

**Introduction:** If someone were to ask you what the primary motivation should be to seek spiritual growth, to increase in the walk of holiness, and to pour oneself into doing good works, one might get a range of different answers:

*To glorify God.*

*Gratitude for eternal salvation.*

*To gain or maintain assurance of salvation. (If I don't produce works, maybe I'm not saved).*

*To avoid the discipline of the Lord.*

*Because I get a sense of purpose in doing good things.*

*To show others what God is like.*

*So my witness of the gospel will be consistent.*

*And so on...*

### **But what about the Biblical doctrine of eternal rewards?**

Among the very last recorded words of our Lord Jesus Christ to the believers reading the book of Revelation are these:

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My *reward (misthos – pay in proportion to work)* is with Me, to give to every one according to his *work*" (Rev 22:12; italics added).

“Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup> For we must **all** appear before **the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether **good or bad**<sup>1</sup>.” – 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

“But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the **judgment seat of God.**” - **Romans 14:10**

**The Bema:** The “judgment seat” here as used by Paul is the *Bema* – a raised dais. In the gospels and Acts contexts it refers to the platform of the magistrate as he sat and judged cases. But Paul uses it in the original Greek athletic contest sense in every case. In this sense the *bema* is a raised dais at the Isthmian games where the contestants would compete for the prize under the careful scrutiny of judges who would make sure that every rule of the contest was obeyed. The victor of a given

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<sup>1</sup> The word for “bad” here is not the word for moral evil – *poneros*. The word here is *phaulos* and it means “ordinary, base, common.”

event who participated according the rules was led by the judge to the platform. This victor's platform was called the *Bema*. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory. We do the same thing in our Olympic games to this day.

2 Timothy 2:5 “And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.”

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. 25 And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”

### **The Bema judgment for reward:**

1. Occurs after the rapture and before the end of the Tribulation.
2. Only glorified believers from the church age are judged. No one else.  
Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12f; 2 Cor. 5:9f; 1 John 2:28; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 1 Tim. 6:18-19; Tit. 2:12-14
3. Place is in the heavenlies with Christ.  
1 Thessalonians 4:17 and Revelation 4:2 and 19:8
4. Sin is *not* judged here, but at the Cross. In all of these passages ... Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the Bema to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's Bema to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the Bema bestowed rewards to the victors. He did not whip the losers. In other words, it is a reward seat and portrays a time of rewards or loss of rewards following examination. But it is *not* a time of punishment where believers are judged for their sins. Such would be inconsistent with the finished work of Christ on the cross because He totally paid the penalty for our sins.  
With reference to sin, Scripture teaches that the child of God under grace shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37; Rom. 5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32); in his standing before God, and on the ground that the penalty for all sin—past, present, and future (Col. 2:13)—has been borne by Christ as the perfect Substitute, the believer is not only placed beyond condemnation, but being in Christ is accepted in the perfection of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10; Heb. 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23).
5. Judgment is for reward for faithful service (good works) by the church age

saints, reward is proportional to more or less good works done more or less with the right motivations. **1 Cor 3:10-15**

6. More or less reward is the *only* issue.

7. Is not to be confused with two other times and places of judgment:

1. At the end of the Tribulation, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. The judgment of the sheep and goats (judgment of gentile nations and the basis of judgment is how they perceived and treated Jews in duress during the Tribulation) with Daniel's Son of Man sitting in judgment on king David's throne in Jerusalem, on the earth, just at the very beginning of the millennial kingdom. Matthew 25:31-33, etc.
2. At the end of the millennial kingdom. The Great White Throne judgment of only unbelievers. Place: without reference to place, as earth and the starry heavens have fled from the presence of God on the throne! Revelation 20:11-15.

### **The General Nature of Rewards**

1. **The Promise of Crowns. (which we'll see below/later). This seems to be used as a symbol of victory, authority, and responsibility.**
2. **The Promise of Heavenly Treasure** (Matt. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:4). Stresses their eternal value and security.
3. **The Promise of Divine Accolades or Commendations.** This is seen in those passages where a reward is administered in the form of something like “well done thou good and faithful servant ...” (cf. Matt. 25:21; Lk. 19:17; 1 Cor. 4:5b).
4. **The Promise of Special Responsibilities and Authority of the Lord’s Possessions** (cf. Matt. 19:28; 24:45-47; 25:21, 23; Lk. 19:17-19; 22:29-30; Rev. 2:26).
5. **The Promise of General Exaltation, following the pattern of Christ's** (Phil 2:1-11)

### **The General Principles of Reward According to Jesus**

**Matt 5:19**, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called **least in the kingdom of heaven**; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called **great in the kingdom of heaven**.”

**Luke 19:11-27**

**Matthew 19:27-30**

### **The General Principles of Reward in the Epistles**

1. *Tes dikaiosunes stephanos, “the crown of righteousness.”*  
2 Tim 4:8, “in the future there is laid up 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 loved His appearing.”

The “crown of righteousness” is symbolic of the righteous life Paul lived meaning he was faithfully obedient to the Word of God throughout his post-salvation experience. It is like the soldier’s medal for valor in the face of battle and the medal does not contain valor but it does declare that its possessor is valorous.

2. *Ton amarntinon tes doxes stephanon, “the incorruptible crown of glory.”*  
1 Peter 5:1-4, “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellowelder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

“The unfading crown of glory” refers to the fact that Christ will bestow special recognition upon those who have labored faithfully to care for and disciple other Christians. This passage refers to the fact that faithful pastors who fed their flock the Word of God will be honored by the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. *Ton stephano tes zoes, “the crown of life.”*  
James 1:12, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised

to those who love Him.”

Rev 2:10, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

“The crown of life” is to those who bear up faithfully under great trial or are who are martyred in the cause of Christ.

4. *Ton stephanon aphtharton, “the incorruptible crown.”*

*1 Cor 9:25, “Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”*

*The crown imperishable/incorruptible is for any believer who carries out his works within the boundaries.*

5. *Stephanos kaucheseos, “the crown of rejoicing.”*

*1 Thess 2:19-20, “For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”*

*“Crown of exultation or rejoicing” consists in the people whom we have led to Christ.*