

SOME DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WINNERS IN THIS WORLD AND THE WINNERS IN THE CHRISTIAN RACE

I. THE WINNERS IN THE CHRISTIAN RACE WILL BE GATHERED IN A DIFFERENT PLACE AND INVOLVE A DIFFERENT PEOPLE

A. Unlike the Olympic games and other sporting events, the Christian ceremonies will take place in heaven. Worldly ceremonies are held in different cities and much work and wealth are involved to make things the most spectacular as possible, but the Christian arena will feature the glories of heaven. A certain songwriter penned the words, "Heaven is a beautiful place, filled with glory and grace..." and so it will be when the people of God are gathered there. Their gathering will follow the rapture of the church and each Christian will stand before the "Bema" or Judgment Seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10). The word "*bema*" means a "*reward chair*" and this is the word used of the seat before which the winners of the Greek games came and were awarded. Another word, "*kriterion*" is used for a judicial Bench where sentences were handed down for crimes committed (James 2 :6).

From this necessary and proper distinction we should gather that the Judgment Seat of Christ (bema) has absolutely nothing to do with judgment of any sins. Christ paid the penalty for our sins and there is no condemnation upon those who are in Christ (Jn. 3:18; Rom. 8:1; Col 2:10). As far as sins in the believer's life are concerned, they are judged on earth either by the believer himself (I Cor. 11:3) or by the Lord (I Cor. 11:32; Heb.12:3-5; I Jn 5:16).

B. Unlike the games and ceremonies of this world, the Judgment Seat of Christ will only involve Christians. Oftentimes participants at games in this world are disqualified for a number of reasons. Sometimes drugs are involved or something used as an unfair advantage. It should be noted also that this judgment has nothing to do with whether a believer will enter heaven or whether he will remain there. When the Lord comes for His own they will never be separated from Him (I Thess. 4:17).

C. Unlike the participants in the games, ceremonies, and awards of this world, no one will be disqualified and exempted from participation and examination (Rom. 14:11; I Cor.3:13)). This means every Christian will be there despite any failures on his part and every Christian will be examined.

II. THE WINNERS IN THE CHRISTIAN RACE WILL BE GATHERED FOR A DIFFERENT PURPOSE

A. This judgment will be carried out for the glorification of Jesus Christ and not for the glorification of believers. We see this is the purpose that is involved in our being saved and serving the Lord (Rom. 15:6; I Cor. 6:20;10:31; I Pet, 2:12; Eph.1:12}. We see this is the idea demonstrated when believers will cast their crowns before the throne of God and ascribe praise to the Lord (Rev. 4:10,11).

B. Unlike Christians, the winners of the various games in this world, such as the Olympics, are for the glorification of individuals who are determined to be winners. As a

results such awards foster pride and self-glory in the individuals and provides them the grounds for boasting and gives them the sense of superiority to others. Notice how God looks upon pride and vainglory and how He regards it (I Cor.1:26-29; I Pet. 5:5,6;Jud. 7:2).

III. THE WINNERS IN THE CHRISTIAN RACE WILL BE AWARDED ON THE BASIS OF THEIR INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

A. This judgment will involve believers as servants and how they have served the Lord.

1. In this relationship we notice first of all that every believer will stand before the Lord Jesus and give an account of himself. (Rom.14:10; II Cor. 5:10).

2. In this relationship we find that every believer, in spite of all our failures, will receive some praise from the Lord(ICor.4:5).

B. This judgment will take into consideration then every work that a believer has done in his service for the Lord (I Cor. 3:11-15).

1. Notice the figure of a foundation and two different kinds of building materials are used to illustrate this judgment of a believer's works. Every believer is building upon the spiritual foundation of Christ and everything that he does in the Lord's service is one of two kinds of materials (I Cor. 3:11,12).

2. Notice the two kinds of building materials fall into two categories of that which is unburnable or indestructible and that which is burnable or destructible. From this figure and the context of what Paul is saying to the Corinthian believers we may conclude that any and all works done by believers in their fleshly efforts and for their own glory is that which will be burned. On the other hand the works done under the leadership and control of the Holy Spirit which is done for the Lord's glory will be indestructible. The figure of fire in determining what sort of work was done illustrates the refining process. One can't see impurities in metal until it is heated. So it is with believers' works. We can't observe and determine many times what sort of work a believer is doing, but at the judgment seat its true character will come out.

C. This judgment will be made according to what sort of works a believer has done.

1. It will take into consideration every work that believers have done. It will involve every word (Matt. 12:36) and every deed (Rev. 22: 12).

2. It will take into consideration both the good works and the bad works (II Cor. 5:10). But notice the word "bad" (**kakos**) used here is not the word for evil (**poneros**) but rather it means the lack of quality that something should possess so

that it is in essence “good for nothing”. Keep in mind that sin in the believer’s life is judged on earth .

D. This judgment will determine both the motive and the method by which every work was done. In this respect everything done for show, vain glory, or otherwise will be made manifest (I Cor. 4:5).

1. In this relationship every believer will have to give an account of the way he has used his own particular spiritual gifts (I Pet.4:10,11; 5:1-4).

2. The service we have performed as God’s stewards will be judged (I Cor. 4:2,4). And finally the way we have used the opportunities which the Lord has given to us will no doubt be involved (Gal. 6:10; Matt. 20:1-16).

IV. THE WINNERS IN THE CHRISTIAN RACE WILL RECEIVE UNPARALLELED RECOGNITION AND REWARDS

A. The Judgment Seat of Christ will result in believers receiving and losing rewards for their service.

1. Every work which abides or which was done in obedience to the Spirit of God for the glory of God will receive a reward (I Cor.3:14).

2. Every work which is burned or which was done in the strength of the flesh and or one’s own glory will suffer loss of reward (I Cor.3:15).

B. Unlike the awards for the winners of this world, the rewards given at the Judgment Seat of Christ will be indestructible and eternal. They will not fade nor tarnish. They will not lose their value but be eternal. They will be the Lord's acknowledgment of every service which believers have rendered unto Him and they will be rewarded by bestowing upon them certain crown for their service.

C. Notice the word “crown” here is not that of a King (**diadema**) but rather that which a conqueror (**stephanos**) would wear. This more properly applies to believers in Christ (Rom.8:37).

D. Unlike the awards of this world, there is nothing which will compare with the rewards that believers will receive for faithful, Spirit-led and God-honoring service. The Olympic gold, silver, and bronze medals will pale in comparison to the crowns which Christians will wear.

1. An incorruptible crown will be given to believers who discipline themselves to serve the Lord according to His will rather than letting the flesh direct them (I Cor.9:25).

2. A crown of rejoicing will be given to believers who win souls to Christ (I Thess.1:5-7; 2:1-13; 2:19).

3. A crown of righteousness will be given to believers who love and live for Christ's coming (II Tim. 4:7,8;I Jn.3:3).

4. A crown of life will be given to believers who endure testings, trials and sufferings for the Lord (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

5. A crown of glory will be given to pastors who faithfully and unselfishly feed the flock which God has given them (I Pet.5:2-4).

E. As far as rewards and/or crowns are concerned there seems to be two factors involved here. One factor, no doubt, is faithfulness because this is illustrated and required in every case recorded in the Lord's teachings (I Cor.4:2; Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 19:12-17).

The second factor seems to be that of endurance which goes hand in hand with faithfulness . To apply this one must have some endurance which results in faithful service if we would receive rewards. Although these rewards are given for the Lord's glory and not for ours as believers which is demonstrated in Rev. 4:10,11, they will no doubt be a personal manifestation which will glorify the Lord Jesus Christ throughout all eternity. Note Dan. 12:3;Matt. 13:43; I Cor. 15:40, 41,49 in this connection.

F. It should be noted, while salvation is a free gift (Eph.2:8,9), believers must work to receive crowns. Remember when the battle's over we shall wear a crown!