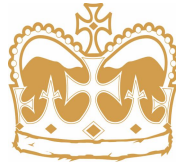


GOD... THE DIVINE REWARDER

**By
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INTRODUCTION

What motivates you as a person? Consciously or subconsciously, all of us are motivated by *something* – or *someone*. All *motion, mobility* and *momentum* are *motivated* by some *motive* or *motivation*. It doesn't matter whether it is getting out of bed...taking a bath...combing our hair...putting on make-up...cooking a meal...dressing nicely...going to work...paying our bills...going shopping...working out...going on vacation...running for political office...voting in elections...going to the doctor...praying...reading your Bible...going to church... making love...getting married...getting a divorce...having a baby ...or having an abortion – there is a *motive* behind every *motivation*. And that primary motive and motivation is to have *meaning* in life which you hope will result in *happiness* and *pleasure*.

In reality then, *there are no unmotivated motions*. There are no abstract, impersonal motivations. Each one of us is motivated in everything we do by some conscious or unconscious *motive*. Therefore, all of our *actions* and *activities* flow out of our *attitudes* – whether or not we are consciously aware of them. One is manifest through the other. One is *internal* while the other is *external*. *Attitude is the root*; while *action is the fruit*. As a result, all of our *thinking* is a *dress rehearsal for our acting*. So *there are no unmotivated actions* or *inconsequential attitudes*. Every one of our *attitudes* and *actions* has consequences for both *time* and *eternity*.

PRINCIPLE:

“All motion, mobility and momentum are motivated by some motive or motivation, primarily to find meaning in life.”

The primary motive which motivates us is often referred to as our “M.O.,” or *modus operandi*. That is the Latin phrase for: “*manner of working, or way of doing things.*” This is closely related to your *modus vivendi*, or “*manner of living.*” So “*how we live*” and “*how we work*” are consciously or unconsciously reflections of our *world-view* – which is the lens through which we *view life*.

Therefore, at the core of our being, we all *live and work* in order to receive some kind of *reward...return...compensation...benefit...payback...profit*. And it is our hope and prayer that *our reward will bring us happiness...pleasure...enjoyment...meaning...fulfillment* – what C.S. Lewis called “...that *permanent satisfaction.*” In other words, we desperately hope that *our profit* will result in *our pleasure* – and that our pleasure will *last*.

In reality then, *every human being is naturally focused on his or her own happiness*. Whether or not we have ever stopped to analyze it, *we are all motivated by our own desire to be happy and to experience pleasure* as we go through life. We are often afraid to express this “natural desire” and “human drive” – because it sounds so selfish and narcissistic. But *I believe that God created us with a desire for happiness and pleasure*. That’s the basic thesis of this study.

PRINCIPLE:

“Every person is consciously or unconsciously motivated by the desire for happiness and pleasure.”

If you think about it for a minute, you know that principle is true. That’s because it is clear that God did not create any of us with a natural desire for *unhappiness, misery or*

pain! People who have that kind of sick and negative motivation are known as *masochists*. That word simply means: “A person who finds pleasure, sexual or otherwise, from being dominated, mistreated or hurt.” Or simply put: “Getting pleasure from pain.”

Closely related is *sadism*, which means: “Finding pleasure from dominating, mis-treating, or hurting others.” So while the *sadist* is the *giver of pain*, the *masochist* is the *receiver of pain*. But both are emotionally sick individuals! No normal person likes to *give pain* or *receive pain*. We naturally prefer *pleasure over pain*. That’s how God created us. Therefore, we all *seek pleasure* – and we try to *avoid pain*. That is “natural” for all “normal” human beings.

We refer to the *unselfish desire* to bring pleasure and well being to others as *altruism*. The opposite of that is *egoism*, which is *self-centered pleasure*. The most extreme form of this kind of self-centered *egoism* is *hedonism*, which is the philosophy that the highest good in life is to seek one’s own pleasure – all the time. Hedonists, then, become “pleasure junkies!” *Hedonism* is a *pleasure-seeking way of life*, but usually with a very *selfish twist*.

However, correctly understood, all of us to some degree are *hedonist* – we seek our own pleasure as we go through life. Therefore, the real issue is one of *degree* and *balance* – which is always the biggest challenge for us human beings!

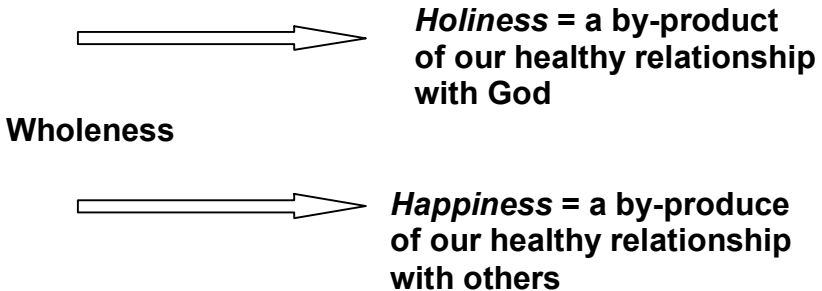
So we are all *hedonist* by *divine design*. We were created by God in such a way that this is one of the greatest motivations of our lives. This is existentially proven by the fact that we consciously or subconsciously desire pleasure over pain...health over sickness...happiness over unhappiness...elation over depression...

laughter over tears...success over failure...profit over loss...winning over losing. We would far rather go through life “feeling good” than “feeling bad.”

But, like everything else in creation, this “natural desire” for happiness and pleasure has become *fallen, perverted, sinful* and *selfish*. Masochism and sadism are the most extreme forms of this “perversion of pleasure” at the expense of others. But all of us have some capacity for those emotional perversions within us. When we have been hurt, abused, slighted or neglected, we all have a perverted desire for vengeance...to lash out...to get even...to put down...to hurt in return...to collect our debts...to pay back *pain for pain!* We all have the sick desire to dominate...to control...to put others down...to get our way – whatever the cost! When we have been hurt, we are not interested in an “...**eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth**” (Ex. 21:24; Matt. 5:38). Instead, we want an “arm and a leg” for an eye, and a “life” for a tooth! We want our payback in spades! We want to collect our debts with compound interest! That’s why human history is so often *written in human blood!* And to this very moment, our contemporary world is still filled with human evil...murder...crime...wars...racism...holocausts...prostitution...abortions...genocide and infanticides. Whether individually or collectively, we all want our own happiness and pleasure – *even if it means pain and suffering for someone else.*

But originally, this motivation for happiness and pleasure came from God, and was to be *other-oriented*. Rather than being *self-centered* and *self-seeking*, our pleasure and happiness was to be centered in God...focused on His creation...directed to our mate. We were to find our pleasure in human relationships...in our work...in our play. Our pleasure was to be *altruistic* rather than *egotistic*. Through *unselfish love* we were to seek the happiness and pleasure of others, and find our own in

return. Our *happiness* was to be a by-product of our healthy relationships. So while *holiness* was a by-product of our healthy relationship with God, *happiness* was a by-product of our healthy relationships with others. Both our *holiness* and *happiness* were spiritual and emotional manifestations of our *wholeness*. We might illustrate this formula as follows...



By God's design, *happiness* was meant to be a by-product of *wholeness* and *holiness*. But since our world has been radically damaged and broken by sin, our lives are fragmented...our emotions are fragmented...our marriages are fragmented...our families are fragmented...our children are fragmented. As a result, there are no members of Adam's race who are by nature *whole people*. We are all *broken by sin*. We are all "damaged merchandise." We are all *fragmented* in spirit, soul and body. Or as young people used to express it, we are *spread out...spaced out...far out...off the wall!* But even in our broken, fragmented state, we still all seek for happiness and pleasure – even though we usually do it in a broken, twisted, distorted and selfish way.

With that thought in mind, read carefully these insightful words by the French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal, written in the mid 1600's:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever *different means* they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. *They will never takes the least step but to this object.* This is the *motive of every action of every man*, even of those who hang themselves.¹

C. S. Lewis made the same observation in his book, *The Weight of Glory*:

“If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to *desire our own good* and earnestly to *hope for the enjoyment* of it is a *bad thing*, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the *unblushing promises of reward* and the *staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels*, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are *half-hearted creatures*, fooling about with *drink* and *sex* and *ambition* when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased...”²

Every wise parent or successful teacher also understands this cardinal principle of “pleasure and pain” as the greatest motivator for molding and modifying behavior. They know that the use of “rewards and punishments” is one of the best ways to teach children. You begin with the *positive approach of rewarding good behavior* with

¹ Blaise Pascal, (1623–1662). **Pensees** (Thoughts), Section VII, Second Part [<http://www.classicallibrary.org/pascal/pensees>, May 27, 2003]

² C. S. Lewis, **The Weight of Glory**, 1941, pp. 3-4.

something that brings pleasure and happiness to the child. If that does not work, you use the *negative approach* of *withholding rewards* in the face of bad behavior. When those two fail, as they will from time to time, then you will have to bring *pain through punishment*. And some punishment is always necessary in parenting because every child is born with a sinful, rebellious nature. That's why the wisdom of Proverbs clearly teaches:

- **“He who *s pares the rod* hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to *discipline him*”** (Prov. 13:24).
- **“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the *rod of discipline* will drive it far from him”** (Prov. 22:15).

Therefore, there is an inviolate principle that teaches: *“Whatever is reinforced reoccurs.”* Or to express it another way: *“Whatever you feed grows; and whatever you starve, dies.”*

PRINCIPLE:

**“Whatever is reinforced tends to reoccurs.
Whatever you feed, grows; and whatever you starve, dies.”**

In parenting, the more you *reinforce good behavior through rewards*, the more that good behavior will tend to be repeated. Conversely, if you *reward bad behavior*, that *negative behavior will continue to occur*. And bad behavior or disobedience needs one of two things: *instruction* or *discipline*. It takes wise discernment as a parent to determine whether the negative or wrong behavior is arising from *childish immaturity*, or from *willful rebellion*. If it is *immaturity*, there is need for *instruction*. But when there is *willful rebellion*, there is need for *discipline* or *punishment*. Then the child learns through

consistent parental instruction and reinforcement that: *Obedience brings pleasure, while disobedience brings pain.* God promised that when parents would consistently instruct their children this way, they would “...**live long in the land**” (Deut. 11:21), and “...**great will be your children’s peace**” (Isa. 54:13).

PARENTING PRINCIPLE:

“Immaturity needs instruction, while rebellion needs discipline.”

Then our children learn:

“Obedience brings pleasure, while disobedience brings pain.”

By God’s design, our two greatest teachers in life are *pleasure* and *pain*. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, “*God whispers to us in our pleasures, and shouts to us in our pain!*” God uses *pleasure to woo us to Himself*, and He uses *pain to wean us from sin.*” Wise parents will learn to do the same with their children.

PRINCIPLE:

“God whispers to us in our pleasures; and He shouts to us in our pain.”

“He uses pleasure to woo us to Himself, and pain to wean us from sin.”

My wife, Patt, and I sought to raise our own four children by this clear Biblical principle of “reward and punishment.” And God graciously honored it in the lives of our children – who are now raising our 9 grandchildren by that same principle. So when teaching *Marriage and Family Seminars*, Patt and I often emphasize this crucial principle of parenting – especially to mothers and fathers of young children. We sometimes express it this way: “*Catch your children in the act of doing something good!*” Then as you *affirm, praise* and *reward* that good behavior, you will reinforce it in your child’s life. As a result, that good behavior will tend to be repeated again

and again until it increasingly becomes a *character trait* and life-style for your child.

On the other hand, if you only “*Catch your children in the act of doing something bad,*” you will reinforce that bad behavior. In other words, if your children only “get your attention” when they do something bad...throw a temper tantrum...do something wrong...fail at a task...make a bad grade...blow it with a brother or sister...spill their milk at the table, then they will learn that it is *negative behavior that is rewarded with your attention*. And to a child in need of parental attention, “negative attention” is better than *no attention at all!*

However, in parenting, perhaps the single hardest principle to teach small children is the principle of “*deferred gratification.*” Both our fallen human natures, and our perverse culture, drive us toward “*instant gratification.*” That means that we want every drive and desire fulfilled NOW! We don’t want to have to wait for it...postpone it...put it off...sublimate it...or defer it to a later time. And we definitely don’t want to have to wait until we “grow up!” We *want what we desire* – and we want it right NOW!

But many psychological and social studies have shown that the children who learn the importance of sometimes *deferring their gratification* to a later time, grow up to be far more disciplined, productive and happy individuals. Their peers who were not taught this principle are far more prone to excesses like *emotional instability, financial irresponsibility, submission to peer pressure, premature sexual indulgence, tobacco and alcohol abuse and drug addiction*. Therefore, as they grow up, their lives are increasingly characterized by “addictive behavior.”

So while God, as the Ultimate Parent in the universe, does motivate us through “rewards and punishment,” He

often teaches us the discipline of *delayed gratification*. He teaches us the principle of *patience* and *postponement*. He teaches us the discipline of *waiting*. That produces *character* in us. It brings forth the “**fruit of the Holy Spirit**” in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23). *Delayed gratification*, then, produces virtues like *discipline... faith...trust...patience...perseverance...self-control*. In other words, it makes us *mature* – which is Christ-likeness.

PRINCIPLE:

“Learning the discipline of *delayed gratification* produces *character* and *Christ-likeness*.”

As God’s children, we learn what we must teach our own children: *Not every good behavior will be instantaneously rewarded with pleasure, and not every bad behavior will be instantaneously rewarded with pain*. The Bible is a realistic Book. It does teach that for the disobedient, there is “**...*pleasure in sin for a season*”** (Heb. 11:25). It also teaches that there is oftentimes *pain and suffering for the righteous*. An example of *unjust suffering* is best seen in the Old Testament through the life of Job. In the New Testament it is supremely seen in the *undeserved suffering of Christ on the cross*. And the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul is one continuous example of pain and suffering as the reward for faithfully serving the Lord Jesus (Acts 14:19; 16:16-37; II Cor. 6:3-13; 11:23-30; etc).

However, because this is a *moral universe* by God’s design, there are often *immediate spiritual, mental, emotional and physical pleasures for obedience*. When we have obeyed God, we have a positive sense of “doing right.” We “feel good” inside. We know that we have “pleased God.” We sense that our character has grown more Christ-like. We feel that we have become stronger in the Spirit. We are less susceptible to temptation. And

as a result, we are generally more *holy, happy* and *healthy* than those who are willfully rebellious and sinful – which has now been scientifically proven through many clinical tests.

Conversely, there are often *immediate spiritual, mental, emotional and physical pains for disobedience*. When we do wrong, we “feel guilty.” Our conscience condemns us. Our minds are plagued by bad memories. Our emotions are damaged and distraught. Our bodies become addicted to negative habits. We waste time and money. We have a perpetual hangover from our excessive and addictive life-style. We become despondent and depressed – oftentimes suicidal. As a result, we generally live a more *unholy, unhealthy* and *unhappy life* – which medical science has also proven. But as *immediate* as some of the results of our “pleasures and pains” are, they are still temporal. They largely influence and impact this earthly life. However, they are not disconnected from the next life. There is a “law of continuity” that teaches that everything we do in this life has *deferred manifestations* into the next life. So our ultimate and final “rewards and punishment” are not in this life – but in the life to come.

The principle is clear...

PRINCIPLE:

“God rewards good behavior with *pleasure*; and He punishes bad behavior with *pain* – both in *time* and *eternity*.”

As our *Abba Father*, God delights in rewarding His children! Because of His unconditional love and unmerited grace, He wants to reward His creatures with blessings from His benevolent hands. By virtue of *creation*, He gives us *life*. But only by virtue of *recreation* is He able to give us *new life, abundant life, and eternal life*. It is clear then, that God does not desire to see any *suffer* or *perish*, as the Bible clearly teaches:

- **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him *shall not perish* but *have eternal life*. For God did not send His Son into the world to *condemn the world*, but to *save the world through Him*” (Jn. 3:16-17);**
- **“*God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time” (I Tim. 2:3-6);**
- **“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise...He is *patient* with you, *not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*” (II Pet. 3:9);**
- **“...He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else...God did this so that all men would *seek Him* and perhaps *reach out for Him* and *find Him*, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:25-27);**

Our wise and loving Father, then, built the “law of rewards” into His universe. And He also planted that same law in our very nature as His offspring. I believe the Bible clearly teaches that this law is written into the very fabric of creation – as well as into the heart of each of us as His creatures. And wonder of wonders, *Christians are written on His heart and hands* (Isa. 49:16), and we are *His own highest reward* (Eph. 1:11, 18), as we will see further in this study.

With those introductory principles in mind, let's now lay our spiritual foundation by looking at some crucial verses that show that God is indeed the *Divine Rewarder*.

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THE GOD WHO REWARDS

One of the very first things we see about God in the book of Genesis is that He is a *God who blesses*. He takes great delight in *blessing* the works of His hands. To *bestow blessing* is a manifestation of His gracious giving nature. We see this early in the creation process. Right after God created all of the diverse creatures in the animal kingdom, He “...**blessed them**” (Gen. 1:22). And after He created the first man and woman in His image and likeness, He crowned their lives with *blessing* and *honor*.

“He *blessed them* and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Gen. 2:27-28).

So God not only *created* the man and woman, He *blessed them*. He first of all gave them the *undeserved reward* of life in His image and likeness. Then He *blessed* and crowned their lives with an *unmerited authority* to “**rule over**” everything that He had created. In doing so, God *blessed them* with the ability to *procreate* and *co-create* with Him. He gave their lives dignity and purpose through the *blessing of meaningful work*.

God’s *blessings*, then, are the greatest source of *pleasure* in this life! There is no *higher joy*, no *greater happiness*,

or more *lasting pleasure* than to live a life under the blessing of God! That is His greatest desire for each of us. *God's greatest pleasure is to bless us with His unmerited favor.* Therefore, when His *blessings* flow to us and *through us*, He receives the glory.

So wonder of wonders, *God's great pleasure is to bring us pleasure!* That's how His love for us works. And if you think about it for a moment, you will know this is true because as humans, *we too gain our greatest pleasure by bringing pleasure to those whom we love.* When we have been blessed, we love to share that blessing with others – which only magnifies our blessing! All true virtues are multiplied and magnified as they are *shared* – and diminished and decreased when they are *hoarded*.

PRINCIPLE:

***“Because of His unmerited love for us,
God's great pleasure is to bring us pleasure –
just as our greatest pleasure is in bringing pleasure to others.”***

Therefore, the *blessing of God* is a theme that consistently runs through the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

God did not cease to give His *blessings* after the creation of Adam and Eve. Even after man's sin and rebellion, God continued to impart *blessing* in all of His dealings with man. When He established His covenant after the flood, **“God blessed Noah and his sons...”** (Gen. 9:1). When He entered into His covenant with Abram, God said: **“I will bless you...and you will be a blessing”** (Gen. 12:2). There again is the pervasive principle: *“We are blessed to be a blessing!”*

So thoughtfully read these following verses about the *blessings* and *rewards* of our gracious God. Allow your mind to drink them in. Let them settle down deep in your

spirit. Give them time to transform your thinking. Let the Holy Spirit use them to heal your damaged feelings and emotions. Let these profound verses heal you of your negative Father-God-concepts. If you will do that, these Biblical truths will *transform your being by transforming your understanding of the nature of God.*

“After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’” (Gen. 15:1).

Note here how God promises to Abram that He will be both his **“shield”** and **“reward.”** God had told Abram to **“...leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”** (Gen. 12:1) In the face of this “leaving” and “going,” God was assuring Abram that He would receive a *reward* in return. God would be to him both his *protector* and his *provider*. But before Abram would let God be that for him, he had to have his *fear* replaced by *faith*. Just like He does with us, God had to first of all deal with the “fear factor” in Abram’s life before He could enjoy His blessings. God had to teach Abram that only *faith* would be the all-sufficient protective **“shield”** for his life.

PRINCIPLE:

“Fear is the greatest ‘robber of rewards’ in our lives.”

Therefore, whether for Abram or for us, *fear* is the single greatest “robber of rewards” in our lives. Before God could *bless* Abram, He had to first get rid of the negative fear that would continually rob Abram of the **“great reward”** that He wanted to be for him. And He must be allowed to do the same for you and me.

“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” (Heb. 11:6).

This is obviously a New Testament parallel to Abraham’s story. Here again God underscores the “principle of faith” as the key that unlocks His *blessings* and *rewards* in a person’s life. We can also see here the balance between *faith* and *fervor*. **“Without *faith* it is impossible to please God,”** and without the *fervor* of **“...earnestly seeking Him”** – we will not receive His *rewards*!

PRINCIPLE:

“It takes both FAITH and FERVOR to please God.”

That’s why James, the brother of Jesus, reminds us: **“Has not God chosen those who are *poor* in the eyes of the world to be *rich in faith* and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?”** (James 2:5). Here in America, we *earnestly seek money and material things* as the highest good in life. In the process we become guilty of *idolatry*, or the **“worship of things”** through insatiable *greed* (Col. 3:5)! As a result, we *passionately pursue money* – rather than **“...earnestly seek God.”** The result is obvious: we are “rich in things” but “poor in faith.” In fact, the more *things* we have, the less *faith* we have! Money and materialism become our security rather than God. Financial success and social status define our identity and as a result, *our possessions possess us* – and in the process we are *robbed of God’s reward*.

PRINCIPLE:

“The more things we have, the less faith we tend to have.”

“...You, O Lord, are loving. Surely You will reward each person according to what he has done” (Ps. 62:12).

Here again we see a recurring Biblical principle: “God *rewards us* because He *loves us*, and our *rewards* are based upon what we *do* in response to His love.” Therefore, everything we *do* in this life will result in either *reward* or *punishment*. So our *eternal destiny* is determined by our *earthly doing*.

PRINCIPLE:

“God rewards us because He loves us; and our rewards are based upon what we do in response to His love.

Therefore, our eternal destiny is determined by our earthly doing.”

“The *faithless* will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good man *rewarded* for his”
(Prov. 14:14).

Many of the Proverbs are what is known as *Hebrew parallelisms*, where similar or opposite truths are laid down side-by-side. Here we see how the “**faithless**” will be “**...fully repaid**” – that is *punished* – while the “**...good man**” will be faithfully “**rewarded**.”

- **“See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and His arm rules for Him. See, His *reward* is with Him, and His *recompense* accompanies Him”** (Isa. 40:10).
- **“The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: ‘Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your Savior comes! See, His *reward* is with Him, and His *recompense* accompanies Him’”** (Isa. 62:11).

These verses teach us about two inviolate laws that govern *everything* we do in life. First the “**law of sowing and reaping**” (Gal. 6:7-9; II Cor. 9:6), and the “**law of return.**” On the one hand “**...the wages of sin is death**” (Rom. 3:23). But on the other, God’s wages are

“**reward**” and “**recompense**” – or *blessing, pleasure and happiness*. The obvious question is this: “*Which one am I working for?*”

“But I said, ‘I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the Lord’s hand, and my *reward* is with my God’” (Isa. 49:4).

This verse reminds us that we are to ultimately live and work for God’s reward, not for man’s. If we only work for man’s reward, we will ultimately be disappointed, disillusioned and depressed. But if we work for God’s reward, there will be pleasure and happiness – both now and for eternity. That’s why God says to His people: **“Those who hope in me *will not be disappointed*”** (Isa. 49:23; Ps. 22:5; Rom. 5:5; 10:11). And one of my favorite promises is this:

“You have made known to Me the *path of life*; You will *fill me with joy* in Your presence, with *eternal pleasures* at Your right hand” (Ps. 16:11).

God not only delights in bringing us *happiness and joy* in this life, He will one day bless us with “***...eternal pleasures***” at His right hand!

“I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind (motive), to *reward* a man according to his *conduct*, according to *what his deeds deserve*” (Jer.17:10).

Here again we see that we cannot separate our *rewards* from our *conduct*...our *receiving* from our *servicing*...our *profession* from our *possession*. So what we *do* in this life

will determine what He *does* in this life – and in the next. The Lord Jesus expressed it this way in another context:

“Whoever acknowledges Me before men, *I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven.* But whoever disowns Me before men, *I will disown him before My Father in heaven*”
(Matt. 10:32-33).

So here again we see the “*law of continuity*” at work. We just cannot separate or disconnect our attitudes and actions in this life from the life to come. Our *confession about Him before men* will determine His *confession about us before the Father*. If we are *ashamed of Him now*, He will be *ashamed of us then*. But if we will openly *affirm Him* before men, He will *eternally embrace* us before the judgment seat of God. And that alone leads to “**...*eternal pleasures at His right hand.*”**

“...great are Your purposes and mighty are Your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; You *reward* everyone according to his *conduct* and as his *deeds* deserve” (Jer. 32:19).

Contrary to what many people want to believe, our *every word* and *every deed* in this life have *eternal significance*. Therefore, there are no inconsequential attitudes or actions. God watches and records “**...*all the ways of men.*”** And as a result, He will “**...*reward* everyone according to his *conduct.*”** Those are sobering words indeed!

“For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will *reward* each person according to what he has done” (Matt. 16:27).

This verse teaches us that one of the specific reasons for the return of Christ is to “...**reward each person according to what he has done.**” Our deeds in this life will either make us *long for His coming* or *loath His coming*. If we are honest, we will have to admit that for many of us, *the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus would be an unwelcomed interruption into our lives!* It would mean an eternal termination of our petty plans and trivial pursuits. It would bring a permanent end to the building of our own little kingdoms – at the expense of His. It would turn the spotlight from our glory to His. It would result in a reluctant submission to His sovereign will by our selfish will. It would mean a final capitulation to His Kingdom and glory!

If that is the case, *why not start the process now?!* Why not surrender every area of your life to His Lordship. Then *rewards* will await you – rather than *ruination*.

“...you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free” (Eph. 6:8).

It is important to carefully note the context of this statement by the Apostle Paul. He is writing to exhort Christian slaves to work wholeheartedly for their human masters.

“Slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and *there is no favoritism with Him*” (Eph. 6:5-9).

This was obviously not an isolated labor-management principle that Paul laid down for just the Christian workers in the city of Ephesus. He gave this same vocational exhortation to all the Christians. Note his almost identical words in the Colossian letter:

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, *work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 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*” (Col. 3:23-24).

These very practical words have great relevance for our work force today. If Christian employers and employees worked and operated their businesses by these guidelines, it would transform the work place! There would be more harmony, better time management, higher productivity, fairer wages, less absenteeism, fewer labor-management disputes, and greater job satisfaction. How very practical indeed is God’s Word!

“The nations were angry; and Your *wrath* has come. The time has come for *judging* the dead, and for *rewarding* Your servants the prophets

and Your saints and those who reverence Your name, both small and great...” (Rev. 11:18).

Here again we can see that when the Lord returns, it will be a time of “**...judging the dead.**” That very thought *angers* the unbeliever! They do not want to believe that there is a coming judgment. They refuse to accept the fact that there is a living God who will ultimately hold them accountable. They abhor the thought that they are not totally free to live and die as they jolly well please. They rebel against the Biblical revelation that there are *eternal consequences* to their every attitude and action! That’s why “**...the nations are angry**” at the very thought of judgment!

But the Bible is absolutely clear in this. At the time of God’s judgment, there will be both *eternal wrath* and *eternal reward*. And there will be no confusion between the two. There will be everlasting “**rewards**” for God’s servants “**...the prophets and saints and those who reverence God’s name.**” But there will also be divine *wrath* for those who are hostile to God and have lived a life of *indifference* toward Him – or *anger* against Him. But the resurrected and reigning Lord still says...

“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).

Notice the consistent reminder that our *reward* from God will be based upon “**...what we have *done.*”** That’s why God gave us *Commandments*, not *suggestions*! So our *receiving* is directly related to our *doing*. We cannot separate one from the other. Our *rewards* therefore, will be based upon our *activity* – not our *inactivity*. They will not be based upon what we *talked about doing* – but upon what we actually *did*! We will be rewarded on the basis of what we actually *gave financially*, not upon what

we *planned to give* – but never got around to giving. We don't get any "brownie points" with God for our "good intentions." As the old saying goes: "*The road to hell is paved with good intentions!*" So it takes more than "good intentions" to gain a reward from God – it takes "good investments," or "good works," as we will continue to see in this study.

PRINCIPLE:

"It is *good works*, not *good wishes*, that meet needs and please God. It takes *good investments*, not *good intentions*, to win our eternal reward."

But Jesus raised the bar even higher. He said that our judgment would go beyond our *deeds* to our *words* – even to our *idle words*.

"I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for *every careless word they have spoken*. For by your words you will be *acquitted*, and by your words you will be *condemned*" (Matt. 12:36-37).

Sobering words indeed! However, they should also motivate us to reprioritize our lives around the purposes of God so that we would not let *anything* or *anyone* rob us of our *reward*. Note these several Scriptural exhortations to that end:

- **"Do not *throw away your confidence*; it will be *richly rewarded*. You need to *persevere* so that *when you have done the will of God*, you will *receive what He has promised*" (Heb. 10:35-36; c.f. 6:15; 11:26).**

- **“Watch out that you do not *lose what you have worked for*, but that you may be *rewarded fully*” (11 Jn. 8).**

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TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.





YOU AND YOUR INHERITANCE

A very similar – and oftentimes accompanying Biblical word to “**reward**” – is the word “**inheritance**.” The word “**inherit**” denotes *something that has come to you from someone else*, usually your parents. People often speak about “their *inheritance*” – or what they hope to one day *receive* from their parents or grandparents.

Concerning the *inheritance of wealth*, recent studies reveal some staggering financial statistics about the transference of wealth in America:

“Over the next 50 years, between \$41 trillion and \$136 trillion will pass from older to younger generations” (Boston College Social Welfare Research).

That suggests that on an average, \$1 trillion to \$3 trillion in wealth will change hands *every year* for the next half-century! Tragically, much of that wealth will be wasted through the selfish pursuit of earthly pleasure. Satan will “devour” billions of dollars of God’s resources as he seduces these inheritors through carnal pleasures. Like the Prodigal Son wasted his father’s inheritance in the far country (Lk. 15:13), many of these overnight millionaires will also waste their inherited fortunes in the “Vanity Fairs” of this world. Multiplied millions of dollars of God’s money will be selfishly squandered through the “conspicuous consumption” of palatial mansions, extravagant vacation homes, prestigious automobiles, flashy sports cars, luxurious yachts, pricey clothes, costly jewelry, gourmet dining and luxurious living!

And yet, that staggering American wealth that is beginning to change hands is mere “pennies & peanuts” when compared to the wealth that God has given to us as an inheritance through Jesus Christ! So regardless of the area we have been abundantly blessed in, the Lord Jesus clearly taught: **“To whom *much is given, much is required*”** (Lk. 12:48). That’s why we see two very clear exhortations in the New Testament to those who have received *worldly wealth*. The first one from James, the brother of Jesus, is a more negative warning, while the one by Paul is a more positive exhortation. But both are timely words to every person who is rich in the things of this world – which basically includes almost ALL of us Americans:

- **“Now listen, you *rich people*, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have *hoarded wealth* in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. *You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter*”** (James 5:1-6);
- **“Command those who are *rich* in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to *do good*, to**

be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

So let's look at 6 specific verses about our *spiritual inheritance* as Believers...

1. **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”** (Matt. 5:5). To say the very least, that is a staggering statement! It is one thing to be the inheritor of a few million dollars, or an earthly estate. But it is quite another thing to **“...inherit the earth.”** Of course this final transference of wealth by our Heavenly Father will only take place when the Lord Jesus returns to set up His earthly kingdom. At that time, those who have proven faithful in the stewardship of “small things” will be given much more. And when Jesus refers here to the *meek*, He is not talking about the *weak*. The word *meek* basically means “power under control” – which means our lives and assets under the control of Christ. The *weak*, on the other hand, are those whose lives and assets were “out of control” of the Lord Jesus.
2. **“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’”** (Matt. 25:34). These words spoken by Christ summarizes His teaching about the final judgment of all mankind. We clearly see from the context of this verse, that our judgment and reward would be based upon whether we...

- *fed the hungry;*
- *gave water to the thirsty;*
- *clothed the naked;*
- *ministered to the sick;*
- *visited those in prison;*
- *cared for the stranger.*

Our final reward, then, will be specifically based upon our direct involvement in these 6 areas of need. Nothing could be clearer than this in the entire Bible! Jesus made it abundantly clear that the primary means of our receiving our *eternal inheritance* is our *ministry to the needy* in His Name. He said that “...**whatever you *did* for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me**” (Matt. 25:40). So the risen Lord has so identified Himself with the “...**least of His brothers,**” that to do something tangible for one is to do something specific for the other!

We can also see in this verse the *perfect omniscience* and *providential planning* of God. As the “**Alpha and Omega...the First and the Last**” (Rev. 1 17), He knew *all things* before He ever created the world. God’s omniscience obviously included His perfect knowledge of man’s sin and rebellion. Therefore, God made provision and preparation to send His Son into the world to save the world – before He ever created the world! Talk about long-range planning! That’s why Jesus is referred to as the perfect sacrificial “...**Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world**” (Rev. 13:8). And for all those who would accept Jesus, God the Father had also planned an *incredible inheritance*. He was going to give us *His Kingdom* that He had “...**prepared for us since the creation of the world.**” (Matt. 25:34) How sad that

most of us give our lives and resources to build our own little petty, paltry kingdoms – when our Heavenly Father wants to give us His *eternal Kingdom!* As Paul said, God has truly “...**graciously given us *all things***” (Rom. 8:32; c.f. 11:36; I Cor. 8:6; 11:12; Eph. 1:12; Col. 1:16).

Jesus again taught this same truth through another pastoral analogy when He told His Disciples: “**Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom**” (Luke 12:32). Jesus’ careful choice of words here also reminds us of another important truth: *Christians will never be the majority.* We will always be a “**little flock**” – a minority in any country or society. That simply means that we will never *Christianize* the world. However, we are clearly commanded to *evangelize* the world – which means to make Christ a viable option for every human being. And for those who respond, God will one day give them His Kingdom!

In Paul’s farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders, he said this: “**Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified**” (Acts 20:32). It was the assurance of an “**inheritance**” that was Paul’s exhortation for their faithfulness.

3. “...having *believed*, you were marked in Him with a *seal*, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a *deposit*, guaranteeing our *inheritance* until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:13-14).

There are several key words in these verses that we must carefully note: *believe*, *seal* and *deposit*.

- “**...having believed**”: Here again we see that *belief in Christ* is the key that secures for us our *heavenly inheritance*. And authentic *Biblical belief* means more than just intellectual ascent. It means more than just theological understanding of Biblical facts. Belief means far more than just *head knowledge*. It means nothing short of *total submission* to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Belief – like love – must have an object, and the sole object of our belief is Jesus Christ – plus nothing else! Just as there is an exclusivity in His love for us, there must be a corresponding exclusivity in our belief in Him. That’s why the Bible says:

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

- “**...you...were marked in Him with a seal**”: The word here for “**seal**” is the Greek word, *arrabon*. This word reminds us that the Holy Spirit is God’s “down-payment” toward our eternal reward. This word for the Holy Spirit is variously translated as follows:
 - “**...the earnest of our inheritance**” (KJV);
 - “**...pledge of our inheritance**” (NASV);
 - “**...stamp of ownership**” (TEV);

- **“...the *guarantee* that He will give us everything He has promised” (NLT);**

People in earlier days would put down “earnest money” to seal a financial deal. It would not be the full “purchase price,” but a percentage of it. This “earnest money” was the *down payment* which guaranteed that the full amount would eventually be paid. So the Holy Spirit is “God’s *earnest... God’s down payment...God’s first installment* on eternity!

I especially love the more contemporary rendering of this verse from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson:

“It’s in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it...found yourselves home free – *signed, sealed, and delivered* by the Holy Spirit. This *signet* from God is the *first installment* on what’s coming, a reminder that we’ll get everything God has planned for us...”

In modern Greek, this word for “**seal**” is *arrabona*, and literally means an “engagement ring.” So the gift of the Holy Spirit is God’s divine “engagement ring” guaranteeing that a heavenly wedding will one day take place (Matt. 22:1)!

In the same way, over 40 years ago I proposed to my wife, Patt, and asked her to marry me. The moment she said “yes” as a college senior, I gave her a wedding ring. It was a *signet...a seal...a sign...a symbol* of my love for her. It was also a guarantee that I would soon marry her – which I did after our graduation from college! That gold

wedding ring “*sanctified her.*” It “*set her apart*” from all other women as belonging to me. It said to all other men who might desire to date or marry her: “*This woman is spoken for...she is engaged... she belongs to someone else...she is not eligible...she has committed herself in love to someone...she intends to marry J.L. Williams!*”

In the same way, the Lord Jesus sent His Holy Spirit, after His ascension on the Day of Pentecost. He was given as a guarantee...a down payment... an engagement ring to show us that we belonged exclusively to Him. The presence of the Holy Spirit indelibly marked us as His Bride. From that moment on, we were no longer our own – we had been “**...bought with a price**” (I Cor. 6:19; I Pet. 1:18-19).

The primary role of the Holy Spirit then, is to keep us faithful to our Heavenly Bridegroom. He is in our hearts to keep us from committing *spiritual adultery* with the many seductive lovers of this present world. His role is to keep us *faithful* as a “**...pure virgin to Him**” (II Cor. 11:2), until He comes to take us to the “**...place that He has prepared for us**” (Jn. 14:1-3). The Bible calls this celestial event the “**...wedding of the Lamb**” (Rev.19:7). It will be an *eternally glorious time of celebration* during which our Heavenly Bridegroom will lavish His rewards upon His beloved earthly Bride! It will be the time when we fully receive the *eternal inheritance* that the Heavenly Father has prepared for His Son, the Lord Jesus, and for His Bride, the Church.

So through the Gift of the Holy Spirit, God gives us a *100% guarantee*, an *arabon*, an *earnest* that our inheritance is *eternally secure!* To again quote

*The Message: "...we are **signed, sealed and delivered** by the Holy Spirit!"*

It was this understanding that caused the Apostle Paul to pray that 3 great truths would transform the thinking of the Ephesian saints...

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know (1) the hope to which He has called you, (2) the riches of His glorious *inheritance* in the saints, and (3) His incomparable great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms..."
(Eph. 1:18-20).

If you pause to ponder these verses, they will literally "blow your mind!" They teach the profound truth that I have intimated about earlier. As incredulous as it may seem, this verse clearly teaches that *we are God's inheritance!* For years I wrongly read that verse – just like most Christians do. I interpreted it to mean: **"...His glorious inheritance for the saints."** That is certainly a clear Biblical truth as we have already seen. God does indeed have an inheritance *for* the saints. But that's not what this verse says. It speaks about **"...His glorious inheritance *in* the saints."** So while we will one day **"...inherit His Kingdom,"** He will also *inherit us!* That's basically what a **"saint"** is – someone purchased by Christ to be God's exclusive possession. That's why He called the Old Testament saints: **"...My treasure"** (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6). Wonder of wonders, then, we are

that “...**treasure hid in a field**” (Matt. 13:44) that the Lord Jesus gave His all for – to purchase us for God.

So if you are a Christian, you are a “**saint**” that God will *inherit* for all eternity! The sobering question then is this: “*What will He inherit when He inherits you and me?!*”

4. Here is another similar and powerful parallel prayer that Paul prayed for the saints at Colosse. It is another one of the great prayers in the New Testament. But don't just *read it*, thoughtfully *pray it* for yourself. Prayerfully ponder each petition in the prayer:

“...since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may *live a life worthy of the Lord* and may *please Him in every way*; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the *inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light*” (Col. 1:9-12).

Here Paul prays that these young Christians would “...**live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way.**” What does a life like that look like? Just outline the verse into its individual petitions:

- “...**bearing fruit** in every good work...”
- “...**growing** in the knowledge of God...”
- “...**being strengthened** with all power...”
- “...**have great endurance** and **patience**...”
- “...**joyfully giving thanks** to the Father...”

And all of this is to the specific end that we might “...**share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.**” What an exciting motivation to “...**live a life worthy of the Lord!**”

5. “**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving**” (Col. 3:23-24).

Earlier we looked at this incredibly relevant labor-management principle that if applied would transform the market place. Obviously the issue here is not *what we do*, but rather *who we do it for*. Are we *working for the boss...working for ourselves...working for a pay check...working for retirement* – or are we “...**working for the Lord?**” If it is the latter, then we will “...**work at it with all our heart**” – regardless of the nature of the work. If we are truly “...**working for the Lord,**” then we can be absolutely certain that we will one day “...**receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.**” So while your boss may not notice the

quality of your work, God does! And while you may be passed over for a raise or promotion, God has an **“inheritance...as a reward”** waiting for you in heaven. What a great motivation to be the *very best* on our job that we can be!

6. Here is a final great exclamation and affirmation about our eternal inheritance:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us *new birth* into a *living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, and into an *inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade* – kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

This verse clearly separates Christianity from all otherworld religions. It is the difference between a *living faith* and a *dead faith*...between a *living relationship* and a *dead religion*...the difference between *spiritual life* and *spiritual death*! That’s because everything hangs on the current status of the religion’s founder. Let’s have a roll call of those who would sit at the “religious roundtable,” each vying for prominence and preeminence. Let’s ask: “Where are they today?” Buddha is dead. Confucius is dead. Lao Tzu is dead. Abraham is dead. Baha’u’llah is dead. Mohammed is dead. Khrishna, Shiva, Vishnu – and the millions of other Hindu deities, never even lived – they are all mythological. Only Jesus Christ is *alive*! He is firmly rooted in history. Indeed, history is *His-story*! He came, lived, ministered, was crucified, buried – and *raised from the dead*. The skeptic-persecutor-turned-Apostle summarized it this way:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of *first importance*; that Christ *died* for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was *buried*, and He was *raised on the third day* according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than *five hundred* of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living...Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also...” (I Cor. 15:3-8).

The Apostle Paul rightly understood that the legitimacy of Christ’s claims of deity all hung upon the fact of the resurrection. If Jesus was still in the grave, He had no more power than the founders of other religions. But if He had indeed risen from the dead, it was definitely an issue of “...**first importance!**” In fact, when it comes to faith – the resurrection is the *only thing* that is *important!* If I am “betting my life” and “staking my eternity” on a religious leader, I want to make sure he is *alive* and not *dead!* The *empty tomb* is proof! The testimony of the 500 plus witnesses is irrefutable. The evidence for the resurrection of Christ is more than sufficient to convince even the greatest skeptic who will take time to consider the facts.

Therefore, since Jesus Christ alone rose from the dead by the power of God, only He can give a “**living hope.**” If our *hope* is in a dead person, it is not a “**living hope**” but a “*dead hope*” – which is *no hope at all!* Only the Christian has a “...**living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**” Therefore, to be “...**separate**

from Christ” is to be “**...without hope and without God in the world”** (Eph. 2:12).

All of the many religions that spring out of the east make mystical promises of *nirvana* or “eternal bliss,” through *reincarnation* – or an endless cycle of rebirths. Other religions offer some kind of *reformation* through personal discipline, self-effort or good works. But unlike the Buddhists, the Muslims and the Hindus, we have a “**...new birth into a living hope.**” And the *inheritance* He has for us is as eternal as He is! That’s why “**...it can never perish, spoil or fade.**” That’s an *inheritance* that you can “bet your life on!”

It was this motivation of *reward* that kept Christ going in the face of difficulty, persecution and rejection. It kept Him faithful to the end. This certainty of *reward* held Him steadfast up *to the cross* – and *through the cross*. That’s why Hebrews says of Jesus: “**...for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame**” (Heb. 12:2). By faith, Jesus saw the *reward* that lay ahead on the other side of the cross. And as incredulous as it sounds, the reward He was focused on was *you and me!* As Hebrews says: “**In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering**” (Heb. 2:10). That’s why an old Gospel song says: “*When He was on the cross, you were on His mind!*” It was to “**...bring you to glory**” that caused Jesus to endure the *shame* and *pain* of the cross!

Suffering, then, is one of the means of reward. It is not *suffering for suffering sake* – that is masochism. It is suffering for the sake of a cause

greater than oneself. It is *temporal suffering* that leads to an *eternal reward*.

Since the “**author of our salvation**” *suffered* for us, we should fully *surrender* to Him – even if it causes us suffering! Only then will we fully receive our *inheritance*...our *birthright*...our *reward*!

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.



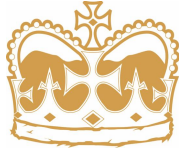
MEANS OF REWARD

Now that we have seen for certain from the Bible that God is indeed the *Divine Rewarder*, what are some of the means through which we can be certain of gaining a *heavenly reward*? How can we be sure of an *eternal inheritance*? How can we live our lives in such a way that we can be *absolutely certain* that at the judgment we will hear Him say: **“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful...Come and share Your Master’s happiness...Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”** (Matt. 25:21; 34)?

Fortunately, the Bible is very clear about this. We are not left in the dark to speculate about the means to a heavenly reward. At this point we are given **“...a clear word of prophecy”** (II Pet. 1:19). So let’s look at the primary things we can *do* in order to insure our reward.

As I have thoroughly studied this subject in the Bible, I see *6 major ways* that we can *secure our inheritance* and *win our reward*. These 6 areas are where we are to wisely invest our *time, talent, treasure* and *technology* – for *God’s glory...for our good...and for the good of others*. And they are all weighty “W” words for easy remembrance and teaching.

As we look at these 6 areas we are to invest our lives in, I will give some personal commentary, but I will also saturate you with God’s Word, and let the Holy Spirit lead you into the liberty that will come from the application of these truths to your life.



WORSHIP

There is absolutely no substitute for *worship* in the life of the Believer. As we grow in the Lord, worship become the very air that we breathe. Worship is the spirit that we live in. It is not something that we *do* for an hour on Sunday morning at church. It is far more than just sitting through a “worship service” from 11:00 AM – 12:00 on Sunday morning. Worship increasingly becomes our *life-style*.

However, as essential as worship is, it is never clearly defined in the Bible. Perhaps that’s because *worship is different things to different people*. You find explanations and examples of worship, but never a precise inclusive definition. This is because the definition of worship depends on the individual person...the cultural context... and the attitude of the heart. We are told by Jesus, as we will see further in a moment, that our worship of God must be “...in **spirit and in truth**” (Jn. 4:24). But beyond those broad guidelines, worship is not specifically defined in the Bible. Therefore, there is no divinely revealed “Order of Worship” specifically spelled out in either the Old or New Testament. There is not a “Church Bulletin” in the Bible with a divinely sanctioned liturgy clearly spelled out.

However, the closest thing to an “Order of Service” is found in one of Paul’s letters to the Church at Corinth. It is toward the end of 3 long chapters that deal with the use and abuse of spiritual gifts in worship.

“When you *come together*, everyone has a *hymn*, or a *word of instruction*, a *revelation*, a *tongue* or an *interpretation*. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church...God is not a God of disorder but

of peace...Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (I Cor. 14:26, 33, 40).

Please notice several important things in this passage. First, this is a passage that deals with public, collective worship. Paul begins by saying: **“When you come together...”** Secondly, it is an admonition that all Believers are to be *participants*, not *spectators*: **“When you come together, everyone...”** is to be *prepared* and *involved*. Thirdly, there was a *diversity* of natural talents and spiritual gifts being manifest: **“...everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.”** So unlike most worship in American churches, everyone in the New Testament Church was to be actively involved in worship. It was not a performance for a few “religious professionals.” It was a Body ministry participated in by *everyone* – but **“...properly and in orderly manner”** (NASV).

Previously Paul had enumerated the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Christ has made available to His Body the Church. And the “gift mix” is as different and unique as there are individual Christians. Just as we all have unique fingerprints, voiceprints, DNA – we all have different combinations of *natural talents* and *spiritual gifts*. Here are some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Paul names in this particular passage: **“wisdom...knowledge...faith...healing...miracles...prophecy...discernment...tongues...interpretation of tongues...helping...administration”** (I Cor. 12:7-10, 28). In Romans he gives another similar list of spiritual gifts: **“prophesying...serving...teaching...encouraging...giving...leading...mercy...hospitality”** (12:6-13). And all of these

gifts are given “...for the common good.” They are given for “...the strengthening of the Church.”³

So there is to be “unity in diversity” within the Believers – just as there is unity in the Trinity. That’s why Paul laid down these foundational principles before he discussed the particular gifts of the Holy Spirit: He set forth the Trinity as the model of “unity in diversity.”

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men”

(I Cor. 12: 4-6).

Here we see the Triune God at work in the distribution and manifestation of spiritual gifts. Paul says the “**Spirit**” is the one who gives the “**different kinds of gifts.**” It is the “**Lord**” who calls His people to “**different kinds of service.**” And it is “**God**” who produces “**different kinds of working.**” In the Body of Believers, just as in the Trinity, there is to be a temporal and eternal “unity in diversity.”

So the gifts of the Holy Spirit are primarily for two things: *worship* and *work*. And while our *worship* is to *glorify God*, our *work* is to *edify man*.

PRINCIPLE:

“Spiritual gifts are for *worship* which is to *glorify God*; and for *work* which is to *edify man*.”

Therefore, our worship can be “charismatic” or “calm.” It can be *ordered and traditional*, or *free and spontaneous*.

³ For a more detailed study of this subject refer to my book on *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit*.

And both forms – and everything in between – can be right and acceptable before God! God looks at the *motivation of the heart* more than the *manifestation of the hands!* He is more concerned with the *posture of the heart* than the *portion of the body.*

But we do know for sure that worship can be unacceptable to God if it is more of a *performance for man* than a *heart adoration of God.* That's why Jesus gave this warning to His disciples of old:

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven...And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; *they have received their reward in full...*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; *they have received their reward in full*” (Matt. 6:1, 5, 16).

We can receive lots of rewards on earth by doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Tragically, there are still many “religious hypocrites” today who worship in order to be seen by men. They are not focused on God – they are focused on men. They are not concerned about what God thinks, but about what men think. Their attention is not on God – but upon the men and women sitting around them. What God said of His people of old could also be said about millions sitting in church pews today:

“These people come near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but *their*

hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men” (Isa. 29:13).

As we saw earlier, both *faith* and *fervor* are spiritual prerequisites for authentic worship. Look at just two examples:

- **“You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with your whole heart”** (Jer. 29:13). That’s spiritual *fervor*!
- **“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”** (Heb. 11:6).

Faith then, is essential in everything – but especially in worship. How do we diligently seek Him? Through the disciplines of the Christian life: prayer...Bible study... meditation...fasting... giving...baptism...Holy Communion.

Another exhortation to collective worship is found in the book of Hebrews. There we are told:

“...draw near to worship...And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more are you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:1, 24-25).

There are millions of Christians who are **“...giving up meeting together”** as they try to substitute “media Christianity” for the local church. They have become what I call “celluloid Christians,” rather than active church

members. They try and get their weekly dose of spirituality by sitting in front of a TV set – watching some tele-evangelist, prosperity preacher, or faith healer. But in this isolated context, there is no authentic flesh-and-blood fellowship...no personal encouragement...no accountability...no “...**spurring one another on to love and good deeds.**” (Heb. 10:24). There is little or no divine-human encounter. These isolated Christians have become “solo spectator saints.” Beloved, that is not authentic worship! Certainly we can experience God by ourselves. Certainly we can worship God when we are alone. But most authentic spiritual worship takes place in the *fellowship of others*. There is an “us” and a “we” in most true Biblical worship.

We can see this *plurality of worship* in these familiar words of the Lord Jesus:

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the *true worshipers* (plural) *will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they* (plural) *are the kind of worshipers* (plural) *the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers* (plural) *must worship in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:23-24).

It is important to note that this is one of the few places in the Bible where it specifically says that God is *seeking* something. Or more correctly put, God is seeking *someone*. Jesus said that God was seeking “**true worshipers.**” Who, then, is that kind of “**true worshiper?**” We are simply told it is any person who “**...worships the Father in spirit and truth.**” There are at least 3 simple truths about worship revealed here:

- First, worship must be directed to the “**Father.**” This reminds us that *we are all worshipers*. Every person worships *something* or *someone*. We may

worship ourselves...our spouse...our children... our grandchildren...our job...our position...our possessions...our religion...our tradition, etc. But we are all worshipers. However, all worship that is not sharply focused on the “**Father**” is “false worship.” Jesus said God was seeking “**true worshipers**” who would “**...worship the Father.**” This is not the worship of any god. It is not a puja to some idol or goddess. This is none other than the worship of the “**...God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Eph. 1:2). That means that the worship of any other deity or any other being is false worship.

- Secondly, Jesus said our worship was to be “**...in spirit.**” That means that authentic worship arises out of the *spirit of man* until it communes with the *Spirit of God*. Worship is our heart connecting with His heart... our mind meditating on His thoughts... our wills submitted to His will. It is lavishing our love and adoration upon the divine “Lover of our soul.” True worship, then, is a matter of the *spirit*, not of the *flesh*. Much therefore that masquerades as “Christian worship” today is very superficial and truncated. It is oftentimes fleshly and carnal. It does not arise out of the *spirit*. Most of our worship is carefully scripted and orchestrated. It is precisely timed and measured. It is ordered and controlled by a church bulletin. It is precise and predictable. In the end, it is largely *man-directed worship* and *man-centered worship* – rather than *God-centered worship* directed by the Holy Spirit.
- Thirdly, Jesus said our worship was to be “**...in truth.**” This means that true worship must flow out of the *Word of God* through the *Spirit of God*. That’s why Jesus prayed for His disciples on the night before He went to the cross: “**Sanctify them**

in truth, *Thy word is truth*” (Jn. 17:17). It is only the *Word of God* that gives us a revelation of the *nature of God* so that we can worship Him in accordance with who He is. Our worship must be consistent with His nature and character. And He has revealed to us that He is “**Abba, Father**” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) to those who know Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we can see a *Biblical balance* in authentic worship. It is a balanced blend of “**spirit**” and “**truth.**” Unfortunately, Christians tend to vacillate from one extreme to the other. Part of the Body of Christ tends to emphasize the “**spirit**” in worship, and are more free, spontaneous and demonstrative. On the other side are those Christians who emphasize the “**truth**” dimension of worship, with a strong emphasis on the Word, doctrine and theology. But authentic Biblical worship is a balance of both “**spirit and truth.**”

PRINCIPLE:

“Authentic Biblical worship is a balance of *order* and *arbor*, *love* and *liturgy.*”

In church services, we often hear the pastor say this about another aspect of worship: “*Let us now worship the Lord with the giving of our tithes and offerings.*” That is to remind us that *giving is an act of worship*. And yet for many professing Christians, it is the most painful part of the service! As a result, it is an act of worship that many do not participate in at all. When the offering plate comes by, they put nothing in. Or if they do put something in, it is usually only a *token* – not a *tithe*. In reality, most Christians do not even “tip God.” While they would normally give a 10% or 15% tip to a waitress in a restaurant, they do not come near the Biblical *tithe* in their giving to God. Studies have revealed the following appalling facts:

- Only 3% - 5% of professing Christians tithe;
- Only 12% of evangelical Christians tithe;
- The average tithe is a paltry 2.5% - 3%;
- 37% of evangelical Christians do not give *anything* to the Lord!

Those are appalling statistics indeed! The lack of giving among Christians has caused the majority to become what I call “spiritual freeloaders!” They are “welfare Christians” who live off the tithes and offerings of others! They are the ones who “...**rob God**” (Mal. 3:10). Certainly they will forfeit their heavenly reward because of their stingy, miserly heart!

You see, you always give yourself in some tangible way to whatever or whomever you worship. Therefore, we give our “tithes and offerings” to God as a tangible way of saying that we truly love Him...worship Him...deem Him worthy of praise...give Him the honor and glory He deserves. Our finances are simply physical tokens of our spiritual commitment to Him. *Our money is a material way of expressing a spiritual reality.* It is a tangible way of acknowledging that He is the *Owner* and we are but the *stewards*.

But we must remember as we give our “tithes and offerings,” that *God does not need our money.* That’s because *God does not need anything.* He is the all-sufficient God who has no needs. So we give, not because He needs our money, but because *we need His blessing.* We need both the temporal and eternal rewards that will come as a result of our giving. We Americans especially need the freedom from bondage to money and materialism that *only giving* helps break! It reminds us that He is our heart’s treasure. That’s why

Jesus said: **“Where your *treasure* is, there your *heart* will be also”** (Matt. 6:21).

Let me give you a personal example. Until very recently, I never cared about the stock market. The primary reason is that I never had any excess money to invest there. So it was a waste of time for me to follow the status of various stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange. But after Patt’s mother died, we inherited some stock from her. Suddenly, I had a keen interest in the stock market! I was constantly interested in whether our little stock portfolio had stayed the same...increased in worth...or decreased in value! I now had a “heart interest” in the stock market because I now had some “treasure” there!

In the final analysis, we always put our treasure where our heart is. *Our treasure and our heart are inseparably connected.* For example:

- If your heart is in your business, you will continue to invest in it;
- If your heart is in the stock market, you will increasingly invest in it;
- If your heart is in your home, you will invest your treasure there;
- If your heart is in cars, you will invest your money in fancy automobiles;
- If your heart is in your boat, you will sink more and more money in it;
- If your heart is in golf, you will spend more and more of your money on playing golf and on golf supplies, etc.

PRINCIPLE:

**“Our treasure and our heart are inseparably connected.
Where we invest our treasure reveals the true love of our heart.”**

But if God is your treasure, then your heart will be where His heart is. As a result, you will increasingly invest your *time, talent, treasure* and *technology* where He has invested His Son – and where He continues to invest His Holy Spirit. Therefore, if God is your heart’s treasure, you will faithfully...

- Give your tithes and offerings to the church;
- Give to the cause of global missions;
- Give to meet the needs of the poor, the aliens, the widows and orphans;
- Invest your treasure to “...**feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty, minister to the sick, visit those in prison, give hospitality to the stranger**” (Matt. 25:37-39).

Giving then, is another expression of authentic worship of the “...**Father in spirit and truth.**” Also, our worship through the giving of our “tithes and offerings” is one of the ways that we *wean our hearts from materialism*, and *fix our treasure on God*. Giving is one of the first steps in winning the war against *greed* – which is *idolatry* (Col 3:5).

A final and very familiar scripture about worship are the words of Paul to the Christians in Rome:

“...offer your bodies as *living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God – this is your *spiritual act of worship*” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Paul wrote this as a Jewish convert to Jesus Christ as God’s Messiah. As an orthodox Jew, Paul fully understood the Jewish sacrificial system. Through out his life, he had seen thousands of animals slain as sacrifices in the Temple. As a rabbi, he had no doubt carried out many

animal sacrifices to atone for his own sins, and for the sins of other Jewish worshipers. So he was very familiar with living animals which became *dead sacrifices* on the altar as their life's blood was poured out as a substitute for man's sin. Paul clearly understood that the sacrificial system was the very heart of the Jewish religion and Jewish worship.

However, through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, he received a newer understanding about worship. He realized that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross had fulfilled all of the sacrificial system of Judaism. All of the millions of animal sacrifices down through the centuries pointed toward Christ as the final perfect sacrifice **"...once for all"** (Heb. 10:10). Therefore, Paul reminds us that God wants a different kind of sacrifice. Rather than desiring more *dead sacrifices* on the altar, God wants us to be **"living sacrifices"** for Him in all that we do. While Christ certainly wants us to be willing to *die for Him* if necessary, He is much more interested in us *living for Him!* He wants our *altar of worship* to be our lives... our marriage...our homes...our job...our work...our play – our *all!* Anything short of that is "faking it." Anything less than that is make-believe worship. It is a spiritual masquerade...a religious charade...a liturgical cover-up for authentic **"...worship in spirit and truth."**

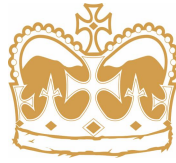
And there is a logical corollary here. If we are to be **"living sacrifices,"** we can only do that through our *earthly body*. So everything we do in our bodies either **"pleases God"** or displeases Him. It either *glorifies God* or *dishonors Him*. All that we do either brings Him *praise* and *pleasure*, or brings *grief* and *pain* to His holy heart of love. So when we do what is **"pleasing to God,"** it is an **"...act of worship."** In fact, it is the only authentic **"...spiritual act of worship"** that God accepts. Anything else is unacceptable to Him and unsatisfying to us.

And in the final analysis, only this kind of *worship* results in *reward*. The reward of *fellowship* with Him now – and ultimately for all eternity!

That brings us to our next means of *reward*, which is very closely connected to *worship*.

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TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.





WORD

The more you immerse your life in the Word, the greater you will be motivated to live for the rewards that God wants to give you. Notice these words by the Psalmist:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is Your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward”
(Ps. 19:7-11).

Notice that the verse places the emphasis on **“keeping”** the Word of God – not just **“knowing”** the Word.

In a parallel teaching in the New Testament, Jesus said to a group of Jews who had believed in Him: **“If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”** (John 8:31-32). So Jesus taught that it was not just “knowing truth” that sets a person free, it is “doing truth” that brings spiritual liberation. There are millions of Christians who “know truth” intellectually and theologically

– but not existentially. As a result, they still live in spiritual and emotional bondage. While they “know truth” *theoretically* in their heads, they do not “know truth” *experientially* in their hearts. And, it is the *experience of truth that sets you free*, not just the *knowledge of truth*. The *acquisition of truth* is foundational because a person cannot apply a truth that they have not heard of. But when it comes to truth, we must always move from the *acquisition of truth* to the *application of truth*. So it is always necessary to move from *information* to *application* before we can experience the liberty of Christ concerning His promises. Then part of the immediate *reward* for obeying and applying God’s word is the *spiritual security, mental tranquility and emotional stability* He gives us.

PRINCIPLE:

“It is not the acquisition of truth, but the application of truth, that sets you free spiritually.”

As we saw earlier in this study, the Book of Proverbs is filled with Hebrew parallelisms where two “parallel truths” are laid down side-by-side in the same sentence. Sometime they are parallels of *similarity*, and sometimes parallels of *dis-similarity* or *contrast*. One Proverb of contrast clearly expresses this matter of *reward* through obeying God’s Word:

“He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded”
(Prov. 13:13).

Here you can see the clear contrast between one who “**scorns instruction**” and one who “**respects a command.**” Both are *rewarded*. But while the scorner has to “**pay**” for his disobedience; the one who shows “**respect is rewarded.**”

Tragically, many Christians and non-Christians alike are in the “*pay-back period*” of their disobedience. They are *reaping what they sowed* – and the harvest is anything but rewarding!

But there is another similar Proverb that is totally a positive parallelism:

**“Whoever gives heed to instruction *prosper*s,
and *blessed* is he who trusts in the Lord”**
(Prov. 16:20).

Here then is a Proverb that promises *prosperity* and *blessing* as a reward for *obedience*. And if there is anything that most people are interested in, it is *prosperity* and *blessings*! As we will continue to see in this study, there is nothing wrong with *possessions*, *prosperity*, *blessings* and *benefits* – as long as they come from God and are under His control. But when we begin to cross that materialistic line of *greed* and “worship things,” then we are in trouble spiritually. Then it is our *greed* – and not God’s *glory* – that motivates us. And Paul clearly reminds us that *greed* is nothing short of *idolatry*, or the “worship of things” (Col. 3:5). That’s a serious situation that God calls an abomination!

However, when we *possess our possessions* rather than allowing them to *possess us*, our prosperity will be a tool for God’s glory as we use it to minister to others.

So the Bible clearly teaches that God wants us to *prosper*, but in the right way. He wants us to prosper through *obedience* rather than through *opportunism*. And God always wants to *prosper us spiritually before He prospers us materially*. In other words, He wants to give us a “wealth from the Word” rather than a “wealth from the world.” That’s why *righteousness* must always precede *riches*.

With that truth in mind, let me share a few cardinal verses on *prosperity* through the Word of God:

- (God's promise to the Children of Israel): **“Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may *prosper* in everything you do”** (Deut. 29:9);
- (God's words of exhortation to Joshua): **“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be *successful* wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to *do* everything written in it. Then you will be *prosperous and successful*”** (Josh. 1:7-8);
- (God's promise to David): **“Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in *prosperity*, and his descendants will inherit the land”** (Ps. 25:12-13);
- (Solomon's admonition to his son): **“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you *prosperity*”** (Prov. 3:2);
- (John's exhortation to his beloved friend, Gaius): **“Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may *prosper* and be in good health, just as your soul *prosper*s”** (III Jn. 2; NASV).

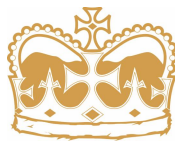
Our God, who is the *Divine Rewarder*, does indeed want His children to prosper! However, He wants us to prosper from the “inside out.” He wants us to *prosper spiritually* through obedience to the Word before we *prosper materially* through our work in the world. He wants us to become “rich in spirit” before we try and become “rich in materialism.” He knows that *wealth through the Word is eternal* while *wealth through the world is temporal*. Since God values *righteousness* far more than *riches*, He wants us to do the same.

PRINCIPLE:

***“Wealth through the Word is eternal;
while wealth through the world is temporal.
Therefore, true wealth is measured by righteousness
rather than by riches.”***

So obedience to God’s Word has its own reward, both for this life and the life to come. But as we will see again later, when God is the source of our wealth and prosperity, “...**He adds no trouble to it**” (Prov. 10:22).

In addition to *worship* and the *word*, another means to a life of reward is our *witness* for Christ. So let’s now turn to that source of reward.



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are needed to see this picture.



WITNESS

On one occasion Jesus spoke to His disciples about the cost of authentic discipleship. In that same context, He reminded them both about the *cost* and *reward* of following Him:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after Me, he must *deny himself* and *take up his cross* and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then *He will reward each person according to what he has done*” (Matt. 16:24-27).

The *cost* was nothing less than the *cross*. Therefore, to live one’s life as a faithful witness of Christ is *costly*. Contrary to what a lot of Christians would like to believe, there is no “bargain basement” discipleship. As the German theologian, Bonhoeffer, said: “God does not offer *cheap grace!*” He does not have two levels of discipleship – one for the committed, and one for those looking for “easy-believism” and “bargain-basement salvation.” However, God does promise an eternal *reward* for faithfulness.

There was a rich young man who thought he wanted to follow Christ. But after he heard Christ say that he must **“...go, sell your possessions and give to the poor...he went away sad, because he had great wealth”** (Matt. 20:21-22). This caused Peter and the other disciples to examine the level of their own discipleship. And in typical fashion, Peter took the lead and blurted out his concerns to Christ:

“We have left everything to follow You! What then will there be for us?’ Jesus said to them, **‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for My sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first’** (Matt. 19:27-30; c.f. Mk. 10:29-30).

Note first of all that Jesus did not verbally chastise Peter for asking this. He did not accuse him of being selfish or self-seeking in asking such a question. There was not a hint of rebuke in Christ’s response to Peter. He perfectly understood that this was a normal and natural concern. So Jesus assured Peter of his reward for faithful service – both in time and eternity.

Doctor Luke’s account of this conversation between Peter and Jesus makes the same promise:

“I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to

receive many times as much *in this age* and, *in the age to come*, eternal life” (Lk. 18:29-30).

When did Jesus say they would be rewarded? He said it would be a two-fold reward. First, there would be rewards “**...in this age**” as well as “**...in the age to come.**” The final reward would take place at the time Jesus called “**...the *renewal* of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne...**”

I can certainly testify to the truth of that promise in my own life. The ministry God has called me to has often caused me to be away from “**home...wife...brothers...parents...children...fields.**” However, God has rewarded me abundantly with other homes all over the world that are always open to me. And while I have often had to be away from my wife, children and grandchildren, God has given me a worldwide family of new brothers, sisters, mothers and children – from many countries, cultures, races, tribes and castes. And since I no longer have the time to plant and tend to my own garden, God has allowed me to eat from the fields of the family of God worldwide! Truly I am a blessed and abundantly rewarded member of the Body of Christ. He has certainly blessed me “**abundantly above all I could ask or think**” (Eph. 3:20)! And on top of all of that, I have the assurance of “**eternal life...in the age to come!**” Talk about a “win-win situation” for both time and eternity! You just cannot improve upon God’s plan. The benefits are literally “out of this world!”

And you can also see in these words by the Lord Jesus that the rewards will be perfectly proportioned to each individual. That’s part of what He meant when He said: “**Many who are *first* will be *last*, and the *last* first.**”

But Jesus also taught that our rewards would not just be because of the “big things” we have done for Him in this

life. He said that no expression of love...no act of mercy...no word of kindness would go unnoticed or unrewarded. Even something so small and simple as giving someone a cool drink of water in His Name would be rewarded:

“Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in Your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’ ‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in My name can in the next moment say anything bad about Me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, *anyone who gives you a cup of water in My name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward*” (Mark 9:38-41).

So it is not just giving a **“cup of water”** to someone who is thirsty that will result in an eternal reward. It is giving a **“cup of water in Christ’s name”** that results in a heavenly reward. That’s because as we give *physical water* in the Name of Christ, the recipient may also come to know about that **“living water”** who alone can quench the deepest thirsts of the human soul! It is only the Lord Jesus then, who can become for a spiritually thirsty person that **“...spring of water welling up to eternal life”** (Jn. 4:14). It is only the Lord Jesus who could say:

“If anyone is *thirsty*, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever *believes* in Me, as the Scriptures has said, ‘*streams of living water will flow from within him*” (Jn. 7:37-38).

So whenever we are quenching the thirst of the needy, we must always try and use the *water* as a *witness*. We use the gift of *physical water* as a witness to the gift of *spiritual water*. As Christians, we do not want to just quench people’s thirst who are on the way to hell! We

want to give *physical water* “**in Christ’s name**” so that the recipient will ultimately tap into that “**...spring of water welling up to eternal life.**” Only then will the needy be rewarded with the gift of *physical life* through the “**cup of water**” we give them to drink when they are “dying of thirst.” And the giver will be rewarded in heaven for this act of mercy done “**in Christ’s name.**”

Another similar exhortation by Christ about our ministry to the poor and needy is from in Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount:

“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys” (Luke 12:33).

In the preceding verses, Jesus has been exhorting His disciples about worrying.

“Do not set your heart on what you will eat and drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows you need them. But seek His kingdom and these things will be given to you as well.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor...”
(Luke 12:32).

Jesus reminded His disciples of their coming inestimable inheritance. He assured them that one day God would “**...give you the kingdom.**” What an incredible inheritance! Therefore, on the basis of what they were going to inherit, Jesus told them to hold the material

things of this life very loosely! Only then would they be able to **“Provide purses for themselves that would not wear out, treasures in heaven that will not be exhausted...”** (Lk.12:33).

The Apostle Paul further emphasized the individuality of our rewards as Christians. Even though we will all be rewarded with the *Kingdom of Heaven*, within that realm there will be great individuality of reward. That’s because we have different callings...different natural talents...different gifts of the Spirit...different spheres of influence...different assignments in His vineyard. But while the ministries may differ, every faithful servant will be rewarded by God:

“The man who *plants* and the man who *waters* have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor” (I Cor. 3:8).

Note once again that it is **“labor”** that brings a reward – not *lukewarmness* or *laziness!* Paul assures us that *no work for the Lord would go unrewarded* – whether it is one of sowing...weeding...fertilizing...preaching...teaching...parenting...helping...building...doing medical work – *NO work done in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ will go unrewarded.*

As we all know from the New Testament, Paul’s primary work was preaching. That’s why he said:

“If I preach voluntarily, I have a *reward*; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. *What then is my reward?* Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it” (I Cor. 9:17-18).

These words of Paul are simply an echo of the exhortation of Christ when He first sent out the Twelve: **“Freely you have received, freely give”** (Matt. 10:8).

But in addition to *worship*, the *Word* and *witnessing*, there is a fourth major way we win our reward from the Lord Jesus. Let’s now look at it.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.





WORKS

According to the Bible, one of the most significant ways that we are rewarded is on the basis of our *good works*. However, we are saved solely upon the basis of Christ's all-sufficient vicarious *finished work* on the cross. We can neither *take away* nor *add to*, His *perfect work of redemption* on our behalf. However, we are rewarded on the basis of our **"good works"** and **"good deeds"** done for His honor and glory – in response to His completed work for us. Every knowledgeable Christian then, knows that we are not saved *by our good works*. No amount of **"good work"** can justify us before a holy God! The Bible is very clear in reminding us:

"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isa. 64:6).

Outside of Christ, all of our **"...good works are like filthy rags."** And the more the good works, the bigger the pile of **"filthy rags!"** That's pretty sobering to our sense of "works righteousness!" Therefore, the only 'work' we can do is to *appropriate by faith the finished work of Christ on the cross in our behalf*.

This fact is illustrated by an incident in the life of Christ. One day a crowd of people asked Jesus: **"What must we do to do the works God requires?"** He responded: **"The work of God is this; to believe in the one He has**

sent” (Jn. 6:28-29). Therefore, the only ‘work’ that can save us is to **“believe.”** That means that we fully trust in Christ as our Lord and Savior, and appropriate by faith His *death, burial and resurrection* for our justification, sanctification and glorification. It is *His work* alone that saves us and imputes to us His *righteousness*. The word “righteous” means that we are now *“right with God”* rather than *“wrong with God.”* On the basis of our faith, *all that Jesus is* – is *imputed to us*. That’s what I call the “great exchange” – *all that He is in exchange for all that I am!* And all of this is *done by God in our behalf*. Or to quote Paul:

“It is because of Him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’” (I Cor. 2:30-31).

So when it comes to the matter of our salvation, we can never boast in our **“good works”** – but only in *Christ’s perfect work on the cross for us!* So we Christians can never “boast in ourselves” or in the merits of our “good work.” We can only **“...boast in the Lord.”** Paul further expressed it this way:

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”
(Gal. 6:14)

However, even though we are not *saved BY our good works*, we are *saved FOR good works*. This is not *work’s righteousness*, but rather *work’s reward*. Understanding this principle, James, the brother of Jesus, asked this question: **“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith**

save him?” James then answers his own question by giving a practical example of *faith in action*:

“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action* (good works), *is dead...Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do”* (Ja. 2:14-18).

These verses by James have often been summarized this way: *“We are saved by faith alone. However, saving faith is never alone – it is always accompanied by good deeds.”*

PRINCIPLE:

***“We are saved by faith alone.
But saving faith is never alone,
it is always accompanied by good works.”***

Because of the truth of this foundational spiritual principle, the Bible is filled with exhortations and motivations to us Christians about living a life filled with **“good works.”** And those **“good works”** are to be done for *man’s good* and for *God’s glory*.

Let’s look then at some of the major verses about **“good works”** and the *spiritual rewards* that will result because of them. It is fitting that we begin with a familiar teaching by Christ:

“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your *good deeds* and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Contrary to what some people wrongly believe, we are not to do all of our **“good works”** in secret. We are not to always be an “anonymous worker” or a “secret giver.” In some cases, we are not to be “closet Christians” who always do their good deeds in secrecy and anonymity. In some cases that would be **“...hiding our light under a bowl”** (Matt. 5:15). So at least some of our works must be of a *visible* nature. Our good deeds must be able to be seen by men as a witness. To some degree they must be an outward visible demonstration – just like the Incarnation of Christ was. That’s why John could write this about Jesus:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen* with our eyes, which we have *looked at* and our *hands have touched* – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life *appeared*, we have *seen it* and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (1 Jn. 1:1-2).

People then, often need to be able to **“...see your good deeds”** so that they will in turn **“...praise your Father in heaven.”** It is obviously implied here that along with our “good works” there is also a “good word.” There is some kind of witness or testimony about the fact that God is the one who is both motivating and enabling the good things that we do. That takes us back to the verse we looked at earlier about **“...giving a cup of cold water *in Christ’s name*”** (Mk. 9:41). We always seek to make it clear that the good things we do are because of Him – not because of us. Therefore, the good works that we do are not to *draw attention to us*, but to *deflect attention to God*. Our good deeds are not so that we will get the glory, but so that people will **“...praise our Father in heaven.”**

Jesus, then, clearly identifies Himself with our good works when done for His honor and glory and for the good of others.

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives the one who sent Me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a *prophet’s reward*, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a *righteous man’s reward*. 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. 10:40-42).

These are powerful verses about the *oneness of nature* between Christ and God, and the *spiritual oneness* of believers with Christ. *Just as God was totally identified with Jesus*, in the same way *Jesus is totally identified with His people*. Jesus was one with the Father to the degree that to see Him was to see God (Jn. 14:6-11)...to believe in Him was to believe in the Father...to accept Him was to accept the one true and living God.

In the same way, Jesus said that to receive a prophet – in this case the disciples being sent out by Him – was to receive a **“...prophet’s reward.”** Likewise, to receive a righteous man was to receive a **“...righteous man’s reward.”** In other words, to receive one of God’s workers is to receive God Himself...to receive a Christian is to receive Christ Himself...to do some good deed for one of His children, was to do it for Christ. To give even a **“cup of cold water”** to the smallest and least of Christ’s disciples – was to *do it unto Him*. Therefore, that person **“...will certainly not lose his reward.”**

Jesus also gave a very instructive parable about how we should be spending our time between His First Coming and His Second Coming.

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to *give them their food at the proper time*? It will be *good* for that servant whose master finds him *doing so* when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions” (Matt. 24:42-47).

Jesus used this parable to summarize one of His major teachings about the “End of the Age” and His Second Coming. He exhorted His disciples to **“keep watch”** so they would not be caught off guard...not be found sleeping...not be found on leave from their assigned work. And what was the “good work” they were suppose to be found doing? It was that they be found faithfully **“...giving food at the proper time.”** This was the same thing that Jesus thrice told Peter after His resurrection when He said: **“Feed my sheep”** (Jn. 21:15-17). So it is the primary calling of Christian leaders to *feed* the people of God.

This is a responsibility that I constantly remind national pastors and Christian leaders of around the world. I emphasize to them that their highest calling and first priority is to consistently *feed the family of God on the*

Word of God for the glory of God! If they faithfully do that, God will reward them at the Second Coming of Christ with exceeding great rewards. God will “...**put them in charge of all His possessions.**” What an incredible *reward!* Can you imagine being “**put in charge**” of all of God’s possessions?! That my friend is a *reward* worth *working for!*

PRINCIPLE:

“A pastor or teacher’s highest calling is to fully give themselves to the feeding of the family of God on the Word of God for the glory of God.”

When it comes to doing good works, there is another very instructive incident in the life and ministry of Christ. He went to the Pool of Bethesda where there was a multitude of sick people described as the “...**blind, the lame and the paralyzed**” (Jn. 5:3). Jesus walked into this mass of broken and hurting humanity – and went directly to a man who had been a crippled invalid for 38 years. After a brief conversation about his sickness, Jesus healed the man. Immediately the man went away rejoicing. However, the religious leaders were indignant because Jesus had done this “good work” on the Sabbath. In their eyes, He was a lawbreaker! After a time of interrogating the healed man, his parents and Jesus Himself, the Lord said this about His working on the Sabbath:

“My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working” (John 5:1, 17).

Here is another one of the great distinguishing marks between Christianity and the other religions of the world. These words spoken by the Lord Jesus clearly separate Him from all of the other founders of world religions. *Only Christianity reveals a God who is actively at work in His universe for man’s benefit.* Jesus clearly revealed to us the awesome fact that the true and living God is not aloof

and transcendent from His creation. He is not some kind of “unmoved and uninvolved” prime mover in the universe. He is not the deistic God who has created and wound up the universe – and is now sitting back dispassionately as it runs down into oblivion! Nor is He the mystical and meditating Buddha – sitting in the lotus position deep in introspective contemplation – oblivious to the world around him.

“No!” Jesus said, *“My Father is at work – and because He is working, I am working! I cannot stop working until My Father stops working – whether on the Sabbath Day or not.”*

So if the Lord Jesus was one who **“...went around *doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil...*”** (Acts 10:38), dare we do any less? Remember how Jesus exhorted His Twelve Apostles with these words: **“As long as it is day, we must do the *work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work*”** (John 9:4).

And Jesus “practiced what He preached” to the degree that He could say the night before He was crucified: **“I have brought You glory on earth by *completing the work You gave Me to do*”** (John 17:4). This verse reminds us that Jesus came to this earth as **“...the last Adam”** (I Cor. 15:45) to *complete the work* which the first Adam had failed to accomplish. Therefore, the compelling challenge to each of us is this: *What is the work on earth that God has called me to do? And, am I faithfully doing that work for His glory?*

Now that we have looked at several crucial passages about work from the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, let’s look at some from the Apostle Paul.

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will *abound in every good work*...Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also *supply* and *increase* your store of seed and will *enlarge* the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made *rich* in every way SO THAT you can be *generous on every occasion*” (II Cor. 9:8).

Why does God bless us and give us an abundance? Why does he not only **“supply”** – but also **“increase”** and **“enlarge”** our harvest and storehouse of resources? Is it so that we can consume more and more on ourselves? Is it so that we can live a life of “conspicuous consumption?” Is it so that we can hoard it for the future? No! God often gives us *more than we need* SO THAT we can share with others who have *less than they need*. So as Christians, we are not to “live above our means,” but rather “live below our means” – so that others can simply have the “means to live by!” As Paul said: **“Your plenty will supply what they need...then there will be equality”** (II Cor. 8:14).

PRINCIPLE:

“As Christians we are to live ‘below our means’ rather than ‘above our means,’ so that others will have the means to live.”

Perhaps one of the most familiar verses in the Bible after John 3:16 is Ephesians 2:8-9. Both of these cardinal verses deal with our salvation – solely made possible through the *love of God* and the *grace of the Lord Jesus*. But as is so often the case, we lift a verse out of its immediate context. As a result we either misinterpret the verse altogether, or miss the force of the context of the verses preceding and following the verse we are focused on. Ephesians 2:8-9 is a good example:

“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. For we are *God’s workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus to *do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Eph. 2:8-10).

Paul first reminds us that we are **“saved”** solely on the basis of our **“faith”** in the **“grace”** God extended to us through the death of the Lord Jesus. This is *God’s work* from start to finish. Therefore, salvation is the **“gift of God”** that comes to us as a free gift. We do not deserve it. We only deserve death, judgment and hell. But instead of justice, God has given us *mercy* and *grace*. We cannot earn it...merit it...buy it...work for it...or achieve it by some “good works” on our part. If we could, there would be some reason for us to **“boast.”** But salvation is *100% grace* from beginning to end. It is **“...not by works.”**

However, while our salvation is never *by works*, it is always *unto works*. We were saved *from* something, *for* something. In other words, through our faith in Christ, we were saved *from* our old works righteousness – *for* the good works God has prepared for us.

Here then is God’s purpose for our creation and redemption. Once again, we are not saved *by works* – we are saved *for works*. The work of redemption is God’s work start to finish. Before He created the world, He had a plan of redemption prepared for us that we could not do for ourselves. That’s why Christians are called **“God’s workmanship.”** But what were we *created* and *recreated* for? Nothing could be clearer here. Paul said that we were **“...created in Christ Jesus to *do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”**

So before God did His work of creation, He had a *work* in mind for you to do.

Therefore, you and I are not an accident. We are not the mindless result of evolutionary fate. Our ancestors did not crawl out of the primordial ooze and slime through a competitive “survival of the fittest.” No, we were created by a very personal, all wise God who had a very *specific purpose* in mind for each of us. It is blatantly obvious that if He had specific purposes in mind for every star in the galaxy...for every plant and flower He painted the world with...for every creature that He created – then He certainly created us for a very specific purpose also! God has a plan with each of our names on it. He wrote it into our DNA. It is His subjective internal guidance system to direct us to His will and work for our lives. And He gave us natural talents to accomplish His plan for us. In addition, He gave the gifts of His Holy Spirit as the enabling power to accomplish His will.

Frankly, that degree of personal intimacy and involvement with me blows my mind! It constantly awes me and humbles me to contemplate that before God spoke the world into existence – He knew this little point in time that I would be living in. He knew in advance all of the circumstances of my life – and prepared the perfect work for me to do. Then through His sovereignty, He precisely orchestrated the events of my life down to microscopic detail – all for one purpose: *That I would have the opportunity to accomplish the work He created me to do.* And He did the same for you!

And equally amazing is the fact that He will then *reward* us for doing the work He created us to do! That’s why Paul wrote:

“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the

Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free” (Eph. 6:8).

With similar words he exhorted the Colossian Christians, as we have seen before in this study:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men since you know that you will receive an inheritance for a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col. 3:23-24).

Earlier in that same letter, Paul answered one of the most frequently asked questions about *how to know God’s will*. Here he clearly wrote about the kind of Christian life that pleases the Lord by accomplishing His will:

“...since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you, and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will...And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God...” (Col. 1:9-10).

In this passage, Paul reminds us that our socio-economic circumstances do not prevent us from accomplishing the work that God called us to do. Remember that these specific verses were written to “Christian slaves” – believers who were still in servitude. Some were serving masters who had become believers. Some were slaves to pagan ministers. And yet he told them that they could still accomplish God’s spiritual and vocational will for their lives – even as slaves! In essence Paul says to these slaves who seemed to be hopelessly locked in an unfair political and economic situation:

“You may think you cannot glorify God as a slave. You want to be free, and feel you can only glorify God that way. But in case you are not able to be free from social and physical bondage – and even continue to be a slave all your life – *that does not keep you from being able to accomplish the work that God has called you to do.* Always remember that **“It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”**”

What a revolutionary concept for our vocation – whether in the First Century or Twenty First Century! *Everything we do, we do for the Lord Jesus Christ!* We are not working for man, *we are working for God.* We are not subservient to man, *we are submitted to Christ.* We are not working for our own advancement, but for *the advancement of His Kingdom.* We are not working for a paycheck; *we are working for His reward!*

The Christians at Thessalonica obviously had come to understand this principle. Therefore Paul could praise them for their work for the Lord:

“We continually remember before our God and Father your *work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:3).

That’s authentic Christian work! That’s maturity of spirituality and vocation because it is *right action* flowing out of *right attitude.* It is **“...work produced by faith”** and **“...labor prompted by love.”** That’s *Biblically balanced* living and working because the *good work is a product of faith* and the *labor is prompted by love.* So Paul praised them for their *faith at work* and their *love in action!*

It is also very important to note that the many exhortations for “good works” in the New Testament are not just for men only. They are equally for women. That’s because God is an “equal opportunity Employer!” While He often designates different spheres of work and service for men and women, He expects each to work for His honor and glory – and for the good of others. With that in mind, note these words of Paul to the women of his day, and our day:

“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with *good deeds*, appropriate for women who profess to worship God” (I Tim. 2:9-10; c.f. I Pet. 3:1-6).

Obviously Paul is not against a woman dressing nicely. Nor is he against jewelry and make up. He just wants women to not fall into the social trap of putting their confidence in external things. He does not want them to define their femininity or seek their womanly identity through things like clothes, jewelry and fashion that are constantly changing. He wants them to be clothed with the beauty of “**good deeds**” which never go out of fashion! So Paul exhorts women to make sure their *wardrobe* matches their *worship*.

Good works are important for every Christian, but especially for Christian leaders. In fact, it was to be one of the distinguishing marks of authentic spiritual leadership. It is for that reason that young Christians were not to be prematurely put in positions of leadership in the church. They could not be a “**recent convert**” according to the Apostle Paul, “...or he may become **conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil**. He must also have a *good reputation* with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and

into the devil's trap" (I Tim. 3:6-7). And one of the things that would give him a **"good reputation with outsiders"** would be his *good works*.

There is a parallel passage about church leadership written by Paul in his second letter to Timothy:

"Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure...The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, *good deeds* are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden" (I Tim. 5:24-25).

Here again, Paul was underscoring to Timothy what he had previously written. He gave this promising young pastor some seasoned advice about choosing qualified leaders in the local church. He warned him **"...not to be hasty in the laying on of hands."** Why? Because you may prematurely commission someone to church leadership who is unworthy – proven by their *works*. He reminded Timothy that all of us are headed for a sure **"place of judgment."** And both our *sins* and our *good works* will go with us to that judgment. For some, their *sins* and their *good works* have already been exposed in this life, so they **"...reach the place of judgment ahead of them."** For others, their *sins* and *good works* will **"...trail behind them"** and will only be exposed after the person dies, or at the judgment. But when it comes to our *good works*, Paul said that our **"...good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden."**

So we are clearly reminded by this passage that both our *sins* and our *good deeds* will be made manifest before God and man. The ones that were hidden before man will

be exposed before God, and dealt with accordingly. The sins will lead to either punishment or loss, while the *good works* will result in *gain* and *reward*.

But Paul not only instructed Timothy about the qualifications of leadership in the church, he also reminded him that neither wealth nor social prominence necessarily qualifies a person for such positions of responsibility. In fact, Paul told Timothy to boldly warn the wealthy with these sobering words:

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be *rich in good deeds*, and to be generous and willing to share” (I Tim. 6:17-18).

This would have been a hard thing for Timothy to preach! It would have certainly offended some prominent members of the church and community. It could certainly have cost him financially to preach such a message! It probably negatively influenced the weekly offerings at the church. It certainly would have run against the socio-economic grain of the day, which assumed that money automatically brings power and influence – inside and outside of the church.

But Paul still encouraged this young pastor to take this rather bold position with those in the Church who had been blessed by God economically. He instructed Timothy to **“*Command those who are rich...not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth.*”** Why? The answer is very obvious – as every stockbroker, investor or money manager knows. The simple truth is this: **Wealth...is so *uncertain.*”** Interest rates change... stocks are devalued...international monetary markets

radically fluctuate...stock markets crash or have severe corrections...stock portfolio can evaporate like a vapor... fortunes can be lost in a moment of time. Therefore, confidence and hope in wealth is very misplaced and naïve. It is only a matter of time until wealth lets you down. And as it plunges in value, so does your hope! Timothy, then, was to exhort them to “**...put their hope in God.**”

But in this same context, Paul also reminded Timothy that God is not a “mean ol’ ogre in the sky.” He is not a celestial Scrooge who wants everyone to live an austere life of poverty and self-denial. No, Paul reminded Timothy that God “**...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**” Here again we can see that the Bible clearly recognizes and affirms the “enjoyment factor” in life. Paul clearly did not say that God wanted all of us to be *miserable* and *unhappy*. Quite the contrary. Our Abba, Father “**...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**”

Take a few moments to again let that truth sink into your spirit. But at the same time, realize that God wants you to find your *greatest enjoyment in Him* – not in *things!* It is only then that you will hold “things” lightly. When you find your greatest enjoyment and pleasure in Him, you will do as Christ did and invest in others. Then you will “**...be rich in good deeds...generous...and willing to share.**” Then you will be the kind of spiritual vessel that the Lord will delight in using, as these next verses remind us.

“In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and

prepared to do any good work" (II Tim. 2:20-21).

What could be clearer than this practical household example?! By nature, we are all "dirty clay pots." Some of us are just plain old "cracked pots!" By virtue of sin, we are all "unclean wooden vessels" – totally unfit for God's use. At best we are only good for the "**ignoble purposes**" of being filled with garbage, filth, refuse, excrement – which is not a very pleasant thought! In the days before indoor plumbing and bathrooms, homes often had a "johnie bucket" for going to the bathroom during the night. And you could be certain that it was not made of "**gold and silver!**" And in the morning it was someone's unpleasant task to "go empty the johnie bucket!"

While that may be a rather crude and socially unacceptable example, it is very close to the truth of this text! In comparison to God's absolute holiness, our sinfulness makes us unclean...filthy...defiled...polluted – a "**vessel of wrath prepared for destruction**" (Rom. 9:22; NASV), only fit for "**ignoble purposes.**" But when we are saved and *cleansed* by the blood of Christ (I Jn. 1:9), we become "**...an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.**" That's why Paul followed through with this thought and told Timothy to "**Flee the evil desires of youth**" (II Tim. 2:22).

But Paul wisely did not keep Timothy focused on the negative motivation of "**fleeing.**" He turned him to the positive: "**...pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.**" So we "**flee**" from the negative, so that we can "**pursue**" the positive. They are two sides of the same spiritual coin. So the balanced Christian life is one of "**fleeing**" and "**pursuing.**" It is then that Timothy would be a "vessel of gold and silver" in the household of God. He would then be "**...an instrument for noble pur-**

poses, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work” – which is what Christian ministry and Christian living is all about.

By God’s grace, may each of us be those “noble vessels” of “**gold and silver**” that will pour out “**good works**” on all those in need around us.

Paul wrote a very similar exhortation to another young minister by the name of Titus. As you read it, note how Jesus is redeeming and purifying a people unto Himself who will in turn give themselves to a life of good works.

“In everything set them an example by *doing what is good...our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good*” (Titus 2:7, 13-14).

It is safe to say then, that both the *Incarnate Word*, the Lord Jesus, and the *Inscripturated Word*, the Bible, are working together to produce the same results in our lives – “**good works.**”

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that *the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (II Tim. 3:16-17).

It is because of the fact that “**All Scriptures is God-breathed**” that it is useful...profitable...beneficial...edifying...sanctifying – for “**...teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.**” And what is all of that transformation for? It is for the specific purpose that “**...the man of God may be thoroughly equipped**

for every good work.” So the “work of the Word” in us is to “...thoroughly equip us for every good work.”

The Word’s work in us is so that we would *work for God’s glory!* Then as we saw at the beginning of this section, the world...the pagans...the unbelievers...the skeptics...the needy will “...**see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.**” (Matt. 5:16b) The Apostle Peter echoed the same words when he wrote...

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (I Pet. 2:12).

Sadly, there is oftentimes very little appreciable difference between how a Christian lives and how a non-Christian lives! Our life-styles, values, priorities and pursuits are often very much like those of the people of the world. And sad to say, in the American church, we have about the same amount of struggle with the sins of the flesh, pornography, divorce, alcohol, drug abuse and dysfunctionality as the non-Christians do. An indicting fact now confirmed by studies and statistics.

It is because of the often sad similarity between Christians and non-Christians that the writer of Hebrews had to make the following exhortation.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24-25).

These verses clearly teach that every serious Believer must be consistently involved in some local Christian

fellowship. You show me a so-called Christian who is erratic in his church attendance, and I will show you a person who is also erratic in their “good works.” As the poet Keats, said: “*We all take the habitual journey homeward to self.*” Without others in the Body of Christ to “**spur us on to love and good deeds,**” without fellow Believers to exhort us to “**...fan into flame the gift of God which is in us**” (II Tim. 1:6), we will automatically “*...take the journey homeward to self.*” We will increasingly live *selfish lives* rather than *selfless lives*. Rather than *love others*, we will *love ourselves*. Rather than *work for others*, we will *work for ourselves*.

So as serious disciples, we must *meet regularly* with some kind of accountability group that will “**...spur us on to love and good deeds.**” And the intensity of our “**good deeds**” is to increase even more as we “**...see the Day approaching**” – which is speaking about the *Judgment Day*, or *the Day of the Lord*.

It is because of the inseparable connection between our “good works” and our final judgment that we are to give ourselves to a *life-style of good works*. Thus Paul’s exhortation to the saints at Corinth, as well as to us:

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”
(I Cor. 15:58).

Why are we to “**...stand firm?**” Why are we to “**Let nothing move us?**” Why are we always to “**...give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord?**” Because God is taking note. He is carefully recording every deed – whether good or bad – in His eternal ledgers. We are told in the Bible that God has “two sets of books,” and they are eternally accurate. There are the “**books**” in which

the deeds of the unbelievers are recorded, and by which they will be judged. Then there is “...another book...the **Book of Life**” that records the lives and deeds of the redeemed (Rev. 20:11-15). When these two sets of books are opened, all mankind will be “**judged by what he has done**” and rewarded accordingly.

So Paul reminded these Corinthian saints to “...**always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**” Every good deed you do in this life will have *eternal consequences!* So the judgment will either lead to *eternal ruin* or *eternal reward*.

But in addition to being rewarded on the basis of our commitment to *worship*, the *Word*, to *witnessing*, and to *good works*, we will also be rewarded on the basis of our faithfulness in spiritual conflict.

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are needed to see this picture.





WARFARE

Simply put, the authentic Christian life is a *life of warfare*⁴. Tragically, most Christians in the west do not live with that mind-set. Because of the peace and prosperity they enjoy, their Christian life is lived out in a *picnic mentality* rather than a *warfare mentality*.

The Christians, who do understand something about the concept of spiritual warfare, still tend to spend most of their time “hanging around the barracks” – called the church. They go through the “basic training” of confirmation classes. They “join the church” and are baptized. They learn something about the “*Training Manual*” called the Bible, but most never seriously study it. They are even taught that it is a powerful “...**double-edged sword**” (Heb. 4:12), but most never take it out of the sheath. It generally is a dust-catching decoration on their coffee table at home.

So week after week, they go to the barracks for more programs and training. They spend a lot of time in the “mess hall” eating and having fellowship dinners. In the process, they keep going over and over the “basic fundamentals” of the faith. They continue to clean and oil their weapons – but seldom use them. As a result, they spend their entire Christian lives “peeling potatoes” and “polishing the brass.”

⁴ For a more in depth study of this subject, see my Study Guide entitled: “Spiritual Warfare.”

Periodically these passive Christians, with a peacetime mentality, decide they need a new and better barrack, one that offers more comfort and conveniences. After all, if they are going to spend all of their lives in the barracks, they want them to be as beautiful and comfortable as possible! They will even memorialize in stained glass some of the spiritual war heroes of past battles! They will also put in the narthex of their barracks the names on brass plaques of those who “Died in Service” – but not in Christian service! As a result, they build more and more elaborate and costly barracks to meet in. Before long they have to spend all of their money paying for their new barracks – and the growing staff that it takes to run it for them. In the end, they have little or no money left over to spend on spiritual warfare!

So as far as global missions are concerned, these docile and domestic disciples are basically AWOL (“Away Without Leave”)! They have little or no interest in the meagerly deployed and under-equipped troops fighting on the front lines. They seldom pray for them, write them or support them – and most never visit them. After all, it might be dangerous to venture out to the front lines! So there is little inter-reaction between the front-line troops out where the battle is raging, and the ones hanging around the barracks – dressed up like soldiers and “playing army games!”

How odd it must be to these self-absorbed Christians, involved in endless ecclesiastical narcissism, the Biblical mandates like these:

- **“Endure hardship...like a good soldier of Christ Jesus”** (II Tim. 2:3);
- **“Put on the full armor of God...”** (Eph. 6:11, 13; I Thess. 5:8);

- **“...fight the good fight”** (I Tim. 1:18; II Tim. 6:12);
- **“The weapons we fight with...have divine power to demolish strongholds”** (II Cor. 10:4).

So many western Christians have forgotten that when the Lord comes again, He will be riding on a “white war horse.” He will not be coming to join our annual church homecoming followed by “dinner on the grounds.” There will be a meal alright, but not the kind we usually think about in church. Jesus will be coming to wage war – the “last battle” of human history. Listen to these sobering words out of the prophetic war annals of eternity:

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His head are many crowns...He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses...Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of lords.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great’ (Rev. 19:11-18).

Those are indeed sober and unsettling words to Christians who want to live in the illusion that the Christian life is one of peace and tranquility. Those are unwelcome words for people who want to follow the “Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild” – rather than the “...**Lord strong and mighty, the Lord *mighty in battle***” (Ps. 24:8)!

This Old Testament truth reminds us of a similar statement by the Lord Jesus. It was spoken about the ministry of John the Baptist that was being fiercely opposed by both the religious and political leaders:

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been *forcefully advancing*, and forceful men lay hold of it”
(Matt. 11:12).

The New American Standard Version renders this verse this way:

“From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers *violence*, and *violent men take it by force*.”

Jesus was saying here that the Jewish religious leaders, as well as the political leaders, were trying by *force* to withstand both John’s ministry and His own ministry. They were wanting the Kingdom of Heaven on their own terms. And that *violence* and *force* culminated in John being beheaded, and Jesus being crucified!

But there is also the truth here that it is only *forceful men and women who boldly advance the Kingdom of Heaven*. And this bold, forceful spiritual advance always causes violent men to oppose that Kingdom advance! Revival always produces a counter-revival. Every advance by the *Kingdom of Light* is violently opposed by the *Kingdom of*

darkness. As the “**Prince of this world**” (Jn. 14:30), Satan never gives up an inch of his real estate with out a fierce battle! That’s why so many of the chapters of the history of the Christian Church are “written in blood!” So it is only *faithful* and *forceful* Christians who advance the Kingdom of God. It is never done by passive pew-sitters who have taken *flight* from the front lines! So our *faith* can never be separated from our *fight*. If we have an *active faith* in Christ it will always be revealed in an *aggressive fight* for the advance of His Kingdom. It is the difference between “Great Commission Christians” who are in active *combat* for the Kingdom of God, and “Comfortable Christians” who are content to sit out the battle on the safety of their church pew!

PRINCIPLE:

“We can never separate our *faith* from our *fight*. Great Commission Christians are in the thick of the battle for the advance of the Kingdom of God.”

One thing for sure, when our Commander-in-Chief returns, He will *reward* His faithful troops. Just like soldiers receive the *Purple Heart* or *Bronze Star* for bravery or for being wounded in battle, the Lord Jesus will also *reward* His faithful and valiant “soldier-saints.”

Let’s look then, at some of the *rewards* that are promised as a result of *faithfulness* and *forcefulness* in the face of persecution and spiritual warfare.

- **“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 in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Matt. 5:11-12).**

- “Blessed are you when *men hate you*, when they *exclude you* and *insult you* and *reject your name* as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because *great is your reward in heaven*. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets...But I tell you who hear Me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. *Do to others as you would have them do to you*. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then *your reward will be great*, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:22-23, 27-36; c.f. Matt. 5:43-47).
- “Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the *face of suffering*. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to *insult* and *persecution*; at other

times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. *You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised*" (Heb. 10:32-36).

- "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. *He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible*" (Heb. 11:24-27).
- "Blessed is the man who *perseveres under trial*, because when he has stood the test, he will *receive the crown of life* that God has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12).
- "Do not repay *evil with evil or insult with insult*, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that *you may inherit a blessing*" (I Pet. 3:9).
- "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have

gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be *rewarded fully*” (II John 1:8).

- “Do not be afraid of what you are about to *suffer*. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will *suffer persecution* for ten days. *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10).

But before closing this section on *spiritual warfare*, we need to remind ourselves about how we are to *act* and *react* to those who are our enemies. How are we to live in times of war? How are we to respond in the face of persecution? Fortunately, our Training Manual, the Bible, gives us clear instructions about this:

- “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: ‘*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven*’” (Matt. 5:44).
- “*Do not repay anyone evil for evil...Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Rom. 12:17-21).
- “If your *enemy* is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals

on his head, and *the Lord will reward you*
(Prov. 25:21-22).

For most people in the west, these are somewhat confusing verses. We basically understand the part about *loving, feeding* and *praying* for our enemies. We even understand that we are not to live for *revenge*. But the closing words about “...**heaping burning coals on his head**” seems to be a contradiction! How can you *love* a person – and then turn around and “...**heap hot coals on his head?**” Good question!

The answer is to be found in the cultural context of this verse. In the days when Jesus spoke these words, women cooked by wood and charcoal – just as they continue to do in most of the world today. It was their responsibility to always keep some “**burning coals**” in their small clay cooker. That way at a moment’s notice they could blow or fan the smoldering coals into hot flames for cooking. They never knew when a neighbor or stranger would stop by for an unexpected visit, which always meant the serving of tea or coffee – if not a full meal. A good example is the unexpected visit by the three heavenly strangers to Abraham and Sarah’s tent (Gen. 18:1-15).

So in Biblical times, just like in much of the world today, hospitality was a sacred responsibility. In eastern countries and cultures, it was the woman’s responsibility to “keep the home fires burning,” as we often say today. If a woman let her fire go completely out, she would either need to start another fire from scratch – remember there were no matches. Or, she would have to go to a neighbor and borrow a few “**hot coals**” from her fire.

Also, since these self-contained clay stoves were small, the women would often carry them on their heads from place to place. So if the fire in your stove went out, you

would go borrow some “**hot burning coals**” from your neighbor. But what if this person needing some “**hot coals**” was your enemy? Then you would “**...heap burning coals on his head!**” As an act of kindness and *love for your enemy*, you would not just give *one smoldering ember*; you would “**...heap burning coals on his head!**” You would send your enemy away with more than was needed or asked for. As a result, they would not be embarrassed by their inability to extend hospitality to her family, or to some stranger at her door.

So this was an *act of blessing* instead of hostility. It was an *act of love* rather than aggression and retaliation. It was a gracious *gesture of kindness* to someone who did not deserve it. In their cultural context, it was a practical way of “**...loving your enemy.**” So contrary to what some people think when they read this passage, Jesus was not contradicting Himself. Nor was He saying that we should *burn* or *scorch* our enemy on the head! No. He was exhorting the people of His day to “**love your enemy**” in a very practical and unmistakable way.

Jesus also pointed out that this act of love and grace toward our enemy was one way we proved that we are “**...sons of our Father in heaven.**” Why? Because that is exactly how God acted toward us. Remember the words of Paul?

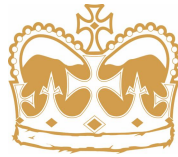
“At just the right time...Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son...” (Rom. 5:5-10).

So if the Father “**...loves His enemies,**” then His sons and daughters are to do the same. It is one of the greatest authenticating marks of our spiritual sonship.

And, it was also one of the ways we earn an *eternal reward*.

But there is a final way that the Bible assures us that we can win a *reward* from our Heavenly Father. It is directly related to our material possessions.

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are needed to see this picture.





WEALTH

First of all we need to see how wealth and prosperity are portrayed in the Bible. *Is money evil? Are riches bad? Is God against wealth? Is money the 'root of all evil,' as we often hear people say?*

First of all, the Bible *never* says that “*money is the root of all evil.*” It does say however, that the “**...love of money is a root of all kinds of evil**” (I Tim. 6:10). There is a vast difference between “*money being the root of ALL evil*” and the **...love of money being A root of all kinds of evil.**”

You see, it all has to do with how a person views money and wealth. If wealth and riches are seen as one's *treasure*, then it is sinful. Money then is a *materialistic idol* that is worshiped. (Col. 3:5) But if money is simply seen as one's *tool*, then it is not sinful at all. It is nothing more than an *instrument* to be used for the good of others and for God's glory. So the crucial question is this: “*Do I see my resources and riches as a 'tool' or a 'treasure?' Is my wealth an 'idol' that I secretly worship, or an 'instrument' through which I serve God and bless others?*” When God gives wealth, He intends that it be received and used as an *instrument...a tool...a resource* to bless others.

PRINCIPLE:

“When money and wealth are seen as an ‘instrument’ to be used rather than an ‘idol’ to be worshiped, then it is a ‘tool’ for generosity rather than a ‘treasure’ for our glory.”

Therefore, in the Bible, wealth is often clearly portrayed as a *blessing from the Lord* – as well as an *instrument of blessing* to benefit others in need. There are many Biblical examples of this. Here are just a few to help us get a clear Biblical mind-set about the ultimate source of all *righteous riches*.

“...Abram went up from Egypt...with his wife and everything he had...Abraham had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold” (Gen. 13:1-2).

It is interesting and instructive to note that this is the very *first mention of riches and wealth in the Bible*. And it is equally obvious that God was the Source of Abram’s wealth. We know that because God had earlier promised Abram:

“I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...I am your shield, your very great reward” (Gen. 12:2; 15:1).

Here we see God’s promise to be Abram’s *Protector* and *Provider*. His **“shield”** and his **“...very great reward.”** And since Abram was a nomadic pastoralist, the first thing God did was to bless him with a lot of **“livestock”** – camels, donkeys, cows, sheep and goats. They were Abram’s mobile bank account! In addition, God blessed him with **“silver and gold.”** And later on, God did the same for Abram’s son, Isaac:

“Isaac planted crops in the land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. The man became rich and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him” (Gen. 26:12-14).

So Isaac diversified his financial portfolio from just being a pastoralist to also being an agriculturalist. As a result, he literally became the *envy* of all of his neighbors! Wealth tends to do that to people, doesn't it?!

After God gave the children of Israel a land of abundance and prosperity, He warned them about the folly of any erroneous thinking that they were somehow the source of their wealth and prosperity.

“You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this *wealth* for me.’ But *remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant...*” (Deut. 8:17-18; cf. 26:10; 28:3-6).

In light of the above principles, carefully read the following verses about God being the ultimate source of wealth and riches.

- **“The Lord sends *poverty* and *wealth*; He humbles and He exalts” (I Sam. 2:7);**
- **“Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord?” He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. He will spend his days in *prosperity* and his descendants will inherit the land” (Ps. 25:12-13);**
- **“Blessed is the man who fears the Lord...*wealth* and *riches* are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever” (Ps. 112:1-3);**

- **“Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?...With me are *riches* and *honor*, *enduring wealth* and *prosperity*”** (Prov. 8:1,18);
- **“The blessing of the Lord brings *wealth* and He adds no trouble to it”** (Prov. 10:22);
- **“...when God gives any man *wealth* and *possessions*, and enables him to enjoy them...and be happy in his work – this is a *gift of God*”** (Ecc. 5:19);
- **“God gives a man *wealth*, *possessions* and *honor*, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them...”** (Ecc. 6:2; 9; 11);
- **“Misfortune pursues the sinner, but *prosperity is the reward of the righteous*”** (Prov. 13:21).

One of the great sins of the nation of Israel that they repeatedly fell into was the deception that they were somehow the source of their own wealth and prosperity. As a result of this deception, they were also guilty of the corollary sin of using their wealth for *idolatry* and *immorality*. Sound familiar? As a result of this disobedience, God had to repeatedly warn them and judge them:

“She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the *silver* and *gold* – which they used for Baal” (Hosea 2:8).

By contrast, King David humbly acknowledged that God was the source of his own vast personal wealth, as well as the wealth of his people, that made it possible for them to liberally give for the building of the Temple:

“O Lord our God, as for all this *abundance* that we have provided for building You a Temple for Your Holy Name, *it comes from Your hand and all of it belongs to You*” (I Chron. 29:16-17).

That’s the humble attitude about riches and wealth that God blesses and honors – because it acknowledges and honors Him as the source of all earthly prosperity.

Now with those foundational truths about the ultimate source of any wealth and prosperity we might enjoy in this life, let’s now look at some of the *rewards* for the faithful and wise use of our wealth.

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have *no reward* from your Father in heaven. So when you *give to the needy*, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, *they have received their reward in full*. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then *your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you*...Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But *store up for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt. 6:1-4, 19-20).

Notice here how Jesus said, “...**store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.**” Who was the beneficiary here? Was God going to benefit from the treasures we store in heaven? Were the heavenly hosts going to be blessed by it? No! Jesus clearly said that *we* would be the direct beneficiaries of our “...**giving to the needy.**” How are we to benefit? How can we be absolutely assured of this *heavenly reward*? Simply by *redirecting and redepositing* our temporal treasure into the Bank of Heaven! How do we do that? *By investing our temporal resources in eternal causes.* Then the “**needy**” are benefited *in this life* and we are benefited *in the life to come!* That’s a “win-win” for everyone!

Jesus gives this same eternal investment advice when He summarized His ‘Parable of the Shrewd Steward’:

“I tell you, use *worldly wealth* to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, *you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings*” (Lk. 16:9).

The *New Living Translation* of this verse is even more clear:

“I tell you, use your *worldly resources* to benefit others and make friends. In this way, *your generosity stores up a reward for you in heaven.*”

It is clear from both of these translations that we are to take every opportunity to use whatever “**worldly resources**” God may entrust to us to “...**benefit others and make friends.**” Therefore, we are to use our *resources* to build *relationships*. Tragically, just the opposite usually takes place. Most often our *pursuit of riches destroys our relationships*. We all know story after story of the person who “lost everything” while “seeking

everything.” In the pursuit of wealth and prosperity, they lost their marriage, their children, their close friendships. So those *riches destroyed their relationships*. Instead of their wealth “**making friends**” for them, it caused them to lose authentic friendships. After they accumulate riches, their wealth “bought” them many associations, but few if any, true intimate friendships.

But when we use our *resources* to “...**benefit others and make friends,**” we will be *enriching ourselves* and *enriching others*. And in the process, our “...**generosity stores up a reward**” for us in heaven.

PRINCIPLE:

“When we use our *resources* to build and nurture *relationships*, we enrich *others* while we enrich *ourselves* – and God gives *eternal rewards*.”

And there is another related principle about the stewardship of wealth that comes from this same Parable:

“Whoever can be *trusted with very little* can also be *trusted with much*, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So *if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?* And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you *property of your own?*” (Luke 16:10-12).

In this very practical parable, Jesus reminded His disciples – and the Pharisees who were standing by listening – that there is a direct relationship between the stewardship of “**worldly wealth**” and “**true riches.**” Notice that Jesus did not equate “**worldly wealth**” with “**true riches.**” He made a clear distinction between the two. Obviously “**worldly wealth**” is intricately connected

to *this world*. Because it is *made in this world...spent in this world...invested in this world*, it is *limited to this world* – unless it has been invested in *eternal things*. But when **“worldly wealth”** has been invested under the guidance of our Heavenly Financial Manager, it will draw *eternal dividends!*

Therefore, **“true riches”** are *trans-worldly*. They *transcend* this world and this life, and have an *eternal impact*. That is **“true riches”** because the person is wealthy in this life and in the life to come. Tragically, many “worldly rich people” lose it all when they die. People often ask when a wealthy person dies: *“How much did they leave?”* The answer is obvious. They *left it ALL!* Death is the *great separator*. It eternally separates us from *everything* in this world – all *riches, resources and relationships*.

None of us, then, can take our wealth with us into the next life. This is true for the Christian and pagan alike. However, while the Christian investor cannot “take it with him,” he can certainly “send it on ahead of him!” By using his **“worldly wealth”** to help and bless others, he is making secure deposits in the Bank of Heaven. As a result, he is **“...storing up for himself treasures in heaven.”**

So Jesus taught in this parable that **“worldly wealth”** is a *material test* that would reveal the level of our stewardship and trustworthiness. In other words, if we are not honest and trustworthy with **“worldly wealth,”** then God will never entrust to us **“true riches.”** And from God’s perspective, **“true riches”** is never *money or material possessions* – which are only *temporal*. **“True riches”** are things that “money cannot buy” – things that are everlasting in their impact. And the only thing that is eternal are *relationships* – which is what we were created by God for. As Job said: **“Naked I came...and naked I will go”** (Job 1:21). We come into this world with

nothing, and we leave this world with *nothing!* We are *naked* coming and going!

The only thing that we will take out of this life are our *relationships*. First of all, we will take the *relationship with ourselves* into eternity. There we will live with the character we have created in this life. So here is a crucial question: “*Can I live with ME for all eternity?!*” As you ponder that thought, you might want to read about a very rich man who did not like living with himself in the after-life. He was not at all pleased with having to live for all eternity with the results of the bad choices he made in this life. In fact, he was *eternally tormented* in spirit, mind, emotions and body over his wrong use of wealth in his former life (Lk. 16:19-31).

Secondly, we all take our *relationship with God* through the Lord Jesus into eternity. There we either experience the *eternal absence of God*, or *hell*; or we experience the *eternal presence of God*, which is *heaven*. And everything hangs on my *relationship with Jesus Christ!*

Lastly, we all take our *relationship with others* into eternity. While heaven is a place of *eternal relationships*, hell is a place of *eternal aloneness!* Can you imagine the difference?! Either being *eternally together* or *eternally alone!* And the more we use our “**worldly wealth**” to “**...gain friends for ourselves,**” the greater our *eternal reward* and *eternal relationships!*

What are the things that are really *eternal?* What are the things that out-last this brief life? What are the *temporal things* that pay *eternal dividends?* They are things like *relationships, love, character, respect, honor, integrity, influence, a good name, happiness, joy, satisfaction, peace of mind, contentment, wisdom*. Those are the things that make a person truly rich!

PRINCIPLE:

***“Worldly wealth results in wanton wastefulness;
but...
righteous riches result in rewarding relationships.”***

So God uses **“worldly wealth”** as a material *litmus test*. And if we are selfish, foolish, miserly, and wasteful with it, we prove to be unworthy stewards. As a result, we forfeit the opportunity of being rewarded with true wealth. And at the same time, we lose our *heavenly reward*.

Jesus then concluded this parable with some sobering words – primarily meant for the Pharisees **“...who loved money.”** Jesus said: **“What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight”** (Lk. 16:14-15). No ambiguity or uncertainty there about how God views the **“...love of money”** as opposed to the “love of people!”

So the revealing question is this: “Do I *love things* and *use people*; or do I *use things*, and *love people*?” The answer to that question clearly reveals whether money is my *tool* or my *treasure*...whether my wealth is my *idol* or my *instrument*...whether I can be trusted with **“little”** or with **“much”**...whether I value **“worldly wealth”** or **“true riches”**...whether I love what is **“detestable in God’s sight”** or whether I treasure what is a “delight to God’s heart.”

Paul gave some similar investment advice to a group of special friends. In fact, they were the only Christians who faithfully supported him financially. He wrote these words of thanksgiving to them for their support. And he also assured them that their financial gifts would result in *eternal rewards*.

“...as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I

set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of *giving* and *receiving*, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, *you sent me aid again and again when I was in need*. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for *what may be credited to your account...the gifts you sent...are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God*” (Phil. 4:15-18).

How many churches had the Apostle Paul planted in his lifetime? Dozens! But as amazing as it may seem, not one of them supported him financially except the Philippian church. What does that tell us about people? What does it reveal about a lot of Christians – whether in the First Century or the Twenty-First Century? It shows that we are often very *ungrateful* and very *tight-fisted!*

However, Paul wasn't complaining or upset because of the lack of financial support. That's because He ultimately looked to God as His source and sufficiency. And as a pioneer church planter, he generally supported himself as a bi-vocational evangelist and missionary (Acts. 20:34-35; I Cor. 9:6; I Thess. 4:11; II Thess. 3:6-10; c.f. Eph. 4:28; I Tim. 5:8). Paul also expressed his deep appreciation to these faithful partners in Philippi for their financial generosity. However, he told them that he was most joyful about the fact that their gifts were not only helping him in ministry, they were also being **“credited to their account”** in heaven. As a result, their gift was a **“fragrant offering”** that was an **“acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.”**

Be well assured that you too can continuously make gifts that will have a *double impact*. They will meet needs here, and produce *eternal dividends* that will be **“credited to your account”** in the Bank of Heaven – and will be *eternally secure!*

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are needed to see this picture.





YOU AND YOUR CROWN

A word that is often associated with our *reward* from the Lord is the word “*crown*.” Therefore, it is a blessing, encouragement and motivation to study some of the Biblical passages about the various *crowns* that await the faithful Christian worker.

First of all there is the *crown for witnessing*:

- **“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to *win as many as possible*. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to *win the Jews*. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to *win those under the law*. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to *win those not having the law*. To the weak I became weak, to *win the weak*. *I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some*. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings. 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 crown⁵ 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” (I Cor. 9:19-27).

In this well-known passage from the pen of Paul, we can see his passionate heart for evangelism. Paul was willing and eager to do *whatever it took* to get the Good News to people in a culturally sensitive way. Whether they were free or slaves...Jews or Gentiles...under the law or outside of the law...weak or strong – Paul’s passion was to share Jesus with them in a way they could relate to and respond to. So his spiritual *modus operandi* became: “**I have become *all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*”** And why did he do all of this? He did it “**...for the sake of the gospel**” and so that he could “**...share in its blessings.**” What was one of those *blessings* of the Gospel? A *victor’s crown*. Or to echo his words: “**...we do it to get a crown that will last forever.**”

In this passage, Paul said he was like a *marathon runner* who was competing in order “**...to get the prize.**” He was like an Olympic boxer who did not aimlessly “**...beat the air**” – but made every spiritual blow count for the Kingdom! And in order to get the *winner’s crown*, Paul approached Christian ministry like an Olympic athlete

⁵ There are two Greek words for crown: *stefanoß* transliterated *Stephanos*, as in the wreath or garland which was given as a prize to victors in public games, which we may receive as a reward. Only Jesus will wear the kingly *diadema*, or crown that represents absolute authority (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 129:12)..

who stayed in a perpetual state of **“strict training.”** As he put it: **“...I *beat my body* and make it my slave.”**

He gave this very same exhortation to Timothy, his “son in the faith.” Paul was mentoring him in Church leadership, and he exhorted him to be a good spiritual athlete:

“*Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*” (I Tim. 4:7-8).

There was not a hint of *spiritual pampering* in Paul’s words! No life of ease and indulgence. No trying to live like a “king’s kid,” as a popular saying goes in some branches of American Christianity. Paul knew nothing of the ‘Prosperity Gospel’ of *“name it and claim it...profess it and possess it...blab it and grab it!”* For the sake of the Gospel, Paul knew a life of *discipline...self-denial...privation...hardship...rejection...persecution*. Listen how he described his life of Apostleship earlier in this same letter. He begins by sarcastically chiding the self-indulgent carnal Christians in Corinth who want to live like “little kings”:

“*Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich. You have become kings – and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!*” (I Cor. 4:8)

Then Paul went on to paint a graphic contrast as he described his life-style as an Apostle:

“*It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have*

been *made a spectacle to the whole universe*, to angels as well as to men. We are *fools for Christ*, but you are so wise in Christ! We are *weak*, but you are strong! You are honored, we are *dishonored!* To this very hour we go *hungry and thirsty*, we are in *rags*, we are *brutally treated*, we are *homeless*. We work *hard with our own hands...Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.*” (I Cor. 4:9-12a, 13b)

And what was Paul’s response to the kind of abuse he constantly faced for the Gospel? Listen to these words that are such a challenge to my own heart:

“When we are cursed, we *bless*; when we are persecuted, we *endure it*; when we are slandered, we *answer kindly*.” (I Cor. 4:12b-13a)

And then Paul had the audacity to call them to follow him in this same life-style of total self-giving for the Gospel:

“I am not writing this to shame you, but to *warn you*, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to *imitate me*” (I Cor. 4:14-16; c.f. II Cor. 11:16-29).

So Paul was like a veteran Olympic athlete who was willing to go through *anything* for the sake of the Gospel. Why? Because he knew at the end of the race a *victor’s crown* was awaiting the faithful spiritual athlete who persevered to the end!

The Philippian church was Paul’s most faithful, supportive church. The churches of Macedonia were also especially

dear to Paul's heart because of their faithfulness and generosity – even in the midst of poverty, privation and persecution (II Cor. 8:1-5). They were not like the carnal, self-indulgent saints in Corinth. Therefore, Paul spoke of both of these churches as being his “**joy**” and “**crown.**”

- **“Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, *my joy and crown*, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!”** (Phil. 4:1).
- **“For what is our *hope*, our *joy*, or the *crown* in which we *will glory* (or “boast”) in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? *Is it not you?*”** (I Thess. 2:19).

These passages should cause us to do some soul-searching. They should cause us to honestly ask ourselves:

- *“Who will be my joy and crown when I stand before the Lord Jesus?”*
- *Who will be in heaven because of my life and witness?*
- *Who will be the source of my ‘glory’ and ‘boasting’ in the presence of the Lord Jesus when He comes?”*

Closely related to this crown for *witnessing* is the next crown...

A crown for ministry:

- **“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder; a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock**

that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive *the crown of glory* that will never fade away” (I Pet. 5:1-4).

In this personal exhortation to his fellow shepherds, Peter exhorted them to be real *servant-shepherd-leaders*. Elders who would be authentic “...**examples to the flock**” – rather than *exploiters* of the flock. He implored them not to just be “**hired hands**” (Jn. 10:12) who were “...**greedy for money.**” But that they would be true *spiritual shepherds* who were “...**eager to serve**” those whom God had “**entrusted**” to their stewardship. When they served “**God’s flock**” with that kind of attitude, they could be assured that when “...**the Chief Shepherd appears, they would receive a crown of glory that would never fade away.**” That’s a crown worth ministering for!

Thirdly, there is the *crown for obedience*:

- “...**if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules**” (II Tim. 2:5).

Notice the qualifications here for winning the “**victor’s crown**” as a *spiritual athlete*. It is “...**competing according to the rules.**” Every athletic competition has a set of *rules that regulate the game*. Without the *rules*, the game would not be possible. Without the *rules*, every athlete would become a “*rule unto himself.*” He would

“make up his own rules” as he went along. As a result, there would not be a *competition*, there would be *chaos!*

So what a timeless word this is from Paul! That’s because there has never been a time when more Christians in America have been “doing their own thing” than now. Never has there been more Christians “breaking the rules” – than today! And yet, they are doing so still expecting to receive a *crown*. They assume that they are the “exception to the rule.” They naively believe that the “rules of life” do not apply in their situation. They think they can disobey God with impunity.

But just as breaking the rules disqualifies an athlete from winning the competition; disobedience likewise causes the Christian to forfeit the “**victor’s crown.**” Remember then, that we can only “win at the game of life” if we “**...compete according to the rules.**” Therefore my fellow Christian athlete, I exhort you to “**...run in such a way as to get the prize**” (I Cor. 9:24).

Fourthly, there is the *martyr’s crown* for persecution and poverty for the Lord’s sake:

- “**Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him**” (Ja. 1:12);
- “**Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the**

confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had a better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be ***richly rewarded***. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, ***you will receive what He has promised***” (Heb. 10:32-36).

- (To the Church in Philadelphia) “**I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name...Since you have kept my command to *endure patiently*, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole earth to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will *take your crown*” (Rev. 3:11).**
- (To the persecuted Smyrna saints) “**I know your *afflictions* and your *poverty*...do not be afraid of what you are about to *suffer*. I tell you, *the devil will put some of you in prison to test you*, and you will *suffer persecution*...Be faithful, even to the *point of death*, and I will give you the *crown of life*” (Rev. 2:9-10);**

Certainly if there are any Christians who deserve to be honored in heaven with a *crown*, it is the “*suffering saints*” down through the ages. These are the ones who have been “...**faithful to the point of death.**” They are the ones who have not only *lived for Christ*, they *died for Christ*. They are the “**others**” who are also listed in the “Faith Hall of Fame” in Hebrews 11. Listen to how they are described:

“Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword.”
(Heb. 11:35b-37a)

And those who were not killed for their faith, suffered a “living death” because of their faithfulness and fidelity to the Lord Jesus. Listen to their life-style as a result of following Jesus:

“They went about in sheepskins and goat-skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and in caves and holes in the ground” (Heb. 11:37b-38).

That’s anything but the “Peace and Prosperity Gospel” that is so popular in the west today! Instead, these Christian’s lives were characterized by *poverty*, *privation* and *persecution*. And that is still the “normal Christian life” for millions of Christians around the world today! It is sobering to realize that the number of *Christian martyrs* grew more in the Twentieth Century than in the previous nineteen centuries combined! So in heaven, God is having His greatest “reward ceremony” in human history as He gives out these *myriads of martyr’s crowns!*

Fifthly, there is a *crown for perseverance*:

“...I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store 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 longed for His appearing” (II Tim. 4:6-8).

These verses remind us of what Jesus repeated on two different occasions: **“He who stands firm to the end will be saved”** (Matt. 10:22; 24:13). It is important to note that both of these exhortations were spoken in the context of *persecution*. This was an echo of what Jesus said in His interpretation of the “Parable of the Sower.”

“The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a *short time*. When *troubles or persecution* comes because of the word, he quickly *falls away*” (Matt. 13:20-21).

Unfortunately, there have always been the “rocky Christians” – as opposed to the “solid rock Christians.” They are the ones who have *rocky Christian lives...rocky marriages...rocky emotions...rocky relationships...rocky finances...rocky vocations – rocky everything!* These are the “superficial saints” who only have a “shallow faith.” They initially receive the Gospel message **“...with joy.”** But thereafter, they continue to try and live off of their *feelings* and *emotions*. They never seriously get into the Word, so at best they have only a superficial Biblical knowledge. As a result, they have little spiritual depth to their Christian lives. So when **“...troubles or persecutions come”** – and they *will come* – they do not “hang tough.” They are *spiritual short-termers*. So, sadly, they **“...quickly fall away.”**

But as we saw earlier, Paul was a spiritual “long distance runner.” He well knew that the Christian life is not a 100 meter dash – but a rugged “life-long marathon” that required perseverance to the end! While Paul *started*

poorly, he finished strong! By God's grace he "went the distance." He "crossed the finish line." He won the "**victor's crown.**" And my friend, so can you!

Finally, we need to see *what our crowns are for?* Are they so we can draw attention to ourselves in heaven? Are they given to us so that we can pompously "strut around heaven" showing off our crowns? Are our crowns so we can boast before the heavenly host: '*Look what I did for Jesus?*' No! A thousand times "*No!*" Our crowns are so we will have something to lay at the Lord's feet! It is so that we will not be empty-handed in the presence of our reigning Lord! Note this vision of the Apostle John:

"...the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being'" (Rev. 4:10-11).

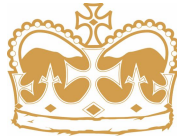
So any crowns we might be awarded in heaven are so that we will have something to *lay before Christ's throne.* It is so we will not go into His presence empty-handed – with nothing to lay at His nail-scarred feet. It is so that we will have some *token of love...some gift of gratitude... some offering of thanksgiving...some crown of grace* – to joyously lay before Him. And this will largely be determined by two things. First, our crowns will depend upon how we lived the one solitary life that we were given. And secondly, our rewards will depend upon how we used the material resources and opportunities that God entrusted to us. This truth is succinctly summarized in the little poem that sometimes hangs on small plaques in Christian homes:

*“Only one life t’will soon be passed,
and only what is done for Christ will last.”*

That says it all! It is only what we have done for Christ through our *ministry to others* that will determine the *crown on our head* that we will *lay at His feet!*

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.





CONCLUSIONS

We have clearly seen in this study that the true and living God is the God who delights in *blessing* and *rewarding* His people. He is indeed the “*Divine Rewarder*.” And He gives rewards on the basis of His *love, mercy* and *grace*. No rewards come to mankind because they are “deserved.” The only thing that we all deserve is *judgment, punishment, death* and *hell!* But because of His *sovereign unmerited grace*, God *redeems us, reconciles us, restores us* and *rewards us* – all for His own honor and glory. So all *rewards* and *crowns* are awarded on the basis of *who He is* – not on the merits of *who we are*.

Because of this fact, our all-powerful, all-loving and all-wise Heavenly Father, created each of us with an internal spiritual and emotional response mechanism for “rewards” and “punishments.” He has written this “positive-negative dynamic” into His universe. More importantly, He has indelibly inscribed it on the “tablets of our hearts.” It is in our moral and motivational DNA. This internal moral compass is what the Bible calls *conscience*.

Even a cursory investigation of the world around us proves that there is an obvious “good-bad” tension written into the universe. In a sense, they are opposite sides of the same moral coin. Those in the eastern world call this tension the “yin and yang.” They often symbolize it by the colors of “black and white” in an intertwined circle. But in their minds, the difference between the two is only *maya*,

or *illusion*. They believe that things like *good and evil* or *light and darkness* are all a matter of our limited *perspective*. What is “good” to one may be “bad” to another, and vice-a-versa. So the difference between the two is a mere *human illusion*. It is only our limited perspective that causes us to call one thing “good” and another thing “bad.”

However, from the Biblical perspective, there is *no illusion* at all between these *moral opposites!* *Right* and *wrong* are not the same. *Holy* and *unholy* are not a matter of perspective. *Good* and *evil* are not interchangeable. *Light* and *dark* are not synonymous. *Morality* and *immorality* are not relative. *Freedom* and *bondage* are not equal. *Life* and *death* are two very opposite experiences. *Obedience* and *disobedience* lead to very different results. One leads to *rewards* and the other to *retribution!* One ends in *eternal life* – or *heaven*; while the other ends in *eternal death* – or *hell*.

So God uses “rewards” to motivate us toward *obedience*, and “retribution” to turn us away from *disobedience*. And the very first human experiment in this took place in the Garden of Eden. It was a “living Paradise” – literally “heaven on earth.” The very name *Eden* tells it all because it means a “House of Pleasure” or “Garden of Delight.”

In that place of absolute perfection, God promised our first parents, Adam and Eve, *fellowship* or *alienation... oneness* or *aloneness...pleasure* or *pain...abundance* or *adversity...beauty* or *brokenness...liberty* or *bondage... life* or *death*. And He gave each of them a *will* that had the “freedom to choose.” He did not preprogram them for obedience. They were not humanoid robots or moral autonomy tons who had to obey God. Adam and Eve were created by God as *free moral agents* who could say “Yes” or “No!” But both choices came with a *price tag*. In

God's world, there would be no *morally neutral choices*. Each choice would result in either *reward* or *retribution*.

- Reward: “**You are free to eat from any tree in the garden...**”
- Retribution: “**...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die**” (Gen. 2:16-17).

We all know the “rest of the story!” Eve listened to the serpent rather than to God...Adam listened to Eve's advice rather than God's command...they both blamed God and each other for their own disobedience...they were banished from the Garden to live the rest of their lives “east of Eden”...their first son, Cain, created the first “religion of good works” by substituting his own sacrifice for God's prescribed one through blood...in anger he murdered his brother Abel...Lamech, one of Cain's descendants became the first polygamist – and the “beat goes on” until this very day!

God set the exact same choices before the children of Israel. But He expressed these *rewards* and *retributions* in terms of “ **blessings** ” and “ **curses.** ” To dramatize this clear moral choice, God took them into a valley between two mountains. This place has come to symbolize the “Valley of Decision.” One is called *Mount Ebal* and the other is *Mount Gerizim*. On my Bible Study Tours to the Holy Land, I have visited that exact place. While the people stood in the valley, the priests read out the “*Curses from Mount Ebal*” and the “*Blessings from Mount Gerizim*.” And then the people would say “*Amen!*” to the “ **blessings** ” and “*O, No!*” to the “ **curses.** ” Note the contrast between the two:

- Blessings: “If you *fully obey* the Lord your God and carefully follow all His commands...the Lord will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these *blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God...*” (Deut. 28:1ff).
- Curses: “However, if you *do not obey...*all these *curses will come upon you and overtake you...*” (Deut. 28:15ff).
- Summary: “See, I set before you today *life and prosperity, death and destruction...*This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you *life and death, blessings and curses.* Now **CHOOSE LIFE**, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God...*For the Lord is your life, and He will give you many years in the land...*” (Deut. 30:15-20).

Tragically, the story of the Israelites shows that they constantly disobeyed God and put themselves under the “**curses**” rather than the “**blessings.**” But each time they rebelled, they paid a severe personal and national price for their disobedience! And as we saw earlier:

- “For everything that was written in the past was written to *teach us*, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).
- “These things occurred as *examples* to keep us from setting our hearts on evil

things as they did...We should not test the Lord, as some of them did..." (I Cor. 10:6-9).

It is my closing prayer, then, that we will have a *teachable spirit* so we can "learn from their example," that we would be wise and "**choose life**" so that we may receive His *rewards* – and escape His *retribution*. Then and only then can we pass on a blessing to our children.

How could we do anything but love and live for a *God who delights in rewarding His people!* And as we have seen from this study of His Word, He rewards us on the basis of our commitment and faithfulness to...

- *Worship*
- *Word*
- *Witness*
- *Works*
- *Warfare*
- *Wealth*

May He abundantly *reward you* as a result of your reading and applying God's Word that's found in this book!

In His Rewarding Love,
J.L.



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