

Christian Rewards in God's Kingdom

Living the supernatural life is a blessing not only now but also in the future. There is a great difference in the doctrine of salvation for the lost and the doctrine of rewards for the saved. Salvation is by grace, not by works, but rewards are according to the works of the believer. Salvation is a gift; rewards are earned. 1st Corinthians 3: 8-15 reveals several truths about rewards:

- a) Every believer will be rewarded according to his or her own labour (v 8).
- b) We are labourers together with God, not for salvation but for His service (v 9).
- c) We are supposed to build on Christ as our foundation (v 11).
- d) We have a choice of two kinds of building materials (v 12-15): gold, silver, and costly stones or wood, hay, and straw. The first kinds represent eternal quality of labour that results in rewards. The second represent temporal quality of labour that results in loss at the judgment seat of Christ.

A minister sat at the bedside of a dying friend. As the friend talked of going home, tears filled his eyes. The minister thought he was afraid to die and tried to speak words of encouragement to him. The friend said: "I'm not afraid; I'm just ashamed to die." Christ was his Saviour, but he had to meet Him empty-handed. His life was like "wood, hay, and straw." It doesn't have to be that way. Christians can live and die crowned with victory. Sometimes the Christian's reward is called a prize, but several times it is called a crown. Five crowns are mentioned in the New Testament:

1) The crown of life (James 1:12 deutsch: Luther)

This crown called "crown of life" is sometimes also called "lover's crown." We find strength to overcome temptation and endure trials through the love of God. Without His love in our hearts, trials can cause us to become bitter and critical and lose the crown of life. This is also the crown that is received for being "faithful unto death" (Revelation 2:10). All believers have eternal life, but not all believers will be rewarded with the crown of life. To receive it, we must love the Lord more than our lives (Mark 8:35).

2) The crown of rejoicing (1st Thessalonians 2: 19.20)

The crown of rejoicing is called the "soul-winner's crown". The greatest work we are privileged to do for the Lord is to bring others to get to know Christ as their personal Saviour. Why should we win the lost? It is wise to win the lost (Proverbs 11:30 deutsch: Gute Nachricht) from the way of sin (James 5:20). It is a cause for joy in heaven (Luke 15:20). Every soul-winner will shine as the stars forever (Daniel 12: 3). How can we win souls? We can win souls by our life example. Others see Christ in us as we respond properly in life situations (2nd Corinthians 3:2). We can lead others to Christ with our mouths. We need to witness verbally for Christ, trusting the Holy Spirit to give us power (Act 1:8). We can win souls through our giving. We should give tithes and offerings to support others who are preaching Christ and so have fruit abound to our account (Philippians 4:15-17). There is much rejoicing when the lost are saved. Heaven rejoices (Luke 15:10), the new believer rejoices (Acts 8:39), the sower and reaper rejoice together (John 4:36), and the whole family of God rejoices.

3) The crown of righteousness (2nd Timothy 4:8)

The crown of righteousness is the crown earned by believers who eagerly anticipate the second coming of Christ. Paul would say: "I have fought a good fight" (2nd Timothy 4:7). In the realm of spiritual warfare, Paul won the battle. He could also say, "I have finished my course". In the course of travel, there was no detour around hard places. There was no looking back (Luke 9:61-62). Instead, Paul kept his eyes on

Christ (Philippians 1:6). Finally he could say: "I have kept the faith". He preached all the counsel of God (Acts 20:24-31).

4) The crown of glory (1st Peter 5:4)

The crown of glory is a special reward for the faithful, obedient, God called pastors. The Chief Shepherd Himself gives it. It is eternal and it "fades not away". Yet every believer may share in the pastor's crown of glory (Matt 10:41). God will reward those who support His chosen servant through prayer and encouragement and giving freely of self and possessions. The pastor earns this reward by feeding the church (1st Peter 5:2). Taking the spiritual oversight of the church and being an example to the church, pastors are supposed to walk with God by faith. They are called to spiritual leaders.

5) The incorruptible crown (1st Corinthians 9: 24.25)

This is the crown for victorious living. In the Greek games, the competitors ran for a corruptible crown; in the Christian race, we run for an incorruptible one. The key to victory is a disciplined life, whether in the Olympic Games or in the Christian life. Athletes deny themselves many things their bodies crave. Likewise, Christians must subdue their bodies or else be disqualified for the prize. The New Testament contains guidelines for us to win the crown of victory. We must deny self of anything that would weigh us down and hinder us. We must keep our eyes fixed on Christ (Hebrews 12: 1.2). We must find our strength in the Lord (Ephesians 6:10-18). We must place our all on the altar of the Lord (Romans 12: 1.2). We must, by faith, refuse anything that would impede spiritual progress. There is no way to win this crown and be a spectator in the Christian life. We must enter the race and run to win.

In an old legend, an angel was talking with an aged Christian. Going into a great chamber, he brought out a beautiful crown with shining jewels of rare value. He said: "This is the crown I designed for you when you were young, but you refused to surrender yourself completely to the Lord; now it is gone." From the chamber he brought another crown. It was beautiful but not nearly as beautiful as the first one. He said: "This is the crown I designed for your middle age, but you gave those years to indolent discipleship; now it is gone." The angel brought a third crown from the chamber. It was just a plain gold crown with no jewels in it. He said: "Here is the crown of your old age. This is yours for all eternity." Every one of us will receive a reward according to our labour. What will be your reward? Jesus, the bridegroom is waiting for you all the time. The conditions that prevent His approach are all of your own making. Take the right place before Him, and He will be most ready, most glad to satisfy your deepest longings. When Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica (2nd Thessalonians 1: 4-6), they were in the midst of intensive suffering. But Paul in his love encouraged them to look beyond their immediate troubles to the return of Christ and the affirmation that they will receive from Him. So you and I are also called by God to finish our lives well by holding to the truth that lasts and labour for an eternal crown which has been prepared for us in eternity.

Yours in His service, F.P. Arthur from Ghana/ West Africa,
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