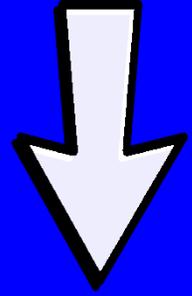


LIVING FOR HIS RETURN



Part 5: The Bema of Christ



A. THE MEANING OF BEMA

1. In Greek times a *bēma* was a raised, throne-like stone platform on which rulers or judges sat when making speeches (Acts 12:21) or hearing and deciding cases (Acts 18:12-17).
2. All believers will stand before the “bema seat,” the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10).
3. Bema seat: where the presiding officer sat.
4. Only believers will stand in this judgment and will be held accountable for the deeds they accomplished in relation to what they have been given (Luke 12:48b). The outcome will be reward or deprivation of reward. Salvation is not in question (1 Cor. 3:15).
5. Two different words translated “judgment seat”
 - “*Kritēron*” (Jas. 2:6; 1 Cor. 6:2, 4) meaning the instrument or means of trying or judging anything.
 - “*Bēma*” meaning a place where all contestants in Grecian games were rewarded, and where winners were rewarded. It was never a judicial bench.¹

B. THE TIME OF THE BEMA OF CHRIST

1. J. Dwight Pentecost provides several good arguments indicating that the event will most likely take place immediately following the Rapture of the church.²
2. Charles Ryrie concurs with this timing.³

C. THE PLACE OF THE BEMA OF CHRIST

1. Since the bema follows the Rapture, it must take place in the heavenlies (1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Cor. 5:1-8).
2. It will take place in the Lord’s presence (2 Cor. 5:10).

D. THE JUDGE AT THE BEMA OF CHRIST

1. The Judge will be Jesus Christ himself (2 Cor. 5:10).
2. A part of the exaltation of Jesus Christ is the right to manifest divine authority in judgment.

E. THE SUBJECTS OF THE BEMA OF CHRIST

1. The bema of Christ is concerned only with believers.
2. The first personal pronoun “we” occurs with too great a frequency in 2 Cor. 5:1-19 to miss this point.
3. Pentecost believes that we will not be judged en masse, or in classes, but one by one in accordance with individual merit.⁴

¹ Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 219-220.

² Pentecost, p. 220.

³ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 597.

⁴ Pentecost, p. 223.

4. All believers will be judged in heaven. All righteous acts—many of which will have been disregarded and some punished on earth—will be finally rewarded.

F. THE BASIS OF THE EXAMINATION AT THE BEMA OF CHRIST

1. It is not to determine whether the one judged is a believer or not...the question of salvation is not being considered.
2. Because of the atoning work of Christ on the cross all sins have been forgiven to those who have accepted Christ as their Savior. This judgment, therefore, is not about the believer's sins.
3. Pentecost points out that the purpose of the bema is to make a public manifestation, demonstration or revelation of the essential character and motives of the individual.⁵
4. The believer's works are brought into judgment, called "the things done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10), in order that it may be determined whether they are good or bad.
5. Concerning the word "bad" (Gr. *phaulos*); Paul did not use the usual word for bad (*kakos* or *ponēras*), either of which would signify that which is ethically or morally evil.
6. The Lord's purpose here is not to chasten his child for his sins, but to reward his service for things done with the proper motives.
7. It must be emphasized that these are not works for salvation but works resulting from salvation (Eph. 2:10).
8. The reward will be based on the individual's inner character and motivation.
9. Things done by the individual in his own strength, or for his own glory, will not be rewarded but will be considered as worthless (*phaulos*). This can also include deeds done with the wrong motives, or not done as an expression of God's love, or done in conflict to God's will. See the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-29).
10. Believers will be judged on the basis of what they did with what they have been given (Luke 12:48b)

G. THE REWARDS OF THE BEMA OF CHRIST

1. The result of this judgment will be the gain or loss of eternal rewards—not punishment (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Rom. 14:10-12).
2. These rewards are sometimes depicted as crowns.⁶
3. These represent positions of leadership and service for Christ in his kingdom (Matthew 25:21; Luke 19:17; Rev. 20:6).
4. In the NT there are five areas in which specific mention is made of a crown reward.
 - Crown of Life (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10): Martyr's crown for those who have persevered under trials and have been "faithful unto death"
 - Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 5: 1-4): "Shepherds of God's flock,"..."elders" (overseers), those who felt called to care for a community of believers.
 - Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6-8): For those who long for the coming of Christ
 - Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19): Probably all believers since Paul sees no contradiction in referring to both Christ and his friends as his hope and joy and crown in heaven.
 - Crown of Victory (1 Cor. 9:25-27): An incorruptible crown given to those who discipline themselves to live a life consistent with their testimony
5. Other rewards mentioned in the NT.
 - White robe (Rev. 3:5)
 - Hidden manna (Rev. 2:17)
 - White stone (Rev. 2:17)
 - Seat of honor given to "overcomers" (Rev. 3:21).

⁵ Pentecost, p. 223.

⁶ Crown (Gr. *stephanos*), a victor's crown, one bestowed with honor and dignity. Whether these are literal crowns or figurative crowns is uncertain. Scriptures such as Psa. 103:4, and 149:4 speak of crowns figuratively while Revelation 4:4 speaks of literal crowns.