

Bema Seat Judgment and Rewards

The Bema Seat judgment refers to the judgment of believers. The passage we will be looking at for three studies is 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. When we say Bema Seat judgment, it is important to realize we are thinking about the rewards for believers. Our study will cover the different types of rewards receive God will give and His criteria for giving rewards.

But first, we will look at what Scripture says about God as our judge because our subject is God's Bema Seat judgment of believers.

The church used to talk about God as judge, and the horrors of hell until more recent years. Then the Church went silent on these topics because the culture of our day wants to hear that God is love, not that He will judge us. But for us to ignore the idea that God is a judge would be a huge error because Scripture does not do that.

Illustration — God Is a Judge. God has no problem at all calling Himself a judge. This is illustrated throughout the entire Bible. The first example is found in Genesis 2 where God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden. Now that is a great example of God's love. God loved us enough to create us, first of all. God loved Adam enough to put him in the beautiful Garden of Eden.

Then God saw that Adam was alone. God had

compassion on Adam and made a wife for him. Adam named her Eve. God first showed His love for Adam by making him, putting him in a gorgeous garden with wonderful food and water. Then He gave Adam a spouse. It was incredible what God did for him in Genesis 2.

On occasion I have thought I would like to have been there and to have seen the Garden of Eden. It had to have been an incredible place.

What else did God do? God put up what I call a stop sign. The stop sign was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God verbally said, "Stop! Do not touch this, do not eat of it, because on the day that you do, you will surely die." God was talking about both physical and spiritual death.

In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Adam and Eve ignored God's stop sign and what He asked them to not do. Then God came to them after they sinned and said, "What have you done, Adam?" Adam responded with excuses. What is interesting about God's question is that God knew their secret sin.



Bema Seat In the City of Corinth-and-Acrocorinth

They thought they could hide from God, and He would not know what they had done. Genesis 2 shows God's love. Genesis 3 demonstrates His omniscience. God knew what they had done, but He asked them a question to motivate them to admit their guilt. In Matthew 6:6, Jesus was teaching about God the Father and said that He "sees what is done in secret." The message is that neither you nor I can

do anything that God does not see. We cannot hide what we have done from God. So, Genesis 3 reveals that we cannot hide our sin and guilt from God.

Next, Genesis 3 reveals that God is holy because He then judged them. He had put up that stop sign, “Do not do this,” and they went ahead and did it anyway. So God demonstrates that He is trustworthy. Can you imagine what it would have been like if God had told them stop and they had disobeyed anyway? Then what if God had said that He really did not mean stop? That would have revealed God is a liar or that we could not trust Him. That would have revealed that God is not holy and just.

Genesis 3 reveals that God called both of them to accountability. He immediately demonstrated many of His characteristics. God’s attributes were suddenly on display for all to see. When they ate of the fruit of that tree, they brought physical and spiritual condemnation on themselves. They became sinners and were headed for the Lake of Fire.

Then Scripture reveals again that God is love. Love is demonstrated all through the catastrophe because in chapter 3 and verse 15, He promised Adam and Eve and all of us a future Savior. God refers to Him as “the seed of the woman.” God also judged Satan and Adam and Eve. Why? Because they sinned. God has told us that there is a divine principle at work that we reap what we sow.

Do you know what God did? Watch this: the word “judge” is never used in chapter 2 or 3. However, the illustration of God as judge is there because He judged the snake, the devil, the woman, and the man. There was a consequence for their behavior. Genesis 3 illustrates the fact that God is a judge.

Before we go to the New Testament, I want to share four principles in the Old Testament that crystallize the truth that God is judge.

Explicit Statement — God Is a Just Judge.

The first principle is that God is the just judge. Look at Genesis 18:25. The reason I want you to see this verse is that it gives us the second illustration of God as judge. It explicitly states that God is judge. In Genesis 18:25 there is a discussion that occurred before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed.

Abraham was pleading with God because he was concerned about Lot living in Sodom and Gomorrah. He did not want Lot destroyed. Verse 25 says that Abraham said:

“Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” Genesis 18:25 (NASB)

Who is he talking about? God. Abraham believed that God is a just God. This judge is just. You cannot bribe or manipulate this judge. This judge does not see politicians and the wealthy in a different way than the poor and the powerless. Abraham said that God is the “Judge.”

In the book of Genesis, not only do we have an illustration that God is a judge; but also an explicit statement that He is a judge. It is wonderful to read here that God is a judge of all the earth - not part of the earth, not some individuals, and not the people who do not have power or wealth. He is the judge over all the earth.

The message is simple: God is judge. It is illustrated from Genesis through Malachi. It is illustrated significantly in the major and minor prophets. The prophets hammer the issue again and again that man is wicked. Unless there is repentance, they are going to be judged. When they were judged and repented, then the cycle only repeated again. We see it repeated over and over in the Old Testament.

God Is a Holy Judge. The second principle dealing with God as judge is that He is holy. The prophet Habakkuk was pleading with God. He was struggling with the issue of how God could use another nation that is more evil to judge a nation that is less evil? Habakkuk 1:13 says:

Your eyes ...

Habakkuk was talking about God’s eyes.

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil . . . Habakkuk 1:13 (NASB)

He was correct. God is holy. He is too pure to approve evil. So, the first principle is that God is just. The second principle is that God is holy. In reality, those two attributes go right together. If you do not have one, you do not have the other.

God Does Not Like to Punish.

The third principle is that God does not like to punish people. Did you know that? Some of us might think that God is just eager to pounce on us with punishment, but He is not. Look at Lamentations 3:33. I like this verse because it gives us a whole different perspective of our God. Lamentations 3:33 says,

*For He does not afflict willingly
Or grieve the sons of men. Lamentations 3:33 (NASB)*

Now what does this say? What this says is that God does not willingly cause us pain, nor cause us suffering. That is, God is not eager to cause you suffering. He is not eager to do that. Some people would think, “Well, I read the Old Testament, and it looks like God is just eager to do that all the time.” The message is, no, He is not. This verse is saying that when God does afflict us, it is not because He is eager to do it; it is because He must.

It is because of our sin, and He has to put a stop to it. He is trying to rescue us. So He is not eager to do it. What we have done is we have pushed Him into a corner where He finally has to do something because we are not responding on our own as we should.

The message is repeated again a little differently in Ezekiel 18:32. This principle is “screaming” that God loves us. He is not eager to squash us like a bug. Ezekiel 18:32 says,

*For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,”
declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”
Ezekiel 18:32 (NASB)*

Now is that not really clear? God says, “I have no pleasure in the death of anyone.” So He says for us to “repent and live!” He would rather that we repent and live. He has no pleasure in the death of anyone. In the Psalms there is one

death that He does enjoy. It is the death of His godly ones because then we are with Him. Again, that proclaims that God love us.

God Must Punish Sin. The fourth principle of God as judge is found in Revelation 20:7. This is an important one that you might miss. This passage deals with the rebellion that will occur after the millennial kingdom. The events in this passage in Revelation follow the millennial kingdom. Verse 7 tells us,

*When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.
Revelation 20:7-8 (NASB)*

Verse 7 says that after the millennial kingdom is completed, God will allow Satan to be released. If you look at the first part of the chapter, you will find that Satan will be bound for a thousand years. If you look at both the minor and major prophets, the message is that during the millennial kingdom there is no war. There is peace. There is no suffering and no disease. In fact, we are told that a child playing near the hole of a cobra will not be bitten (Isaiah 11:8). The wolf will lie down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6). They do not bite or eat one another, and there is no violence.

The millennial kingdom will be fabulous, like a utopia! It is what everyone hopes for, wishes for, wants and desires. Do you know what happens after the millennial kingdom, after everyone has had this wonderful experience? The unbelievers will rebel against God! Now why would they do that?! God will have just given them this glorious experience. So why would they rebel against God? Look at verse 9:

And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. Revelation 20:9 (NASB)

They will come against God and there are no armies this time. There is just fire from heaven that comes down and destroys them all. Verse 10:

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10 (NASB)

So what does this tell us about God as judge? Simply this: He must judge because men are intransigent, rebellious sinners. Men will not obey God. We are so evil, so wicked that God must punish us when we refuse to stop sinning. In Genesis 8:21, God said,

The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth. Genesis 8:21 (NASB)

That is how God characterizes our heart. We are evil. Even after the millennial kingdom, man will rebel. Even after he has had this incredible experience, he is going to rebel. So God must judge.

Jesus as Our Judge. Now let us go to the New Testament. Those are four principles in the New Testament. I want you to see Jesus' statement with regard to the idea of judging. So turn to John 5:22-23:

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. John 5:22-23 (NASB)

Here Jesus said that He will be the judge. He is going to be judging everyone. This passage is really simple. He said, "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,"

Believers Do Not Come into Judgment. Then in verse 24, Jesus said:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and

believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." John 5:24 (NASB)

What we see in verse 24 is that Jesus said the one who believes in Him—that is, believes in Christ—will not experience death; but will experience eternal life. He will not come into judgment.

So verses 22, 23, and 24 reveal that Jesus will be our judge. Do you see what the Scripture keeps describing? God is a judge. So Jesus, who is God, is a judge. When is the last time you heard anyone teach that Jesus is a judge? It is a topic that you rarely hear. But Jesus did not have a problem at all talking about Himself as being our judge. Jesus is a judge. Those who believe in Him will have eternal life and will not be sent to hell. Jesus said it.

Hebrews 9:27 says that it is appointed for every person to die once, and after that comes the judgment. Here is Revelation 22:12,

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." Revelation 22:12 (NASB)

What does it say? "To render to every man according to what he has done." Look at Acts 10:42:

And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:42 (NASB)

Peter said Jesus told them to tell everyone that there is One who is going to be the judge of the living and the dead. That is Jesus. Verse 43 adds,

"Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." Acts 10:43 (NASB)

Verse 43 adds that there is one way to escape that judgment,

and that is by putting your faith in Christ.

Now go back to John 5:24. I want you to look at the last part of that verse. Jesus says,

“... has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” John 5:24 (NASB)

The Greek work that is translated as “passed” is in the perfect tense. It is a verb. The perfect tense refers to something that occurred in the past and has ongoing action. In other words, the idea is that believers have passed out of death into life. It has already occurred. It is completed action. It is done.

Ephesians 2:6 says that believers are already sitting in heaven. Romans 8:28 says that believers have been glorified already. That is in the aorist tense, which refers to a completed action.

It is a powerful statement by Jesus. He said that if we believe in Him, we do not have to worry. We have passed from death. We are not going to die. Then he said that we have life. It is an incredible comment! Verse 25:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.” John 5:25-27 (NASB)

So Jesus is repeating the idea that He is going to be the one who is our judge. Verse 28 adds,

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice.” John 5:28 (NASB)

Five Kinds of Judgments. Now I want to talk about five different kinds of judgments that are described in Scripture.

The Sheep and Goat Judgment. The first judgment is the

one we call the Sheep and Goat judgment. It is described in Matthew 25:31-46. This judgment occurs in the end times. It comes at the end of the tribulation. This judgment determines who goes into the millennial kingdom and who immediately goes into hell. Only Christians go into the millennial kingdom. Everyone else, those who have rejected Christ will go to hell, that is, the Lake of Fire. Verse 31 introduces this judgment:

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory . . .” Matthew 25:31a (NASB)

Jesus is talking about His second coming.

“... and all the angels with Him.” Matthew 25:31 b (NASB)

Now verse 34 is the judgment of the sheep. Jesus said,

“Then the King will say to those on His right.” Matthew 25:34a (NASB)

The sheep are the Christians. That is another term for “saints.”

“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Matthew 25:34b (NASB)

He said to the sheep or the Christians to come on, you are going into the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the beginning of time. Then Jesus continued to describe what true believers do.

“For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink?’”

Matthew 25:35-37

What is the message? Jesus said we can know believers by their conduct. This sounds like James 2:17-23. James says that faith without works is dead! The message is that if a person is truly a believer, we should be able to identify them by their behavior.

When you come to verse 41, notice what Jesus said.

“Then He will also say to those on His left . . .”

Matthew 25:41 (NASB)

Who were on His left? The goats, those who are not true believers or Christians. They be sent to hell. He said,

“ . . . Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink.”

Matthew 25:41b-42

Jesus continued describing the behavior of the goats, which was the opposite of the sheep’s behavior.

Look at verse 46.

“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:46 (NASB)

Do you see what Jesus was doing? Jesus was describing the fact that He is the judge, and at the end of the tribulation there will be a judgment called the Sheep and Goat Judgment. At the end of the tribulation, He will decide who goes into the millennial kingdom. Only Christians will enter the kingdom.

Antichrist and False Prophet Judgment. There is another judgment which is for the beast or the anti-Christ and the false prophet or the false religious leader during the tribulation. If you go to Daniel 7:10-12, you find that it describes a judgment that is identical to one in Revelation 19:20-21. It says,

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. Revelation 19:20-21 (NASB)

Judgment of Satan and the Demons. A third judgment is about Satan and the demons. Revelation 20:10. Do you remember there was a rebellion and then fire came down, consumed them? The passage said that the devil and the demons were thrown into the lake of fire and joined the false prophet and the beast. That is the third judgment.

Great White Throne Judgment. Now the fourth judgment is the one that none of us want to be a part of, it is described in Revelation 20. This is for non-Christian. It is called the great white throne judgment and the description begins in verse 11.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne . . .” Revelation 20:11-12a (NASB)

I am always amazed when I read this passage. It speaks of the dead and the great. The Greek word for “great” is *meGas*. The word for “small” is *mikros*. The word micron refers to something very small, and mega refers to something very big. So God is saying that it will not matter whether you were an unimportant or an important person on the earth during your lifetime. It will not matter who you were or where you were from.

He said, “And I saw the dead, the great and the small”—the really big and the really small persons—“standing before the throne.” The only ones not there are the believers. You will see in just a minute why I said that.

“... and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades ...”
Revelation 20:12b-13a (NASB)

That is hell.

“... gave up the dead ...” Revelation 20:13b (NASB)

That is, the unbelievers who were in hell will now be standing before the great white throne judgment, getting ready to hear the justification for their punishment. Hell will be waiting to receive for eternity.

“... gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.” Revelation 20:13c (NASB)

So will unbelievers be evaluated? According to their deeds. That is the message.

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:14 (NASB)

Now watch verse 15:

“And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”
Revelation 20:15 (NASB)

Verse 15 is a summary statement. It makes the point that if you are not a Christian, that is where you are going. That is where you will spend eternity. If you are not in the book of life, you are going to the lake of fire. I do not want to be part of that judgment.

Bema Seat Judgment For Christians. Now let me show you the judgment I want to be a part of. It is described in 2 Corinthians 5. This will be brief because I plan to

study and teach this more deeply in the next two studies. 2 Corinthians 5:1 says,

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God...” 2 Corinthians 5:1a (NASB)

The apostle Paul is talking about our physical body.

“... a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven.” 2 Corinthians 5:1b-2 (NASB)

He is talking about our mortal body. Verse 3,

“... inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” 2 Corinthians 5:3-5 (NASB)

When he said, “gave to us the Spirit as a pledge,” He is talking about believers. Do you remember in Ephesians 1:14 that those who come to faith were given the Spirit as a pledge as a promise? He is talking about believers here.

Verse 6 adds,

“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 (NASB)

Paul describes what we really want. Verses 9 and 10 are the verses we want to focus on. Verse 9:

“Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at

home or absent to be pleasing to Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:9 (NASB)

Paul’s message was that if you are truly a Christian, you will want your hearts’ to desire to please Christ. It is interesting that the word for “pleasing” has the idea “to strive to please or to be acceptable.” It is not just pleasing; it is that you are striving to please Him. It is the mark of a believer. True believers want to please Him. You are striving to please Him and not yourself. You are pleasing Christ.

Verse 10:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . .” 2 Corinthians 5:10 (NASB)

“Oh! Wait a minute! We are going to get judged too?! I thought we were going to escape judgment!” No, no, we are escaping the bad judgment—punishment. The Greek word for “judgment” is bema. This judgment is the Bema Seat judgment. This word is very interesting. Let us look at how the Greeks used the word “bema.” The Bema Seat in Greek culture actually referred to a platform where the athletes would receive a prize. The athletes who stood on the Bema Seat were given a wreath. It was like a crown. Today we would liken it to someone competing in the Olympics and receiving a gold medal. This judgment will not be about condemnation but one for rewards.

Can you imagine standing before Christ and all of the saints and being given a reward? It is fantastic! It is of this judgment you should want to be a part. This is the good judgment.

Paul continues with,

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ . . .” 2 Corinthians 5:10a (NASB)

Can I change it to the “reward platform”?

. . . so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10b (NASB)

What is the message? God is still going to be the judge even of Christians. He is going to reward you according to what you have done.

In Hebrews 6:10 we are given a great statement. I have said it many times. It says,

“For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name . . .” Hebrews 6:10a (NASB)

God will not forget what you have done for the saints and in the ministry to the saints. The author of Hebrews was talking to a group of believers when he told them, “God is not unjust so as to forget.” Do you know what God is? He is a just judge. Even at the Bema Seat, He is a just judge; and He will reward you according to the good works you have done. Next time we will discuss what kind of rewards believers will receive and how He decides what we will receive.

Conclusion. I want to conclude by asking of which judgment do you want to be a part? I hope the answer is very simple. In John 5:24, Jesus tells us the escape the great white throne judgment. He said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment . . .” John 5:24a (NASB)

Jesus was talking about how to escape the judgment that sends a person to the lake of fire.

“. . . but has passed out of death into life.” John 5:24 (NASB)

How do you escape this judgment? Believe in Christ, that is how. You believe that Jesus is God, because He said it in John 8:24,

“For unless you believe that I am He . . .” John 8:24b (NASB)

That is, He is God. The statement “I am He” refers to the fact that He was and is the I Am that I Am or sometimes referred to as the Great I Am. That is what Jesus was saying.

... you will die in your sins. [John 8:24c \(NASB\)](#)

We must believe that He is deity; He is God. In 1 Corinthians, the gospel says that He died on a cross. He shed His blood so you and I could have our sins forgiven. He came up out of the grave as proof that He was the perfect sinless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. By faith we then accept Him.

Scripture also talks about repentance. You have to seriously be repentant because in Matthew 13, Jesus talks about wanting to be saved just as you would want or desire a great pearl—you have to really want it. You have to want your life to be changed. That is all part of true belief—saving faith. If you really believe that He is God, is holy, is just, and you are a sinner who needs your sins forgiven, then you have true belief. The proof will be your transformed life.

Do you know why Jesus came to die for us? He came to forgive us of our sins. I hope that you believe in Christ, you are trusting Him for the forgiveness of your sins and are looking forward to the day you will be with Him.

