of heartache when losing reward and possible shame and regrets that go along with this experience. But I think the negatives and tears will be replaced rather quickly by endless days of praise and joy. We will face the record, experience a mixture of sadness and joy associated with this final examination, and then enter our eternal state.

Now think of this in light of our study. The only judgment that a pardoned and justified believer in Christ will face in this day will be a judgment for their lack of performance, as a servant, and their loss of reward connected with unfaithfulness to God. This would be reward which he otherwise could have received, had he been more faithful as a servant, living according to God's will.

The ratio of useful to useless works will bring the final conclusion regarding our life of service while on earth. This indicates that Jesus is not judging us as sinners but is merely examining us in relationship to our useful and useless works. In other words, we will receive payment for the way we lived. When believers stand before the Lord Jesus Christ they will be recompensed for the deeds they have done in the body ("according as his work shall be" - Rev. 22:12). We will get exactly what is coming to us by way of reward or loss of reward in this day. We will "receive" payment for the way we lived, either by receiving reward or losing of reward.



This Scriptural principle of Galatians 6:7 will stand the test of time. We do not earn our eternal salvation but we do earn our eternal reward. Keep in mind that our entire life of useful and useless activities will be evaluated. The times of spiritual victory will be assessed alongside of our sinful and useless deeds. Our failures will be evaluated alongside of our faithful living. The Lord Jesus will somehow sort

them all out and be able to reward each person “according” to what we have done or how we have lived (2 Cor. 5:10).

How will God reward Christians for the good that they do in light of their compromise and failures? How does a life of twenty years of faithful service compare to one or two years of unfaithful living as a Christian? How will the failures and sins of one day stack up against the victories of the next day? Only the Lord Jesus will be able to balance it all out in the day of judgment! Even Solomon in all of his earthly pursuits of life realized that there would be a time or reckoning, when God views the lives of all people and the way that they have lived.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

Jesus will use what He can in the coming day of examination. One thing is certain, Jesus will reward faithful living and the more faithful we are to Him the greater our reward will be. This is why the Judgment Seat of Christ becomes a motivation for godly living, faithfulness, commitment to the Lord and His cause, and persevering up to the end of our lives (2 Tim. 4:8).

One Christian man shared this. “In a book a few days ago I came across a statement that gripped me. The statement was this: Do you realize that we are only a heartbeat away from a fixed state of reward, be it joy or shame. The phrase that really got hold of me was that phrase a fixed state of reward. Just one heartbeat, just one breath away from what I will be throughout all eternity. More and more I began to think about this fixed state, realizing that where I take off in time, I take up in eternity. As a man lives, he dies; and as he dies, he lives again in that condition throughout all eternity—just a heartbeat away from a fixed state of reward.

“The thought that came to me is if this heart should take its last beat, and I come into that fixed state of reward, is this what I want it to be? Realizing that there is nothing that can change it after that, that all I am going to do to determine my life, my existence in eternity, must be done this side of that heartbeat, what would it be? Would it be of joy or of shame? Paul realized that this life is just a prep room for eternity—that everything we do in this life, everything we do in our bodies in some way or another determines our fate, our condition, on the other side of that heartbeat. As



he writes to these Christians at Corinth, his mind is traveling to that judgment seat, and he recognizes that all of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and there receive for what we have done, good or bad.”

Each believer will pass through a time of judgment and reward such as this in a future day. We will perhaps see the blessed Lord Jesus Christ sitting upon an elevated Bema seat within the atmospheric heaven above, after the resurrection and translation of the church into the first heaven (1 Thess. 4:17). Evidently this is where the Judgment Seat of Christ will take place, for the Bible says we will “meet the Lord in the air.” We will meet Jesus Christ face to face for this final examination within the first heaven, prior to our entrance into the third Heaven. More on this later.

In this meeting place within the air, the believer will be judged as a servant. There will be an evaluation of his faithfulness and unfaithfulness. No doubt, we will certainly experience remorse and regret for failures and known sins, our lack of zeal and commitment to the Lord and failure to live effectively for Him. We will in the coming examination day realize that we could have received more reward had we been more faithful in our living and service to God.

2 John 1:8

“Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought (*the truths departed unto the saints*), but that we receive a full reward” (*obtain the reward God wants to give to us*).

No, we will not face our sins in judgment, but we will face them in remorse and with regrets when looking back upon our failures and what could have been. There will be a true sense of sorrow but at the same time there will joy that overcomes the sadness of lost opportunity.

Samuel Hoyt said it best:

“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 undo the sorrow aspect is to make faithfulness inconsequential.”



Let's review and summarize what we have studied thus far. What is at issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ is not our position in Christ but our performance in the family of God. The believer will not be judged as a sinner under God's wrath in this day but as a servant under God's examination.

The New Covenant promises that God will never again remember our sins to bring judgment against us (Heb. 10:17). Therefore, this judgment will not determine our destiny but our rewards in view of our living and service rendered unto God. Simply stated, the object of the judgment seat is to review and to reward – not to penalize and pound us as sinners. Nevertheless, one of the mistaken ideas is the belief that there cannot be a serious review of our lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ because as believers our sins are forgiven and “cast ... into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

Doesn't Calvary cover it all? Yes, thank God it does! Praise the Lord! For this reason, some believers do not understand the Judgment Seat of Christ as a real judgment that relates to the true nature of “good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10) deeds and “the hidden things of darkness” (1 Cor. 4:5) as the Bible clearly reveals. They do not view this judgment as an overview of the unsanctified and carnal deeds that were related to the believer's days upon earth. We must be careful of passing off this judgment as having no serious review of our lives. Remember that there would be no need for any judgment if it only relates to our good works. There must be a judgment that separates the good from the bad.

How can God remember our sins no more and still review our lives? How can both be true? The same way it is true today. God can review our lives without condemning us as sinners (Rev. 2:9,13,19) because of our position in grace (Rom. 5:1-2). Grace does not condemn us as sinners in this life nor

will this occur before the Bema as we enter the next life. The blessed truth about God remembering our sins no more means that He does not view us as sinners in Christ (Rom. 3:24; Jude 24). This is true in this life as well as the next life and when we stand before the Bema. Never again will we be sinners within the throne room of God's presence for we have been declared legally righteous. Remembering our sins no more also means God's wrath and judgment will not be brought against us for our sins and we will not be condemned as sinners since there is no condemnation in Christ (Rom. 8:1; John 3:18).

Our judicial forgiveness before God is sealed and final. Of course, this does not mean there cannot be a general review of how we have lived and served as Christians. We will never be judged for our sins and threatened with judgment (hell) as sinners, but this does not exclude the fact that we will be examined as servants to determine what was "bad" or unworthy (2 Cor. 5:10) in relation to our sanctification and service, so that the Lord can reward us for the "good" that we have done.

To confirm to our minds and hearts what was "good" in our lives there needs to be a revelation of the true nature of our sanctification and service during this life. The "bad" must also be revealed. We cannot wiggle out of this! As the "righteous Judge" (2 Tim. 4:8) Christ must give a general scan of our lives to accurately assess and reward us for the "good" we have accomplished. As a result, we will know where we stand in relation to the way we have lived and served Christ. God not remembering our sins does not mean we will not remember our past and wasted opportunities to live for Christ and serve Him faithfully while on earth.

The good news is that Christ can perform this scanning judgment upon our lives at the Bema without hounding and haunting us for our fleshly deeds and sins, bringing them against us, and condemning us for them as sinners. The nature of grace is to pass over sin and not bring condemnation against His people for their sins (Ex. 12:13; 23; 1 Cor. 5:7). This will be the case at the Bema. Nevertheless, to accurately reward us for the good He will in some general way reveal to us the true nature of our sanctification and service while living on earth, both good and bad. This general judgment and assessment of our lives reminds us that the way we have lived will have a ripple effect that will go on for eternity. It will be an awesome revelation of God's righteous judgment upon our sanctification and service as a Christian.

# Judgment Seat of Christ and the Sins of Christians

"I will remember their sins no more"

(Heb. 8:12; 10:17; Micah 7:9)

\*This is true in this life and the next life\*

"no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1; John 3:18)

In never remembering our sins God means He will not judge us for our sins. Christians will NEVER experience God's wrath because of their position in Christ (Rom. 5:1-2). But God will allow Christians to remember the way they have lived by performing a general scan or overview of their lives and reveal the results to them (1 Cor. 4:5).

The RECORD of our sins is erased (Eph. 1:7) but the RESULTS of our sins and fleshly deeds (loss of reward) will be on the table at the Bema (2 Jn. 8).

The Bema is not a place of RETRIBUTION but REWARD. The WORKS of Christians are judged – not the CHRISTIANS ("try every man's work" & "a man's work shall be burned" - 1 Cor. 3:13, 15).

Our GRACE relationship with Christ means we will not be rebuked by Christ, shamed by Christ, hounded for our sins, nor confess our sins before the Bema and within Christ's presence (Jude 24).

"I know thy works"

(Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19)

"whether it be good or bad"

(2 Cor. 5:10)

"the hidden things of darkness"

(1 Cor. 4:5)

"lest ye be condemned"

(James 5:9)

Christians will NOT be judged or condemned as SINNERS but as faithful versus unfaithful SERVANTS. Grace burns the worthless *works* of believers (1 Cor. 3:15) illustrating that God's wrath passes over His people, resulting in their *reward!*

To prove Christ is the "righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8), He must judge our entire Christian life and service (good and bad works). There would be no need for a judgment if nothing was bad in our lives. A general agreement and word of acknowledgement of the Lord's assessment of our lives will take place (Rom. 14:10-12).

The Bema is not a place of CONDEMNATION for our sins but COMMENDATION for our service and life lived for the Lord (1 Cor. 4:5).

So, we cannot dodge the fact that there will be fleshly and evil works in some general way revealed to us at the Judgment Seat of Christ which can be deemed as worthless. The Bible says that the Lord will in some way "make manifest the hidden things of darkness" (1 Cor. 4:5). This general revelation of our lives is not designed to judge us for our sins but to set the record straight regarding our sanctification and service for Christ and which is deemed worthy or good (2 Cor. 5:10).

Nevertheless, in revealing to our hearts the record of our lives, God will not be judging Christians for their sins, and as sinners, but judging them as saints to reward them for their sanctification and service. A general scan and exposure of our entire lives as Christians, including

**In revealing to our hearts the record of our lives, God will not be judging Christians for their sins, and as sinners, but judging them as saints to reward them for their sanctification and service.**

our fleshly and non-rewardable deeds, does not mean the believer will be judged for his sins and face God's wrath in any way. Nor does it mean we will be harassed and reprimanded by God for our sins. What it means is that our whole life can be broadly examined to determine our rewards. Grace burns the worthless works of believers (1 Cor. 3:15) illustrating that God's wrath passes over His people, resulting in their reward! The nature of grace is to withhold judgment for our bad deeds while at the same time reward us for our good deeds.

**The scanning of our lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ is not to bring judicial judgment against us as God's saints (Romans 8:1, 33-39) but to simply set the record straight regarding our sanctification, faithfulness, and service.**

The Lord who is acting as the "righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8) on this day cannot get to the good without the revelation of the bad so all God's saints will know that His evaluation and rewards are just and righteous.

The point is this. If everything in our lives is only good, there would be no need for a judgment. Therefore, our grace relationship with Christ does not override the fact that the Lord will expose who we really were and how we lived our lives on earth as Christians. At the same time, because of our positional standing in Christ and grace (Rom. 5:1-2), we will not be judged for our sins, nor will we possess fear in our hearts that God's wrath will be meted out against us in any way.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not experience God's chastening and chastisement for our sins, since we are standing in the presence of the very One who was judged for our sins! The scanning of our lives at this judgment is not to bring judicial judgment against us as God's saints but to simply set the record straight regarding our sanctification, faithfulness, and service.

➤ **Explaining 1 John 2:28**

Apparently there will be shame on the part of unfaithful believers who have lived their own carnal and selfish lives.



1 John 2:28

“And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

This shame will not result from Christ rebuking and punishing His saints for their sins and failures. Rather, shame will be experienced in the lives of believers when they realize that their own present lives were not in order when Jesus returned and that they had squandered away many opportunities to live for Christ and do what was right. There will be shame in relation to our sinful living as a Christian, unfaithfulness, and neglected opportunities to serve the Lord. There will also be a sense of shame for the loss of reward and missed opportunities.

The Bible seems to teach that there will be shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ, to a greater and lesser degree, depending on the measure of unfaithful living and the service of each believer. This shame will then result from a misspent life in sin, selfishness and slothfulness (laziness). This verse is talking about the “confidence” that we are living for Him and walking with Him in fellowship. We should live in such a way, so that when Jesus returns, we would have confidence that our lives as God’s servants will be pleasing to Him!

Some Christians hope that when Jesus returns that they will slip into Heaven, hide behind a cloud, and sit in the back row so that God will somehow overlook their dismal performance of living the Christian life. This is a false assumption. There will be no hiding and no opportunity to put a better spin on what you did in their life. No attorney will represent you. The look in the eyes of Jesus (Rev. 1:14) will penetrate our hearts and reveal to us in a moment’s time what the record of our lives has been and the reward that we will receive for eternity.

A blind soldier was playing the piano in the convalescent ward of a London hospital. Presently some visitors entered the room, but he was used to such interruptions, and played on, filling the long ward with lovely melody. When the music ceased, a gentleman walked over to the piano and said, "Well done, my friend!" The surprised soldier, thinking it was one of his comrades, swung round on his stool, and with a smile said, "And who are you?" Quick as a flash, and as startling, came the reply, "Your King!" In an instant the man was on his feet with his hand at salute, his whole being instinct with pleasure at the honor accorded him by the royal word of

praise. Someday we will all stand before Jesus Christ. It should be our desire to hear those words, "Well done thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21,23).

➤ **Explaining 1 John 4:17**

1 John 4:17

"Herein is our love made perfect (when it reaches maturity), that we may have boldness (confidence that our spiritual life is in order) in the day of judgment (Bema Seat): because as he is, so are we in this world" (since we love others and live as Christ does).

John is teaching us that our love for other saints (1 John 4:7-8) should be growing and in one sense reach a level of maturity in view of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Why? So "we might possess boldness in the day of judgment." This means that we will have confidence that when we stand before the Lord, at the Bema Seat, that our life will be pleasing to Him and that we will be rewarded for loving the saints. This is not a confidence related to our acceptance before God but our confidence related to our accountability toward Jesus Christ on this future day of judgment. Jesus will examine us regarding the way we have loved His saints, reached out to them, expressing genuine concern for them, their spiritual growth, meeting their needs, and being a positive influence in their lives.

Hebrews 6:10

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

William Gladstone, in announcing the death of Princess Alice to the House of Commons, told a touching story. The little daughter of the Princess was seriously ill with diphtheria. The doctors told the princess not to kiss her little daughter and endanger her life by breathing the child's breath. Once when the child was struggling to breathe, the mother, forgetting herself entirely, took the little one into her arms to keep her from choking to death. Rasping and struggling for her life, the child said, "Momma, kiss me!"

Without thinking of herself the mother tenderly kissed her daughter. She got diphtheria and some days thereafter she went to be forever with the Lord. We must remember that real love forgets self. Real love knows no

danger. Real love doesn't count the cost. It loves without regrets or returns. Jesus will remember all of our acts of love that we have showed toward the saints. God has a good memory!

➤ **Explaining 1 Corinthians 3:12-15**



1 Corinthians 3:10-15 gives us a similar picture of this coming judgment as it relates to Christian service: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder (*church planting*), I have laid the foundation (*the Gospel and Scriptures*), and another (*the future pastors or elders of the churches*) buildeth thereon. But let every man

(*evangelists, pastors, and teachers*) take heed how he buildeth thereupon (*indicating proper message and methods, teaching doctrine and duty which keeps Christ as the focus – examining how we built and not what we built*).

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones (*worthy works of Christian service*), wood, hay, stubble (*worthless works of Christian service*). Every man's work (*the specific works related to Christian ministry*) shall be made manifest (*revealed to each individual*): for the day (*the Judgment Seat of Christ*) shall declare it (*bring it out into the light*), because it shall be revealed by fire (*the fire of God's righteous judgment and omniscience*); and the fire (*Christ's all-encompassing judgment of the believer*) shall try every man's work of what sort it is (as to its quality, motive, sincerity, intention, or why it was done – Phil. 1:10-11). If any man's work (*service rendered unto the Lord*) abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss (*the loss of reward*): but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (*spared from a total loss of reward through the fiery process*).



Please notice that it's the WORKS of Christians that are judged – not the CHRISTIANS (“try every man’s work” & “a man’s work shall be burned” - 1 Cor. 3:13, 15). The fact that Christians will “suffer loss” reminds us that the loss of rewards, which we otherwise could have received at the Judgment Seat of Christ, will be a real and noticeable loss. We need to take this to heart today! Again, the negative aspect of his judgment is loss of reward.

This Scripture passage explains what will transpire at this final examination. It may have a special reference to the teachers of the Word of God and how Christ will try the teachings that they have taught people and conducted their church ministries. Perhaps the different descriptions of the gold, silver, and precious stones versus wood, hay, and stubble includes the teaching ministry of the ministers as they build upon the foundation that was already laid.

More likely, it would include the entire aspect of their ministries – how they conducted themselves, their temperament as a pastor, how they treated others, what they permitted in their local churches, the things they taught, and the reasons they were preaching (Was it for God’s glory or for their gain and praise?). The Bible says that teachers will receive a stricter “condemnation” or judgment in this coming day (James 3:1), which is a judgment and sentence related to our degree of faithfulness as pastors of the local churches. God will give the final sentence and assessment on how faithful we were to the truth, how we have maintained His holiness, and conducted ourselves within our ministries. This means that pastors need to weed out of their ministries the wood, hay, and stubble for these things will not stand the test at the Judgment Seat of Christ. I’m convinced that much which goes on in churches today is not descriptive of gold, silver, and precious stones.

Of course, the Lord will not only try the lives of those who teach God’s Word, He will also test all our lives as believers in relation to how we have lived. So, there is application of this text to all of us in many ways. The fire of God’s omniscience and righteous judgment will test all the works of our lives, both the good and the bad. When the Bible talks about what “sort” the work will be that is tested, it has reference to the quality of the work. We want to always talk about quantity today, but God is more interested in quality! Our works that we do for the Lord are to be holy, righteous, Biblically-based and done out of a right motive or sincerity of heart. At

Christ's judgment seat, the true character of a believer's life and work will be seen ("the day shall declare it" – 1 Cor. 3:13).

Those works which we have done solely for the Lord and His glory will abide or last. The believer will receive a reward for these works. However, the quality of works that are unbiblical, sinful, fleshly, and for the glory of man will be burned up. In the end, the believer will suffer the loss of reward because of these works. This again means that we will lose reward which we otherwise could have received in this day, if we would not have been self-centered and ignoring God's holiness and righteousness.

There is much to lose in this coming judgment day. But be reassured, we will never lose the salvation that Jesus has eternally promised us (John 3:16, 36, 10:28). When passing through the fire of His judgment, we will suffer only the *loss of reward*. The Bible says that we will be "saved; yet so as by (through) fire." This is a process that all Christians will pass through in the coming day. None of us will be spared from some loss of reward.

There are those who interpret this to mean that carnal believers will barely be saved from Hell and just slip into Heaven through the process of this judgment. I find this interpretation a total misunderstanding of God's eternal and complete forgiveness which He grants to the believer (Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14, Heb. 10:17). It defies the nature of free grace as it pertains to justification (Rom. 3:24). No believer will barely escape hell and slip into Heaven. This judgment is not a judgment to determine who will get into Heaven based on their earthly performance. We are not working to be accepted by God. We are saved by God's grace and not our performance of works or manner of living (Eph. 2:8-9).

The fire here is not talking about the fire of Hell. It has reference to the fire of God's righteous and omniscient judgment, a fire that will be able to penetrate and distinguish between the different kinds of works (good and bad), and this would include the motives behind our works of service rendered unto the Lord. In reality, every believer will have plenty of carnal works that will need to be burned up and removed. Every child of God will pass through the same fire and experience the removal of carnal works in ratio to their godly works, the godly works remaining because of a person's faithfulness to God (1 Cor. 4:2).

Granted, those believers who have focused more on fleshly living than living and service rendered unto God, will experience a greater loss than others, who have tried to concentrate on living faithfully, spiritually, sincerely, and righteously before the Lord. However, all of us will pass through the same fire and will experience some loss of reward in this day. Every believer will be like a stick burning in a fire that is suddenly snatched out and saved from being completely consumed, which in this context is representative of the believer's works not being consumed in their entirety. We can be reassured that certain works will remain and that God will reward every believer in this day (1 Cor. 4:5).

As portrayed elsewhere in Scripture, the entire picture of reward and loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:13-15) is used to illustrate how all Christians will pass through God's fiery judgment upon their works, experiencing both gains and losses, but at the same time being spared from *total loss of reward*.

2 Corinthians 5:10 teaches something similar:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one (*inclusive of all Christians*) may receive the things *done* in his body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be good or bad*" (*inclusive of both good and bad works*).

Let's set the record straight. Since all Christians will receive gains and losses, and since no person is meriting Heaven on the basis of how much or little reward they receive (Eph. 2:8-9), 1 Corinthians 3:15 is not conveying how some Christians will barely escape the fires of Hell, be saved by the skin of their teeth, or at the last moment be rescued from the eternal burnings. Do not make more of a picture than God makes of it! Some prophecy students need to remember that Pauline theology aligns with Pauline eschatology. How can our "in Christ" position (Rom. 3:24; 8:1, 38-39; 1 Cor. 1:2) be in jeopardy and we barely make it into Heaven, when the Father sees us through the saving work and perfections of His Beloved Son?

This interpretation of being "barely saved" (1 Cor. 3:15) is absurd and does a great injustice to positional doctrine and the doctrine of grace. We are not barely saved but saved to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). How can we have the promise of eternal life (John 3:16; 6:47) and then barely make it into Heaven?

The teaching of 1 Corinthians 3:15 is simple. Every Christian will receive gains and losses since each will pass through the fire. Some will receive more gain than loss and others more loss than gain. But in the end, we will all pass through the fire of God's omniscient judgment and be rewarded accordingly (1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10). Although many works will be burned up and deemed unusable, there will be those that remain. Hence, the picture of taking a stick from the fire before all is lost is appropriate. Only those worthy works represented as gold, silver and precious stones will remain after we pass through the fire. The worthless and fleshly works represented by the wood, hay and stubble will not produce any reward for our lives. They will be eliminated. They will be burned up like wood, hay and old corn stalks (1 Cor. 3:13).

Only the gems will last, but the junk will burn to ashes. Only our godly living and works that we do for the Lord out of a right motive will stand the test of Christ's fiery eyes (Rev. 1:14; 1 Cor. 3:14).

“Every man on earth is given just one life  
Every life on earth is but a vapor.  
It appears, then it's gone  
With a record of what's done,  
Then we stand alone at the judgment seat of Christ  
God's Holy Son.

Every deed I've done and every thought I've known  
Every choice I've made tried by fire.  
Will it burn or remain, will I bow my head in shame.  
Will I hear God say, "Welcome home my child,  
Well done, My faithful one."

We must all bow down at the judgment seat of Christ.  
We must give account for the things we've done with our lives.  
I will live my life for Jesus Christ  
So that in eternity my life will be  
Gold and silver and precious stones.”

This illustration of unworthy works being burned up would be extremely significant to the people of Corinth that Paul was speaking to, since not too long before this was written, their whole city was devastated by fire. They all knew firsthand what damage fire could do. When the fire swept through

Corinth, every house that was built out of wood, hay, or straw, was devastated and left in ashes. But the wealthier people there had houses built with beautiful pillars of granite, and some even had houses built totally out of marble. These houses made of costly stones were still standing after the fire swept through, though they were obviously very badly scorched.

This is the way it will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Only the gems will remain! What will be left on your pile of works after it has been torched by the fire of God's omniscience and righteous judgment? The believer should learn to keep short accounts with God and keep an eye on the sky, expecting the Lord to return at any moment of any day. As we live in the light of His imminent return, we will seek to keep our lives pure and clean before the Savior, and maintain a right attitude toward ministry and service, so we might receive greater reward in this day.

1 John 3:3

"And every man that hath this hope (hope of the Rapture, meeting the Lord, and standing before the Bema) in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

A little first-grader beamed with satisfaction about a spelling test on which his teacher had written a large "100--Good work!" The boy said, "I want to show this to Dad and Mother because I know it will please them." We can just see him riding home on the bus, hardly able to wait for that moment when his parents would express their excitement for how well he had done. His desire to make Dad and Mom happy was obviously a very important motivating factor in his life.

May we, as believers, possess this same desire as well. We should want to please Christ at this future Bema Seat. This should be a motivating factor for our lives today, to keep them in spiritual order and readiness to meet the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 again concludes:

"Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him (living a life that is well pleasing to Christ). For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

George Whitefield wanted to have a series of words placed on his tombstone when he died. He wanted these words to serve as a constant reminder to all believers of their coming final examination.

“Here lies George Whitefield;  
What sort of man he was  
The great day will discover”

Only the Judgment Seat of Christ will reveal what kind of servant we have really been for the Lord. In that day, the gaze of Christ’s fiery eyes will reveal to us what kind of servant we have been. The final outcome of our service for the Lord and the life we have lived for the Lord will be displayed through the reward we receive. There is a day coming when recognition, honor and reward will be properly distributed among God’s people. Little reward down here may mean great reward in that future day. God is going to give us reward us for how we have served and lived for Him.

#### God’s Pay

“Who does God’s work will get God’s pay,  
However long may seem the day,  
However weary be the way;  
Though powers and princes thunder “Nay,”  
Who does God’s work will get God’s pay.

He does not pay as others pay,  
In gold or land or raiment gay;  
In goods that vanish and decay;  
But God in wisdom knows a way,  
And that is sure, let come what may,  
Who does God’s work will get God’s pay.”

The Lord Jesus will reward and honor all of us according to how we have lived and what we have done for Him. Remember that the Lord is viewing what kind of life you are living today and in the future He will give you the full review of your life. He is making a record of your life as a servant for this future day of judgment and reward. The Lord knows the kind of life we are living and how much work we are really accomplishing for Him. The eyes of God are upon me; He sees everything I do!

Hebrews 4:13

“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

The old spiritual puts it like this:

“My Lord is constantly writing all the time!”

What kind of life is He recording about you today? What about this month or last year? We have seen that there are negative consequences associated with this judgment. There can be shame, regret, loss of reward, and even a time of tears, tears of remorse and regret (1 John 2:28), as we face our life and see how unfaithful we have been and realize how we have failed the Lord in so many ways.

The elements of remorse, shame, and regret cannot be overlooked and avoided when studying about this day. There will likely be a mixture of sadness and joy on this final day of examination.

E. Schuyler English strikes the proper balance:

“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 reward given will be another example of the grace of our Lord; for at best we are unprofitable servants.”

Yes, there will be great joy but also some sadness as we face the true and final record of our lives.

Dr. Frank Logsdon has said:

“It is a solemn engagement indeed to project our thoughts toward this day when, on bended knees before the fiery eyes of Omniscience, we face the record.”

- Do I have a right motive when I serve the Lord?
- Am I willing to serve the Lord?
- How much am I doing in the Lord’s service and work?
- Have I been offering to use my gifts for the Lord?
- Am I doing it willingly, sincerely, sacrificially, and faithfully?

Not only our Christian service, but the entire record of our lives, how we have lived for the Lord, how faithful or unfaithful we have been to Him will be made apparent to us on some grand scale.

One mistaken idea among Christians concerning the Bema Seat of Christ is that there will be no serious review of our lives at this judgment. This notion is not true. Although we will not be judged as a sinner before the presence of the Lord, we will be judged as a servant of the Lord. Our lives will be reviewed and examined very carefully according to 2 Corinthians 5:10.

We will all “appear” (2 Cor. 5:10) before this time of judgment. Once again, the word “appear” means to reveal or make visible what has been hidden or unknown. Also, the word “manifest” in 1 Corinthians 3:13 (“Every man’s work shall be made manifest”) points to the truth that something will be brought out into the light and made known or plainly recognized by each individual child of God.

How we have lived will be examined. Our unfaithfulness to the Lord will in some way be known to each participant in this judgment. After all, of what value is a judgment if we all pass with flying colors and every person is rewarded equally?

Dr. I.M. Haldeman once remarked:

“There is not the thickness or tissue paper between us who are Christians and the Judgment Seat of Christ.”

In other words, the whole narrative of our lives will be brought out into the light of God’s fiery omniscience. The vision of the glorified Christ reminds us that His eyes are like a penetrating fire that reveals everything.

Revelation 1:14

“His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.”







The piercing, probing and omniscient eyes of Jesus will see through us! Christ will in some way be able to present our entire life before us a moments time! This fiery glance of His eyes may very well be what is depicted in 1 Corinthians 3:13 when it says, "...the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." Beloved, no corners will be cut in this coming day of judgment. Nothing will be swept under the carpet. This will be a day of

examination for God's servants. No, we will not be judged as a sinner, condemned for our sins, confessing and answering for our sins, experiencing God's retribution and discipline for our sins, but we will be examined and judged as one of God's servants. We will know the true story of our lives.

Among the millions of apples grown each year, some of them do contain worms. Although most producers of apples do their best to keep this from happening it still happens. You can have a wormy apple. Lots of people think the worm works his way in from the outside. But it has been discovered that the worm comes from the inside. When the apple blossom is on the tree, an insect comes along and lays an egg in it. Sometimes later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats his way out. So, what appears to come from the outside actually has its origin on the inside.

This is a good reminder as we begin the next section of our study.

Jeremiah 17:9

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

This is true and even Paul acknowledged that he could not always know the nature of his own heart. But the carnal Corinthians were judging Paul's heart and motives in ministry, claiming that they knew what was fully happening on the inside of his heart. This is the background of 1 Corinthians 4.

## ➤ Explaining 1 Corinthians 4:2-5

1 Corinthians 4:2-5:

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. (*the importance of faithfulness in God’s service*) But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: (*the inaccurate judgments of man*) but he that judgeth me is the Lord (*the impeccable judgment of Christ*). Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”

Here is a general overview of these verses:

1. Don’t be over-critical and hastily and improperly judge other Christians (their overall spirituality, inner hearts, and motives)
2. Be careful when assessing ourselves (our conscience can fool us regarding our own spiritual condition)
3. Jesus will judge the hidden things of darkness in all of our hearts (things we do know about and some things we don’t know about).

These verses deal with the matter of carnal and improper judgment. Apparently, some of the Corinthians were judging Paul’s motives in his service to the Lord. He sets the record straight. God alone can judge the inward reasons and purposes why someone is serving the Lord. Therefore, we should not lightheartedly, flippantly, and quickly judge the hearts of other Christians in their services rendered unto God. Motives are important to the Lord because they are an indication of WHY we do something. Is the deed done for your glory or God's?

When Paul talks about “man’s judgment” he is referring to a specific type of premature and carnal judgment, a judgment that was proud, over-critical, and which usurped the authority of the Lord as ultimately judging others. The Corinthians were practicing this type of judgment. They would pick their favorite teacher over others and then judge the motives of those teachers they did not like (1 Cor. 3:3-7). This is what Paul is addressing. With haste and without any reluctance and carnality in their own lives (1 Cor. 3:3), the Corinthians judged the spirituality of other Christians, even bringing a verdict against the motives of their own hearts in ministry. This

was indeed man's judgment, a hypocritical type of judgment that Jesus condemned elsewhere (Matt. 7:1,5).

Paul reasons that others could not properly judge his own inward motives in serving the Lord ("I judge not mine own self") for even himself could not be fully and completely trusted in determining his motives at certain times. Paul did not presently know anything that was spiritually faulty in his life but still too precaution ("For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified"). In other words, the human heart is desperately wicked as it is fueled by the sin nature (Jer. 17:9) and therefore cannot always judge properly. We can deceive ourselves into thinking our motives are pure when in reality they are not.

Is our conscience a safe guide? This is what Paul is really getting at. Paul says that it is not an accurate guide when it is not guided by God's truth and when we lean on it to approve our wrong forms of living. Even he was afraid to evaluate himself in a positive light for he knew that his conscience can deceive him. Instead of being led by our conscience, we are to be led of the Spirit (Gal. 5:18).

When our conscience rebukes us and tells us that we are wrong, we should obey it. However, our conscience can also approve our easygoing ways and wayward living, and it can appeal to our vanity and actually flatter us. So, we need to be careful about our conscience.

It was Longfellow who put it like this:

"Not in the clamor of the crowded street, Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng, But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat."

Man values things like cleverness, wisdom, wealth, and success but God is looking for those who will be faithful to Jesus Christ in their everyday living and Christian service (1 Cor. 4:2). The servant must concern himself with faithfulness to God because he knows he must someday give account of himself to God. But this faithfulness that is required in stewards is sometimes difficult for others to evaluate. We must be careful that we do not judge a person's inward motives and reasons for serving the Lord. Paul now applies this to a larger extent and relates it to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:5 goes on to declare:

“Therefore judge nothing (*the inappropriate judgment without cause*) before the time (*the inescapable Judgment Seat of Christ*), until the Lord come (*the imminent return of Christ in the Rapture*), who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: (*the inward purposes or true nature of our hearts, the inner attitudes which are stained by sin*) and then shall every man have praise of God” (*the important ending of praise and reward*).

In this verse, Paul is referring to the "time" when the Lord comes and sets up His Judgment Seat. When Paul states, “judge nothing,” does he mean we can never assess the actions of other Christians? No, this is not what Paul is teaching here. This is because elsewhere we are called upon to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21), judge the sinful actions of brothers and sisters (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6-7, 11), mark them who are teaching error (Rom. 16:17-18), reprove the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), and make sure that what is being said is true (Acts 17:11). Jesus taught that we are to judge matters with a righteous judgment or discernment (John 7:24). If we are not to exercise discerning judgment, then we cannot put into practice these commands of Scripture. There is a place for honest, loving criticism (Eph. 4:15) so that we can help and restore others (Gal. 6:1).

It’s obvious that there is a difference between unjustly judging someone and using spiritual discernment and judgment. Paul is condemning the over-critical spirit and unbiblical side of man’s judgment that Christians commit against other Christians. What Paul is condemning here is the critical spirit of quickly assessing and determining the spirituality of others and the motives of why Christians are involved in ministry and service. Here is the point. We should not rashly determine what is going on in a person’s heart, acting as expert judges of the human heart. At the same time, what a person does, his attitude, his actions, his words, will work together to reveal what is in his heart, for out of the heart flow the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

When Paul talks about the “hidden things of darkness” he is referring to those things which are unknown to men, but not to God. The things hidden in the darkness within the inner recesses of a person’s heart would include the known or conscious motives of God’s servants which are carnal but would also include the unconscious motives of God’s servants which might

also be carnally based and inaccurate. In other words, this may even include things hidden from the person's own conscience, or those things of which we were not aware. Sometimes even Christians can be deceived about the true nature of their service to the Lord and their motives.

The old saying is true: "Ignorance is not bliss." I think the hidden things of darkness will certainly include the carnal things that Christians were unaware about in relation to their personal lives and Christian service. It will be those things that were hidden to them because of their choice to not listen to God's Word, their lack of discernment, and their failure to practice consecrated and holy living. The hidden things of darkness are the things which Jesus referred to in this way: "I have somewhat against thee" (Rev. 2:4), "But I have a few things against thee" (Rev. 2:14).

In light of this, Robert Gromacki states:

"When Christ returns, an accurate assessment of men, methods, and motivations will take place."

Today Christians can make inaccurate and carnally-based judgments about men and ministries which are not based on a righteous standard of judgment. In other words, our judgment can be carnal and clouded in many ways because of our own bias, pride, and personal preferences. The ultimate judgment and evaluation of Christ's servants and ministries is going to occur at His judgment seat. Paul tells us to be prepared for this day for we can expect to be probed. This will not only be true in relation to our Christian service but our entire Christian life. Our guilty secrets are known by the Lord. We may conceal them from man, but we cannot conceal them from the Lord.

It's Christ who "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness." In the context of ministry this refers to our motives in serving the Lord. Was our service done for our glory, fleshly pursuits, or for God's glory? This refers to the reasons why servants do what they do. Is our service selfish, man-centered, or God-centered? In a broader sense, we will be examined (not judged) for our entire course of living. In this case, the deeds would extend to those things done when a person is alone, totally unsupervised or unwatched by men.

Yes, the Bible then states that Christ “will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.” This evaluation will also include what was really on the inside of our hearts while we lived as a Christian on earth.

Theodore Epp said it best:

“There is a day coming when our Lord is going to turn on the spiritual X-ray machine and will reveal the true motives or realities of the heart.”



Woodrow Kroll explains it like this:

“Just as day brings light from the sun to reveal the hidden things of darkness, so that day will bring light from the Son to reveal the hidden things of darkness done in our bodies. However, many hidden things which are good will be revealed as well...It will be a day of both vindication and a day of disappointment.”

At the close of this evaluation and probing of our hearts and lives, Christ will find something in every Christian life for which to praise him for since the Bible teaches “then shall every man have praise of God.” This means that all Christians will have some praise extended toward them which in this context relates to how all Christians will receive some reward. The Ryrie Study Bible says this about 1 Corinthians 4:5: "At the judgment seat of Christ, when counsels are revealed, all believers will receive some praise from God, for all will bear some fruit." Of course, the more faithful among God’s children who have truly glorified His name, who have served Him with a right heart and motive, will receive more praise than the less faithful.

When Paul speaks of praise, he is likely still thinking in terms of the Corinthian situation, in which some gave praise for Apollos, some for Cephas, and others for Paul (1 Cor. 3:3-5). Ultimately, it’s Jesus who is going to give out the proper praise and reward in this future day. All debunked and biased forms of judgment do not matter today. Only the final Judge and judgment upon our ministries, service, and personal lives will matter.

There are several practical applications of this passage of Scripture to our Christian lives. First, God’s opinion of us is more important than man’s opinions. If we are going to be a faithful servant of the Lord, we must come to a point where the opinions of the Lord about our ministries are more important than the opinions of man. If you are always worried about what everyone else thinks and cater to their opinions, you will be miserable,

frustrated, and ineffective in your service to the Lord. You can only have one master (Matt. 6:24). Paul learned to discount congregational pressure. Paul was able to say the evaluation of the critical, judgmental Corinthians was a very small thing to him (1 Cor. 4:3). In other words, the opinions of others were not at the steering wheel of his life.

The Welwyn Commentary Series concludes:

“He (Paul) wasn't trying to be arrogant, and he certainly wasn't saying he had no sensitivity to others. He was simply registering his deep conviction that he could not serve God effectively, if he constantly concerned himself with what people thought of him. This doesn't mean the preacher is above criticism, but it does mean he must not let criticism from others be the determining factor in what he preaches and in how he conducts his ministry. Congregational pressure, cultural pressure, personal pressure is sometimes tainted with human fallibility and frailty and cannot be trusted to be completely accurate. In the last analysis, only one thing matters: how the Lord looks at us. “

Abraham Lincoln once said:

“Public opinion in this country is everything.”

Unfortunately, this is true. There is a danger to defer to the opinion of others, to yield to the criticism of our enemies and surrender to them instead of following the truth and God's way.

Second, we should live for the praise of God. These verses also give us a helpful reminder that as servants of God, we must serve for the future approval of our Lord, rather than serve for the present praise of people. Our single purpose in life and serving the Lord should be to please God (2 Tim. 2:4; Gal. 1:10). This is the motive that should determine how we think, what we do, and how we serve the Lord.

John 12:43 says:

“For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Someone remarked:

“The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.”

I'm afraid this is also true!

God's judgement will reveal what no one else can fully discern: the secret motives of the heart. On this day or "that day" (2 Tim. 4:8), the faithful servant will have all the praise he needs, praise from the Master himself! How foolish it is for God's servants to live for human praise when they have the promise of God's praise! And how foolish will those feel who preached for human praise when, on the day of reckoning, they find themselves deprived of God's praise!

Of course, who gains the greatest praise, or who gains the greatest reward (1 Cor. 4:5) can only be determined by Christ since He alone knows the motives or purposes and will of our hearts. What we need to do when serving the Lord is ask: Why am I ministering? Am I ministering so I'll be famous? So I'll be popular? So I'll be loved by everybody? Am I ministering just because I feel I must do this? Or am I ministering so that God is glorified. This is the only motive that will keep us on track as we serve the Lord.

1 Corinthians 10:31

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

If we are serving for any other reason than God's glory, then we will not receive reward for our service. God knows all about the hidden things of our hearts! If we are serving halfheartedly, out of necessity, if we are serving to gain notoriety, to feed our carnal nature in some way, serving with a competitive spirit, or to perform before others and entertain them, then we won't receive reward for that service. In other words, when looking at the broad spectrum of our lives, Jesus will not view our wrong motives in service as gold, silver, and precious stones since our acts of service were not done with the right motive. Instead, these acts of service will fall on the pile of wood, hay, and stubble.

One preacher wrote:

"One of the marvelous experiences we will have on that day (the Judgment Seat of Christ) will be to realize that many dear saints, completely unknown to the world and perhaps hardly known to fellow believers, will receive reward after reward after reward from the Lord's hands—because their works were of gold, silver, and precious stones. Their hearts will have been pure, their works will have been precious, and their rewards will be great."



Although the primary focus of the Judgment Seat of Christ is based on reward, we cannot help but see that there will be a serious review of our lives to determine our rewards. The Judge will decide what we did with what He gave us. Dear friend, do not take this most solemn event lightly. There is a day coming when we as believers in Christ will be evaluated for the way we have lived upon earth. The secret sins of our lives that deal with evil motives, thoughts, words, actions, unforgiveness, hypocrisy, jealousy and envy will be brought out into the light which means that in some way they will be made known to us. However, this internal revelation is not revealed in order to condemn us but to actually commend us for those things that remain and which will result in reward (“and then shall every man have praise of God” – 1 Cor. 4:5).

We have talked about this already. Allow me to make one more comment on this. Some view Paul’s statement to mean that only those who receive reward will receive God’s praise in accordance with their reward. But this seems to be reading into this text something that is not here. I take this to mean that the Lord will find some fruitful acts of service in every believer that He will praise and reward them for in the day. Joy comes in the morning!

Please note that some have posed this question. If all the saints will receive praise and subsequent reward who have lived during the Church Age, then what about babies who have died and gone to Heaven during the Church Age, who could not live and obtain reward. Another example is often given. What about the thief on the cross and others who were saved on their deathbeds who did not have time to serve God and gain reward? The Word of God is silent about the specifics of this, but it does declare that all the saints will be praised and included in this reward by the Judge who always does right (Gen. 18:25).

God knows what He is doing. He will have something good to say about all His saints and reward all His people in this coming day. This means that Christ will give reward to those who have died as babies and young children, even though we cannot fully comprehend how He will do this with our own finite minds. We simply leave the future to God and His ways knowing that God declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) and that He knows what could have been and would have come to pass if things were different.

All of us will be grateful that Jesus found something to reward us for at the Bema Seat. The end result of this judgment will be one of joyfulness and appreciation for God's graciousness in rewarding us as His people. When the judgment is all finished and the smoke has cleared (1 Cor. 3:15), God will be glorified in that He will have a redeemed company of people who has been rewarded for their living and service rendered unto Him.

Again, when God brings forth the hidden things of darkness and reveals them to our hearts (1 Cor. 4:5), it does not mean that we will face judgment for our sins and that all of our shortcomings will be visibly displayed like a DVD before the saints of all the ages on some giant screen in the sky. It does not mean that every sin that we have committed will be held against us. However, it does remind us that we need to be faithful and have pure motives in our ministry and personal living for this is what will count in the end.

What the Scriptures teach is that we will in some way personally know what kind of servant we have been for the Lord. We will in some measure and capacity recollect our worthless deeds and unfaithful living while on earth. In fact, we will know in a moment's time what kind of servant we have been for the Lord as we face the record of our lives! Our faithfulness and what we have done for the Lord is all that is going to last. Nothing else will matter but our final reward.

Yes, in this examination, we will in some way know the hidden things of darkness in our hearts. In some kind of general way, probably unbeknown to us today, we will know where we have failed the Lord and where we stand on this coming day. If this were not the case, then we could not be rewarded accordingly (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12).

Erwin Lutzer explained it very well by saying:

"Even if our sins are represented as forgiven, we cannot escape the conclusion that our lifestyle is under judicial review, with appropriate rewards and penalties."

Of course, the penalties have to do with a loss of reward and ruling privileges in our future reign with Christ. However, in that moment, when we face the record of our past unfaithful living as a believer, we will still have the complete assurance that we are forgiven by God's grace and that we will not face judgment for our sins in any way (John 6:47). We will have

the full assurance that we are only being examined for our life of service and dedication to God. We will understand that the manner in which we have lived will determine our eternal reward but not our eternal destiny.

The words of the song come to my mind as I write:

“Only one life, twill soon be past,  
Only what’s done for Christ will last.  
Only one chance to do His will.  
So give to Jesus every day,  
For it’s the only life that pays,  
When you recall you have but one life!!”

Revelation 22:12

“And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

This reminds us that Jesus will return in a sudden manner without any delay. He will not tarry as we often say. When Jesus decides to return, He will do it quickly and on His timetable. This is why we need to be a faithful servant of the Lord who is living for Him in these last days. When Jesus returns we will be rewarded according to the way we have lived. Quality, quantity, motive, and sincerity will enter in to this final day of examination. And think of this, if our motive is right in serving the Lord, the quality and quantity will also be right.

It is very clear that the Bible passages dealing with the Judgment Seat of Christ refer to Christians, not unbelievers and that this particular judgment involves believers giving an account of their lives to Christ.

➤ **Explaining Romans 14:10-12**

Romans 14:10-12

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? (*judging improperly regarding insignificant matters – things of unimportance as revealed in Romans 14:1-6*) or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? (*despise or look down upon another brother when judging him on the basis of personal preference*) for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall

confess to God (*agree with Christ's evaluation of their lives*). So then every one of us shall give account (*verbal agreement*) of himself to God.”

Paul is talking about how Christians will one day bow down before the Lord Jesus Christ in complete acknowledgement that His judgment and assessment of their lives is perfectly righteous and accurate. We will know in a moment what the record of our lives has been when we give “account” of ourselves before Jesus Christ.

This is similar to what Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 4:2-5. It reminds us that we should not be hasty in our judgments of others and possess an over-critical spirit in our assessments and judgments of other Christians. This is especially true in relation to matters of insignificance which do not pertain to specific areas of doctrine and spirituality. We should not set ourselves up as holier-than-thou judges over others by improperly assessing their Christian lives, taking a punch at them, when we misunderstand about the true nature of spirituality and Christian living.

The matters in Paul's day dealt with judging one another in relation to the Sabbath day versus Sunday and other unimportant matters regarding certain foods that were originally forbidden under the Law of Moses (Rom. 14:1-3). After 33 years of being a pastor, I have learned something very important. It's an important lesson that we must all learn. And here is the lesson: Some things really don't matter. They are personal preferences and we should not become a mean-spirited and uninformed judge over others when it comes to matters that do not overturn sound doctrine and those specific areas that do not violate the teaching on sanctification and spirituality.

Why? It's because a day of accountability is coming for all of us. We will all be judged at the Bema. We cannot wiggle out of it! We will give an “account” before Jesus Christ of our lives, our faithfulness and unfaithfulness. We cannot get passed what the Bible is teaching here. We will not be judged as a sinner but as a servant of Christ in direct proportion to how we have lived out our lives on earth. It involves a judgment based upon our good and bad deeds in life and our overall performance as a servant of Christ. There will obviously be the good, the bad, and the ugly that will be sorted out by Christ on this day of examination. Only the good will remain.

A computer network is a set of computers connected together for the purpose of sharing resources. The most common resource shared today is connection to the Internet. Other shared resources can include a printer or a file server. The Internet itself can be considered a computer network.

I am told that there are many different types of computer networks.

- Personal Area Network (PAN) ...
- Local Area Network (LAN) ...
- Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) ...
- Campus Area Network (CAN) ...
- Metropolitan Area Network (MAN) ...
- Wide Area Network (WAN) ...
- Storage-Area Network (SAN) ...
- System-Area Network (also known as SAN)

God has His own information network and it will be downloaded to us very quickly and we will know the information at a moment's time. God will be able to do this in a split second for all His redeemed saints. In other words, Christ can cause our entire lives to be present to us in a moment of time. The Bema Seat will not take seven years as some Bible expositors suggest. I cannot imagine a Christian waiting seven years in Heaven to be examined by Christ! This exam will be over in a moment's time!

Lehman Strauss agrees:

“However one thing is certain, as Henry W. Frost has said: ‘A divine judgment need not take long.’ It is absurd even to conceive of a problem of space when we think of that vast expanse in the heavens. ‘It is possible that this judgment of the saints will be instantaneous, and that each Christian will rise into the air to enter at once into his proper place and appointed rewarding.’”

Leon Wood also suggests the brevity of this judgment:

“If Christians are to be judged for works done prior to the rapture, it is reasonable to believe that such a judgment would follow the rapture as soon as possible. It seems logical to let those judged know the results of their judgment sooner rather than later ... both First Corinthians 4:5 and Revelation 22:12 indicate that Christ will bestow rewards at the time of His

coming for His own, with the implication that this will happen at a moment very near that time.”

I agree with these conclusions. The Bible suggests that we will “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17) and this is where the Judgment Seat of Christ will occur.

Dr. Dwight Pentecost has said:

“It is scarcely necessary to point out that this examination must take place in the sphere of the heavenlies ... Since the bema follows the translation, the ‘air’ must be the scene of it.”

This event will immediately follow the translation and resurrection of Church Age saints. Rewards are associated with “that day” which is the Biblical language for the Rapture (2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Cor. 4:5). The Bema will occur somewhere in the heavenlies before the presence of the Lord. Christ will quickly make known to us the record of our lives on earth and we will experience a dual sensation of both gladness and sadness when meeting the Savior. We will pass through a judgment that will be over in a very short period of time. There is no Biblical evidence that the duration of the Judgment Seat of Christ will be long and drawn out.

It must also be understood that only our post-conversion days as a Christian will be evaluated and not our pre-conversion days as an unsaved person. Jesus is going to judge us from the time we became a servant of His through the new birth. Even Paul the apostle was looking forward to great reward in spite of the fact that he persecuted the church in his pre-conversion days (2 Timothy 4:6- 8).

Erwin Lutzer once again observes:

“We’ll not be judged on what we did from the time of our first birth, but what we did since our second birth.”

He then concludes:

“We will be judged on the basis of our loyalty to Christ with the time, talents, and treasures that were at our disposal. In other words, we are judged for the opportunities that were given to us, be they few or many, great or small. All believers have the potential to be generously rewarded.”

Revelation 14:13

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

Rest and reward is part of the afterlife for believers. Everything done for Christ and in His name will be richly rewarded - every kindness, sacrificial gift, prayer, tear, and word of testimony for Christ.

In Mathew 20:1-16, Jesus gave a parable of servants working in a vineyard. “For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive.

“So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.”

You will notice that those who worked longer and shorter hours were given the same pay. Those who came early to the vineyard named their price but the others did not and were rewarded the same amount while working less. Jesus taught that everyone should be happy with what they are given. Jesus

also taught that He will be generous when reviewing those who are faithful to Him, even though they might not have been saved as long and served as long. The parable reminds us that rewards are not based on results or size of ministry but on being faithful to what God has given us to do, whatever it might be. We should be satisfied and faithful with our place in the vineyard, where God has placed us, no matter how obscure a place it might be. We should also remember that rewards are not necessarily based on the amount of time we spend in the vineyard.

If we serve faithfully in the place and time God gave to us, we will be generously rewarded. "So the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:15). Some who thought they would be first will be last when entering the earthly kingdom because their service was born out of pride and selfish ambition. Others who served out of love and gratitude will be highly rewarded and honored. The point is that God will reward all His disciples justly, graciously, and generously (2 Tim. 4:8).

Haddon Robinson says that one day his son came in from the hot Texas sun and exclaimed, "Dad, I've mowed the lawn!" which, of course, is another way of saying, "Pay me!" His father asked, "How much do you think your work is worth?" The boy refused to answer. When pressed, he continued to evade the question, and his father insisted, "Why don't you name your price?" To which the boy replied, "I know that if you make the decision you will give me more than I would ever ask!"

As God's saints, we can anticipate good things from the generous hand of the Lord on this future day of examination. Beloved, let us serve faithfully where God has called us and use our time, talents, and treasures wisely. We will be richly rewarded for doing so. We need to remember that a day of accountability and reward is coming as Romans 14:10 clearly teaches.

This means we should reflect upon our decisions and seek to make the right ones in light of this judgement seat. In fact, we must conclude that life is a series of decisions. Every day of your life you live on the basis of the decisions that you make. You make literally hundreds of decisions every day. You decide what you are going to do that day. You decide how you are going to respond or react to the things that come into your life. Every day of our lives is a series of new decisions.



Jerry Vines wrote:

“What I am tonight is on the basis of the decisions that I made in my past. What I am going to be tomorrow will be determined by the decisions I make today.”

Yes, we will one day stand before the Lord and the decisions we have made will impact our eternal reward. As we contemplate the Judgment Seat of Christ and our accountability to God, we must remember the importance of our decisions and how they will affect our reward.

Now let's return to Romans for a few moments. You will note that Romans 14:12 goes on to say, “every man shall give account of himself to God.” This means that you cannot give an account for me and I cannot give an account for you. In this coming day, every believer will give his or her own report! You will not back me up, nor will I back you up with words of promotion or excuses. Nothing will be sugarcoated in this day. All of our wasted life and wicked deeds will in some measure have an impact upon our faithfulness, as a servant, and the measure of our reward in this day.

Some writers have assumed by Paul's use of the word “confess” in Romans 14:11 that we will have to confess all of our sins or at least our unconfessed sins to God (1 John 1:9). They also suggest that we will have to confess to God all of our missed days at church, lack of giving, and missed opportunities for witness. In general, many teach that Christians will have to confess to God about all the details of their misspent lives and their overall lack of performance for the Lord while living on earth.

Granted, all these things will come under the scrutiny of God's judgment in this day. All of these areas are important and will affect the kind of servant we have been for the Lord and the reward that we will receive. But as we have already mentioned, Paul is not suggesting that our examination before the Lord will be some kind of gigantic confessional booth in the sky, where every detail of our lack of performance or missed opportunities (James 4:17) as a servant will require individual confession.

We will not confess all our sins before Christ but confess or acknowledge that His revelation and assessment of our lives is righteous and accurate. Paul incorporates a quote from Isaiah 45:23 in this section and applies it to the believer's judgment at the Bema. He does this to assure all of us that we will have to give an account before the Lord someday. This same quote

is used in Philippians 2:10-11 where it has reference to the entire universe of beings confessing that Jesus is Lord. Even the devil will one day be forced to confess this to the Lord at His Second Coming. Paul takes this verse and makes application of it to the judgment seat of Christ for Christians. His intent in using this quote is to show that we will have to give an account before the Lord of our earthly lives.

The word “confess” means to openly acknowledge or agree to something. In the context of the Judgment Seat of Christ, it would obviously mean to agree with the Lord’s evaluation of our unfaithfulness, sinful, and unproductive living versus faithful, productive, and godly living while living on earth as His children.

Coupled with this confession or agreement is the word “account.” This is the word “logos” which means to speak a word. The idea is that we will give a word or speech concerning the way that we have lived and served. Again, this is not suggesting that we will confess all of our past earthly sins and every wrong turn that we have taken in our Christian life. This would require more than a simple confession or word!

Apparently Paul had in mind something else. In this day of final examination, all Christians will in a brief word and way, outwardly confess (agree) that the Lord has faithfully and righteously examined their life as a servant. This is a single confession. It’s a once and done matter. It’s not referring to the untold millions of confessions regarding the past sins and failures of God’s children but the singular confession to the Judge that His examination of our lives was correct. We will outwardly agree that all the omniscience of the righteous Judge (Jesus Christ) has revealed about our lives was absolutely true.

We will not confess our sins, answer for our sins, be chastened for our sins or be judged for them in any way. This is not the nature and purpose of this judgment seat. We will simply acknowledge that all the wood, hay and stubble, which the Lord has revealed in our lives, and the gold, silver, precious stones, was an absolutely true and righteous judgment on His part (Rev. 15:3). We will agree with the Judge! The idea is that we will in some verbal way agree with the Christ’s evaluation of our life as a servant, whether it pertains to our lack of stewardship or faithfulness (how we have used our gifts, money, and life for the Lord and His work). In some manner and in some way, every Christian will outwardly verify and agree to the

examination, which the Lord has just given them. This may occur on an individual or corporate basis.

In the final analysis, we will all give this word of agreement – “Yes Lord, it is true.” A general confession is going to occur on this momentous occasion. The Bible is clear about this matter. “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

When as a child we received a report card, it reminded us how we performed throughout a particular school marking period. The report card revealed to us in unmistakable terms how we had performed. When taking the report card home, we found ourselves that very evening, confessing our lack of performance to our parents! We said, “It is true, I failed in this or that.” The report card told the true story.

In a similar fashion, when Jesus hands out our final report card of our lives, we will confess that the way He has graded us was just and right. All we will do is give a word of agreement to the Lord. We will verify that He has handed out the report card in a just way and the final grade will stand no matter what!

- What might your grade be in that coming report card day?
- What kind of performance will you have had as a servant?
- What have you been doing for Jesus Christ?
- Are you doing it faithfully and sincerely?
- How committed are you to the cause of Christ?
- Have you been allowing sin to control your life?

When you confess in that coming day the words, “Yes Lord it is true,” what will be true about your life? Will it be true that you have squandered many years and opportunities to really serve the Lord? Will it be true that you have wasted away much of your life with your own selfish and carnal living? What will you really confess to in this future day?

We will have regrets for a short time because of our misspent opportunities and wasted living for Christ. Apparently we will still retain the memory of the way we have lived while upon planet earth. I’m convinced that many of us will wish that we had given Him more of our time and labor and life as a servant. We will wish that we had lived a more faithful life before the Lord

and for the Lord. We will probably all say to some extent: I'd wish I had given Him more!

“By and by when I look on His face,  
Beautiful face, thorn shadowed face.  
By and by when I look on His face,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

More, so much more,  
More of my life than I e'er gave before.  
By and by when I look on His face,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

By and by when I look at His hands,  
Beautiful hands, nail-riven hands,  
By and by when I look at His hands,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

More, so much more,  
More of my life than I e'er gave before  
By and by when I look at His hands,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.”

But then, in a moment's time, those same fiery eyes of our Lord, will in some marvelous way express His wonderful love toward us and take away the sorrow and remorse for any lack of service and dedication we have had failed to do for Him. Christ will do this by giving praise to every believer for those worthy things which they have done. 1 Corinthians 4:5 once again states: "... and then shall every man have praise of God."

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the amount of disappointment and remorse will be quickly turned into joy as we enter our eternal state (Rev. 21:4). The overall tenor of this judgment will be one of joy and not sadness. It will be a day of joyous reunion and comfort when we meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:13-18, 5:11). It will not be a day of horrified terror, judgment for sin and answering to God for an unfaithful life. Our sorrow will be relative or small (insignificant) in comparison to the commandment of our eternal joy.

## ➤ Explaining 2 Corinthians 5:11

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:11:

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.”

Paul follows up his segment on the Judgment Seat of Christ speaking about the terror of the Lord. What does this expression mean? It certainly cannot be speaking about the terror of the unsaved who are facing God’s judgment since God’s wrath is not being meted out on Christians before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 8:1). Nor can Paul be speaking of the terror that the saved will experience when standing before the Bema. This is because we are not going to meet an angry God who is against us but our loving Savior who has died for us!

When Paul uses the word “terror” in this text it can mean several things. First, the word carries the Biblical understanding of reverence, awe, wonder, and amazement when facing the eternal God, Jesus Christ, at this judgment seat. The Bema Seat should strike a sense of awe and wonder in us, when we think of meeting Jesus Christ, so much so, that we persuade other believers to live lives that are honorable, and which glorify God.

In other words, since Paul had this type of reverential fear, respect, and reverence of God, he went around persuading or convincing other believers about their need to develop this same time of reverence and respect for God in view of their future examination before the God of the universe. Let us remember that the greater reverence and respect that we have for God in this life, His holy character and ways, the more we will live like God and be rewarded in the future. Whether or not Paul would succeed in persuading others to live differently would not affect his own life. He knew that his entire life was an open book before God (“we are made manifest unto God”).

Charles Spurgeon declared:

“If God has spoken, listen! If God has recorded his words in a Book, search its pages with a believing heart. If you do not accept it as God’s inspired word, I cannot invite you to pay any particular attention to it; but if you regard it as the Book of God, I charge you, as I shall meet you at the

judgement seat of Christ, study the Bible daily. Treat not the Eternal God with disrespect, but delight in His Word.”

So, the word “fear” can have the meaning of rendering up reverence and respect to God for who He is in His eternal character and being which should result in us responding to this revelation of God in holiness and humble service.

Second, the word “terror” can also connote the healthy and wholesome dread of not pleasing our Lord and Savior when He appears for His children in the Rapture or when we appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is that holy dread of meeting the Lord when our life is not in order. This understanding of “terror” flows out of the previous concept of revering God. In other words, we should possess a wholesome desire to want to please the God who should be revered as infinitely holy, righteous, and full of glory. We should not want to displease Him with our lives and when we stand before Him someday.

John Walvoord comments:

“This fear is of the possibility that his life will be revealed as one wasted and spent in selfishness rather than in devotion and complete obedience to Christ.”

When Paul talks about the “terror of the Lord” following his explanation of the Judgment Seat of Christ, he was not saying that the Bema would be a day of dread and some kind of horrifying or terrifying experience before the presence of the Lord. That is not what this fear means. This concept of fear would distort our grace relationship with Christ.

Elsewhere, we read how Paul anticipated Christ’s return. He did not paint the picture of the Bema as a place where we are terrorized and are filled with actual fear and terror.

Philippians 3:20

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look (joyfully and with great expectation) for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Titus 2:13

“Looking (with joy and great expectation) for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”

Paul was looking forward to seeing Christ. He was not anticipating the wrath and dread of an angry God but the reception of a loving and merciful God. After all, we are going to see our Savior who loves us very much (John 11:35-36). Jesus is not going to look at us in this day to terrorize us with our sins or cause great fear to swell up in our hearts because of our past failures in life. Granted, there will be disappointment and remorse at the Judgment Seat of Christ because of our sins and failures; however, there will not be the terror of judgment and fright because of our sins. We will know that all of our sins will not incur God's wrath upon our lives in any way.

We shall see His lovely face, that face which reveals to His children of His great love, grace, and mercy!

Luke 22:61 reveals this to us:

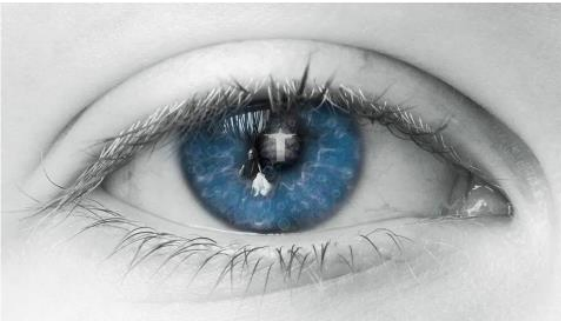
“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.”

So it will be in this coming day! The Lord Jesus will look upon us and expose us for what we really were. But this will occur before the face of a loving Savior who has already forgiven us for all of our sins and failures. His look is that wonderful look of love!

“His wonderful look of love, His wonderful look of love;  
Made the teardrops start, broke and won my heart;  
His wonderful look of love!”

I believe this is the way it will be when we see Jesus for the very first time! We will not look into a face that demonstrates anger and initiates terror in our hearts, where we will experience the fear and dread of Christ's disciplinary judgment and harassment for a misspent life. We will see the face of the very One who loved us and died for us (Gal. 2:20). What a thrilling and awe-inspiring moment it will be!

## Face to face! O Blissful Moment!



“Face to face! O blissful moment!  
Face to face to see and know;  
Face to face with my Redeemer,  
Jesus Christ who loves me so.”

Jesus may be disappointed with our unfaithfulness, but He will not be harsh with us on this day. God’s terror will not be seen or evidenced before His forgiven children. This is because the anger of God has been appeased through the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf (1John 2:2).

While knowing that God loves us with an everlasting love (Romans 8:38-39), we will realize our own lack of love and unfaithfulness toward Him. We will not experience the terror of His judgment in this day because of our sins, but experience remorse for our waywardness, worthless deeds of the flesh, and lack of love for the Lord. We can be sure that some tears will flow in this meeting place within the air, prior to our entrance into Heaven, where no tears will fall (Revelation 21:4).

Erwin Lutzer once again states:

“Much will change about us in eternity, but much shall also remain the same.”

How we have lived while on earth will be reflected throughout the eternal ages of time in our reward and own ability to reflect God’s glory (1 Cor. 9:24; 1 Pet. 5:4; Col. 3:4; Dan. 12:3). God will give *general* rewards for being a faithful servant and steward. He promises to reward us for giving a cup of cold water in his name (Matt. 10:42) and our labor of love toward the saints and those in need (Heb. 6:10; Matt. 6:18). In some way, all the righteous things we do will result in reward (2 Cor. 5:10). There are also *specific* rewards that we will receive which are identified as crowns (1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 1 Pet. 5:4; James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

Here is the thrilling reality of what lies ahead! All the reward we do receive will ultimately translate into our ability to radiate or shine forth God’s glory from our own personal glorified bodies throughout eternity (1 Pet. 5:4; Dan. 12:3; Matt. 13:43). What a sobering reality and incentive this provides for our lives today. We should want to maintain a healthy spiritual state



and keep serving the Lord faithfully in light of our eternal and unchanging reward which will ultimately bring glory to God forever and forever.

Earl Radmacher has captured it well when stating:

“The person I am becoming today is preparing me for the person I shall be throughout all of eternity.”

When I was a boy, I used to throw stones in the ponds where I would fish. I often wondered why I did not catch many fish! Well, when you would throw a stone in the water a rippling effect would begin to travel across the entire pond. It is amazing how that one little stone could have such a far-reaching effect upon that large body of water.

How we live today will have a rippling  
Effect that will last forever!



In the same way, the way we live our lives today, and every day, has a rippling effect that will go on for eternity! The things that we do and say today will affect our eternal reward and how much we can reflect God’s glory. In one sense, we are creating today the person we will be for eternity.

We must ask ourselves today two very important questions. Somewhere within the time frame of the next twenty years, what will you wish you would have done for Christ? We might also ask, “Somewhere within the time frame of the next twenty years, how will you wish you would have lived your life?” These are soul searching questions that we need to ask ourselves on a daily basis, so that we might keep our lives in check and remember that we will be evaluated as a servant in the coming day.

Roy Laurin once said:

“Measure your life by the broad sweep of eternity”

Matthew Henry had a way of expressing the importance of living everyday of our lives with the view that it may be our last day to gain reward or lose reward for eternity. He wrote: “It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day.”

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not see our life passing before our eyes. But we will see that it is already past and now the time to be judged as a servant and steward of God has come. We will in some measure know just how unfaithful, unwilling, and unusable we have been over the course of our lives. But we will also know the degree of our faithfulness and commitment to Christ.

2 Timothy 4:1 is a charge or summons to us:

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.”

Both the Rapture (“appearing”) and the kingdom are placed side-by-side since our accountability and reward received at the Bema Seat will carry over into the Millennial Kingdom and will also translate into privileged to rule with Christ. Our general and specific rewards (the crowns) will be transferred into ruling and reigning privileges during the Kingdom Age. Undoubtedly this will be more amazing than anything we could ever imagine!

Evangelist Kenneth F. Dodson has written:

“Actually, for the Christian, the judgment seat of Christ is God’s gateway into the Millennial Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is there that every Christian’s position in the thousand year reign will be determined on the basis of God’s just evaluation of the Christian’s life in this sinful world.”

Although every believer will enter the Millennium (Rev. 5:10), not every believer will have an equal status of reward and reigning privilege with the Lord.

2 Peter 1:10-11 gives this promise:

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Abundant living in this life results in abundant reward and spiritual blessings in the earthly Millennium. The way we live today will result in greater privileges of recognition and rule in the earthly theocracy. So in reality we are preparing today the person that we will be for all eternity!

The subject of future reward is a solemn truth that we should reflect upon every day. Will Jesus honor and reward me in the future day, as a faithful servant, or will I receive little reward for my lack of commitment and faithfulness to Christ?

1 Corinthians 4:2

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

One cannot be a servant of Christ without being a steward at the same time. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, our stewardship will be taken into consideration. We should be found faithful today as a steward but also at the time of the Rapture when Jesus returns for His Church. A steward in Bible times was a house manager that overlooked the affairs of his master. The parallel is easy to see. Jesus is our Master and we are to manage our time and entire life in such a way that we are living for Jesus Christ, pleasing Him, and committed to His cause. We are to be a steward of our spiritual gifts, our giving to God’s work, and in using our body for holy purposes. Our stewardship is directly linked to our accountability before the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Romans 14:12 once again says:

“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

No, we will not be personally judged as a sinner at the Bema Seat, but God reserves the right to judge us on the basis of our faithfulness as a servant and steward of His Word and righteousness. God spares us from being judged as a sinner but at the same time He makes us responsible for the kind of life that we have lived as a believer by disqualifying us from receiving reward at the Bema (1 Cor. 9:27).

Remember that faithfulness to God not only means that we are committed to do good deeds but that we also seek to live free of evil deeds. Our life as a servant and steward will come under the scrutiny of God’s judgment. The way we have lived our life will be reflected in the gaining or loss of reward (2 Cor. 5:10).

There is a story told of a commercial traveler who presented himself before his chief after finishing his round. Taking the very small batch of orders in his hand, the manager looked at the man and said, "And is this all you've done?" In reply the man looked steadily at his employer and said, "No, sir, it

isn't all I've done, but I'm afraid it is all I can show." In our work for God, it is often when we toil hardest that we can show the least tangible result. But if there has been the earnest endeavor to serve Christ and to do what is right, we may be sure that He knows all about it and will reward us accordingly.

➤ **Explaining 1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 also speaks to the matter of discipline and faithfulness in light of the Judgment Seat of Christ: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain (*run to win!*). And every man that striveth for the mastery (*who is part of the contest and struggle*) is temperate in all things (*maintain self-control*). Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible (*win an eternal reward*). I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection (*discipline the body*): lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (*should become disqualified from receiving reward*).

Running the Race of the Christian Life



In these verses, Paul compared the Christian life to a race. Whatever makes a winning athlete will also make a winning Christian. Of course, discipline and sticking to the important things is the key to winning the race. Racing was well known due to the Greek athletic festival of the Isthmian games held in Corinth.

In these games 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 (2 Tim. 2:5). The victor of a given event who had participated according to 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.

Paul is teaching that we are to run the race of the Christian life in order to receive a prize or reward. Our reward will not be a temporary reward that fades away but an eternal reward ("an incorruptible crown" – 1 Cor. 9:24).

This is a special reward given to those who have disciplined their lives and therefore served God faithfully, effectively, and victoriously. In general, the Bible is teaching that when we receive reward for our faithfulness and service to Christ in this future day of examination, we will have won the race of the Christian life. This will be demonstrated by the reward you have received, whether it be this reward or some other reward and honor that is bestowed upon us in the coming day. So, we must run to win! We must live in such a way that we anticipate receiving reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

We must remember that living for Jesus Christ and being faithful to Him is the only thing that is going to last for eternity. There should be no wasted time and energy when it comes to living for Jesus Christ. We should be redeeming the time (Eph. 5:16-17). Our Christian life should be lived in a disciplined and controlled fashion, where we allow our body to be a slave to us instead of allowing ourselves to become a slave to our body (1 Cor. 9:27). By disciplining our bodies to serve the Lord and being faithful to Him will assure us of a future reward.

A contestant in the Isthmian games who failed to meet the training requirements was disqualified. This is what Paul means when he used the word “castaway” (1 Cor. 9:27). The person who was disqualified could not even run, much less win. The point is this. Paul did not want to spend his life preaching the requirements to others and then become a castaway or “disqualified” runner for not meeting the requirements himself. This would cause a loss of reward.

The idea is that our unfaithful and selfish living in this life can disqualify us as believers from receiving a specific prize or reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which we otherwise could have had. We do not want to fail the test of living for Christ down here and lose reward like a runner who is disqualified from a running event. No, we won't be disqualified from entering Heaven but be disqualified from receiving a specific reward that we could have received.

Bennie Locke, an engine driver who has done fifty-seven years of service on the Lakawanna Railroad, and who never received a demerit mark from his superior officers, had the habit during the greater part of his service of

removing his cap on entering his engine and uttering a prayer for God's protection on each day's run.

He describes one of his experiences:

"Number Six was twenty-five minutes late out of Scranton one day, and I had my little prayer as usual when I stepped into the cab. After I had asked for the safety of our train, I said, 'Lord, help me to bring her in on time.' It was a stiff climb up the Pocono Mountains for the first part of the trip, and it never seems so steep as when you are late. I couldn't gain a second on the way up but after we dipped over the summit, things began to break just right for me. It was a beautiful day, with air perfectly clear, and we almost flew down the mountain. I just held her steady and let her go. At last the old train shed at Hoboken loomed ahead, and, as we pulled into the station I looked at my watch and we were just on the dot.

"As I stood wiping the sweat from my face there was a tap of a cane on the outside of my cab and on looking out I saw the president of the road, all smiles, and he said to me, 'A good run, sir! A very good run!' That meant more to me than anything that could have happened in this world. And, brother, when I make my last run, and pull into the Great Terminal, if I can just hear Him say, 'A good run, sir! A very good run!' the toil and the struggle down here won't matter."

In the book of Revelation, the Church, portrayed as the Bride of Christ, is seen rewarded and in Heaven in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ to earth. Her wedding gown is evidenced by the reward that she has received and her ability to radiate Christ's glory from this glistening gown.

Revelation 19:7-8 portrays the prophetic scene:

"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. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white (a glistening white-like brilliance): for the fine linen is the righteousness (plural – "righteousnesses") of saints."

The glistening clothing does not represent the righteousness of Christ in this particular instance but rather the righteous actions that have resulted in rewards for Church believers. The fact that the Bride is wearing her

beautiful garments of brilliance (the glow and glory aspect of our rewards) reveals that she has already experienced the Judgment Seat of Christ seven-years prior to this when she meets the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17).

Now, in Heaven, the marriage between Christ and the Church has been consummated and His Beloved Bride is seen rewarded for eternity. The examination of the Judgment Seat of Christ is a means to an end, the end being to give reward to His saints. The primary emphasis is to hand out rewards for a life well lived and service well rendered unto the Lord. The emphasis is not upon rebuke, chastening, and condemnation for our sins.

In conclusion, salvation does not remove the believer from being accountable. We will not be judged as a sinner at the Judgment Seat of Christ where we must fear Christ's wrath, punishment, retribution, rebuke, or discipline since Christ paid the full penalty for our sins. Likewise, we will not have to confess all the forgotten sins of our past lives since this is a judgment focusing on rewards and not recourse for our past sins. However, we will be judged as a servant and steward whose entire life will be given a sweeping review with the prospect of gaining and losing reward. And it will only take a moment of time, as Christ looks upon His saints and reveals to their minds and hearts the record of their service and stewardship.



Someday we are going to have a face-to-face encounter with the Supreme Judge of Eternity! The Bema is an awesome revelation of what lies ahead for each child of God. So, "knowing the terror of the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:11),

possessing great reverence and respect for Christ, possessing a wholesome determination and desire to please and not offend Him (2 Tim. 2:4), and understanding the awesome nature of His appearance and our accountability toward Him, we should make every day count for eternity!

“With eternity’s values in view, Lord,  
With eternity’s values in view;  
May I do each day’s work for Jesus,  
With eternity’s values in view.”

### **Acknowledgments**

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