

Eternal Rewards

(appropriate for mid-schoolers or older)

2 sessions, 60 minutes each - Michael R. Daily

(Portions taken from Rev. John S. Mahon, Grace Community International, Houston, TX)

Eventually, at some point in your Christian life, as you seek to follow and obey Christ, you'll come to a point where you realize that doing the things God wants you to do is difficult. You'll begin to realize that doing what God wants you to do requires sacrifice – sacrifice of your time, your money, and your emotional energy. There will be fun things that you will want to do and you'll realize that you may have to “not do” some of these fun things in order to make time to do the things God wants you to do. You'll look around and, of course, the non-Christians won't be doing these things. But you'll also notice that many of the other Christians aren't doing them either and it doesn't seem to bother them. And you'll ask yourself, “Why am I doing these things?”

At this point perhaps you'll begin to have a discussion with yourself and it might go something like this: You're a Christian, right? (right) God has given you eternal life as a free gift hasn't He? (yes) No matter what you do or don't do God has promised that you will live with Him in paradise forever, isn't that right? (right) And isn't it true that God will love you just as much regardless of what you do or don't do? (yes) Now we don't have to mention this to anyone else but just between you and me didn't God promise, when it's all said and done, didn't He promise to forgive you for all of your sins? (yes) Since all of these things are true, it seems to me that the smart thing to do here – now we don't have to tell anyone else about this – but deep down in our heart of hearts it seems to me that the smart thing to do is to be a pew potato. (What?) You know, a pew potato, you go to church and plant yourself in the pew. You enjoy the music and the message, you socialize with your friends, you take advantage of all the fun, entertaining things the church has to offer – and you let someone else do the hard work and make the sacrifices. Because after all, it's not like you're going to lose out on anything, right?

When this temptation comes upon you what will you say? What will you do? God knows that we will face this temptation and so He created an eternal reward system to help us deal with this. When we stand before God at the end of our life He wants us to be able to look at the reward He has for us, compare it to the hard work and sacrifices we made out of love for Him and devotion to Him, and say to ourselves “I am so glad I made those sacrifices, I only have one regret, I wish I had done more”. God has created His reward system so that no one will ever regret serving Him.

In our study we will discover that God rewards every act of service we do out of love and devotion to Him. We will also discover that, in addition, God has special rewards or “crowns” for faithful service in 5 areas. Each of the five crowns has a unique name. In the study you will learn what the name of each crown is and what it is given for and you'll come away with a new appreciation for how much God really values what we do for Him.

Eternal Rewards

As we start our study we will begin with some general principles and background. As we progress through the study you will notice that we will get into more and more detail.

1) **Eternal Rewards as a Legitimate Motivation**

Hebrews 11: 1-2 & 6 – vs 1,2 - Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Vs 6 - Without Faith it is impossible to please God. We must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder.

Hebrews 11: 13-16 & 24-27 & 35 – vs 13-16 - People of Faith viewed themselves as strangers and exiles on the earth, they did not view the earth as their home because they were looking to an eternal city as their home. Vs 24-27 - Moses was motivated by the reward he would receive and was willing to give up a place in the royal family of the most powerful nation on earth. Vs 35 – People of Faith endured hardship knowing that they would receive a “better” resurrection.

Hebrews 6: 10 – God will not forget your work in His name. Even though we will forget things we did in service for God years ago He will not forget. In fact, someday He will remind us of these things as He rewards us.

I Corinthians 15: 58 – Your toil is not in vain in the Lord. Regardless of what the outward result appears to be God promises to make sure our toil is not in vain – in the end we will never regret our service to God.

I Corinthians 2: 9 – All that God has prepared for those who love Him. We know from John 14 that those who love Him are those who obey Him.

Matthew 6: 19-21 – What does this verse say? Pastors often preach on the verse. They will say that what it means is that instead of laying up treasure on earth, give it to me. And when you do that God will lay up for you a treasure in heaven. Well, that is exactly what this verse means. However, it is also true for many other areas of service in addition to financial giving.

Revelation 22: 12-16 – One of the last things Jesus says in the Bible is that he is coming quickly and His reward is with Him so it must be important.

(Isaiah 40: 10, 11) – His reward is with Him

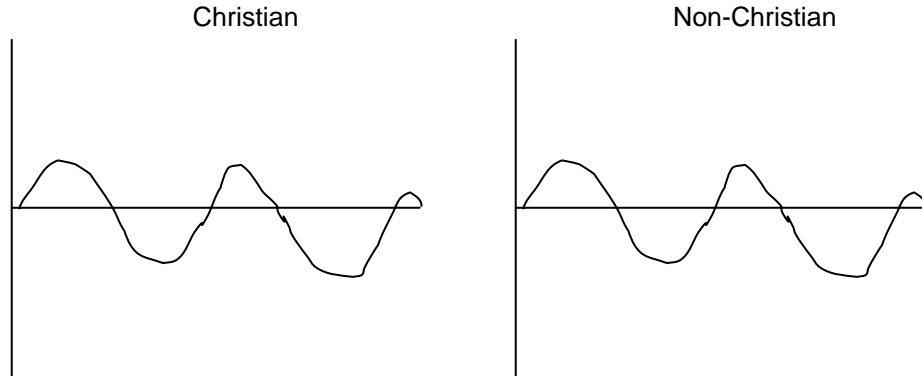
2) **How God Determines our Reward for Individual Acts of Service**

I Corinthians 3: 8-15 God rewards our labor or effort and the quality of our work. He does not reward the quantity of our work since that is a function of our spiritual gifts and design. For example, God will reward you for your faithfulness in evangelism regardless of the numerical result, not everyone is designed to be a Billy Graham. Ask them what the foundation is. It is Christ. Draw a concrete slab on the board labeled “Christ”. The foundation is our salvation. Now as we live our lives we build on this slab. What are built on the slab? Gold, Silver, Precious Stones, Wood, Hay, Straw. The Gold, etc. are those acts of service and sacrifice we did out of love and devotion to God. Our sins and worldly loves are the Wood, Hay, and Straw. As our lives pass through the fire of purification those impure things are burned up. The good things left are what God gives us a reward for. We are then purified for entry into heaven. The foundation, our salvation, is not damaged by the fire therefore this is a fire of purification, not of punishment. Nevertheless, a Christian who has lived his life for himself in disregard of God will suffer loss as he sees what he gave his life to burned up.

II Corinthians 5: 9, 10 – All men will appear before the Judgment seat of Christ to be recompensed for our deeds in the body. However the process is a little different for the Christian and the NonChristian.

Matthew 16: 24-27 – 2nd coming, recompense every man

At this point draw two graphs on the board, one for the Christian and one for the nonchristian. Each graph has a vertical line on the left side with a horizontal line bisecting the vertical section into a top and bottom half. Draw a rough sine wave that crosses back and forth from the top of the horizontal line to the bottom and back.



The top sections represent the times you obeyed God in Faith (Gold, Silver, Precious Stones). The bottom sections represent times of disobedience and sin (Wood, Hay, Straw). Now lets see how the judgement process works for each. First, the Christian.

Romans 8:1 – no condemnation for those in Christ

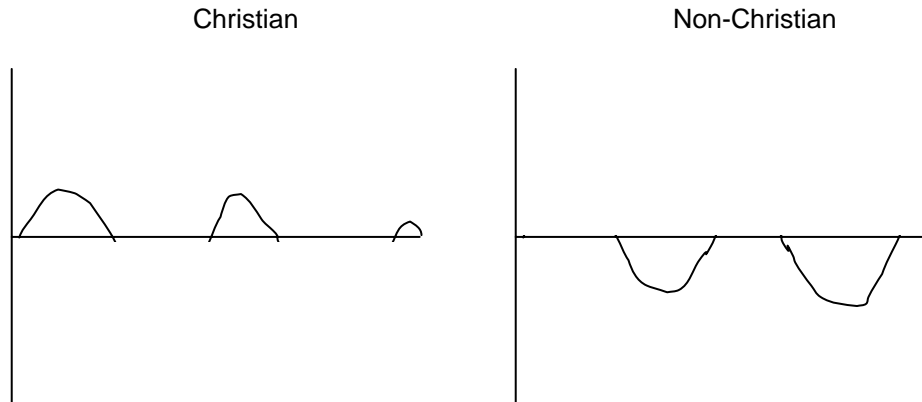
Romans 4: 7, 8 – Blessed are those whose sin will not be counted against them.

Psalms 103:10-12 – God has not dealt with us according to our sin, nor rewarded us according... Based on these verses the blood of Christ has wiped clean our sins and we can erase the bottom sections on the graph.

Isaiah 64: 6 – Righteous deeds apart from Christ are like filthy garments

Based on this we know that the righteous deeds of those without Christ have the value of filthy rags and are worthless so we erase the top sections on the Non-Christian's graph.

The graphs now look like this:



Now we are ready to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and be recompensed for our deeds in the body, whether good or bad.

For the Christian it is a very positive experience as God welcomes us as a mature child he has known for many years and traces through our lives not sure about the blank areas but proudly reminiscing about our love and faithfulness during the positive times as His child.

For the nonchristian the process is more of a legal action. An angel announces that you are standing before almighty God. A God of Holiness, Righteousness, and Purity. A God who cannot allow any sin to stand in His presence. Let the judgment begin. As the angel traces from the beginning of your life he quickly hits a bottom section at which time the process stops. He announces: "You have sinned against Almighty God, ignoring his statutes and ordinances. You are hereby sentenced to eternity in the fires of Hell. (Gavel hit noise). Next case.

Some Examples of Things God Rewards us For:

Luke 6: 22, 23, 35 – When men ostracize you.

Mark 10: 42-45 – If you wish to become great, serve.

(Matthew 6: 3, 4) – Giving money to your church

(Matthew 6: 6) – Praying

(Matthew 6: 17, 18) – Fasting

(Mark 10: 21) – Giving to the poor

In addition to rewarding us for each act of sacrifice, service, and faith, God also has special rewards or crowns for faithful or exceptional service in five areas. Knowing what these five areas are can help us set priorities for how we spend our resources on the earth.

3) Special Rewards for Long-term, Faithful Service in God's Top 5 Priority Areas

a) James 1:12 – Crown of Life (Perseverance Under Trial)

Revelation 2:10 – Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. Some people think the crown of life mentioned here is not a real crown but a symbolic crown representing eternal life. However, the next verse clarifies why this is not the case.

Revelation 3: 10, 11 – Let no one take your crown. Unlike rewards for individual acts of service crowns can be lost. Since eternal life cannot be lost the crown of life is not a symbol of salvation, it is a crown we receive from God as a reward for our faithfulness.

God has not disqualified anyone from receiving a crown. For example, God never states that the source of the trial is important – only our faith and perseverance. For example, many trials in life are a result of sin. However, if you confess the sin and persevere under trial God will still give you the Crown of Life. What are some examples: Bad marriage, prison, etc.

II Timothy 3: 12 – All who live Godly will be persecuted. This is another source of trial. The bottom line is that sin results in trials and godliness also results in trials. The trials are different in nature but our faithful perseverance during them result in the same crown.

(I Peter 1: 6, 7) – Faith during trials will result in praise, glory, honor

b) II Timothy 4: 7, 8 – Crown of Righteousness (Moral Purity & an Undivided Heart)

The Crown of Righteousness is given to those who truly look forward to the Second Coming of Christ. Their hearts are not attached to this world.

I John 3: 2, 3 – those who hope in Christ's return purify themselves just as He is pure. This verse shows us that those that look forward to Christ's return purify themselves from a love of the world system and other things.

James 4: 4 – Friendship with the world is hostility toward God. If you knew Jesus was returning tomorrow what would your initial reaction be. Would you think that was great or would you regret that you would miss some things?

I John 2: 28 – abide in Him so you won't be ashamed at His coming. If you had to stand before God today, would you be ashamed?

(Psalm 101: 3) – I will set no worthless thing before my eyes.

c) I Thessalonians 2: 19, 20 – Crown of Exultation / Joy (Evangelism, Sharing your Faith)

Matthew 10: 32, 33 – Jesus will confess you before God if you confess Him before men.

Mark 8: 38 – If we are ashamed of Him and His words He will be ashamed of us.

Luke 12: 8, 9 – Jesus will confess us before the angels of God if we confess Him before men.

If we have been faithful in sharing our faith before men Jesus is going to take us around to God the Father and to the angels and talk about how proud he is of us. Some of the angels already know us because they were on missions with us.

d) I Peter 5: 1-4 – Crown of Glory (Disciplemaking, Shepherding, Helping others Grow)

This includes pastoring churches, teaching Sunday school, meeting one-on-one with someone, etc. Now let me ask you a question: On any Sunday, in every church in America there is a shortage of people in one particular ministry area. What area is it? Working with Kids. Why is that? Because there is no glory in it. No one is going to come up to you and say, "Wow, you must be a spiritual giant, you teach kindergarten"! Yet God does not specify that this Crown is only for helping adults. If you want the Crown of Glory (notice the name) and you can't find any adults that want your help, volunteer to help out with a children's ministry. Someday there will be many surprised Christians who are asked to step aside so those who have worked faithfully with children can come forward to receive their crown.

Daniel 12: 1-3 – Those who have insight and lead others to righteousness will shine brightly. This verse tells us that in heaven those who have served faithfully will shine brightly. The closest thing on the earth I can compare it to is a military uniform. Without ever talking to the person, if you know what the insignia mean, you can determine in just a few seconds his level of authority, his technical skills, whether he is good shooting a rifle, flying a plane, driving a tank, jumping out of perfectly good airplanes, etc. You can tell if he has ever been in combat, what the battle theater was, and if he is a true hero or not.

e) I Corinthians 9: 24-27 – Imperishable Wreath (Disciplines of the Christian Life)

In this verse Paul compares the Christian life to those competing in the Games (the ancient Olympic games). They disciplined themselves to receive a wreath on their heads. We are to disciple ourselves as an athlete in training. Is there ever a day the athlete wakes up and doesn't feel like doing his training routine? Yet, he does it anyway in pursuit of the prize. In the same way God has a special crown for those who are faithful in things that have the characteristics of athletic training. What are those characteristics? (every day, hard, requires discipline, pays off in long run, not short run). What would be some examples in the Christian Life?

II Timothy 2:15 – Bible Study, Scripture Memory

Psalms 5:3 – Quiet Time, Prayer

4) Value of Rewards

Crowns allow us to worship God more fully. However, the honor we received when God gave us the crown in front of everyone can never be taken away. Also, the individual rewards have value in the economy of eternity though God does not give us details.

Revelation 4: 4, 10-11 – Worship

For those who overcome - A glimpse into heaven:

(Revelation 2: 7, 11, 17, 26-28)

(Revelation 3: 5, 12, 21)

5) Degrees of Reward – some will be lesser in heaven than others

Matthew 5:19 – the least and the greatest in heaven

Matthew 11: 11 – the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist.

6) God Will Help Us – If we want these rewards God will help us.

Proverbs 24: 16 – the righteous fall 7 times but rise again, the wicked fall headlong & stay down.

Psalms 145: 14 – the Lord sustains all who fall, He raises those who are bowed down.