

CHRISTIAN REWARDS

A Study Outline



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I. FUTURE JUDGMENTS

A. Judgment of Nations (Matt. 25:31-46)

1. Who: "Sheep" and "goats"

- The "sheep" -- The sheep represent the saved Gentiles who fed and protected "these brothers of mine" during the Tribulation. Some have said Christ was referring to the Jews; others say they are all Christians; still others say they are suffering people everywhere.
- The point of this parable is not the *who* but the *what* – the importance of service when needed. (Life Application Bible, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, p. 1707)
- Christ identifies Himself so strongly with His brothers that He refers to them as "I."
- The sheep are then given eternal life beginning with the Millennium.
- It is they who will repopulate the earth during the 1,000-year period.
- The goats represent the unsaved, the followers of the Antichrist who worshipped him and participated in all his treacherous deeds.
- They despised and persecuted the Christians during the Tribulation. Christ condemns these unsaved Gentiles immediately to eternal punishment.

2. What is being judged: The way the nations have treated Jesus "brethren" (Matt. 25:40)

- He will separate the "sheep" from the "goats" (Matthew 25:31-46).
- The judgment is not of all nations (*Gr. ethne*). (Walvoord, p. 398)

3. When: When the Son of Man comes in his glory (Matt. 25:31)

- Following His Second Coming (Walvoord, p. 398)

4. Results: Sheep will inherit the kingdom, the goats will be thrown into the eternal fire (Matt. 25:34, 41)

B. Judgment of the Antichrist and False Prophet (Rev. 19:19-20)

1. Who: The beast (Antichrist) and the False Prophet; all enemies of Christ
2. What is being judged: Their opposition to Christ (Rev. 19:19)
3. When: At Christ's return (Rev. 19:11-18)
4. Results: Thrown into the lake of fire

C. Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15)

1. Who: Those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:12, 15)
2. What: Sinful deeds as recorded in the book of life (Rev. 20:12)
3. When: When the thousand years are over (Rev. 20:7ff)
4. Results: They are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14)

D. Judgment Seat of Christ (Bema)

1. Who: Judgment of believers (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10)

- Specifically those who have been saved between Pentecost and the Rapture." (Walvoord, p. 467)
 - The term judgment-seat, found in II Corinthians 5:10, and Romans 14:10-12, comes from the Greek word *bēma* which was used to denote a raised platform, reached by steps, from which an official would judge a contest.
 - At this *bēma* each believers must appear before it to receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
 - The expression "good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10) ...what is meant by "bad"
 - "Bad" (Gr. *phaulon*). Old word, akin to German *faul*, worthless, of no account, base, wicked. (Robinson)
 - John Walvoord believes it refers to value (motive?), not morality (sin) (Walvoord, p. 467)
 - Other inferences of what "bad" means
 - It was not done as an expression of God's love
 - It was not done according to God's will
 - It was not done to bring glory to God
 - But, will all the secret words and deeds of believers, and all their sins, also be revealed on that last day?
 - It would seem this is so (1 Cor. 4:5; compare Col. 3:24-25) (Grudem, p. 1144)

1 Cor. 4:5 "He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts"

Col. 3:24-25 "...since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

 - For all that has been contrary in their lives to God's will believers will suffer loss. (Vine, p. 282)
 - Believers will be judged according to what they have been given (Luke 12:48b)
 - See the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-29).
2. What is being judged: This is a judgment of the believer's works toward honoring and glorifying God, not his sins.
- Passages that refer to the loss of heavenly rewards are sometimes wrongly taken to mean that a believer can lose salvation.
 - His sins have been atoned for and are remembered no more forever (Hebrews 10:17)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast." Eph. 2:8-9

"...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." Gal. 2:16

"...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" Titus 3:5

- The Christian's salvation (eternal life) is based on faith not on works. Therefore, eternal life cannot be forfeited based on what Christians do or fail to do.
 - But every work must come into judgment (Matt. 12:36; Romans 14:10-12; Gal. 6:7; Ephesians 6:8; Col. 3:23-25).
3. When: Five views ranging from the time a believer dies to the same time the Great White Throne Judgment takes place at the end of the Millennium (Alcorn, p. 47)
 - When a believer dies,
 - Between the time of a believer's death and the return of Christ,
 - Between the Rapture and the physical return of Christ, and
 - At the same time as the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers, after the Millennium
 - Most likely at the time of the Rapture (Walvoord, p. 446)
 4. Results: Christians will be rewarded for faithful service to God. Rewards are conditional, dependent on the believers faithfulness (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-28; 3:21) (Alcorn, p. 47)
 5. Charles Stanley gives the following basis for "good work" (Stanley):
 - We will be judged according to how much truth we have.
 - We will be judged by how many opportunities we had.
 - We will be judged by how we responded to those opportunities.
 - We will be judged according to our actions, attitudes, and motives
 6. S. Michael Houdmann describes good works based on (Houdmann):
 - How faithfully believers served Christ (1 Corinthians 9:4-27; 2 Timothy 2:5).
 - How well believers obeyed the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)
 - How victorious believers were over sin (Romans 6:1-4)
 - How well believers controlled their tongues (James 3:1-9); Matt. 12:36 (Alcorn, p. 68)
 7. M. G. Easton offers the description of "good works" as follows (Easton):
 - They spring from the principle of love to God.
 - They have the glory of God as their object
 - They have the revealed will of God as their only rule (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18, 19).

II. FUTURE REWARDS

- A. Crown of Life (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10)
 - Martyr's crown for those who have been "faithful unto death"
- B. Crown of Glory (1 Pet. 1, 4)
 - Elder/pastor (shepherd's) crown for faithfully preaching and teaching the Word
- C. Crown of Righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)
 - A crown reserved for those who long for the coming of Christ, having kept themselves prepared by leading holy lives while watching for his return
- D. Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19)
 - A special crown reserved for faithful witnesses of Christ whose testimony has been believed
- E. Crown of Victory (1 Cor. 9:25-27)

An incorruptible crown given to those who discipline themselves to live a life consistent with their testimony

F. Other Rewards

1. White robe (Rev. 3:5)
2. Hidden manna (Rev. 2:17)
3. White stone (Rev. 2:17)
4. Seat of honor (Rev. 3:21)

→ "Overcomers" are followers of Christ who successfully resist the power and temptation of the world's system. An overcomer is not sinless, but holds fast to faith in Christ until the end. He does not turn away when times get difficult or become an apostate. (Got Questions Ministries, n.d.)

III. QUESTIONS ABOUT REWARDS

A. Will believers be rewarded equally?

1. No, good work will be rewarded, unfaithful or inferior work will be discounted. Believers will not be rewarded equally.

"The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor." 1 Cor. 3:8

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done." Rev. 22:12

2. Christians will be judged on the basis of what they did with what they have been given.

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." Luke 12:48b

B. Can Christians lose their rewards?

1. Yes, it appears so (Matt. 10:42; 2 John 3:8; 1 Cor. 3:11-15).

"And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Matt. 10:42

"Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully." 2 John 8

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." 1 Cor. 3:11-15

2. The phrase, "will be saved but only as one escaping through the flames" means that unfaithful workers will be saved, but like people escaping from a burning building, all their possessions will be lost. (Life Application Bible, p. 266)
3. Can believers forfeit eternal life by what they do or fail to do (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:5)? Why or why not?

- Passages that refer to the loss of heavenly rewards are sometimes wrongly taken to mean that a believer can lose salvation; but this is contrary to scripture

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast." Eph. 2:8-9

"...know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." Gal. 2:16

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- Ans: The Christian's salvation (eternal life) is based on faith not on works. Therefore, eternal life cannot be forfeited based on what Christians do or fail to do.

C. Are the crowns literal or figurative?

1. Arguments for a figurative interpretation

- Psa. 103:4; 149:4 describe figurative crowns
- The Greek word translated "crown" is *stephanos* (the source for the name Stephen the martyr) and means "a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor generally."
- Used during the ancient Greek games, it referred to a wreath or garland of leaves placed on a victor's head as a reward for winning an athletic contest.
- As such, this word is used figuratively in the New Testament of the rewards of heaven God promises those who are faithful. These rewards are given to those who faithfully serve Christ on earth.

2. Arguments for a literal interpretation:

- Revelation 4:4 describes the 24 elders laying down their crowns before the throne of God. These appear to be literal crowns.
- These are crowns of gold which they wore on their heads suggesting that they are literal crowns
- But nowhere are these physical gold crowns associated with other Christians.
- Although the Scriptures do not state it specifically, it is likely that we will all follow the example of the twenty-four elders in casting our crowns at Jesus' feet (Houdmann, What is the verse about casting our crowns before the feet of Jesus?)

D. What is the promise in Mark 10:29-30?

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-- and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." Mark 10:29-30

1. Ans: Sacrifices made here on earth for the sake of Christ and the gospel will be rewarded generously in heaven.

IV. APPLICATION

- A. The Christian's pursuit is to be toward faithful, obedient service to God, not the direct pursuit of rewards since this would be very self-centered.
- B. Christians are to recognize that faithful, obedient service to God is so important that it will be rewarded in generous ways designed by God.
- C. Christians are to remember that in heaven, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:4)

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