

The Doctrine of the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ

A. Introduction

1. This event is referred to by Paul as the “Judgment Seat of Christ” in:

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat [βῆμα (*bēma*)²] of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil. (NET)

It is evident from the context of Romans 14:1–13; 2 Corinthians 5:1–11 that this is the judgment of the believers connected with the *parousia* [2d Advent], the coming presence of the Lord Jesus. This concerns the evaluation of our life on earth and its character and works (see especially 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The complete and final evaluation of the believer’s life, however, is going to be connected with the *Parousía*, the Second Coming of the Lord as explained in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24; 25; Mark 13; Luke 21). According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, the dead in Christ will be resurrected first, and believers who are still alive will be changed to receive a body conformable to that of those who had already risen.³

Judgment Seat (βῆμα). In Acts 7:5 *bēma* means “step,” “stride,” or “length,” but elsewhere in the New Testament and most often in Greek literature it means “tribunal,” “judicial bench,” “judgment seat” or “throne,” traditionally erected in public from which judgment and other official business was conducted.⁴

² “The *judgment seat* (βῆμα, *bēma*) was a raised platform mounted by steps and sometimes furnished with a seat, used by officials in addressing an assembly or making pronouncements, often on judicial matters. The judgment seat was a common item in Greco-Roman culture, often located in the *agorá* [ἀγορά], the public square or marketplace in the center of a city. Use of the term in reference to Christ’s judgment would be familiar to Paul’s 1st century readers” (*The NET Bible* [Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2005], 2255sn16).

³ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “βῆμα,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 334.

⁴ Colin Brown, “Judgment Seat,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 3:760.

The Greek term *bema* portrays a seat or raised platform where a judge sits to adjudicate a case. The Greeks employed the same term to describe the platform on which a judge or referee sat during the Isthmian or Olympic games at Corinth. Here the winner of the various athletic events received their rewards. No doubt the apostle Paul had such a scene in mind when he used the phrase, “judgment seat of Christ.”

Thus, the contexts and the historical background of the term imply that the bema is for believers a place and time of rewarding rather than punishing.⁵

βῆμα, a dais or platform that required steps to ascend, *tribunal*.⁶

Judgment Seat of Christ. The manifestation of the believer's works is in question in this judgment. It is most emphatically not a judgment of the believer's sins. These have been fully atoned for in the vicarious and substitutionary death of Christ, and remembered no more (Hebrews 10:17). It is quite necessary, however, that the service of every child of God be definitely scrutinized and evaluated. As a result of this judgment of the believer's works, there will be reward or loss of reward. The judgment seat, literally *bēma*, evidently is set up in heaven previous to Christ's glorious Second Advent to establish His earth rule in the millennial kingdom. The judgment seat of Christ is necessary for the appointment of places of rulership and authority with Christ in His role of “King of kings and Lord of lords” at His revelation in power and glory.⁷

2. What distinguishes the tribunal in 2 Corinthians 5:10 are those who gather before the Lord's *bēma* had their sins judged at the cross. In fact, the sins of the entire human race were judged at the cross. For all Church-Age believers, their pre-salvation sins were forgiven at the moment they believed in Christ.
3. During their post-salvation earthly life, their sins were forgiven through confession alone to God alone resulting in the filling of the Holy Spirit.
4. When the Rapture occurs, all Church-Age believers will gather in the third heaven and participate in the Great Genuflect described in:

⁵ David R. Nicholas, “The Judgment at the Rapture,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, gen. ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications 1996), 226.

⁶ Walter Bauer, “βῆμα,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 175.

⁷ Merrill F. Unger, “Judgment Seat of Christ,” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, rev. 3d ed., ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1988), 728.

Philippians 3:9 God has exalted Him to the maximum, and has bestowed on Him the rank which is above every rank [King of kings and Lord of lords],

v. 10 so that in the presence of Jesus every knee of heaven shall bow, both the ones on earth [believers alive at the Rapture], and the ones under the earth [those dead at the Rapture],

Philippians 3:11 and that every tongue shall acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, resulting in the glory of God the Father. (EXT)

5. This passage describes the post-Rapture assembly of the resurrected royal family of God before the throne of God. Jesus Christ will be recognized with His new royal title, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”
6. This new title will be displayed on His toga and sword indicating his authority both judicially and militarily:

Revelation 19:16 He has His royal title which has been written on his *chlamús* [ἵματιον (*himátion*): outer garment⁸, specifically, the *χλαμύς (chlamús)*] and on His thigh⁹: “King of kings and Lord of lords.” (EXT)

7. Following this event, the entire royal family assembles before the Supreme Court of Heaven with Jesus Christ sitting as Chief Justice. He calls to order the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ.

B. The Challenge of Personal Freedom

1. The word “judgment” refers to two concepts: condemnation and evaluation. In this context, it refers to evaluation. In our text the circumstance is the latter since resurrected believers can never again face any judgment.
2. In this case, the royal family will be evaluated with regard to their production of divine good, under the filling of the Holy Spirit, during their Christian lives: “gold, silver, precious stones” (1 Corinthians 3:12a).

⁸ Jesus Christ is dressed in military attire at the Second Advent. The garment typical for the authority of highest rank is the *χλαμύς (chlamús)*: “The purple robe with which our Lord was arrayed in scorn by the mockers in Pilate’s judgment hall.” “A military cloak worn by emperors, kings, magistrates, military officers” (Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, s.vv. “ἱμάτιον,” “chlamús,” 774, 1477).

⁹ The common practice in the first century A.D. was for a sculptor to engrave his name in silver on the statue’s thigh. Here the titles refer to the Lord’s battlefield royalty over human authorities: “King of kings,” and over angelic authorities: “Lord of lords.”

3. It is understood that with the possession of a sin nature, the soul will have entertained ideas associated with human good and evil. These areas will be examined in the process of the evaluation.
4. The evaluation will expose those incidences when divine power was not utilized in the execution of certain deeds and will be classified as “wood, hay, stubble” (1 Corinthians 3:12b).
5. Simply put, the evaluation’s purpose is to determine each person’s production, whether performed through the filling of the Holy Spirit or through the energy of the flesh.
6. The outcome of the evaluation does not determine what kind of discipline may be imposed on anyone. Instead, the purpose is to determine who produced a preponderance of divine good as opposed to those who produced a preponderance of human good and evil.
7. Performance in the plan of God is the issue under scrutiny. Each believer has eternal life, a resurrection body, and membership in the royal family.
8. What will distinguish one from another is whether or not one will be presented with escrow blessings while another will not. Once the evaluation is completed, it will reveal there is no equality in heaven.
9. This inequality will reveal the variety of decisions made in time by each individual. Some will utilize his spiritual assets to the max while others rarely do so.
10. A person’s failure to utilize his freedom to make good choices in time from his position of strength provided by the filling of the Holy Spirit, the availability of Bible doctrine, and consequential application of it to life and circumstances, results in loss of escrow.
11. What God freely gave is a system by which any believer could acquire the principles of divine integrity which would have transformed his soul into a vessel of honor.
12. On the other hand, those who took advantage of these spiritual provisions were able to grow in grace and eventually transform their souls into a vessel of honor.
13. Believers, at the moment of salvation, are placed in an environment of freedom. Each has all the invisible assets necessary to transform his soul away from human viewpoint over to divine viewpoint.
14. The greater the freedom the greater the inequality. The greater the advance, the greater the level of happiness to that believer. The less the advance the less the level of happiness to that believer.

15. The way a person responds to God's grace provisions in time has a definite impact on the level of one's happiness in eternity.
16. The more people who advance to spiritual maturity the greater the happiness that results. Advanced believers are happy because they have learned through doctrine how to manage the trials and tribulations of a fallen planet in the light of eternity.
17. The more happy people there are the greater the happiness and resultant prosperity among a population. The absence of happiness reveals the absence of doctrine in the souls of the people.
18. The distinct absence of happiness within our nation's population expresses the vacuum that exists in the souls of its citizens.
19. Nevertheless, no matter what historical circumstances exist in the devil's world, whether freedom or tyranny, the believer has his own palace inside his soul. Although it is evanescent, that palace is available inside the divine power system.
20. Here are some verses that illustrate this freedom and its benefits:
 - (1) The positive believer will always be provided access to the Word of God no matter where he is located on this planet.

John 8:32 You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Therefore, keep on standing firm, and do not become entangled again in the yoke of slavery inside the cosmic system.

James 1:25 But the one who looks with an earnest desire to absorb in detail the perfect law of freedom, and continues to live in close proximity to it, not having become a forgetful hearer only, but a doer, this man shall acquire unalloyed happiness by the production of divine good. (EXT)

James 2:12 In light of these things, keep on speaking or communicating and keep on applying just as those who are about to receive judgment by the law of freedom. (EXT)

- (2) This "perfect law of freedom" indicates that God has provided a system for you to grow in grace and knowledge of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

- (3) It can be accurately said that this is a unique freedom because it is only available to Church-Age believers and only then when they take advantage of it to grow in grace all the way to spiritual maturity.
 - (4) In addition, this spiritual freedom is way advanced from the national freedom one enjoys in a client nation. This spiritual freedom is malleable to the up- and downtrends of history.
21. Therefore, at the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ, the first challenge the believer will face is how he used his spiritual freedom to advance in the plan of God.
22. Consequently, spiritual freedom means inequality both in time and eternity. Each believer is free to use his volition to advance or not. It is a matter of one's individual responsibility before the Lord.
23. Freedom is not referenced when rabble is roused. Doctrines of demons are easily taught to vacuous minds whose emotions are stimulated by the puppet masters.
24. Presently, our population is at war. The rallying cry from the benighted is "change," but the change sought will, over time, systematically destroy the freedom they abuse when their handlers fulfill their lust for power.
25. The strategy for the past two years has been assassination by disinformation. The news is now out that the ones who did collude with Russia, who did break laws, who are criminals, and who, had they won the election, would have finished Barack Obama's strategy of "fundamentally transforming the United States of America."¹⁰
26. Yet, this is proof that inequality exists when freedom is allowed. The challenge for our client nation is whether those who have the truth can stand fast until the lie is exposed and its sycophants have been identified as Lucifer's rousers of rabble.

C. The Timing for the Evaluation Tribunal

1. The Rapture of Church-Age believers will signal the end of the dispensation. From A.D. 33 to the moment the Rapture occurs, every believer, dead or alive, will be resurrected to meet the Lord in the air.
2. The key passage that documents this event is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. This paragraph explains the sequence of the resurrections. Those who are dead will be resurrected first followed by those who are physically alive a yoctosecond later. (Also see 1 Corinthians 15:51–54)

¹⁰ Comment made in a campaign speech on October 30, 2008, five days before he became president-elect.

3. Both groups will meet the Lord and His angelic hoards in the atmosphere of the earth to be immediately transported through the universe and into the Third Heaven.
4. The first order of business will be the Great Genuflect studied above (Philippians 2:9–11). Following this ceremony, the population of Church-Age believers will be assembled before Jesus Christ Who will conduct the Evaluation Tribunal (2 Corinthians 5:10).
5. While the Evaluation Tribunal takes place in heaven, the Tribulation transpires on earth (Revelation 5:1–18:24).

End JAS2-21. See JAS2-22 for continuation of study at p. 211.)