

SALVATION AND REWARDS

*“The Son of man is going to come in the glory
of his Father with his angels, and will
then reward every man according to his deeds.”
Matthew 16:27*

This booklet is a sequel to the booklet entitled “The Way to
Eternal Life and to Peace with God in this Life”

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SALVATION AND REWARDS

A. INTRODUCTION

This subject is tremendously important to each one of us—it's about our eternal destiny.

The Bible is written for a number of reasons, but the reasons are largely summed up as telling us who God is, who we are, and what God's great eternal plan is for us in this life and in the life hereafter.

In 1 John 5:13 we read: “ *These things I have written to you, who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.*”

Eternal life is for those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ—that is, those who believe that he died on the Cross for them, taking upon himself the punishment which was due to them, thus freeing them from condemnation. James points out to us that we show our faith and our belief in Jesus by our works, that is by our willingness to follow Jesus' teachings, loving one another, helping those in need, and sacrificial giving.

So we are saved by Christ and not by our own good works, and we do good works in response to Christ, and in loving obedience to him. But what many people do not understand, is that we will be rewarded according to our works. There is a vast difference between the doctrine of salvation for the lost, and the doctrine of rewards for the saved.

Salvation is the gift of God by grace, and by faith in Christ “*not of works*” as Paul tells us. On the other hand, rewards are according to the works of the believer.

B. JUDGEMENT AND REWARDS

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:10 *“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in this life, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

And in Revelation 22:12, Jesus says: *“Behold I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”*

Let us look more closely at this subject of rewards for the believer. A most revealing scripture on rewards is found in 1 Corinthians 3:8-15

Verse 8 *“He who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labour.”*

--tells us that every believer who labours in the service of the Lord, especially in spreading the Gospel, will be rewarded *“according to his own labour.”*

Verse 9 *“For we are God’s fellow workers (the Corinthians) are God’s field, God’s building.”*

--tells us we are God’s *“fellow workers”* as we serve; this is not for salvation, as we cannot labour for salvation; but our good work does result in rewards.

Verse 11 *“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

--everything we do is done according to Jesus, by the power of his Holy Spirit, and to honour his name, as we read in Matthew 5:16

“Let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Our good works are done to glorify God and not for our own gratification, or for worldly recognition and rewards.

Verses 12-15 *“Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, for 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 upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

So we have a choice of two kinds of building materials—gold, silver and precious stones—that is, to use lasting eternal materials; or wood, hay and straw—that is, to use temporal materials. The believer who builds on Christ with eternal materials—that is, whose works are according to the will of God through Christ—will receive a reward.

The high quality materials are those that are based on God's standards as set out in the Bible—his commandments his guidelines for living as set out by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and his other teachings. Those believers who build with temporal materials—that is, according to the world and its standards, which will pass away, will suffer loss—not loss of salvation but loss of eternal rewards.

Many of the things which are of eternal value are mentioned in the Bible and are discussed later, so that we are not left without guidance in this matter. This is the case with all important Biblical doctrines.

The Bible tells us that some believers will be ashamed at the judgement—

1 John 2:28 says *"And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence, and not shrink from him in shame at his coming."* The shame will be because of works of wood, hay, straw.

A minister tells this story. During the first year of his ministry he sat at the bedside of a dying friend. As they talked about his going to be with the Lord, the man's eyes filled with tears.

The minister thought for a moment that the man was concerned about his salvation, and attempted to speak words of encouragement to him. The man said: "I am not afraid to die, I am ashamed to die." He went

on to say that Christ was his Saviour, but that he had lived mainly for himself, and now had to meet the Lord Jesus Christ empty-handed. His life loomed up before him as wood, hay, straw. He would be saved, yet “so as through fire”.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:10 that all believers must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may be “*recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad*”. Our works will be judged at the judgement seat of Christ. We will have to give an account of ourselves before the Lord.

Therefore, as Paul warns us in Romans 14:12,13, we should look to our own works, and not judge the works of others; and in 2 Timothy 15, “*to present ourselves approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*”, ready to receive rewards at the judgement seat of Christ.

C. WHAT ARE THE REWARDS AND HOW ARE THEY EARNED?

They are not described in detail in the Bible, as we would expect they would not be. We do not need to know what they are specifically, all we really need to know is that God is perfect love and perfect justice—and perfectly trustworthy. We do get indications that some of the rewards will be in the nature of positions of responsibility and authority in Christ’s Kingdom in the following verses:

Matthew 25:21—“*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.*”.

It seems natural that a position of responsibility as a reward in the Kingdom of Heaven should be a highly valued prize—just as it is in our worldly life, only more so.

In the Lord's kingdom our contributions would be more satisfying and without the same problems. We would have an ideal Top Management to begin with. As we read the full text surrounding these verses we see that the positions of authority and responsibility are rewards for faithful husbandry of the talents we are given in this life.

So the question arises for each of us—am I using the talents and resources God has given me to the best of my ability in the service of others, and to the glory of God?

The Biblical text also indicates that the size of our rewards will be in proportion to the degree to which the answer is 'yes' to this question.

D. THE FOUR CROWNS AND ONE WREATH

Some rewards are given special names in the Bible –

- (a) The Crown of Life
- (b) The Wreath Imperishable
- (c) The Crown of Exultation
- (d) The Crown of Righteousness
- (e) The Crown of Glory

James 1:2 – *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial. He will receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him.”*

This reward goes to those who love the Lord and who live for him through temptations and trials.

There is a great tendency today for us to find all sorts of excuses for yielding to temptations. In the permissive society yielding to temptations is regarded as the thing to do. Immorality is widely regarded as most acceptable behaviour, and all sorts of bad behaviour is blamed upon circumstances supposedly outside the person's control—

their childhood, heredity, being out of work, or anything but the person's inability to resist temptation.

So resisting temptation is becoming harder and harder, as the world applauds those who follow the world's standards, and yield. Those who persist will receive the Crown of Life.

(a) The Wreath Imperishable

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul describes how we receive the Wreath Imperishable if we run the race of life with self-control, by making our bodies a slave rather than being a slave to our bodies, and by being different things to different people, and all things to all men that we might win them to Christ.

(b) The Crown of Exultation

1 Thessalonians 2: 19 – *“For who is our hope or joy or Crown of Exultation? Is it not even you (the Thessalonian Christians) in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming?”*

The Crown of Exultation is the soul-winner's crown. This is the greatest work we can do in the name of the Lord, to bring others to a knowledge of Christ as Saviour, and this work is open to all Christians, although

there are many who think it is not

(c) The Crown of Righteousness

2 Timothy 4:7,8 –

Verse 8 --*“In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will reward to me on that day; and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”*

This is the reward for those who look forward to, and love, the day of Christ's second coming.

Verse 7 – *“I have fought the good fight.”*

Paul fought a spiritual battle throughout his Christian life, and won, by the power of God. He never surrendered to the enemies of righteousness, who operated under the arch-enemy, Satan.

“I have finished the course.”

He had a course to travel, and he did not detour the hard places, neither did he look back. He finished the course with his eyes still firmly fixed on his Lord.

“I have kept the faith.”

Because of these disciplines, Paul could say that he had sought first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, so the Crown of Righteousness would follow.

(d) The Crown of Glory

1 Peter 5:2-4 –

“Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsions but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness, ... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfailing crown of glory.”

The unfailing crown of glory is for the faithful obedient pastor of Christ's flock here on earth.

But every believer may share in the pastor's crown of glory.

Matthew 10:41 tells us that he who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. Those who support their pastors by praying for them, by encouraging them in the work of the Lord, and who undergird their ministry by tithes and offerings, giving freely of their time to the service of the Lord, can share this reward.

As Malachi 3:10 tells us – *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, and test me now in this says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”*

REWARDS IN THIS LIFE

Many of the promises of God in the Bible relate to this life as well as to the next, and some of them declare that our generosity will be rewarded.

Luke 6:38 – *“Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”*

God will always give to us much, much more than we can possibly give to him.

- Even what we give back to Him was firstly given to us by God, for what have we that we do not receive? (1 Corinthians 4:7)
- Then, when we do give a portion of what we have been given, God increases his blessings further to us to ensure that he always outstrips us in love and in giving. How wonderful it is that we have a God who is perfect love!

Many Christians to whom I have spoken on this subject agree that they have found themselves to be better off financially the more money they give away. God seems to keep ahead of them in his generosity to them

as they demonstrate their generosity to others as part of their decision to honour his name in their lives.

This is the key, that our generosity is to be a loving response to God's love to us in Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. We love because God's love overflows us and reaches out to others as a natural and essential manifestation of our Christian walk. And, as always, we are rewarded in this life in proportion to our generosity, as we read in 2 Corinthians 9:6--

“But remember this—if you give little, you will get little. A farmer who plants just a few seeds will get only a small crop, but if he plants much, he will reap much. Every one must make up his own mind how much he should give. Don't force anyone to give more than he really wants to, for God loves a cheerful giver. God is able to make it up to you by giving you everything you need and more, so that there will be not only enough for your own needs, but plenty left over to give joyfully to others.”

(e) A WARNING

Jesus urges us to do something which many of us find difficult; to beware of pride in our generosity, lest we are guilty of being generous in order to create our own rewards of thanks, praise, and recognition from others, rather than from God.

Jesus says that if we do this, then these worldly rewards will be the only ones we get—we cut ourselves off from heavenly rewards (Matthew Chapter 6).

Jesus says in Luke 17:10 – *“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.’”*

We are pleased when others appreciate our generosity—we are pleased that God's light of love has shone through us to others—we are pleased

that others have expressed pleasure—these are God’s great blessings. Why shouldn’t we be pleased? -- but not **PROUD!**

OUR PRIORITIES -- WHERE DO OUR WORKS FIT IN?

To summarise then, the Christian needs to be vitally concerned with works—needs to see this life as a minute moment in eternity and as an important preparation for eternity. How we spend this life determines how we spend eternity—so our works are of the utmost importance to our eternal future.

We must be careful not to live as if this life is all that there is; and as we get caught up in day to day living, with all its demands upon us, the temptation towards temporal or worldly thinking is very strong.

If we were to see young people of school age who, instead of applying some time to learning, spend all their time on other pursuits such as watching TV , surfing, etc. –we would say how unwise they are not to spend their time preparing for later life.

We expect that with time spent at school and in study at home, the young person would devote the majority of time and attention to this preparatory work. We would hope also that there would be a great deal of interest and some enjoyment in doing so.

But many, many people, including many Christians are like the young person who neglects to prepare for later life. They spend so much time on temporal worldly matters, the things of this life, that they have no time left over for the things of God. And each one of us must ask ourselves whether this applies to us. The real test is where we put our time, and where we put our money.

If we spend more time each week watching TV than we do on God’s work, then we clearly prefer TV to God. There are just no two ways

about this—and when I did my analysis of my week some few years ago now, I was ashamed to have to admit that I was putting a number of quite frivolous things ahead of God—so a change in priorities became essential to me.

When I asked myself how I could increase my dedication of time, I found many ways—such as:

- daily Bible reading
- daily prayer
- Bible Studies with other members of the congregation
- a correspondence course in theology through Moore College
- reading books on matters of importance to our spiritual life—such as prayer, faith and Christian living
- learning how to give away my faith in witnessing
- service in the local church
- service to those who are in trouble or in need. A course in counselling was helpful in this.

There is no shortage of ways to serve the Lord, and interestingly I found that many of them can be done in conjunction with our normal daily living. We are regularly in touch with people who need God’s love expressed through us.

Jesus talked about people who had something else to do rather than follow him. He said: *“No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of heaven.”*

So the wisdom which God gives us tells us that—

- while we are young we prepare for adult life and still enjoy our youth.
- while we are adults we prepare for our old age and still enjoy our adult life.

- while we are in this life we prepare for eternal life and still enjoy this life.

Thanks be to God.