

Session Teaching Number 6 Module B

The Biblical Doctrine of Eternal Rewards and Clearing up Misconceptions.

Learning Objectives:

- Learn the Doctrine of Eternal Rewards.
- Understand thoroughly the Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ? The purpose, time, place and judge of the Bema.
- To clear up the common Misconceptions, Confusion and False teaching of this doctrine.
- To gain a clear understanding of the two kinds of sins that causes loss of rewards.

Standing in the Presence of the King: **Please listen to the clip or read along.**

The scene is breathtaking. You have died, and the Lord has come for those who believe in Him. You have been joined to your resurrection body and now stand in the presence of your glorious Savior, the matchless Lord of the church, the absolute Monarch of the entire creation.

Your life flashes before you with three-dimensional vividness and stereophonic clarity (1 Corinthians 3:13). Your beloved Lord publicly sets the record straight. All the false accusations, lies, and unfair criticisms you received in life are exposed for what they really were --- full vindication at last (Rom. 14:1-12; 1 Cor. 4:3, 5; 2Thess. 1:4-10)! Jesus then examines all that you have said, thought, and done in the light of your purposes and motives. Why did you do that? Why didn't you do this? (Romans 14:12). His fiery eye reveals the true value of all that you brought before Him (Revelation 1:14; 1Cor. 3:13).

You are awestruck and defenseless as you hear Jesus' declaration of all that is worthless and sinful, and you are pierced with a deep sense of shame (1John 2:28). Your true spiritual maturity in life is examined, and He decrees the kind of welcome you will experience when you enter His glorious kingdom (2 Peter 1:11).

You are commended publicly for your faithful service (Matthew 25:21) and for your public loyalty to Him (Luke 12:8-9). Then He awards you incorruptible symbols of honor that are accompanied with the announcement of your responsibilities in Jesus' glorious eternal kingdom. ***Because Jesus Himself is ultimately the source of all that is good in your life, He is glorified by every honor He bestows upon you.***

You have just been through the judgment seat (bema) of Christ. from "Going For the Gold" by Joe Wall

➤ The Doctrine of Eternal Rewards:

The Bible uses two different Greek words to describe Jesus' reward:

1. Misthos (Strong's 3407) = Wages

- 1) Dues paid for work
 - a) Wages, hire
- 2) Reward: used of the fruit naturally resulting from toils and endeavors.
 - a) In both senses, rewards and punishments
 - b) Of the rewards which God bestows, or will bestow, upon good deeds and endeavors.
 - c) Of punishments



Matthew 5:11-12 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward (*misthos*) in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. NIV

Matthew 20:8 “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages (*misthos*), beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ NIV

1 Timothy 5:18 For the Scripture says, “Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages (*misthos*).” NIV

2. *Apodidomaia (Strong' G467)= To repay

- 1) In a good sense, to repay, requite.
- 2) In a bad sense, penalty and vengeance.

Remember from module A: Luke 14:14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay* you, you will be repaid* (*apodidomaia*) at the resurrection of the righteous.” NIV



Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards * those who earnestly seek him. NIV

* a combination of *misthos* + *apodidomaia* = *mitsthapodotes* (G 3406) only used once

God chooses to reward because it is an expression of His own generous nature. His plan to reward, like His provision to save, is a display of His amazing grace. Yet there's no other way to think about it. Hebrews 11:6 says if you want to please God you must believe what?

Discuss: First we must believe that He exists. Second we must believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek His face. This is a motivating call to seek intimacy with the Almighty !

➤ The Judgment Seat (Bema) of Christ

Eternal rewards will be given or lost at the Judgment Seat of Christ depending on how a believer has lived his life for the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, the Apostle Paul drew courage and was motivated by the fact of rewards at the return of the Lord for the church which he mentions in every chapter in this epistle and which becomes the primary subject of 2 Thessalonians. Every one of us will “stand before God’s judgment seat . . . [and] give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10b, 12b), further:



2 Corinthians 5:10 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. NASB95 (See also Romans 14:10-12)

* bema Strong's G968

** komizo (G2865) to receive, obtain: the promised blessing

This word (bema) was taken from Isthmian (Corinth – Greek) games where the contestants would compete for the prize under the careful scrutiny of judges who would make sure every rule of the contest was obeyed (2Tim 2:5) the victor of a given event who participated according to the rules was led by the judge to the platform called the Bema. There the laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory (1 Cor. 9:24-25) in these passages, Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. So to, the Christian will appear before Christ's Bema to receive his imperishable award.

The judge at the Bema bestowed rewards to the victors not punishment. Jesus Christ's finished work of the cross totally paid the penalty for our sins. In reference to sin, believers are under grace and shall not come into judgment (John 3:18; 5:24; 6:37' Rom 5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor. 11:32). Instead believers are accepted in the perfection of Christ (being "in Christ") (1Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:6; Col 2:10; Heb 10:14) and loved of God as Christ is loved (John 17:23).

Of further note: The word "judgment seat" is one word in Greek: **bema**

It literally means a "step" or "raised place mounted by steps." In Greek law courts, one bema was provided for the accuser, another for the accused. In the ancient Roman world, the word bema generally referred to the official seat of a judge. In the New Testament the word is used this way in several passages, usually of the Roman governor or of the emperor (Matt 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 18:12,16-17; 25:6, 10, 17). The word is also used to refer to the structure, resembling a throne, that Herod built in the theater of Caesarea, from which he used to view the games and make speeches to the people (Acts 12:21). The word is used a total of 12 times in the NT.

The time of the Bema: This event will occur immediately following the rapture or resurrection of the church after it is caught up to be with the Lord in the air as describe in 1 Thes:13-18. This is at the second coming of Christ.

Note: Those who die believing in Christ before the rapture go to be consciously and personally with Him in heaven (Lk. 23:43; Phil. 1:23), but they don't receive their resurrected bodies until the rapture. They will then be reunited with their resurrected/imperishable bodies (1 Ths. 4:15-17, Lk. 14:12-14; 2 Tim 4:8 and 1 Cor. 4:5). It is at this time when the reward ceremony (Bema Seat) will take place. Longing for the second coming of Christ (our blessed hope) is tied to a longing for our resurrected bodies and our rewards. (Phil 3:11 and Heb. 11:35). **This is what scripture refers to as our glorification (See Session 3A pg. 5 The Gospel of God's Grace).**

The Place of the Bema: It will occur somewhere in the heavenlies in the presence of the Lord. This is evident from 1 Thes. 4:17 and Rev. 4:2 and 19:8.

The Examiner at the Bema: The Lord Jesus Christ will be our judge.

John 5:22 states, "the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." KJV

➤ **Clearing up misunderstandings, and confusion about the Doctrine of Eternal Rewards. (This is why, in part, the Doctrine of Eternal rewards is not being taught).**

1. **Some believers have confused the evaluation of Christians with the judgment of non-Christians, or to put it another way they have confused stewardship with salvation; For unbelievers, the issue is salvation. For believers, the issue is stewardship.**

The [Great White Throne](#) judgment (Revelation 20:11-15): Every unsaved soul in human history stands before it. The throne is white: Its standard is perfectly pure and holy. The judgment is irreversible: The final guilty verdict for the unrighteous results in permanent confinement to the lake of fire. Christians are exempt from this Great White Throne Judgment because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Some of those who fail this judgment have performed many good deeds, and most Christians have performed many bad deeds. The difference isn't measured by righteous acts, or all of us would suffer the same dreaded fate. Instead, Christians are exempt because they are trusting in Christ's Work on the cross; the unsaved all fail because they are trusting in the merits of their own works.

Note: Before this event happens, the Bible tells us that all of the unsaved people are kept in a place called Hades until the millennial kingdom is over. Hades is a temporary place of torment that these souls are kept in until they have to appear before God in this final judgment at the end of the millennium, which will then determine their eternal fate once and for all.

Read more: <http://www.bible-knowledge.com/great-white-throne-judgement/#ixzz2Hnidi9Qt>

2. **At the Bema seat God will mete out a just payback for sins in the believer's life, and some measure of retributive punishment for sins will result.**

This misconception has its roots in the use of the term "judgment seat" in most translations, ignorance of the historical and cultural back ground concerning the Bema, and foggy theology regarding the finished work of Christ on the cross.



1 Corinthians 3:13-15 each man's work will become evident; for The Day (judgment day) will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If

any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss ; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. NASB95 See 2 John 8.

There will be no punishment for sin at the Bema seat because Jesus bore the penalty for all our sins. On the other hand we need to be ever mindful that God's Word clearly teaches there are specific and very serious consequences, both temporal and eternal, for sin or disobedience and there will be loss of rewards at the Bema. We will be held accountable. God's grace is not cheap grace. Sin in the life of a believer is not a small issue.

Share my vision standing before Jesus on Judgment Day

The two kinds of sin which will cause a loss of reward:

1. **Sins of Commission:** Is a category of sin describing the things we did and shouldn't have. I committed a sin when I lied and I shouldn't have (commission). Often we do what God has forbidden. We are very conscious of these things because they are visible. Paul says,



"For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." (Col. 3:25). We know what Paul is talking about. **We often must confess and repent of doing these things.**

2. **Sins of Omission** : Are the category that encompasses the sins of not doing what we should have. We don't think as much about the sin of omission even though it is as pernicious and destructive as anything we could commit. Sin is not just something we do, but sometimes it is something that we ought to have done. Sometimes we sit on our hands and say or do nothing when we should have acted.



James 4:17 says;"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Ezekiel 3:18 "When I (God) say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. NASB95 (i.e. you will be answerable for him; his death shall be laid to your charge, and you shalt be chastised for your negligence).

Acts 20:26-27 (Paul speaking to the elders in Ephesus) I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God (the context is the gospel of God's grace, see Acts 20:24). NIV

Acts 20:20 I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable , and teaching you publicly and from house to house, NASB95

View video clip from Schindlers' List

Filmed in 1993 in Poland. Oskar Schindler is a vainglorious and greedy German businessman who becomes an unlikely humanitarian amid the barbaric Nazi reign when he feels compelled to turn his factory into a refuge for Jews. Based on the true story of Oskar Schindler who managed to save about 1100 Jews from being gassed at the Auschwitz concentration camp, it is a testament to the good in all of us

Therefore: ***“Go and Make disciples*”**

The present (temporal) consequence of Sin or Disobedience (not exhaustive):

1. Loss of fellowship with the Lord with consequent loss of His joy and peace (Ps. 32:3-4)
2. Divine discipline from the Lord here in time.
3. Loss of power and production.
4. Loss of opportunities.
5. Loss of desire and motivation for service.
6. Broken relationships and disharmony.
7. Loss of physical health and vitality.
8. Loss of rewards at the Bema (eternal).
9. Loss of Hearing God's Voice.

3. Some mistakenly assume that the doctrine contradicts salvation by faith alone.

It's true that eternal life is a free gift obtained solely by faith apart from works. (Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). Eternal rewards, however, are related to the sanctification process not the justification process. Justification and sanctification are not the same; neither are eternal salvation and eternal rewards (See Session 3 The Gospel of God's Grace, **also read the article in the resource guide “The Difference Between Justification and Rewards”**).

There is no room for boasting in the kingdom (Eph 2:8-9). Justification is by faith in Christ, not by self-effort. We know that Romans 4:4-5 says, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness." There is no room for God to *pay* us with eternal salvation for the work we do; eternal life is the gift of God. However, there is room for God to pay us with eternal rewards for faithful service.

4. Some Christians are troubled by the doctrine because it seems to suggest “merit” instead of “grace”. They argue that a doctrine of meritorious good works is a contradiction to the truth that we are not under the law but under grace (Rom 6:14).

We are “saved by grace” e.g. justified by grace, sanctified by grace, and glorified by grace. Yet we are rewarded by works (not just any works thou). The grace of God is wonderful. However, it is possible to be so enthusiastic about grace that we ignore any Scripture that speaks of accountability and rewards. We cannot afford to ignore our Lord when He says, "For the Son of Man will come... and then he will reward each according to his works" (Matt 16:27).

5. Some feel the doctrine promotes a selfish motivation.

For many it seems inherently selfish to strive for rewards of any type, eternal or otherwise. **The word *selfish* has two main meanings: greed at the expense of others, and intent on personal gain (self-interest).** The former is clearly unbiblical. The latter is not. Even the Lord Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before Him" (Hebrews 12:1). The Hebrews 11 Hall of Fame is filled with people who were motivated by eternal rewards.

We are not competing against each other for some limited amount of rewards. God has an infinite amount of rewards to give. The more we encourage and help others now, the more we will be rewarded later. It's OK to be intent on our own personal gain as long as it is not at the expense of others.

Scripture does not teach us to be uninterested in our own happiness or well-being all of which are God given needs He wants to meet. The very desire to escape eternal damnation is a legitimate and urgent self-interest. The instinct to preserve our lives is the same; nor are pleasure and enjoyment illegitimate experiences.

Selfishness ought not to be defined simply as the pursuit of our own self-interest. Instead, it should be defined as the pursuit of our self-interest in our own way, rather than in God's way. Since "love" is a preeminent virtue in Christianity, true selfishness often involves a pursuit of self-interest that violates the law of love. Self-interest in God's way is legitimate.



We are to love ourselves "correctly" but in so doing learn to radically depend on Him for every act of obedience. If we reject or discount the doctrine of eternal rewards it is an affront to Jesus. In essence we are saying that His grace is insufficient, that He has not giving us everything for life and godliness, and we don't need to depend on Him for our every good work. Often times these attitudes mask false humility (pride).

It may sound pious for someone to say: "I am not interested in rewards! I serve God out of love and gratitude alone!" But such a person is claiming to be more loftily motivated than even the apostle Paul himself! He wrote:



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. NIV



Of course we should serve the Lord out of love and for God's glory, and understanding the nature of our rewards will help us do that (to be covered in Module C). But the fact remains that the Bible promises us rewards. God gives us salvation, it is a gift through faith, but He rewards us for good works. God graciously supplies the means by which we may serve Him. Indeed, He works in us both to will and to do as we willfully appropriate His grace (Phil. 2:12-13), but the decision to serve, and the diligence employed in doing so, are our responsibility and our contribution and God sees this as rewardable. Compare the following passages:

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. NIV

Colossians 1:29 To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me. NIV

6. Some think all believers will be equally rewarded.

The Parable of the Day Laborers does teach that laborers who worked different numbers of hours were equally paid. The person who worked one hour was paid one denarius—also the persons who worked 3, 6, 9, and 12 hours were paid one denarius.

Doesn't this prove that we will all get the same amount of eternal rewards? No one will get more or less than any other believer, right? But wait a minute. If that is true, then why did the Lord speak in Luke 19 of one servant who will rule over 10 cities and another over 5 and another over none? Clearly, there the rewards are not identical.

The Parable of the Day Laborers shows that God will not penalize a person for coming to faith in Christ shortly before they go to be with the Lord. Likewise all who serve God faithfully during their Christian life, whether they are Christians for one year or 50 years before going to be with the Lord, will be rewarded equally (Compensation package A).

But if a person comes to faith and doesn't serve Christ wholeheartedly throughout his Christian life, he will not get the same degree of reward as one who does (**Compensation Package B with bonuses**). Just as employers don't pay all employees exactly the same wage, neither does God (Matt 16:27).

7. Some assert that differing rewards in eternity will lead to an unholy jealousy or envy.

Won't differences in rewards lead to jealousy or envy in the kingdom? If some rule with Christ and some don't, the non-rulers will be jealous, right? If some have more treasure and some less, won't the ones with less treasure be envious?

We must admit the force of these questions. This might be true if sin were possible for glorified saints. However, glorified saints will never sin. There is an unholy sinful form of jealousy and envy; no glorified saint will experience that form of jealousy or envy.

A glorified saint might regret that he didn't do more in this life for Christ, which is not sin. But he will be content with what he has, for all glorified saints will be content. Even in this life it is possible to be jealous or even envious of those who have more and not sin. If that is true, then surely with glorified bodies and the absence of the Unholy Trinity (See session 3), this will not be an issue.

8. Some claim Jesus taught that we are all merely servants who deserve no rewards.

Doesn't Luke 17:7-10 demonstrate that we should consider ourselves as humble servants of God who deserve no rewards?

This is true. And if that were the only passage we had on rewards, we might infer that there probably wouldn't be rewards. However, because there are many passages in which the Lord promises rewards, this passage is merely saying that God is not inherently obligated to reward us.

God could have chosen not to reward faithfulness. He could have motivated us to obey Him out of gratitude, present blessings, chastisement, and fear of rebuke at the bema. However, He chose to obligate Himself to recompense us for the work that we do. So, our attitude should be one of humility, for we are merely servants. And we should be grateful that God has chosen to reward our obedience.

9. Some say, emphasizing eternal rewards is pointless since believers will ultimately just give all rewards back to Christ anyway.

Even if there will be differing degrees of rewards, they will all be given back, right? We will cast our crowns at the feet of Jesus (Rev. 4:10). Thus, won't the only lasting reward be the joy we experience at having given our rewards back to the Lord?

Hypothetically that could be true. However, **in reality the Lord spoke of treasure that was eternal (Matt 6:19-21). Also, Paul spoke of imperishable crowns that last forever (1 Cor. 9:24- 25).**

Revelation 4:9-10 does not refer to a one-time event. Most miss the fact that the first word in verse 9 is "whenever." Day after day these angelic beings are glorifying God and casting their crowns at His feet. They do not lose the crowns. They merely keep putting them at Jesus' feet to honor Him.

10. Shouldn't we be serving the Lord out of our love for Him and not focused on rewards?

Yes and Yes. It is essential that our focus should always be on Jesus "the reward giver" and not the reward. As we abide in Him and stay focused on the "author and perfecter of our faith" much fruit is the result (John 15:5; Hebrews 12:2). Remember our capacity to truly love is a gift from God, it flows as living water from our inner most being (John 7:38).



For additional reading of this subject please refer to these articles in the Resource Guide:

- "The Doctrine of Rewards" by J. Hampton Keathley III
- The RBC discovery series booklet: "the Judgment seat of Christ" (downloadable)
- Read the book "The Life God Rewards" by Bruce Wilkinson

REMEMBER: 1 Cor. 8:1 “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up”. Studying the Bible is important, but the goal is never knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we learn from Him, fellowship with Him, and obey everything He commands us. Love is the goal thru obedient holy living.

APPLICATION NEXT STEPS: As you review this session in your own personal quiet time, with your POD mates and others, ask yourself; What is God saying to me? and How am I going to respond? Begin now to look for opportunities to start sharing what you have learned with others. That is disciple making. Take advantage of the transformative power of prayer, journaling, writing out personal application/next steps, and memorizing key scriptures. Also, be sure to read the articles and one or more of the books mentioned in the resource guide at the end of each of the seven sessions.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS AND MY PERSONAL APPLICATION/NEXT STEPS:

Scripture I will commit to memorize from this session:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.