

# Day of Evaluation – Judgment Seat of Christ

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

## Introduction

A few weeks ago we started a series of messages on “What happens after you die?” What we have seen so far is that believers in Christ go to be with him when they die. The Apostle Paul said, “*We prefer to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord.*” (2 Cor. 5:8).

The second thing we have seen is that there is more than leaving our body behind and going to be with Christ. There is also a resurrection of the body. That’s what we saw last week: “*we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). There will be a resurrection of the deceased believer’s body and also when Christ comes, those who are alive, will be raptured or taken suddenly to be with Him in heaven.

Today we will focus on a third truth about what happens when believers die. The passage we will be looking at is found in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 which talks about the Judgment Seat of Christ. But before we look at that passage I would like to share with you various New Testament passages that talk about the Judgment Seat of Christ or of God’s Judgment Seat.

In 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 we read, “*So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the **judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*”

Also in Romans 14:10-12 says, “*You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before **God's judgment seat**. <sup>11</sup>It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'”<sup>12</sup>So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.”*

## The Judgment Seat of Christ is Only for Believers

In the context of the two Scripture passages above, it is clear that they refer to believers and not non-believers. The phrases Paul uses in the two passages, “*we must all*” and “*we will all*”, he is including himself also along with all believers. Thus this does not refer to the Great White Throne Judgment which is reserved only for non-believers at the end when they will be judged and thrown in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15).

## Judgment Seat - Bema

In Romans 14:10 it is called “*the judgment seat of God*” and in 2 Corinthians 5:10 it is called “*the judgment seat of Christ*”. Both are the same. The Greek word for “*judgment seat*” is “**bema**”. Bema was an Olympic platform for rewarding the victorious contestants in the games. In Paul’s time the people would be very familiar with the term he was using. The bema was an elevated platform where the athletes were to be rewarded during the sports competitions and even during the Olympic Games. Thus Paul uses it to mean the Divine Tribunal before which all believers are to stand before Christ and be recompensed and awarded for their deeds and service.

## The Day of Evaluation

At this **bema** (judgment seat) all believers will be judged by the things done in or through the body, whether it be good or bad. There they will receive rewards for their faithfulness to the Lord. For some believers they will suffer loss, loss of a reward.

### Exposition of 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

In the context of this passage Paul is talking about worldly and fleshly behaviour and the spiritual division in the Christian body (church) which will affect the rewards the Lord will give when He returns for His Church.

**Verse 10** *“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.”*

Paul was the master builder of the church in Corinth. In matter of fact Paul laid many foundations throughout his missionary journeys. His great success as a foundation layer was due entirely to the Lord. *“By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I laboured even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me”* (1 Cor. 15:10).

Paul says, *“Each one should be careful how he builds.”* This applies to every believer. To some extent all of us teach the Gospel by what we say and do. No believer has the right to be careless in representing the Lord and His Word. Every believer is to be a careful builder because we all have the same responsibility.

**Verse 11** *“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

The foundation is neither on human ethics nor in traditions and decisions of churches and church leaders through the centuries. It is Jesus Christ and Him alone! Every human philosophy, religious system, and code of ethics is doomed and will not stand in the end. Only Christ and Him alone!

**Verse 12** *“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,”*

The materials represent believer’s responses to what they have – how well they serve the Lord with what He has given them. In other words they represent our works. We cannot be saved by good works but every believer has been *“created in Christ Jesus for good works”* (Eph. 2:10). Works are not the source of the Christian life, but they are the mark or fruit of the Christian life.

Gold, silver and costly stones are all found underground. They are deeply embedded. They are also durable and can endure fire. On the other hand wood, hay or straw is found above ground. They are on the surface. They are not durable and are easily destroyed by fire. Every Christian is a builder. God wants us to build only with the best materials, because only the best materials are worthy of Him, and are the most effective and will last.

### **3 Basic Ways We Build**

We build for the Lord, and use the various materials for the Lord, in 3 basic ways:

#### 1/ We build by our **Motives.**

Why we do a thing is as important as what we are doing. A campaign of outreach and visitation done because of compulsion is wood, but visiting the same people in love to bring them to Christ is gold. Singing in church and being concerned about how the people like our voice is hay, but singing to glorify God is silver. Giving generously out of duty or pressure from people is straw, but giving generously with joy to extend the Gospel and to serve others in the Lord’s name is a costly stone.

## 2/ We build by our Conduct.

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).*

The word bad means worthless. It produces no gain. Our behaviour or conduct really matters.

How victorious were we over sin? Romans 6:1-4 reminds us, *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”*

Were we successful in controlling our tongue. Jesus said, *“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matt. 12:36).* Did we manifest the fruit of the Spirit in our lives? Galatians 5:22-23 says, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”*

## 3/ We build by our Service.

Have we fulfilled our role in the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20 says, *“Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’”* It’s the way we use spiritual gifts that God has given us; the way we minister in His name. That’s what is of supreme importance in our building for Him.

Sometime ago a colleague of mine told me he was leaving a certain ministry. The reason he said was, “I wasn’t doing what I do best. I was using my abilities but not my spiritual gifts.” There was nothing wrong with the work he was doing, but for him it was wood, hay and straw, because he was doing what others thought he should do rather than what the Lord had gifted and called him to do.

**Verses 13-15** *“His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. <sup>14</sup>If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”*

When Christ returns, every believer’s work will be tested as to the **quality not quantity**. Fire is the symbol of testing. The truth of the matter is that our lives sometimes are filled with things which will bring us no reward. It isn’t that we’re going to be judged or punished; it’s just that when it comes to reward time, some will lose out. It’s important that we avoid *spiritual waste* in our lives.

At the judgment seat of Christ, even though we are saved and even though we are the children of God and even though our hearts have been changed and transformed, we can still fill our lives with stuff that really has no eternal consequences. It’s like some Christians who have argued over which style of worship music they should use in church services or which version of the Bible they should use, ethnic segregation and isolation in churches, or what position you hold in eschatology or overemphasis of a single doctrine or practice etc.

And that’s going to be literally burned away. The fire here is not a fire of judgment. It’s just burning away the dross or junk to purify the real stuff that is to be rewarded.

## Some Spiritual Hindrances or Encumbrances

- Legalism, hanging on to the old religious ways (Judaist legalism). They are like a ball and chain to spiritual living by faith.
- Focus on others, trying to measure up to them, pleasing people rather than God.
- Pride and false humility. *“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions” (Col. 2:18).*

- Another encumbrance can be fellow Christians. We need to be careful about blaming others for our shortcomings. But a lot of Christians not only are not running themselves but are keeping others from running. They hinder the work of God sometimes because they have been hurt (pride) or because of political correctness or it's not in the constitution of the church etc.

### **The Rewards - Five Crowns**

The believer's rewards at the judgment seat of Christ are as follows:

**1. An imperishable crown (that lasts)** – given to those who strive for the mastery in all things. It's about great discipline and self-control in all things even in the body. It's what you have done in the spirit and flesh. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

**2. A crown of righteousness** – given to all those who love the Lord's appearing. In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 we read, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”*

**3. A crown of life** – given to the person who endures temptation, hardships, suffering and to those who are faithful even to death. James writes, *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him”* (James 1:12; also Revelation 2:10).

**4. A crown of glory - that does not fade away** – given to the leaders of the flock who were examples to their flock. Peter writes, *“Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”* (1 Peter 5:2-4).

**5. A crown of rejoicing** – given to those who bring others to Christ. In I Thess. 2:19-20, *“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”* Paul says that the Thessalonians who were brought to Christ was his glory and joy and because of that there is a crown of reward.

These are five “crowns” of rewards. Whether these are all the types of literal crowns that will be rewarded or whether they are only representative is not revealed. It is certain that God will reward justly, according to what each believer deserves.

We know that in heaven the twenty-four elders are worshiping God by laying down their crowns before His throne (Revelation 4:9-11). This indicates that the crowns will be used as an offering of praise and worship to the One who made it all possible to receive such rewards. It is a way of offering God something to His honour and glory – He deserves all worship! Do you want to enter heaven empty handed and wish you could offer at least one crown of worship to the Lord? I think this is what Paul meant when he said that some will suffer loss (1 Cor. 3:15).