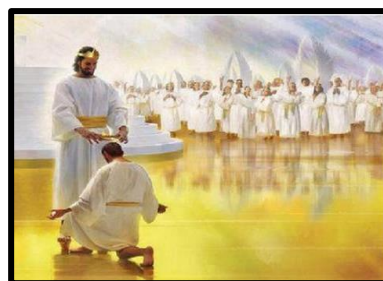


Discipleship on the Believer's Rewards at the Judgement Seat of Christ

Nearly everyone has witnessed some type of awards ceremony where students, businessmen, athletes, musicians, or actors received special awards for their accomplishments. But the grandest awards ceremony of them all will take place at what the Bible calls the Judgment Seat of Christ.

I. The Definition of the Judgement Seat of Christ and Rewards for All Believers

The *Judgment Seat of Christ* is the event the Bible describes where all true Believers will stand individually before the Lord Jesus Christ. Each will give an account of how faithfully he has lived for and served God since accepting Jesus as his personal Savior.



Some theology books also refer to this as the *Bema Seat Judgment* since the actual original Greek word used in the New Testament for “judgment seat” is *Bema*. The *Bema* was actually a raised platform, mounted by steps in the central public area of a first century city. It is where public speeches were made (cf. Acts 12:21), public announcements and legal decisions were announced (Acts 18:12-17), and where winners of athletic contests received their awards.

The *Bema* or *Judgment Seat of Christ* is a very appropriate name for this event in which each born-again Believer will have all of his deeds evaluated by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord will examine each person's life in a fair and just way (Revelations 19:2). All of his good works will be generously rewarded. However, bad or worthless deeds, or those done with wrong motives, will be burned up and the opportunity for rewards for these will be lost (1 Cor. 3:15). Although many Believers will “suffer loss” of reward for neglected opportunities, the Bible promises them God will find something to praise each of His children for (1 Cor. 4:5). That's why this will be the greatest awards ceremony ever!

God wants all Believers to understand these truths about this time of judgment and rewards in order to motivate them to holy living and diligence in serving Him (Philippians 3:14). One of the last things that Jesus Himself promised was, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work” (Revelation 22:12). So, make sure you are busy living for Jesus and serving Him so you will be ready for this event, and let God use you to help get your disciples ready for the *Bema*!

II. Key Verses on Christian Judgment and Rewards

A. Matthew 6:20



"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal."

◆How can you "lay up for yourself treasures in heaven"? →

B. Romans 14:10,12



"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

◆Why should you not judge your brothers and sisters in Christ? →

◆Will unbelievers be at the Bema? →

C. 1 Corinthians 3:8



"Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

◆How do you "plant" in serving the Lord? →

◆How do you "water" in serving the Lord? →

◆How and when will you receive your reward for your labor? →

D. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15



"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

◆How can you build on this foundation of salvation through Jesus with “gold, silver, and precious stones”? →

◆How do you build on this foundation with “wood, hay, and straw”? →

◆How can a person “suffer loss” but still be saved? →

E. 1 Corinthians 4:2



"Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

◆How are all Believers “stewards” (stewards of what)? →

◆How can you be faithful? →

F. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27



"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

◆What are some of the “prizes” you should be striving for? →

◆How can you be “disqualified” in this race? →

G. 2 Corinthians 5:10



"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

- ◆ Who will all be present at the judgement seat of Christ? →
- ◆ What is the meaning of "things done in the body?" →

H. Ephesians 2:8-10



*"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we (Believers) are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

- ◆ Do good works have any part in one's salvation? Why or why not? →
- ◆ Why should all Believers be busy doing good works after salvation? →

I. Ephesians 6:8



"Knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."

- ◆ What are some of the "good" things we can do to be rewarded for? →

J. Philippians 3:14



"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

- ◆ How can you "press toward the goal/prize" of the upward call of God? →

K. Colossians 3:23-25



"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."

- ◆ Why should you do everything in life for the Lord and not for men? →

- ◆ Name some of the things Believers do heartily for the Lord. Do they only involve spiritual things? →

L. 2 Timothy 4:8



"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

- ◆ What is the "crown of righteousness" that you can receive as a reward? →

- ◆ Who will receive this crown? →

- ◆ How can you "love His appearing"? →

M. Hebrews 11:6



"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

- ◆ How can you "diligently seek" God? →

- ◆ What does this verse say people need to believe about God? →

N. James 1:12



"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

- ◆What is the "crown of life"? →
- ◆How can you demonstrate that you love God? →
- ◆Who can receive this crown? →

O. 1 Peter 5:4



"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

- ◆What is the "crown of glory"? →
- ◆Who is the "Chief Shepherd"? When will He appear? →
- ◆Who can receive this crown? →

P. 1 John 2:28



"And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

- ◆Who are the "little children" John speaks of here? →
- ◆How can you "abide in Him" (Jesus)? →
- ◆What would make you ashamed when Jesus appears? →

Q. 2 John 8



"Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward."

- ◆ How can you "lose" the things you worked for? →
- ◆ What should you do to make sure you don't "lose" what you've worked for? →

R. Revelation 2:10



"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

- ◆ What is the meaning of being "faithful until death"? →
- ◆ What is the "crown of life"? →
- ◆ Who can receive this crown? →

S. Revelation 3:11



"Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."

- ◆ What is the meaning of Jesus "coming quickly"? →
- ◆ How do you "hold fast" to what you have/your crown? →

T. Revelation 4:10



"The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne . . ."

- ◆ What does this verse imply Believers will do with the crowns they receive as rewards? →
- ◆ Why do they cast their crowns before the throne? →

III. Important Teaching on the Judgment Seat of Christ and Rewards

A. Define the Judgment Seat of Christ and Rewards for All Believers

(See previous definition)

B. Teach Who will be Present at the Judgment Seat of Christ

All genuine Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ since the church began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) will be present at the Judgment Seat of Christ. See 1 Corinthians 1:2 to note that Paul was writing to Believers. They are the ones he is referring to as “we” in 3:8,10-15; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10. Also note that all of those present are the ones who have been building on the foundation of Jesus Christ and the salvation He provides (1 Cor. 3:11-12). No unbelievers will be at this Judgment Seat of Christ. They will have their own separate judgment, called the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-12,15).

C. Teach What the Purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ Is

1. The purpose of the Bema Judgment is *not* to determine whether or not the person will spend eternity in heaven or hell. *All* those present have already been saved from the punishment of their sins. He has promised that any who have truly believed in Christ will *not* come into judgment or condemnation for their sins (John 5:24; Romans 8:1).
2. The purpose of the Bema Judgment is to reveal everyone’s work—whether small or great, whether done privately or publicly, whether good or bad (i.e. worthless). See 2 Corinthians 5:10. Even the motives behind what was done will be examined (1 Corinthians 4:5a).

The things that were: 1) good; 2) of eternal value; 3) done with pure motives; or 4) done by the power and/or prompting of the Holy Spirit will come out of this examination as “gold, silver, and precious stones.” In other words, they will have passed the test and will receive rewards.

Examples of Works that Remain (Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones)	
Any attitude, word or deed that is done in obedience to Scripture and with pure motives, will be rewarded. Some specific examples in the Bible are:	
Matthew 5:11-12	
Matthew 5:19	
Matthew 6:3-4	
Matthew 6:6	
Matthew 6:17-18	
Matthew 6:20	
Matthew 10:40-41	
Matthew 10:42	
Matthew 18:4-5	
Matthew 19:29	
Romans 12:6-21	
Romans 14:1-12	
Ephesians 6:5-8	
1 Corinthians 3:5-8	
Philippians 4:15-17	
Galatians 5:23,24	
Colossians 3:23-24	
2 Timothy 4:8	
1 Peter 5:4	
Hebrews 6:10	
2 Peter 1:5-11	

Note: There are many unbelievers who are trying to do “good works” like the above in an effort to earn salvation, but God teaches that no one is saved by doing good works (Eph. 2:8-9; Matt. 7:22-23).





Those things done that were: 1) bad; 2) of no eternal value; 3) done with less than pure motives; or 4) done from human effort alone and not by the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit will be burned up as “wood, hay and stubble,”—with nothing left for Christ to reward (1 Cor. 3:12,15).

Examples of Works that Burn Up (Wood and Straw)	
This is something done in disobedience to God or something done with wrong motives:	
Matthew 5:19	
Matthew 5:43-46	
Matthew 6:1	
Matthew 6:2	
Matthew 6:5	
Matthew 6:16	
Matthew 12:36-37	
Matthew 20:1-16	
Matthew 23:2-12	
Mark 7:6-13	
Mark 9:50	
Romans 16:17-18	
1 Corinthians 9:27	
Galatians 6:9	
Colossians 3:25	
2 Peter 2:15-22	

Thankfully, it appears that, no matter how many failures or opportunities for serving God we neglected or ignored, God will find something in every Believer to praise and reward (1 Corinthians 4:5b). That is God’s grace at work! This clearly illustrates the fact that one of the things God wants you to believe about Him is that He will reward everything that you have done for Him (Hebrews 6:10).

D. Teach When and Where the Bema Seat of Christ Will Happen

The Bible does not give a precise date as to when the Bema will take place. It does tell us that, someday soon, Christ will come in the clouds to call His children to come be with Him. Even Believers who have already died will be raised from the dead and called up to be with Him and face this time of evaluation.

Mark 13:32-33

"But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is."

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18



"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."

E. Teach What Kind of Rewards Will be Given to Believers

The Bible does not explain everything about the kind of rewards God will give to His children who have faithfully served Him. However, He has promised not to forget nor fail to reward even the smallest of deeds that they have done (Matthew 25:34-40; Heb. 6:10). Some of the specific types of rewards to be given are listed below, but this is only a partial list. Heaven is so different and so much more wonderful than we can imagine that we cannot fully understand all that God has in mind to reward His faithful servants for until we actually get there. Jesus promised that God rewards "many times" more than anything you have done for Him (Matthew 19:29; 20:20-21).

1. Faithfulness will be rewarded with crowns

The New Testament mentions several crowns that will be given as rewards for faithful service to Christ. The actual Greek word used for crown here is *stephanos*, which is more like the crown that was given to winners of Olympic events at the time of the Apostle Paul. But there are differences between the Olympic crowns and those given to Believers as rewards. Here are some of the crowns mentioned:

***1 Corinthians 9:25 → An "Imperishable Crown"**



This verse says Believers will be rewarded with an imperishable crown. These are contrasted with the leafy Olympic crowns that soon dried up and faded away. Perhaps these imperishable crowns are made of gold since the crown worn by Jesus when He comes to judge the unbelievers in the world will be made from gold (Revelation 14:14), as are many other things in heaven (Revelation 21:19,21).

***1 Thessalonians 2:19 → The “Soul Winner’s Crown”**



Paul called the Believers in the city of Thessalonica that he had led to the Lord his “crown” of exaltation. In other words, Paul was looking forward to receiving a crown at the Bema because he had been used to lead these Thessalonians to the Lord. This is why many refer to this as the *soul winner’s crown*. Everyone who leads another person to salvation is eligible to receive this crown!

***2 Timothy 4:8 → The “Crown of Righteousness”**



At the end of Paul’s life and ministry, he was looking forward to receiving another reward from His Lord, a *crown of righteousness*. He explained that he would receive this crown because he had faithfully lived a righteous and holy life before the people around him. This verse implies that one of the things which helped him to consistently say “no” to temptation and sin was realizing that one day he would stand in front of the Lord. He did not want to dread that day because he had wasted his life doing what displeased the Lord. The verse says that not only Paul will receive this crown, but all Believers who show their love for the return of the Lord by living a righteous life. *Will that include you?*

***James 1:12 → The “Crown of Life” or “Martyr’s Crown”**



James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote his inspired letter to Believers who were suffering greatly for their faith in Jesus Christ. He told them that even though they had lost most of their earthly possessions, their jobs, and were being treated badly, they should think of themselves as being blessed by God. Why? Because God would reward them some day with the *crown of life*. The Apostle John also said that those who are faithful to the Lord even to the point of death would receive this *crown of life* (see Revelation 2:10). That is why some people also call this the *martyr’s crown*. You too can receive this crown if you suffer for doing what is right and for faithfully serving Jesus, even when others make fun of you, threaten you, harm you, or even take your life.

***1 Peter 5:4 → The “Crown of Glory”**



The Apostle Peter wrote this part of his letter to encourage pastors, church leaders, and missionaries who were teaching and discipling other Believers in their faith. He reminded them that if they did their ministries faithfully and with the right attitude, Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, would give them a *crown of glory* at the Bema. They were serving Jesus in difficult places and under a lot of pressure and persecution. They seldom received thanks or public recognition for their hard work, but Peter told them someday they would be publicly rewarded and recognized before all Believers as they were crowned with the *crown of glory*. The glory of that crown will never fade away, and it will last for all eternity. You too can earn this crown as you faithfully use your time, talents, and spiritual gifts to help others grow in their faith.

2. Faithfulness will be rewarded by positions of honor and authority

a. **Matthew 19:28** → Thrones and positions of authority (for the apostles)

The twelve apostles will be rewarded with the privilege of sitting on twelve thrones next to the Lord Jesus when He rules as the King of this earth. They will also be rewarded with the position of being judges over the twelve tribes of Israel. Revelation 20:4 also mentions some who are sitting on thrones and given positions as judges. Since they are not named, we do not know if it is referring to the apostles or to other fruitful Believers—maybe you or people you know.

b. **Matthew 25:14-30** → Positions of authority (for Believers)

In the parable of the talents (especially Matthew 25:21,32), Jesus taught that those who had faithfully used their privileges, opportunities, and earthly position for Him would be rewarded with greater positions of authority in God’s Kingdom in the future (after the Bema).

See also Luke 19:12-27 →

3. Faithfulness will be rewarded with treasures in heaven

Matthew 6:20 → Lay up “treasures in heaven”

Jesus encourages all His true disciples to lay up treasures in heaven. He does not say exactly what kind of treasures they will be, but the idea is that those who use their earthly possessions to further spread the Lord’s work will be rewarded. The earlier verses in this chapter also indicate that these treasures are laid up through sincere giving, prayer, and fasting (giving up the right to eat for a specific period of time in order to think about and pray for specific needs or the work of the Lord to be done). It seems that part of this reward will be seeing others in heaven who your giving or witnessing helped point to Jesus (Luke 16:9).

4. Rewards will be proportional to the amount and quality of service given

Not every Believer will receive the same amount of rewards.

***Galatians 6:7,9** → God promises that we will reap what we sow. It not only refers to having people treating us like we have treated others, but it also has to do with reaping future rewards for continuing to do good, even when it’s hard.

***2 Corinthians 9:6** → God says those who sow little (in giving to the Lord's work) will reap little in reward. He also promises that those who sow bountifully in giving or serving the Lord will also reap more rewards. See also:

Proverbs 19:17 →

Proverbs 22:9 →

***Luke 19:12-27** → Jesus was telling this parable to illustrate that God has given each Believer resources (the “mina” represented time, talents, and opportunities) to serve Christ while they are waiting for His return as King. Those who put these to work and accomplish much (in quality and amount) will be awarded accordingly. Those who accomplished five times as much (in quality and quantity) received five times as much. Those who did ten times more received ten times as much.

F. Teach that There will be Great Surprises on How Much Some are Rewarded

One of the cautions given to Believers about the Bema is not to evaluate everything on the basis of what they can outwardly see. Why? Because they cannot see all the details concerning what any individual does or does not do for the Lord. Neither can they always see the purity of one's actions or motivation (Romans 14:12-13; 1 Corinthians 4:5). Only the Lord's evaluations are just and without any partiality (Colossians 3:25).

*The “first” shall be last

Jesus predicted that it will be a time of great surprises; a time when those whose service and outward actions made them look like they would be “first” in line for the greatest number of awards. However, he said they would actually come in “last” (Matthew 19:20-30; 20:1-16). This means they would have little or nothing left to be rewarded for after their works were tested by fire (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).



*The “last” shall be first

Jesus also said that some who look like they will come in “last” place for rewards will actually come in “first” because, though no one may have seen what they did for Christ, the Lord saw, and He will not forget to reward them (Hebrews 6:10).



William Carey's Sister

Many have heard of William Carey, an English shoe cobbler that went as a missionary to India in 1792 and stayed for the rest of his life. God used him in great ways. He was able to: (1) translate and print parts of the Bible into 40 different Indian languages; (2) start a church in Calcutta, India that is still going today; and (3) start a Bible college that trained many other pastors and missionaries to reach thousands of other Indians and people. Surely he will be rewarded greatly for all that he did for Christ.

But few know of his invalid sister who wanted to go to India with him and help reach those lost people with the Gospel. Because she was not able to walk, she had to stay behind. To many it may look like her physical condition would force her to come in "last" in rewards. But though she stayed behind, she promised to pray for several hours every day for William and his work. Perhaps God used her prayers to enable William to accomplish so much for the Lord. Surely we will learn of her and many others like her who ministered for Christ behind the scenes, in ways that only the Lord Himself knows. These people may gain even more rewards than those who actually served the Lord in public ways.

G. Teach How Believers Should Respond to this Teaching about the Bema Seat

God purposely revealed these truths about the coming Bema Seat Judgment to encourage Believers to make the best use of their time, talents, and spiritual gifts.

1. The Bema Seat Judgment should motivate you to serve Christ

***Philippians 3:14** → The Apostle Paul said that he made every effort to press on towards the goal of winning the prize (rewards) for which God had called him to achieve. In other words, the idea of receiving rewards was a constant motivation for him to keep serving Christ, even though he suffered greatly for doing so. In fact, Paul also said that whatever trials and persecution he experienced in this life was *light* and *momentary* when compared to the eternal *glory* (rewards) which will far outweigh the suffering.

2. The Bema Seat Judgment should motivate Believers to holy living

***1 John 3:3** → The Apostle John said that every Believer who has the *hope* (confidence) that Jesus Himself will come back to take us to be with Him will be busy in this life keeping himself pure. Why? Because he knows he will have to be judged at the Bema. He will be rewarded for what he has done, whether it is good or bad. Living unholy lives will be cause for a loss of reward, and it will bring shame rather than joy.

***1 Corinthians 9:27** → Paul also taught that Believers need to have discipline and self-control or they will be disqualified from earning rewards for how they live. Even after you receive eternal life by believing in Jesus, you still have temptation and desires to do sinful things (lying, cheating, being selfish, etc.). However, we must say no to them, or they will disqualify us from serving Christ with a pure heart. We must obey God's rules in order to compete for these heavenly rewards.

What are things that will disqualify Believers from rewards at the Bema?	

3. Believers should encourage each other to think about and do the things that bring rewards

***Hebrews 10:24,25** → These verses remind Believers that, as the day of the Lord's return approaches, it will become harder to live for God and serve Him faithfully. That's why all Believers are to encourage each other to attend church regularly—in order to stir each other up to show love to others (even enemies; Luke 6:35), and to do good deeds that can bring rewards.

H. Teach What Believers Will Do with These Rewards after the Bema Judgment

***Revelation 4:10** → **Cast their crowns at Jesus' feet**

These elders who are pictured in heaven illustrate what we will probably do with the crowns we receive as rewards. We will cast them at the feet of Jesus because we will realize that He is the One worthy to receive them all. We will realize that we could never have done anything in our Christian life worthy of such reward without His grace and enablement (John 15:5b).



I. Teach What Will Happen to Believers Who Do Not Live for Christ and Serve Him Faithfully

1. **1 Corinthians 3:15** → Words, thoughts, and deeds which are done with no spiritual value will be *burned up* when they are tested by the Lord Jesus. These Believers will be *saved* and will still enter heaven, but they will *suffer loss*. That means they will have lost all those opportunities which they could have been rewarded for.

2. **1 John 2:28** → Believers who waste their lives by living only for themselves and never do things for Christ will be ashamed when they stand at the Bema. They will have no excuses for such a waste of their time and abilities.
3. **1 John 5:16** → The Bible warns that Believers who continue to live in sin and leave God out of their lives can *sin unto death*. This means that God may end their lives on earth at a younger age because they are being a terrible example of what it means to be a Christian. God saves you to change your life and give you power to say no to sin. He wants others to be attracted to Jesus by the way you live (Matthew 5:16). To continue living in sin goes against God's purpose for leaving you here on earth, so He may take you to heaven sooner.

IV. Ways to Teach about the Judgment Seat of Christ

A. Through Specific Bible Lessons

1. Parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30)
2. Paul's anticipated reward (2 Tim. 4:1-8)
3. The letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2-3)
4. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15
- 5.



B. Through Special Lessons

1. Gifts and Rewards (CEF Press)
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Through Music 🎵

1. Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

D. Through Making a Counseling Tool about the Bema Seat of Christ

1. This tool can be made small enough to use with believing children and youth in one-on-one discipling situations.
2. This tool can be made large enough to use before the entire class.