

Bible Study
The Believer's Crowns

1

May 5, 2020
Jerry E. Smith, Ed.D.

The apostle Paul serves as an inspiring example of Christian commitment, faithfulness, and servanthood to all believers in Christ. In fact, Paul was so convinced that his life was an example of fruitful Christianity that he exhorted the Corinthian church to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)! How many of us could, in good conscience, make such a declaration?

In spite of the tremendous opposition and persecution Paul encountered, he pressed on, looking not at those things which are seen but at those things which are not seen. He knew the trials of his faith were temporary. He also knew there was unseen, glorious, eternal reward available to him at the conclusion of his earthly pilgrimage. Paul said, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor 4:13-18).

He told the Philippian church, "Dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to Heaven" (Phil 3:13-14 NLT). The eternal prize awaiting him at the end of his earthly race motivated Paul's life in Christ.

Listen to these words from Paul's last epistle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim 4:7-8). Paul was anticipating, and diligently working toward, an eternal crown which Jesus

Bible Study
The Believer's Crowns

2

May 5, 2020
Jerry E. Smith, Ed.D.

would award him on Judgment Day. Paul knew there was eternal reward for temporal obedience. His life was motivated by the expectation of receiving eternal reward for his efforts in Christ. Furthermore, he taught that these rewards were available to all believers.

The New Testament doctrine of reward for the saved seems to be much neglected, but Paul and Peter taught this doctrine. In an effort to avoid the "salvation through works" mentality, perhaps the church has not informed its members of the eternal rewards available to them for deeds done in the flesh. I believe the doctrine of rewards for the saved is an inspiring and motivating subject which should influence the lifestyle of every Christian. Let's consider what the New Testament has to say about rewards for the saved.

First of all, we must understand that the doctrine of reward for the saved is not a message of salvation by works. Paul was adamant about this. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ...that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal 2:16).

Salvation is received by faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As He said, "You must be born again...born of the Spirit" (John 3:7-8). How is one born-again? "Not by works of righteousness, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life..." (John 3:36).

As these scriptures assure us, salvation is not the outcome of any good thing one

Bible Study
The Believer's Crowns

3

May 5, 2020
Jerry E. Smith, Ed.D.

might do. It is the outcome of believing and receiving, by faith, the good thing Jesus has done for you (2 Cor 5:21). However, salvation is to produce good works. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10). Salvation is not the outcome of good works. Good works are the outcome of salvation. We are saved by grace then empowered by grace to accomplish good works (1 Cor 15:10).

In order to understand the doctrine of rewards for the righteous, we need to review some truths related to judgment. The promise of God's word is resurrection and judgment (Heb 6:2). "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works" (Mt 16:27). To the church at Rome Paul said, "Each of us (*Christians*) will give an account of himself to God" (Rom 14:12). To the Corinthian church Paul said, "...Each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is because the Day (*of Christ, of Christ's judgment*) will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor 3:8-15). From the preceding passage, we learn:

- (1) Every believer will be rewarded according to his own labor.
- (2) We are God's fellow workers, not for salvation, but for rewards.
- (3) We are to build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, the Chief Cornerstone.
- (4) We are to choose to build with eternal materials: gold, silver, costly stones: not temporal materials such as wood, hay, or straw.

Bible Study
The Believer's Crowns

4

May 5, 2020
Jerry E. Smith, Ed.D.

- (5) The judgment of the believer's works will determine reward or loss of reward.
- (6) Salvation will not be the issue. The fruit of salvation will be the issue.

The apostle John encourages the church to continue in Him (*Christ*), so that when He appears, we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28). Paul said all mature Christians should follow his example and "Forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called you heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-15). **God has glorious eternal prizes awaiting those who choose to forget past failures and press into Christ Jesus that He might bring forth fruit through them.**

The believer's works will undergo the test of fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ. "For we (*Christians*) must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10). Sometimes this judgment is called the *Bema* Judgment. "*Bema*" is the Greek word which means a "raised tribunal." Jesus will sit on a raised seat just as a courtroom judge does. We will stand before Him and, hopefully, receive reward for the acts (deeds) of righteousness done during our Christian lives here in the earth. It will undoubtedly be a humbling occasion.

By now, you might be wondering, "What eternal reward does Jesus have prepared for me?" As Paul said, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (1 Cor 2:9-10). Even though the Holy Spirit is revealing those things God has prepared for us, we don't yet have a full revelation, but the New Testament speaks of several crowns or wreaths as eternal reward for the believer.

The biblical definition of such a "crown" is impressive: It is a badge of royalty, a

Bible Study
The Believer's Crowns

5

May 5, 2020
Jerry E. Smith, Ed.D.

conspicuous elaborate twined wreath denoting honor and victory. It is like a prize in the public games. Think of the Olympic medals. Everyone who participates in the Olympic games is a proven, capable athlete, but there are some who have excelled to the point of earning an Olympic medal. They have persevered and earned an earthly, fading award. But in the greatest contest, the Christian race, there are some believers who will have allowed the grace of God to be maximized in their lives. One day they will stand on a raised platform with the King of kings and the Lord of lords to be awarded an enduring, eternal crown which fadeth not away (1 Peter 5:4)!

I believe the recipients of these crowns will cast them before the throne of God as a praise and worship of Him who was the source of their victory. I base this belief upon Revelation 4:10-11. "The twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne saying, Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created."

Next time, we will continue our study of Believer's Crowns, eternal reward for temporal obedience, by considering the **Crown Incorruptible or Wreath Imperishable.**