

Appendix J

The Judgment Seat of Christ

“The name *judgment seat* comes from a Greek word (*bema*) referring to a raised step or platform located in a public area within a city. The civil magistrates would sit there to perform their judicial duties. Most of the NT references to this seat occur where either Jesus or the apostle Paul were brought before a ruling authority. Pilate, for example, sat on this judgment seat when he tried Jesus (Matt 27:19). On two occasion, the expression, ‘the judgment seat of Christ’ (or ‘God’), is found describing Christians standing before Christ at his return and being held accountable for their lives (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10).”

“What exactly will take place at this judgment is the subject of much debate. Some view the judgment seat of Christ as a place of intense sorrow and shame, a place of terror. The believer’s sins are revealed publicly and the believer is punished for those sins not confessed or not adequately dealt with in this life. Others take the opposite position, viewing this as a place of no remorse or shame but only of rejoicing. Christ will strictly dispense rewards and every believer will receive at least some recognition for service. In light of such conflicting positions, it is important to examine the biblical evidence” (R. Bruce Compton, “The Judgment Seat of Christ”).

1. Passages Identifying the Judgment Seat of Christ

1) Romans 14:10

Context is that of “Christian liberty”—believers were passing judgment on one another. In such issues as mentioned here (food and days) this is not their prerogative, it belongs to Christ alone. All believers will stand before the judgment seat of God, and will give an account of themselves to God. Because of this, Christians should not render final judgment concerning the spirituality of believers based on their participation or non-participation in such matters. Thus, in such matter Christians act in faith according to their consciences, vv. 22-23.

2) 2 Corinthians 5:10

Context is that of Paul’s earthly ministry—while on earth life is difficult but transitory. Believers live and minister based on God’s Word, not on what is being presently experienced. The anticipation of being with Christ provides motivation to be pleasing to Him. The anticipation of being before the judgment seat of Christ provides motivation to be pleasing to Him. All believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and will be recompensed for what they have done as believers (“in the body,” cf. 5:6 – context is the life of *believers* walking by faith). The subject of Christ’s recompensing is the “deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

3) These passages clearly detail that Christians will stand before Christ (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10), will give an account of themselves to God (Rom 14:12), and will be recompensed for all their deeds (2 Cor 5:10).

2. Timing – *When Will the Judgment Seat of Christ Take Place?*

It obviously not *before* Christ comes for the church. More than likely it will not be *after* Christ returns to earth with the saints to set up his kingdom (Rev 19). This leaves the period between the Rapture and Christ’s Return to earth, the time known as the Tribulation Period. 1 Peter 5:4 correlates well with this understanding, and possibly also Eph 6:8

3. Aspects – *What* will Happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

- 1) Ascertaining the public/private nature is difficult, the former usually based on “appear” (2 Cor 5:10). Given that we will have glorified bodies and natures, if it is a public occurrence we will not need to be concerned with sneering or guffawing from others, as the only ones present will be the Lord and other believers
- 2) The purpose of the judgment is to ascertain (judge, determine) and reward accordingly the Christian’s life of service for the Lord
- 3) Thus, the “reward” will be according to the quality of the service. Good quality, reward; bad quality, no reward.
- 4) An illustration may be gleaned from 1 Cor 3:10-15.
 - There is debate whether this refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ, but the end times nature seems clear from v. 13 – “the day will show it.”
 - There will be some kind of evaluation of the ministry rendered with reward recompensed according to the quality of the work.
 - The evaluation is not according to external/physical but spiritual standards, as accords with the foundation (Jesus Christ).
 - True spiritual work that is acceptable to God and deserving of reward cannot be accomplished by unspiritual individuals. What looks good and successful from external/physical standards may be completely and entirely spiritually bankrupt. Conversely, what looks bad and a failure from external/physical standards may be worthy of eternal reward.
- 5) Further information regarding the “reward” aspect may be gleaned from 1 Pet 5:4.
 - The “crown of glory” pastors will receive seems dependent on their fulfilling their responsibilities as outlined by Peter in vv 1-3. Faithful ministry results in future blessing. If a pastor is not faithful, he will not receive any blessing, though he may be saved (cf. 1 Cor 3:15)
- 6) The Christian should not fear retribution for and sins he/she has committed while a believer. Scripture is clear that Christ’s sacrifice was a one-time event fully sufficient to cover the sins of all who believe in him.
- 7) Will there be sorrow or regret at the judgment seat of Christ? The texts do not give *conclusive* evidence either way. What is conclusively known is:
 - The overall tone of believers in heaven is one of joy and praise
 - Our holy God has expressed sorrow/regret, Gen 6:6; Eph 4:30

4. Implications – *How* Should the Judgment Seat of Christ Influence My Life Now?

Knowing that I will stand before God to give an account of myself, the Judgment Seat of Christ motivates me to:

- 1) To live to please the Lord in all things
- 2) To serve him faithfully and obediently, Eph 6:7-8; 1 Pet 5:1-4
- 3) Live for the future, not for the present. Persevere in faithfulness, Col 3:1-4
- 4) What about those “unconfessed” sins?
 - Such sin affects the believer’s enjoyment and experience of fellowship with God and assurance of salvation, not his/her position before God
 - The believer can experience discipline in this life, 1 Cor 11:29-30, 32 ; Heb 12:1-11