

The Glorious Presentation of the Saints

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After the resurrection, the members of Christ's Body will make their appointed appearance before the "Judgment Seat of Christ." This is what old-timers often referred to as the "Bema." This is because "bema" is the Greek word used to translate the words "judgment seat" in the following verses.

*"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** [bema] of Christ" (Romans 14:10).*

*"For we must all appear before the **judgment seat** [bema] 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" (II Corinthians 5:10).*

THE MEANING OF BEMA

The Greek word *bema* is a very interesting one. It conveys the simple meaning of "rostrum"¹ or "high platform."² A word of such simple meaning can often have a broad range of uses. Such is the case with *bema*. It was used in a variety of different meanings, such as a throne, or a platform for public speaking.

Not Punitive Judgment

Paul's usage of the word does not convey the idea of "judgment" in a *courtroom* sense of the word. It is not about the passing of a *sentence of condemnation*. It is not about *punitive legal proceedings*.

Not the Movie of Your Life

Sadly many believers have an understanding of the *Bema* as a time of condemnation. They have the mistaken idea that each individual will stand before the Lord and the rest of the

1. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.

2. *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, Complete Biblical Library.

Body of Christ – all at one time – for the purpose of viewing a motion picture review of their lives – for all to see; that the Lord will place on pause the frames of their lives that are “bad” – issuing forth rebuke, correction, condemnation, and judgment.

Sin Question Forever Settled

We must however remember that the question of sin and its judgment have been forever settled on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*“In Whom [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of sins**, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).*

*“In Whom we have redemption through His blood, even **the forgiveness of sins**” (Colossians 1:14).*

Indeed *all* of our sins – past, present, and future; all of them in their entirety – have been fully and completely forgiven.

*“... Having forgiven you **all trespasses**” (Colossians 2:13).*

Even the saints under the Old Covenant could rejoice that their transgressions were as far removed “*as the east is from the west*” (Psalm 103:12), never to be remembered again (Jeremiah 31:34).

TESTIMONY OF OTHER BIBLE STUDENTS

Consider what other diligent students of the Scriptures have written regarding our standing before God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Arthur Pridham (1869):

“A saint will never again come into judgment on account of his natural or inherited iniquity, for he is already dead judicially with Christ, and is no longer known or dealt with on the footing of his natural responsibility ... His guilt has been obliterated by the blood of his Redeemer, and he is freely and justly pardoned for his Savior’s sake. Because Christ is risen from the dead, he is no longer in his sins. He is justified by faith, and is presented in the name and on the merits of the Just One before God ... Into judgment, therefore, on his own account he cannot come.”³

Samuel L. Hoyt (1980):

“Scripture teaches that Christ’s death was all-sufficient, completely satisfying God’s wrath toward sin in the believer. The question of sin in regard to God’s justice has been forever satisfied in the mind of God by the all-sufficient sacrifice of His Son. The penalty for the

3. Arthur Pridham, *Notes and Reflections on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1868, page 141.

believer's sins has been fully paid for by Christ, the believer's substitute. The Christian has been in court, condemned, sentenced, and executed in his substitute, Jesus Christ. God cannot exact payment for sins twice since payment has been fully and forever paid. The believer is seen by the Father as clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God can therefore find no cause for accusing the Christian judicially any more than He can find cause for accusing Jesus Christ. Therefore, at the judgment seat of Christ forensic punishment will not be meted out for the believer's sins ...

“Scripture teaches that for the believer God's justice has already been fully and forever satisfied at the Cross in relation to the believer's sins. If God were to punish the believer judicially for his sins for which Christ has already rendered payment, He would be requiring two payments for sin and would therefore be unjust. Such a concept (punishment for sin) erroneously disparages the all-sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross.”⁴

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1947):

“It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the judgment is unrelated to the problem of sin, that it is more for the bestowing of rewards than the rejection of failure.”⁵

“With reference to sin, Scripture teaches that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37; Romans 5:1; 8:1; I Corinthians 11:32); in his standing before God, and on the grounds that the penalty for all sin – past, present, and future (Colossians 2:13) – has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed beyond condemnation, but being in Christ is accepted in the perfection of Christ (I Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23).”⁶

THE REWARD SEAT OF CHRIST

Instead of being a proceeding of punitive judgment related to sin, Paul's usage of “*bema*” is in the context of the *winning of a race*. It is about the honor and recognition of having *won the prize*. It is the presentation platform where the participants are officially awarded the *gold, silver, and bronze* (i.e., “*gold, silver, precious stones*” I Corinthians 3:12).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“The *bema* in New Testament times was a raised platform at the Olympic Games, where the chief of the games stood and placed awards (*stephanos*) around the neck of all the winners!”⁷

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4. Samuel L. Hoyt, *The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective*, Bibliotheca Sacra, January-March, 1980.
 5. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 406.
 6. *Major Bible Themes*, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Zondervan, page 282.
 7. T.R. Jones, III, *Bible Food for Hungry Christians: Basic Interpretation of New Testament Greek*.

“The word translated ‘judgment seat’ (*bema*) is another instance of Paul’s intimate knowledge of the Olympic games (c.f. I Corinthians 9:24-27). The *bema* was a stand on which the judges stood to observe and evaluate the actions of the contestants. If any athlete broke a rule ... he missed the prize (victor’s wreath – *stephanos*) regardless of the place he finished in the race or contest. Likewise, when an event was completed, the contestants stood before the *bema* to hear the judges’ announcement of the results, and to receive such reward as might properly be theirs.”⁸

“In the Grecian games in Athens, the old arena contained a raised platform on which the president or umpire of the arena sat. From here he rewarded all the contestants; and here he would reward all winners. It was called the ‘*Bema*’ or ‘*Reward Seat*.’ It was never used as a judicial bench.”⁹

SAINTS ON DISPLAY

At the “*Judgment Seat of Christ*” (“*bema*”), the saints will be *presented* on display along with their works for award. This **presentation** before God is the context of Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:21,

*“And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, **to present you** holy and unblameable and unreproueable in His sight.”*

The key here is the word “*present*.” This is *Strong’s Greek Lexicon* #3936 (*paristemi*), which is defined as “to exhibit.” It is also translated “*present*” in the following verses:

*“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may **present** [paristemi] you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (II Corinthians 11:2).

*“That He might **present** [paristemi] it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:27).

It is translated as “*stand before*” in Romans 14:10; and “*shew*” in II Timothy 2:15, both which are passages regarding the *Bema*:

*“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all **stand before** [paristemi] the judgment seat of Christ”* (Romans 14:10).

*“Study to **shew** [paristemi] thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (II Timothy 2:15).

8. Clarence E. Mason, Jr., *A Study of Pauline Motives: As Revealed in 2 Corinthians 4:16-6:4a*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 111, no. 443 (July 1954): pages 220-21.

9. L. Sale-Harrison, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, 1938, page 8.

PRESENTED AS WHO WE REALLY ARE

The simple fact is that we are already “*holy and unblamable, and unproveable in His sight.*” This is our identity in Jesus Christ. He will *present* us to Himself “*a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.*”

At the Bema this is simply being manifested. We are being presented in our reality – “*to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight.*”

The PRESENTATION at the “*Judgment Seat of Christ*” is the effectual result of our “*reigning in life*” – operating in our identity in Christ.

“*For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall **reign in life by one, Jesus Christ***” (Romans 5:17).

What God is now accomplishing in each of our individual lives is the outworking of the fullness of life of Christ in our daily walk – “*that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body*” (II Corinthians 4:10-11).

Make no mistake about it: the *Bema* will be a glorious day of rejoicing for all believers. The gracious fire of God’s undiminished love will consume all that is Adamic from our earthly pilgrimage here. The dross and corruption will be eternally purged away. Thankfully, the “*wood, hay, stubble*” (I Corinthians 3:12) will be removed, leaving only that which is real and of lasting value – our life and identity in the Lord Jesus Christ, and what it produced in our lives.

ANXIETY AND FEAR CONCERNING THAT DAY

“*The Judgment Seat of Christ*” hangs over the heads of many believers as some tribunal of an angry deity. Religious tyranny has snared them in an oppressive mind-set. They live under the shadow of some future inquisition – an examinational and penalizing horror, the thoughts of which leave their hearts in the bondage of anxiety and fear.

This should not be the case! We are to be anxious about nothing, as perfect love casts out fear.

“*Be careful for nothing*” (Philippians 4:6).

Apprehension, dread, nervousness, and anxiety are not to be a part of our lives. They especially are not to characterize our relationship with God. These are things from which God has provided deliverance. This includes worry over our apparent inadequacies, shortcoming, and failures – yes, and even our sins – for even they are forever super-abounded by the inexhaustible grace of God.

“Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20).

“Perfect love casteth out fear”

Hear these words! Hear them in their fullness:

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (I John 4:18).

There is no fear in love. The perfect love of God casts it out.

Dear “beloved of God” (Romans 1:7), is your heart tormented by thoughts of “*the Judgment Seat of Christ?*” Have no more of it! It does not come from your Father, for His love for you is perfect, and “*perfect love casteth out fear.*” Paul wrote it this way,

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7).

TESTIMONY OF OTHER BIBLE STUDENTS

Again let us hear from other students of the Scriptures, this time as they write concerning the glorious nature of Christ’s *Bema*.

J. Dwight Pentecost (1958):

“Thus, associated with this word [*bema*] are the ideas of prominence, dignity, authority, honor, and reward rather than the idea of justice and judgment ... To bring the believer into judgment concerning the sin question ... is to deny the efficacy of the death of Christ and nullify the promise of God that ‘*their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*’ (Hebrews 10:17).”¹⁰

Samuel L. Hoyt (1980):

“The expression ‘*the judgment seat of Christ*’ in the English Bible has tended to cause some to draw the wrong conclusion about the nature and purpose of this evaluation. A common misconception which arises from this English translation is that God will mete out a just retribution for sins in the believer’s life, and some measure of retributive punishment for sins will result ...

“Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the *Bema* to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ’s *Bema* to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the *Bema* bestowed rewards to the victors. *He did not whip the loser* ...

10. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Zondervan Publishing House, pages 219-226.

“Some Bible teachers view the judgment seat as a place of intense sorrow, a place of terror, and a place where Christ displays all the believer’s sins before the entire resurrected and raptured church. Some go even further by stating that Christians must experience some sort of suffering for their sins at the time of this examination”¹¹

L.D. Cunningham (1984):

“Certainly the Judgment Seat of Christ is not a place of condemnation, for Romans 8:1 states, ‘*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ...*’ The Judgment Seat of Christ is, rather, a moment of inspection and an opportunity for reward ... Every young Greek in the days of Paul had a special understanding of the bema. It was the seat of reward on which the umpire of the games sat, and from which he crowned the winners of events. What honor and dignity came from that place!”¹²

GOD’S GLORIOUS PURGING FIRE

“*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***” (II Corinthians 5:10).

“*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest**: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be **revealed by fire**; and **the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is**. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*” (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

Now we need to understand that the building work represented by our lives are not physical **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble**; and neither is the fire testing it physical. This is simply figurative speech. It speaks to us in illustrative ways that we can understand. The point is not that there will be this prolonged process of purging at the Bema. Instead it is that this purging *has* taken place in the resurrection. This day marks the purging that has been accomplished, celebrating that finished work of God.

BUILDING MATERIALS

“The apostle has affirmed that there are two classes of building materials which the ‘*labourers together with God*’ may use in building the edifice upon the foundation already laid. The gold, silver, costly stones are indestructible materials. These are the work of God ... On the other hand, the wood, hay, and stubble are destructible materials. These are the work of men which man has produced by his own effort. The apostle is revealing the fact

11. Samuel L. Hoyt, *The Judgment Seat of Christ in Theological Perspective*, Bibliotheca Sacra, January-March, 1980.

12. L.D. Cunningham, *Youth With A Mission*.

that the examination at the bema of Christ is to determine that which was done by God through the individual and that which the individual did in his own strength ...”¹³

BAD THINGS

“...*Whether it be good or bad*” (II Corinthians 5:10).

Just what is the “*bad*” of this passage? Interestingly enough this is not the normal word for “*bad*.” Here Paul uses a Greek work that has as its meaning “worthless.”¹⁴ E.W. Bullinger defines it as “useless,” stating that “it expresses the lack of those qualities which constitute a person or thing what it claims to be.” R.C. Trench (1807-1886) wrote that the word in this passage means “good-for-nothingness, the impossibility of any true gain ever coming forth from it ... This notion of worthlessness ...”¹⁵

In other words, what we learn from this is that the word “*bad*” here represents those things that are contrary to who we really are in Christ.

J. Dwight Pentecost wrote: “Thus the judgment [of the Bema] is not to determine what is ethically good or evil, but rather that which is acceptable and that which is worthless. 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.”¹⁶

A GLORIOUS DAY

The plain fact of the matter is that the *Bema* (“*The Judgment Seat of Christ*”) is a day to be looked forward to! It is the revelation of the life and work of God in us. Regardless of how things may *appear* to our earthly eyes, we **are** “*His workmanship*,” (Ephesians 2:10). Lay hold on this amazing truth!

We did not make ourselves. We are not self-made men. We are God-made men. We are not the fruit of our own labors. We are His creation. It is all about Him.

“*He hath done all things well*” (Mark 7:37)!

“... *He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1:6).

Remember that this is the very thing of which Paul was so confident:

“*Being **confident** of **this very thing** ... THAT He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*”

Bask in these truths!

13. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Zondervan Publishing House, pages 219-226.

14. *kakos*, Strong’s Greek Lexicon #2556,

15. Charles Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of The New Testament*, 1851.

16. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Zondervan Publishing House, pages 219-226.

PURGING OF THE DROSS

*There is coming a wonderful day in the future, a day of the presentation of the saints at Christ's **Bema**. Although the "good and bad" shall be revealed that day, the "bad" – as in the due process of gold and silver's refinement – will surface to the top. That day will forever remove all the stains and disgraces of the "former things," leaving only the "good" of "gold, silver, precious stones."*

On that day there will be "loss" of the "bad." What a most gracious act, for it will be a gloriously positive loss. It will remove all that we wish to forget. Just as God in His forgiveness remembers them no more, so "the former things are passed away."

GOD'S MASTERPIECES

It is then that our Father will *present* us on open display as His masterpieces – His new creation – His ultimate showing forth of His grace:

*"That in the ages to come He might **shew** [display, exhibit, illustrate, demonstrate, present] the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).*

Here is our reason for expectation of this magnificent event: when all is said and done on that day, "then shall every man have praise of God" (I Corinthians 4:5).

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