

CHAPTER 15

Reigning Grace AND THE BEMA SEAT JUDGMENT



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CHAPTER 15

REIGNING GRACE AND “THE BEMA SEAT JUDGMENT”

¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore **let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
(Hebrews 4:14-16)



REVIEW

The judgment seat of Christ in no way will be dealing with our sin. It is often said the judgment seat of Christ will deal with our service and this is perhaps true. But even here when the works done from a fleshly motive are judged they will be consumed by fire and treated as non-rewardable. If there is sin involved, it will not be attributed in any way to our account nor will it be held against us.

The judgment seat of Christ is to be looked upon as an occasion of unprecedented joy and celebration. It is here that the old nature shall finally receive its just reward. It is here that the believer will finally be forever rid of the old man. It is here where one's practice will finally match up with one's position. In that glorious day, "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).



INTRODUCTION

As I seek to understand all that I am in Him and He is for me, there are many loose ends that have been tied, but some are “slightly” frayed. This is an initial attempt to understand one of those loose ends.

There is much debate as to what exactly will happen at the Bema Seat Judgment. A direct and immediate connection exists between the Bema Seat Judgment and the believer’s future reward.

Listen to the following comments by several popular authors and seek to establish the tone being set.

Many believers (especially in this age) do not realize that the future *judgment seat of Christ* will also administer severe chastisement for unholy conduct.¹

(First John 2:28) These Christians will be ashamed for having neglected to bring forth fruit unto God.²

“The judgment seat will be for revealing and *rewarding* the kind of Christian life the believer has lived.”

[Many fail] to distinguish between how God accepts a *lost sinner* by grace through faith alone (i.e. positional righteousness) and how He accepts *His own children* through faith and works at the future judgment seat (i.e. practical righteousness).³

The New Testament abounds with warnings that carnal Christians will receive chastisement when they stand before their Lord.⁴

Nevertheless, in spite of semantics, one thing is for certain: *whatever* one wishes to call the judgment of some erring believers in this life, Scripture plainly teaches that the *same type* of severe chastisement (and worse) may also be experienced at the future judgment seat!⁵

Those are punished for a time in purgatory who die in the state of grace but are guilty of venial sin, or have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to their sins (1 Cor. 3:13-15).⁶

I believe there are good reasons why there will be tears in

heaven. When we reflect on how we lived for Christ, who purchased us at such high cost, well might we weep on the other side of the celestial gates. Our tears will be those of regret and shame, tears of remorse for lives lived for ourselves rather than for Him who loves us. (p. 9).

God judges justified sinners. God judges us for unconfessed sin, David reminds us that God judges us for sins that have been confessed and forgiven. Judicial forgiveness is one thing, but the discipline the Father inflicts on His wayward children is quite another. (p. 11)

The purpose of this judgment (i.e., the judgment seat of Christ) will be to evaluate us so that we can be properly rewarded for the way we have faithfully (or unfaithfully) served here on earth. All who appear at this judgment will be in heaven, but the question that needs to be settled is the extent of our rule (if any) with Christ.⁷

Okay, Tommy, I'm convicted! What Tommy is talking about is a very neglected doctrine of Christian sanctification, which is the doctrine of rewards for the believer. It's a motivating but sobering topic, and it should be.

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But clearly, passages like the one you've just read about teach that believers will be rewarded for how faithfully they serve Christ.⁸

In the funeral of the young man who died with AIDS, I don't recall mentioning the doctrine of rewards. It didn't seem appropriate in that context. However, if asked, I would have said that if his wayward lifestyle continued to the end, then he forfeited the right to rule with Christ and the related rewards that he would have received.⁹

The second interpretation views the promised rewards as things which only some believers will receive. Thus one can get into the kingdom and yet not have these blessings. Hence in the rewards interpretation the Beatitudes are implicit warnings about the possibility of missing out on special honor and fullness of life in the life to come (p. 1).

All believers enter (Rev 22:17). Only overcoming believers will rule and have special privileges (Rev. 22:14).¹⁰

God is keeping track of what you do for Him every day. (p. 11)

Picture your homecoming, the moment when all of eternity and all the angels and saints pause for you. Heaven will hush as you stand before your Savior to hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' And then heaven will erupt with welcome and celebration as you accept the incorruptible crown that Jesus is reserving for you. It will be your unique moment to bless the heart of God. On that day, you will prove that you valued Jesus' death for you, and you gave Him your heart and life in return. God wants that day, when unseen and eternal things become visible, to be the most wonderful day of your life. ¹¹

One reviewer in commenting on the book, A Life God Rewards, had this to say, "The book is an easy read at only 128 pages and should challenge and encourage the everyday believer to strive for hearing the words of our Lord at the Bema, 'well done good and faithful servant.' The sobering thought is that many Christians will experience shame at not hearing those words at all."¹²

One day you will stand before God, and he will do an audit of your life, a final exam, before you enter eternity. From the Bible we can surmise that God will ask us two crucial questions: First, 'What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?' Second, 'What did you do with what I gave you?' The first question will determine *where* you spend eternity. The second question will determine *what you do* in eternity.¹³

While many have chosen to look the other way and ignore the facts, we have not. We dare not. And we are well aware that there is a price to be paid. But each time I stand before the famous Bema Seat in the city of Corinth in the same spot where the apostle Paul once stood, I am forced to think of another day when we shall stand before the eternal Bema at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And when I do, I want to hear, 'Well done!' and I am supremely confident that you want to hear those same words.¹⁴

Catholic Christians believe that the New Testament also affirms the reality of purgatory. In 1 Cor. 3:11-15, Paul writes: ...This passage speaks about those who have built their lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ. When these people are judged, the 'work' they have done in this life will be tested. If it is good, they will be rewarded. If their work

is inferior (sinful), the fire of judgment will burn it up. These people will ‘suffer loss,’ although they will be saved ‘but only as through fire.’ Christians in the early church who reflected on this passage came to believe that ‘purification by fire’ - a purgatory - would come upon those Christians whose lives and works were imperfect in God’s sight, although they themselves would be saved.¹⁵

As you can see, this topic is no small matter especially in light of the barrage of material by highly visible authors in recent days. I am not sure what each author is attempting to accomplish nor do I wish to judge their motive for such a presentation as the above material represents, but . . .



QUESTIONS

Is the Bema Seat a time of remorse, regret, penal judgment, and personal shortcoming? Is the Bema Seat about you or is there something or someone else who will be receiving the spotlight? Is it a time of reflecting back on failed opportunity and missed choices? Is it possible for the believer not to be ruling and reigning with Christ in heaven? How can I ever know if I have done enough? Am I ever capable of really determining whether my actions (let alone my motives) have been pure?

In studying the Bema Seat Judgment it is important that we do not isolate it from the larger body of positional truth found throughout the New Testament.



DEFINING THE WORD

In studying the Bema Seat Judgment it is important that we do not isolate it from the larger body of positional truth found throughout the New Testament; just as our preservation so also our fellowship, cleansing and forgiveness. All this and more is rooted in the merit of Christ and in Christ alone. This has direct application as to how we are to view the judgment seat of Christ ([Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10] *Bema*).

How often and where is the word used in the New Testament?

The word **bema** is found in twelve verses (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 7:5; 12:21; 18:12, 16, 17; 25:6, 10, 17, Rom. 14:10, 2 Cor. 5:10).

As noted, it is used of Pilate at the judgment of Christ (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13). It is used as a “stool” (Acts 7:5), a “throne” (Acts 12:21), and a place of sentencing (Acts 18:12, 16, 17; 25:6, 10, 17).

From the New Testament there is an element of discernment, evaluation, estimation, and assessment contained in the way the word is used. There are two primary New Testament passages as it relates to the believer (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10-12).

“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” (2 Cor. 5:10).

What is the Bema Seat?

In the large Olympic arenas, there was an elevated seat on which the judge of the contest sat. After the contests were over, the successful competitors would assemble before the *bema* to receive their rewards or crowns. The *bema* was not a judicial bench where someone was condemned; it was a reward seat.¹⁶

It is not the Lord's purpose here to chasten His child for his sins, but to reward his service for those things done in the name of the Lord.¹⁷

In the exercise of the reward of the believer, it will be Christ and not the believer that is glorified by the reward.¹⁸

The question of giving an account can be immediately answered and in short order. There will be an accounting before God of every New Testament believer's life. The life of each individual will be evaluated based on the fruit born.

However, in saying this let us make sure we have our presuppositions in place. Listen carefully to the refining of this thought.

When you say, "The life of the individual will be evaluated based on the fruit born," I just think that the word "evaluation" comes with extensive baggage, because of teacher evaluations, performance evaluations, etc. That is the reason I thought it might be possible to say "the works of our flesh will burn (praise God!) And the work of Jesus Christ will be remaining and be revealed." God does not need to "test" our work to know which is

which. He already knows. It is not as if, He is striking the match and saying, "Well, let's see what we have here..." Therefore, isn't the Bema seat actually my first opportunity to see what the Lord has been doing all along? It will be a display, I think, of the truth of every event and moment as the Lord saw it all along. It is a great gift to me to be able to see for the first time what He was doing all along.

I have wondered: will I be surprised at the size of the bonfire? Definitely, because I have been able to deceive myself about the motive and source behind my activity at times. Moreover, will I be surprised at the extent of what remains? Even more so, I think. I have been reflecting a lot on the fact that the "amount" that the Lord has been doing all along will be a great surprise and joy to me. He is ALWAYS working -- I will only see all of that, and praise Him for it, in that day. Now, I see in a mirror dimly -- I can only praise Him for what I see and for what "in theory" or "in general" I know He is doing that I cannot see. However, in that day, my praise will be specific, as I see for the first time what He was accomplishing all along.

For example, in the recent times when I have been in a black hole of despair, it would be easy to think, "This is all wood, hay, and stubble, -- and there can't be anything of worth here." However, in that day, will I not see that the Lord planned those times for me to see that, "apart from Him I can do nothing" that "His strength is made perfect in weakness" and that at those very times He was bringing forth pure gold in my heart that will be seen in that day? Was it not at those times that He was most precious to me as my only strength and song? Was it not then that I fully knew my dependence on Him? Was it not at those times that I more fully appreciated His grace toward one such as me? Was it not at those times that He continued to work in and through me in people's lives though I thought it was not possible, because I deceived myself into believing it depended on me being "victorious?" I truly think my greatest surprise and joy at the Bema seat will be at the amount that remains, all praise to Him.

The spotlight will be on Jesus Christ. I will see for the first time the extent and beauty of His workmanship. The tapestry of my life will be seen "from the top side" for the first time. What is now to me only loose threads and changes of color and knots and tangles, I will for the first time see in all its beauty? It will be complete. It will not be an unfinished tapestry. The pattern will be personal, individual, and beautiful. He will be revealing, "This

was my workmanship in this specific life, the life of this beloved one." That is the Bema seat to me.

Sometimes I want to explode with joy over such things. How is it that God has chosen to show me such wonders of His love? I am overwhelmed.

I can only concur with this statement.



“CONNECTING THE DOTS”

As we consider the Bema Seat judgment, there are several questions needing to be asked.

- **First**, if fruit bearing is the basis for evaluation, what exactly is fruit bearing?
- **Second**, is it possible for the work of God to fail to such a degree that there is no reward-able act in His workmanship?
- **Third**, if my placement in heaven is based on my performance on earth, when is enough, enough?
- **Fourth**, if salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, why does sanctification and glorification demand a different standard?
- **Fifth**, how does a theology of future rewards from a man-centered perspective generate the kind of rest mentioned in Matthew 11:28-30? Is initial salvation the believer's only certainty concerning placement?
- **Sixth**, what exactly is meant by the label, “Over-comer?”
- **Seventh**, is there a legitimate distinction between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom?
- **Finally**, if all I need is in Christ, what more would I want?

Each of these areas will assist us in examining this important area of future rewards, placement in the kingdom, and the Bema Seat judgment.

First, if fruit bearing is the basis for evaluation, what exactly is fruit bearing?

In looking at the idea of fruit bearing, I believe it is important to remember that fruit-bearing, good works, obedience, and the New Testament commands are all synonymous ideas. I do not believe any kind of distinction can be made between any of these “actions.” I do not believe the Scripture divides them.

The word, “fruit” is found in fifty-six New Testament references. It

can refer to either literal fruit (i.e. the kind you would eat), or figuratively to the kind of fruit that is symbolic of one's actions.

- There is a fruit that is indicative of repentance (Matt. 3:8; Luke 3:8).
- The tree (Matt. 3:10) or branch (John 15:2, 6) that does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt. 7:19; Luke 3:9; 13:9).

Does not this strongly suggest that all good trees/soil produce good fruit? Would not such fruit bearing be certain? What if there is no fruit? Is not the consequence of non-fruit bearing, to be cut off and thrown into the fire? How does this in any way align with God finishing what He begins (Rom. 8:29, 30; Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24)?

- The "tree" can be identified by the kind of fruit it bears (Matt. 7:16, 17, 20; 12:33). The kind of fruit born is indicative of the kind of tree that bore it (Matt. 7:18; 12:33; Luke 6:44).
- Good fruit is born by good trees and the opposite is equally true, bad fruit is born by bad trees (Matt. 7:18). A good tree cannot bear bad fruit (Luke 6:43).
- Good ground bears fruit (Matt. 13:8). Bad ground bears no fruit (Mark 4:7).

If the underlying thought concerning fruit bearing is that a good tree can only produce good fruit, then why am I thinking about my bad fruit? A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, so whatever fruit is born that is bad is of no real consequence.

- Death to self is the key to fruit bearing (John 12:24). One must die to self in order to be saved (Matt. 16:21-28) and salvation produces fruit.
- God is glorified in the bearing of much fruit (John 15:8).
- God has ordained the believer to bring forth fruit, and that our fruit would remain (John 15:16).

Ephesians 2:10 speaks of the believer being God's workmanship. The term, "workmanship" says that we are the product of His hands. He is molding the believer. He is designing us. He is doing the work in us and through us. This does not negate our will to choose, but it does source our will in Him (Phil. 2:12, 13).

- The believer's fruit is of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9). The believer's fruit is by Jesus Christ (John 15:4, 5; Phil. 1:11).

I suppose an individual could produce an action that is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit, but then it would not be categorized as fruit-bearing, good works, obedience, or the keeping of the New Testament command. What exactly is it? It is simply a “filthy-rag” (Isa. 64:6).

If it is not a fruit of the Spirit, then it is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-24). If it is a work of the flesh, it has no eternal value and will be consumed in the day of accounting (1 Cor. 3:15 [if 1 Corinthians 3 is to be used in this way]).

Because of the role 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 plays in the mindset of those who make the Bema Seat judgment a motive for service, we do need to evaluate what this passage is saying.



REIGNING GRACE, THE BEMA SEAT, AND THE JUDGMENT OF FIRST CORINTHIANS 3:10-15

In any discussion of the Bema Seat judgment there is immediate reference made to the nature of the believer’s works being “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw” (1 Cor. 3:12). Yet, is this the nature of the judgment depicted? The intent of this short study is to note the paragraph in light of its immediate surroundings.

From the first chapter of 1 Corinthians it becomes apparent division existed in the local body. The division centered on personalities (1:10-17). This same problem is in chapter three. The personalities noted were all people in positions of leadership (Paul, Apollos, Cephas, etc. [1:12]).

In unraveling the dilemma, Paul makes several points.

- **First**, all leaders, regardless as to their giftedness, are tools. Some plant and some water (3:6).

From other passages of Scripture, I should understand that the Lord gave me the role I function in (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:11ff), whether I am a planter or a waterer.

- **Second**, God is the one who causes growth (3:6, 7).
- **Third**, each of those who labor (whether planting or watering) will receive their own reward (3:8).

- **Fourth**, 3:9 says that the leaders are fellow-workers together for God. Those among whom they labor are God's field, God's building, and God's Temple (vv. 16, 17).

God is the one (3:6, 7) who causes His field, building, and Temple to grow.

- **Fifth**, based on what has been said, we begin to note verses 10-15.

Paul is the one used of the Lord to lay the foundation on which the building will be built (3:10, 11). The foundation is poured only once afterward we now building on this one foundation.

- **Sixth**, "What is being built in verses 10 and 12?" Based on verse 9, the church (people).

This text has singular relevance to the contemporary church. It is neither a challenge to the individual believer to build his or her life well on the foundation of Christ, nor is it grist for theological debate. It has particular relevance . . . to those with teaching/leadership responsibilities. It is unfortunately possible for people to attempt to build the church out of every imaginable human system predicated on merely world wisdom, But at the final judgment, all such building will be shown for what it is: something merely human, with no character of Christ or his gospel in it.¹⁹

- **Seventh**, "Who is doing the building?" The leadership within the church is doing the building (v.10b). This is the same idea in Ephesians 4:11-13.

Now he speaks to the teachers themselves, who succeeded him in the church of Corinth, and in this regard to all that were after or will be pastors of congregations, seeing that they succeed into the labor of the apostles, who were planters and chief builders.²⁰

In response to this question, Alfred Barnes says it is "every man who is a professed teacher."²¹

Although the passage has a primary interpretation and application to the professional ministry, in principle it can also refer to any believer who has an influence on others.²²

Verses 3:6 and 7 tell us that God builds His church. If this is true,

is it possible for the purpose of God in the building of His church fail?

The apostle goes to the farthest extreme here (3:10-15), but in the next chapter he shows that there will be no believer of whom that is actually true. [He cites 4:5] He will find something in every believer's life that He can reward." (134) [Commenting on 4:5, he goes on to say] "If you are in Christ, the Holy Spirit of God is dwelling in you, and in that coming day it will be manifest that every Christian has accomplished something for God for which he can be rewarded."²³

- **Eighth**, the emphasis does not appear to be on the individual, but on the assembly. It is not an individual being evaluated, but the work of the leadership within the church.

Here is another paragraph that has suffered much in the church from those who would decontextualize it in terms of individualistic popular piety (i.e., how I build my own Christian life on Christ). His concern is singular, that those currently leading the church take heed because their present work will not stand the fiery test to come, having shifted from the imperishable 'stuff' of Jesus Christ and him crucified.²⁴

It is common to interpret verses 12-15 in terms of an individual Christian's quality of life as revealed on the Day of the Lord. In its context Paul is, in fact, describing the quality of workmanship done by those contributing to building up the church at Corinth.²⁵

Paul is, of course, thinking of teachers, preachers, and messengers of the gospel. The one who has built permanently and well on earth, with abiding results for good, will receive a reward. But he who builds poorly the church of God will suffer the loss of special rewards God has prepared for labor well done.²⁶

- **Ninth**, the emphasis appears to be on body unity versus body division. If you divided the body you will not receive the reward for that area, but you will still be saved (v.15).

If you destroy the Temple through division, you will be destroyed (3:17).

The one who destroys will be destroyed. The one who

corrupts will be corrupted. This probably refers to an unsaved man, to one who is not on the foundation at all, to the mere professor.²⁷

The people in 3:1-3 are not building but destroying the temple. Their work will fail (v.13).

- **Tenth**, the gold, silver, precious stone is a contrast to wood, hay, and straw (3:12).

I believe it is possible to see the gold, silver, and precious stone as being fruits of the Spirit and wood, hay, and straw being a work of the flesh.

Perhaps a church built on wood, hay, and straw is a church not founded on the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? Such a church would not stand the “test.”

- **Eleventh**, the conclusion to this whole matter is found in verses 21-23, “Do not boast in men, boast in Christ.”



CONCLUSION

As ministers in the church it is possible to see growth that produces numbers without producing Christians. Such a work will not endure and is nothing more than wood, hay, and straw.



THE BEMA SEAT JUDGMENT AND THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Let us pick-up our previous thought concerning the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps there is something we are missing? If the two are synonymous, why am I looking at the New Testament imperative as something I do, whereas the fruit of the Holy Spirit as something He does?

There is no question that the believer should choose obedience over disobedience, but it should be equally true that whatever obedience is produced is because the Holy Spirit is bearing that particular fruit in me and through me.

- The believer should desire to bear much fruit (Rom. 1:13; Phil. 4:17).

- Part of fruit bearing is the pruning process (Heb. 12:11).

Hebrews 12:11 is like Job 23:10.

“But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Second, is it possible for the work of God to fail to such a degree that there is no reward-able act in His workmanship?

Because of the certainty of fruit bearing, I do not believe the work of God can fail, thus I do not believe there is anything like a so-called “fruitless” believer. The implication of this is that every believer will be reward-able.

I believe this is the point of Romans 14:3, 4

³ “The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, **for God has accepted him.** ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? **To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand**” (Rom. 14:3, 4).

I believe this is the point of 1 Corinthians 4:4, 5

⁴ “For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. ⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God” (1 Cor. 4:4, 5).

The scenario of Matthew 25 is clear enough. There are only two kinds of people, those who are saved, and those who are lost. There is not a third category of saved lost people or dark light.

If Matthew 25 can apply, then every believer will hear, “well done my good and faithful servant.” If this is not true, then the alternative is tragically confusing (Matt. 25:30). Because of my understanding of fruit bearing (Mark 4; Gal. 5) every believer will have “works” that are “gold, silver and precious stone (if 1 Corinthians 3 is to be used in this way).” No one who appears in that day will be shut out from the joy and the reward.



Matthew 24 and 25 and the difference between hearing “Well done” and being “Well done”

While many have chosen to look the other way and ignore the facts, we have not. We dare not. And we are well aware that there is a price to be paid. But each time I stand before the famous Bema Seat in the city of Corinth in the same spot where the apostle Paul once stood, I am forced to think of another day when we shall stand before the eternal Bema at the Judgment Seat of Christ. **And when I do, I want to hear, ‘Well done!’ and I am supremely confident that you want to hear those same words.**²⁸

Many believers are under the impression that hearing well done is an affirmation for earthly faithfulness to obedience. Its reception is tentative and uncertain. It is heard only by those who have “totally surrendered” to Christ. Because it is given only to those who obediently follow Christ, some might not hear it. Yet, is this how we are to view the idea of hearing, “Well done?”

The desire of this short study is to put the statement in its context and see if this is how we are to understand it. We will use Matthew 24 and 25 as providing the foundation for the idea.

The exact phrase is found in Matthew 25:21, 23, and Luke 19:17.

“His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:21).

“His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:23).

“And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17).

We will note its usage in Matthew before looking at Luke 19.

The statements in Matthew 25 are found in the larger context of Matthew 24. The context for 24 and 25 is that of the Mount of Olives discourse. His statement is in the larger context of

answering a question asked of Him by His disciples.

The question is in response to His statement in 24:2 concerning the future destruction of the Temple. The question is centered in “What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (v.3).

In response to the question, He runs through a series of events that will proceed the end. He then says, “Then the end will come” (v.14). He speaks of the Tribulation of those days and the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 15-31). He also speaks of the days of Noah being like the days in which the Son of Man returns (vv. 36ff).

He then paints a picture of contrasts between those who are ready and those who are not ready. What follows is a table depicting the two contrasting groups.

Reference	Saved	Result	Unsaved	Result
24:40 Two men	One left*		One taken	
24:41 Two women	One left		One taken	
24:45-51 Two servants	Faithful and Wise Servant	Blessed / Set over all His possessions (v.46, 47)	Wicked Servant (v.48)**	Cut in pieces / weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. 51)
25:1-13 Two groups of virgins	Five Wise	Ready, went in (v.10)	Five Foolish**	I do not know you (v.12)
25:14-30 Two kinds of servants	Faithful Servants Five Two Talents Talents	Well-done, good, and faithful servant. Enter into joy (vv. 21, 23)	Wicked, Slothful, and worthless servants** (vv.26, 30) One Talent	Talent removed, cast into outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (vv.29, 30)
25:31-46 Two nations	The Sheep	Right hand Blessed, inherit the kingdom (v.34)	The Goats	Left hand Cursed into the eternal fire, go away into eternal punishment (vv. 41, 46)

*It is neither clear nor particularly important whether ‘taken’ means ‘taken in judgment’ (v.39) or ‘taken to be gathered with the elect (v.31)’.²⁹

**Like the unworthy servant in 24:48-51, he too would be eternally separated from God.³⁰

It appears His point would be, “Be ready so that when I come you do not find yourself unsaved.” If this is correct, then every saved person falls into the first category. Every unsaved person falls into the second category. Because of the parallelism, every saved person rules over all His possessions, are ready, will hear, “Well done,” is good and faithful, will sit at God’s right hand, and will inherit the kingdom. This is consistent with First Thessalonians 5:23, 24, and Philippians 1:6 and John’s usage of the idea of every believer being an overcomer. Not to hear well done is to find oneself in a place of eternal fire and punishment.

How does this mesh with Luke’s usage of the concept in chapter 19? In Matthew, the story follows His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In Luke, it precedes the event. Both accounts, however, precede the unfolding of His Passion.

In Luke’s account, the parable is to answer a misconception concerning the establishment of the kingdom of God and its immediate fulfillment (19:11). Thus, both Matthew and Luke are speaking of end time truth. In Matthew, it appears to precede His coming and the establishment of His Kingdom. In Luke, it follows the receiving of His Kingdom. Both are the same, nevertheless, because they address the accounting that will take place when the King returns in the establishment of His Kingdom.

Ten Servants	Result
1 = 10 minas (v.16)	Well done Authority (v.17)
1 = 5 minas (v.18)	[Well done] Authority (v.19)
1 = 1 mina (v.20)	Wicked servant (v.22) Enemies of mine / slaughter them (v.27)

There are certain parallels between the two. What you do not want to be is the one who has nothing and does not hear, “Well done!” The potential difficulty in both passages is trying to read out of the

stories more than is intended. Each story is intentional, but neither one is to be broken down and dissected minutely. Parables provide a primary point. Each one serves its purpose. “Either hear well done or be well done.”

Prophetic literature has lost its power to appeal to us, partly because we have been prone to trifle over details, instead of gathering up the great messages of Christ to His people. . . We must not attempt to carry these parables farther than they go.³¹

An additional problem exists in both Matthew and Luke. Both accounts follow the Tribulation and both coincide with the coming of Christ for the establishment of His Kingdom. If there is a rapture of the church, then neither one of these passages refer to the church, unless the Bema seat judgment does not take place until after the Tribulation. If there is only a post-tribulation coming, then the passage could refer to the Church. However, either way the believer will hear, “Well done.”

Clearly the church, the body of Christ, cannot be in view in these statements. The Lord was not describing the Rapture.³²

This thought harmonizes with the idea of rewards. Rewards are given for service rendered. Service is a fruit of the Spirit. Each one bears the amount that corresponds to the portion of faith given. This is in keeping with Romans 12:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. This explains the differing amounts (“thirty fold and sixty fold and a hundredfold) of fruit born by the good soil (Mark 4:13-20).

Every saved person will have service that is reward-able (1 Cor. 4:5). To be sure, this is but an initial attempt at answering an area that is large and complex. The answer is consistent with the doctrines of grace, one’s position in Christ, and the certainty of God’s rule over man’s will. It is not an exhaustive look, but it does provide “food for thought.”



THE BEMA SEAT JUDGMENT AND FUTURE REWARD

Third, if my placement in heaven is based on my performance on earth, when is enough, enough?

(This will tie in with point four) Is it ever possible for the believer to know when enough is enough? If salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, why does sanctification and glorification demand a different standard?

Although, as Evangelicals, we identify salvation as being a monergistic work, why have we made sanctification and our ultimate placement in glorification a synergistic work? If I could not contribute then, why do I think I can now? John 15:4 and 5 clearly speak of not being able to do anything apart from Him. The “I” of self is clearly swallowed up by the cross. This appears to be the point of Romans 6; Galatians 2:20, and Colossians 3:1-4.

What seems so right is, in fact, heresy - the one I consider the most dangerous heresy on earth. What is it? *The emphasis on what we do for God, instead of what God does for us.*³³ He continues on page 23 with the following, “Why not emphasize how much I do for God instead of what He does for me?’ Because that is heresy, plain and simple. How? By exalting my own effort and striving for my own accomplishments, I insult His grace and steal the credit that belongs to Him alone.³⁴

Listen to what Bob George calls “an affront to the cross!”

We reason that now that we are in Christ, it’s up to us to walk the straight and narrow and to name our sins one by one. What an affront to the cross!³⁵

But today people think it is more important to be involved in doing things. ‘Let’s get busy for the Lord’ is the prevailing theme. But the body of Christ is not an organization; rather, it is a living organism. We’ve substituted activity for Jesus and for the learning of truth.³⁶

Sometimes it’s embarrassing to admit to ourselves that we cannot love. But that is exactly what God wants us to see. Without Him, we have no valuable abilities.³⁷

Fourth, what exactly is meant by the label, “Over-comer?” Is their a legitimate distinction between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom?

By far the author John dominates the New Testament usage of the word **nikao** (over-comer). His usage and our understanding of it is crucial.

- First, Jesus speaks of having overcome the world (John 16:33).

For me, my union with Him (see most of the above material) makes what He is mine (1 John 4:17).

- Second, John speaks of the believer having already overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:13, 14).
- Third, as a child of God I have overcome the spirit of the antichrist.

Again why is this true, because of my identity being in Christ (1 John 4:4). This has nothing to do with performance or obedience.

- Fourth, it is our faith in Christ that identifies us as one who overcomes the world (1 John 5:4, 5).
- Fifth, the implication of not being one who overcomes is more than a failure to reign (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

What is this second death experienced by those who do not overcome?

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev. 2:11).

The second death is nothing less than damnation to hell and separation from God (Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8). Only the most creative hermeneutic can get around this plain point.

Revelation 3:5 gives a stern warning of failing to be an overcomer.

“He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5).

What happens to the individual who does not possess the proper garment? In Matthew 22:11 and 12 such an individual is put out. Revelation 4:4, 6:11, 7:9, 13, and 19:16 all make reference to the white garment. What color would you have if not white? Would you be naked?

The same questioning works for the book of life. Christians have their names in the book of life (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27). Non-believers do not have their name in the book of life (Rev. 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 22:19).

To have your name removed from the book of life is to lose your salvation, such a prospect is impossible.

The one who overcomes inherits all things (Rev. 21:7). Since I am a Son, I am an heir (Gal. 4:7). In fact, I am a joint heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Such talk to the contrary is unscriptural.

F.J. Huegel seeks to establish in his chapter, "The Savior Speaks to the Overcomer," that all who are of faith are overcomers (Forever Triumphant, 22-30). "With Christ as our life, we could no more be defeated [i.e., non-overcomers] Christians than we could be beggars and be children of a multi-millionaire" (page 29).



CONCLUSION

The judgment seat of Christ in no way will be dealing with our sin. It is often said the judgment seat of Christ will deal with our service and this is perhaps true. But even here when the works done from a fleshly motive are judged they will be consumed by fire and treated as non-rewardable. If there is sin involved, it will not be attributed in any way to our account nor will it be held against us.

The judgment seat of Christ is to be looked upon as an occasion of unprecedented joy and celebration. It is here that the old nature shall finally receive its just reward. It is here that the believer will finally be forever rid of the old man. It is here where one's practice will finally match up with one's position. In that glorious day, "when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

There are several observations I wish to make.

- **First**, the coming of Christ is a day of great celebration and joy.

This is why I believe it is called the Blessed Hope. Those who will be ashamed are those found to be without Christ.

"Tapestry"

My life is but a weaving between my God and me,
I do not choose the colors, He worketh steadily.
Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow, and I, in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I, the underside.

Reigning Grace and the Bema Seat Judgment

Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful in the skillful Weaver's hand,
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

- **Second**, I see the Bema Seat Judgment as a time in which my old nature will be experientially removed.

The old nature will be the wood, hay, and stubble consumed on that day. He was judicially pronounced dead when I received Christ as my Savior. He is now experientially removed for good forever.

- **Third**, I believe every believer will receive in that day a reward for service (1 Cor. 4:5).
- **Fourth**, because I believe it is a day in which the old nature is completely removed and all of his works rightly consumed I cannot help but believe it will be a day of incredible rejoicing.

Friend it will be at that time that we lose forever our old nature. The idea that we will be ashamed and downcast is a great disservice to the nature of the event. May God open our eyes to the sufficiency of His work in our behalf. May we see the day of accounting as a day in which He receives His glory in the church.

¹ Faust, *The Rod*, (Hayesville NC:Schoetle Publ. Co., 2002), 45 [emphasis his]

² Faust, *The Rod*, 46

³ Faust, *The Rod*, 48, 49 [emphasis his]

⁴ Faust, *The Rod*, 52

⁵ Faust, *The Rod*, 53, 54 [emphasis his]

⁶ *Understanding the Catholic Faith*, 1954, 130.

⁷ Lutzer, *Your Eternal Reward*, (Chicago:Moody Press, 1998), 19.

⁸ Bailey, "Should Christians Think About Rewards?," VERITAS, Dallas Theological Seminary, Vol. 3 No. 4 October 2003, p 7.

⁹ Wilkin, "A Great Opportunity To Proclaim the Gospel," *Grace In Focus*, Mar/Apri 2003, 4.

¹⁰ Wilkin, "Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," *Grace in Focus*, July/Aug 2003, p. 4.

¹¹ Wilkinson, *A Life God Rewards*, (Multnomah Publ., 2002), 117.

¹² Book Review, Ray Loupenay in *Chafer Newsletter*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1, January 2005.

¹³ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 2002), 34.

¹⁴ William E. Sutter, "The Friends of Israel" Newsletter, January 2004.

¹⁵ Alan Schreck, *Catholic and Christian*, 197.

¹⁶ Lehman Strauss, *God's Plan for the Future*, 111.

¹⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1977), 223.

¹⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 226.

¹⁹ Gordon Fee, *First Corinthians*, 145.

²⁰ The Geneva Bible Notes

²¹ Albert Barnes' NT Commentary

²² Gromacki, *Called to be Saints: First Corinthians*, (Ann Arbor:Baker Books, 1977), 48,

49.

²³ H.A. Ironside, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 147.

²⁴ Fee, *First Corinthians*, 136, 137.

²⁵ David Prior, *The Message of I Corinthians*, 59.

²⁶ Millard J. Berquist, *Studies in First Corinthians*, 26

²⁷ James L. Boyer, *For a World Like Ours : Studies in I Corinthians*, 52. See also Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 70 and S. Lewis Johnson, "First Corinthians," *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1235.

²⁸ William E. Sutter, "The Friends of Israel" Newsletter, January 2004.

²⁹ D.A. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8:509.

³⁰ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:80.

³¹ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 288, 289.

³² Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:79.

³³ Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 19.

³⁴ Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*, 23.

³⁵ Bob George, *Faith That Pleases God*, (Eugene:Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 131

³⁶ Bob George, *Faith that Pleases God*, 206.

³⁷ Bob George, *Faith that Pleases God*, 207.