

The Bema Seat:
Presented in Joy or Grief?

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INTRODUCTION

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name” (Malachi 3:16).

“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. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:10-11a).

Many Christians will be shocked when they stand before Jesus Christ. When we think of judgment, believers often picture the Great White Throne and that terrible day reserved for the unsaved. Most never consider the Bema Seat of Christ, which is the judgment appointed for the redeemed. Few even dare to mention this epistle, but when Paul said in 2 Corinthians,

“knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade you,” he was writing to eternally secure Christians.

Everyone who is truly born again shall appear before Jesus Christ at the Bema Seat, and each one shall individually give an account of his life. The Lord will bring out the book of remembrance, mentioned in Malachi, which contains the whole record.

Each time you went to church, every word that was taught at each service, the times of rich fellowship in the car or wherever, every word you used to edify—all of it will be in that book.

Now, picture getting to heaven and for the first time the book is opened—and you can’t say one word in defense, because the facts are all there. For some, that day will be pure joy and rejoicing. However, many will weep and sob with anguish.

The message in this booklet is for all of us. It is being presented not to pamper the flesh, but to prepare us, so we won’t be ashamed when we come before Him.

Chapter One

THE WORD DOES THE JUDGING

“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:47-48).

In John 12, Jesus Christ declared that anyone who rejects Him, refusing to accept His words and His teaching, has his judge: The very message that He had spoken would judge those who refused to hear Him. Jesus said He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. But He also said He came to minister doctrine, the truth about who God is and who we are, revealed in His written Word, and that doctrine would be the instrument used to judge every believer at the Bema Seat of Christ.

If we didn't have these physical bodies, we

could tell how much doctrine a person has received by the size of his soul body (Proverbs 11:25). The moment you get to heaven it will be easy to recognize who was faithful to receive the inculcation of the Word of God in its categorical explanation of life. Likewise, it will be easy to recognize those who did not make the Word of God a priority.

Every day presents opportunities to build up a very strong soul body. This is why, as it is so vividly illustrated in Acts 20:17-38, the Apostle Paul was so dogmatic and fervent, teaching the Word of God to the congregation. “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” He taught doctrine seven days a week—a class in the morning and a class at night. Fourteen classes every week. And he did it with tears.

Why was Paul so willing to spend and be spent? Because he knew that the words he was teaching would be the same words used to judge every single person as each one stands all alone before Jesus Christ in the supreme court of heaven. Paul understood that at the end of each session, each life will be summarized with a declaration. When Jesus Christ comes out, He

has to make an announcement: “Winner!” or “Loser!”

If Jesus says, “Loser!”, then I will be temporarily ashamed (1 John 2:27, 28). I can’t lose my salvation, and I will be happy forever, but I will suffer the loss of rewards. I will not be able to eat from the Tree of Life. I will see others going to the Tree of Life and enjoying its fruit, but I will never be allowed to touch it. I will not receive crowns and rewards, all because I didn’t eat the Word of God. In Jeremiah 15:16, the prophet said, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them....” He ate them—meaning, he devoured them and consumed them categorically—and it was the joy and rejoicing of his heart.

This is why I made a commitment to the Word of God many years ago. I made a commitment to eat it, to masticate it, to digest it, to assimilate it, to circulate it, and to appropriate it, because one day I will be all alone before Jesus and He will use the Bible to judge me. The sixty-six books, the full canon of Scripture, will be the standard by which my life is measured. He will open it up to John 12:47-48 and say, “Because of my justice, even though you are saved forever, the degree of your eternal happiness will now be determined by what you did on earth through my Word.”

Questions to Consider

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:7, 17)

At the Bema Seat, the record will be checked to see if I lived in God’s operational will for my life—did I serve under the right pastor-teacher and function in precise categories as a member in particular? In John 17:17, Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” So, God will check to see if I let the Word of Christ dwell in me richly (Colossians 3:16) and whether I was constantly being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

Ecclesiastes 12:11 says, “The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.” My life will be checked to see whether I had one pastor-teacher—not many teachers, but one—whom I was called to serve

under, wherever that may be. The record will show whether I honored my pastor according to the following verses:

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Galatians 6:6).

Christ will examine my record with these verses because He has delegated authority and gifts to pastors to communicate God’s mind to me. The purpose of this is to establish humility, meekness, and honor in my soul.

Next, He will ask whether I lived by every Word of God. This will be the question. Before I can live by every Word of God, I have to know every Word of God. Jesus said, “It is written,

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

I will also have to give an answer as to whether I was in the geographical will of God—was I in the local assembly that God called me to? This is closely related to the operational will of God. I cannot function in God’s plan for my life if I am not in the right place.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:1-2). Unless the believer is in the geographical will of God and the operational will of God, under the right pastor-teacher, he can never be in the perfect will of God.

In summary, we will be judged at the Bema Seat on the basis of the words Jesus Christ has spoken to us through the office of one pastor-teacher. Did we live in the operational will of God? Did we have the right pastor-teacher and live by every word of God? Did we honor the geographical will of God? Were we in the local

assembly God called us to? Finally, did we present our bodies to God every morning so we could be set apart to live in the perfect will of God each day?

Examine yourselves—not in the subjectivity of human evaluation but in the objectivity of the revealed mind of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Two

RECKONING ON REALITY

A painful part of the Bema Seat judgment will be when Jesus shows us what would have been, had we made right decisions.

Jesus may look at the record of one life and say, "In 1965, I spoke to you and called you to study my Word. You weren't teaching Sunday school or a Bible study. I just said, 'Study.' I asked you to study and be disciplined. I told you to master the Bible and then the Bible would master you."

If the record shows that I failed to do what He asked during this life, then He will show me through His omniscience what would have been, if I'd obeyed Him. In this case, He will reveal to this soul the Father's perfect will for his life and what would have been if the right decision had been made in 1965. Also, He will show how the wrong decision affected the whole plan. This is part of the justice of explanation. Remem-

ber, you and I will be there all alone. Not a single excuse will be accepted. Not one!

By the principles of His omniscience, Jesus Christ will also show each believer who made great decisions what it would have been like if he hadn't made those decisions. People will be praising Jesus all over the place at that moment!

Picture this now. Jesus Christ opens up the book and says to me, "Because of your free volition, I didn't interfere. But now I am going to show you every time in your life when you operated in my permissive will, outside of my perfect will for you."

God will show me the times I was given logistical grace (Matthew 5:45) but refused to appropriate Calvary's grace. I was given logistical grace—the common grace God metes out to believer and unbeliever alike, because of His character, upholding His principles—and I counted it as a blessing, but it wasn't a blessing at all! Instead of experiencing the opportunity to go from grace to grace and faith to faith, developing my soul body in my situation, God gave me what I asked for—but it wasn't what I should have had.

The children of Israel saw miracle after miracle of supernatural deliverance, still they re-

peatedly found fault with God's provision. Finally, in Psalm 106:15 "He gave them their request; but sent leanness unto their soul." He gave them meat instead of manna and they interpreted this as a blessing, but Israel didn't know what they had missed.

The Believer's Call to a Local Assembly

Jesus may say to someone, "I sent you to this pastor-teacher, but you didn't honor him because you were sentimental. I called you to a certain assembly, but you wouldn't pay the price; you were more interested in other things." We must recognize how vital these decisions are to the operational will of God, to the perfect will of God. Missing the point in these matters is no small thing. Our walk with Christ is like a building: each block in the structure is laid precisely, each part supporting and supported by the whole. We cannot walk in the perfect will of God if we do not obey His call to abide under a pastor in a local church.

"He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto

one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matthew 10:41-42)

Let's use our ministry to illustrate this verse. We are in all the world with missionaries and affiliated assemblies. Now, each person who was called to this ministry and has passed the tests of the geographical, operational, and perfect will of God—using rebound when he failed—will share in every success of the pastor and of every missionary. At the Bema Seat, he will receive every reward his pastor receives.

Do you wonder why Jesus will do this? Because every believer is part of the one new man of Ephesians 2:15, the hands receive the same blessing as the toe, from the Head. Jesus Christ is not partial. If a person honors the delegated authority of his pastor in the local church and honors the table of organization, he will be rewarded. Let's mention here that the government of a church can never invade a person's rights, and no one should ever feel in bondage, should he decide to leave; they are never to run your life or to judge you. Likewise, a church member shouldn't judge his pastor when he preaches a tough message. It works both ways!

The Pastor's Part

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

Every pastor will be asked if he taught doctrine categorically, and whether he motivated people to win souls. Of course, God knows the answer, but each pastor will have to go through the judicial process because of perfect justice. God will ask these questions because the congregation members will be judged according to the words that God spoke through the Scriptures in messages. He will not judge apart from the Bible, and the same Bible that Jesus preached is being preached today.

This is why it is so important to hear the Word of God daily. With all the business, domestic, social, security, and temporal pressures, there is no way that any believer can properly retain categories of Truth unless it is being pumped in daily. *Daily ask for your bread.*

Pastor-teachers must give account for their people. Before the Bema Seat, a pastor will introduce each member of his congregation. He will

not be in the judgment room when Christ goes over each life, but the pastor, now in heaven with a perfect mind, will give an objective appraisal of each member, and he will do it with either grief or joy.

Why will the pastor have either grief or joy in giving these accounts? Because he has responsibility, according to 1 Peter 5:1-3. "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."

I want to challenge pastors to get out your dictionaries. Keep your presentations fresh. Challenge the people who hear you all the time and learn to keep the message exciting. Don't be lazy. Learn the whole counsel of God, but learn how to deliver it fresh, so even *you* like your own approach. Think things through in discipline. It never bothered Jesus to say things that were hard to understand. Jesus deliberately would get deeper than what the carnal mind could handle! He didn't keep things on the lower shelf. People

had to think when they heard Jesus teach, and then mix faith with what they heard.

An Office of Grace

“By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name” (Romans 1:5). Paul said it was through grace that he was an apostle. It is through grace that you or I have the office of pastor-teacher. Grace is a reality. I must understand what it is and where it takes me. This verse also shows me it is through this beautiful government of grace that I obey. I obey through grace! And as I obey the Word of God and the Holy Spirit through grace, the propagation of the Gospel is promoted to all nations. Do you see how it goes? As I grow and disciple people and love and honor them, and we care for one another, identifying with one another, then as God leads, we begin to spread out to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.

Isolated groups have abused authority and they have invaded the believer-priesthood of people. As a result, the average Christian doesn't dare to face the mandate to submit to spiritual leadership. The pastor has spiritual authority,

but it is representative authority that protects and provides for the believer-priest. A pastor does not control with his personality, though he leads and communicates the whole counsel of God.

Everyone will stand or fall before God as a believer-priest without the pastor dictating decisions. The pastor is not to judge people for their decisions, but he has every right to preach the categories that will provide the proper foundation for making godly choices.

Chapter Three

FINAL DECLARATIONS

“His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:23).

When my appointment at the Bema Seat is finished, this is what I want to hear Jesus Christ say to me: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” Isn’t this what each of us wants to hear? I preached this message to help people get ready for that day. We will meet Him soon. I want each one to be able to hear those words from the Lord.

Everyone reading this should consider himself warned of what’s to come. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus: “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and

day with tears” (Acts 20:31). Paul had a grace ministry, but he also had a ministry of exhortation. He never preached a message in which he didn’t give a warning—because eternity is a long time.

Those Who Will Be Ashamed

“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:27-28).

In heaven, a huge crowd of those who are saved will be ashamed. Not forever, but they will go through a period of being ashamed. One scholar says the shame will last right up until Revelation 21:4, when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Even after the shame is removed, there is one more problem. These believers will not be

allowed to reign with Christ. They can neither reign nor rule. These people wouldn't receive the best for their lives, so they cannot have the best in eternity. Why not have the best here, which is Jesus Christ? Why not give my very best to Jesus Christ, so I can have the very best for the billions and billions of years to come?

I would hate to hear Jesus Christ proclaim "Loser!" to anyone—everyone standing silent, as the name echos in the halls of heaven. Later, the tears are wiped away and those former things are gone. That person won't remember that he's a loser, but the justice of God has to announce that he is a loser. Justice has to do this.

Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation use the word *overcome* several times. In the Greek text it is a reference to one who wins as opposed to one who loses. Those declared winners at the Bema Seat will be given hidden manna and new names (Revelation 2:17). Winners will be given white stones (Revelation 2:17) and they will sit with the Lord in his throne (Revelation 3:21).

"And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my

Father. And I will give him the morning star” (Revelation 2:26-28). He will give winners the highest reward of the morning star order, and they will reign with Him forever.

Jesus Christ overcame *for* us; now let Him overcome *through* us. This is the key! He has given us His Finished Work victory—and it’s all free! Now, be a winner and let Him overcome through you.

Degrees of Happiness

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

Now, there will be no unhappiness in heaven—I’m saying it again—but there will be degrees of happiness in heaven. I mean, if we are having a party in the garden at the Tree of Life—and the Greek text reveals that there will be a paradise garden where people go to have godly parties—everyone will be invited. This is the good part. But the bad part is that only the winners will be able to eat of the Tree of Life. This is not learned behavior like we have down here through education. This is a supernatural

impartation of a reward.

Jesus Christ will open up a book and say, "What kind of a husband were you, according to the grace of God?" He will find out what kind of a daddy you were and what kind of a soul winner you were. Our priorities and our discipline will be examined.

Christ will say, "I told you to study to show yourself approved rightly dividing the Word of Truth." Those who didn't do this will be declared losers. They are losers anyway, because who can survive spiritually without hearing and studying the Word of God consistently? Every believer who doesn't study every day and rightly divide doctrine will be pronounced a loser. He is destined to be a loser. That's a promise. I am commanded to study. I don't *have* to, but I am commanded.

It's possible for the Bema Seat to really be fun. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17). The greatest joy for a pastor is to present someone to the Lord and say, "Wow, he was great down there!" (Hebrews 13:17). What is the pastor doing? He is presenting a winner with joy.

Others, unfortunately, will be presented in grief. Can you imagine it? Even though he will

have a glorified body and perfect love for all of his people, the pastor will have to introduce some in grief at the Bema Seat. The Lord will ask the pastor, "What is your evaluation so that we can keep the table of justice straight?" And the pastor will have to answer, "I love him dearly, but I must present him in grief."

CONCLUSION

Each of our lives will be judged at the Bema Seat on the basis of the Word of God. Preparing for that time is very simple, according to the Bible. Consider the following points carefully.

Everyone must study and rightly divide the Word of God, meditating on it daily and implementing it faithfully.

Each of us must have *one* pastor-teacher (Ecclesiastes 12:11). We can receive other portions that complement his, but we must be careful not to listen to portions that contradict the sound doctrine we have been taught.

Every Christian will be judged on the basis of the categorical doctrine that was available to him through grace and through love, and according to his obedience to the Word.

In heaven, there will be degrees of happiness, but there will *not* be unhappiness. There will be many crowns awarded in Revelation 19:12, and the great morning star order, which is

the supreme reward.

Finally, we must take up our cross daily through an understanding of the Finished Work and retroactive truth. I can't do this unless I have been taught and am being taught the Word of God. It has to be precise light. In light, we receive more light (Psalm 36:9). In other words, in the generalization of doctrine, we will learn precise doctrine, and precise doctrine will be a precise lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105).

We are to live this life without earthly distractions. We must not live in a double-minded existence, but with a single eye full of light. As we look to Jesus Christ and Him alone, we will see the consummation of His great work in all of us when we stand before the Judge of the supreme court of heaven and hear the declaration, *Winner!*