

Rewards in Heaven

The Bible speaks about judgment of both the saved and the unsaved ... **Rom. 14:10** we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... **Rev. 20:11** And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. **12** And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ... The eternal destiny of the believer will be with Christ, **Rom. 3:20** Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. **21** But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; **22** Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe ... The believer's sin has been completely dealt with by the Saviour's 'imputed righteousness', by which God has 'perfected' His people. Therefore, Hell will never be the eternal abode of the Redeemed. ... That, however, is not the case for the unbeliever because having rejected the grace of God, His eternal wrath determines their future.

Are there degrees of reward in Heaven ... which also begs the question, are there degrees of punishment in Hell? Firstly, are there degrees of reward in Heaven?

For the believer, the gift of salvation is free, to which nothing of our works contribute. We do not deserve a home in Heaven. Salvation is completely *all* of the Lord, **Eph. 2:8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. **9** Not of works, lest any man should boast. We are trusting in Christ alone, and in His promises that when we die we shall go to be with Him forever. And that is the reward of our salvation, **Jn. 14:2** In my Father's house are many mansions ... **3** And ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. ... If that would be the conclusion of the matter, it is more than we deserve.

However, will some believers receive greater reward? ... Are there degrees of reward in Heaven? ... While our entrance into Heaven is already secured by God's grace, do our works have anything to do with our reward once we get there?

One of the greatest motivating factors in Paul's life was that Jesus was coming back, and Paul was expecting to be still alive when Jesus returned, **I Thess. 4:17** Then *we* which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. Following the Lord's return there would be a time of reward for the faithful, **Phil. 3:14** I press toward the mark for *the prize* [*βραβεῖον, the award to the victor in the games*] of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ... The same word for 'prize' is used in **I Cor. 9:24** Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth *the prize*? So run, that ye may obtain. ... It is Paul's same emphasis when he wrote to Timothy, **II Tim. 4:7** I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have

kept the faith: **8** 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 ... Paul was not simply interested in being *in* the race, but he was ‘in it to win it’. There was nothing ‘half-hearted’ about how he lived his faith for he put his absolute ‘all’ into achieving the very best he could ... and in doing so, he was pursuing his hope in the Lord Jesus Who said, **Rev. 22:12** behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Paul gives the three motives for his ministry: (i) the coming of Christ’s judgment, and the hope of reward, **II Cor. 5:10** we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad [*i.e. our labours for the Lord*]; (ii) the compelling nature of Christ’s love to serve Him, **14** For the love of Christ constraineth us ... ‘constraineth’ (*συνέχω*) refers to how the love of Christ completely rendered him under the authority of God; (iii) the change Paul witnessed in people’s lives, **17** if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. ... For Paul, in anticipation of the judgment, these three motives for his ministry were to hear the words of commendation from the Lord, to do the best for his Saviour, **Rom. 14:12** So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

The Judge is the Lord Jesus, **Jn. 5:22** For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son ... The Christian will not be judged on their sin for all their sin has been judged permanently at Calvary, **I Jn. 2:12** your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake ... **Rom. 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. ... That means Jesus completely understands the full and terrible implications of sentence necessary for the judgment of sin because it had all been laid on Him by His Father at the cross, and therefore, there is none more qualified to be the Judge than Him.

Since because of what His Son did for us, God has declared us righteous and, therefore, the judgment for the Christian is a place of reward, - commendation, not condemnation. ... Our reward of eternal life is due to our Saviour’s victory over our sin and our subsequent punishment, as Paul told *the Corinthians*, **I Cor. 4:5** Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: *and then shall every man have praise of God.* ... Every believer will have the praise of God! ...

The word used in **II Cor. 5:10** for the *judgment seat* (*βῆμα, bema*) refers to the podiums in the Olympic stadium upon which the winning athletes ascended to receive their victory awards. In the race, they would all succeed in passing the ‘winning line’ ... There would be the committed enthusiasts, and others, and they

would all receive the prize for finishing the course successfully, ... **then shall every man have praise of God.** Every believer will be saved, for they will endure to the end (Mt. 24:13), they will receive the winning crown ... and the acclamation of God.

While serving Him on earth, we are also described as builders building on the only viable Foundation, **I Cor. 3:11** For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ ... **I Peter 2:5** Ye also, as lively [*living*] stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Upon Christ as our Foundation we can either build using the very best, **I Cor. 3:12** Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones ... or we can use wood, hay, stubble. Obviously, there is a disparity between the two types of 'material', **13** Every man's work shall be made manifest [*tested*]: for the day [*i.e. the day of judgment*] shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is ... The quality of our service for the Saviour, - in terms of our faithfulness, - will be determined, evaluated and examined by the Lord Jesus.

Where we have served in obedience to His Word, **14** If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. However, where we have served our own purposes and our own interests, He will destroy, - they will have been a waste of our time and energy, **15** If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. ... While we shall not lose our salvation, our futile endeavours will be of no eternal consequence, "Only one life, twill soon be passed, only what's done *for Christ* will last".

So, Paul indicates firstly, the reward of eternal life for every believer, - we stand before God in eternity accepted, loved, forgiven, and justified because of what Jesus did for us at Calvary. And secondly, Paul also spoke of the added rewards for those who serve the Lord faithfully. ... Does that mean, though, there will be a place in Heaven for those who have more rewards, and a separate place for those who have less? Does that mean some will be happier than others? No, absolutely not, for the greatest reward of all, - one which none deserves, - will be sharing and being in the presence of the Almighty God for ever, **I Jn. 3:2** Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

In this manner, there are no degrees of reward because we shall not be looking at ourselves or our achievements. In fact, our rewards, - our crowns which have been worked hard for, - we shall not hold on to them but instead, we shall cast them at the Saviour's feet ... the incorruptible crown (I Cor. 9:25), the crown of rejoicing (I Thess. 2:19), the crown of life (James 1:12), the crown of righteousness (II Tim. 4:8), the crown of glory (I Peter 5:4), and many more such crowns. ... We would

not have had them but for Him ... and there is none better than any other in Heaven for all Heaven's citizens are one in Christ, **Gal. 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. ... We shall be received into Heaven because of the same grace He has had for us all, without distinction, **1 Cor. 15:10** by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Yes, there are Christians who work harder than others ... but we are all saved by the same grace of God. None of us deserves salvation, - it is a privilege and a pleasure to serve Him, and we are not doing it to 'gain extra points', but because we love Him. ... Jesus told the parable about the land-owner who hired workers for a penny a day (Mt. 20:1-14). The first group of men went into the vineyard early at six o'clock in the morning, - they had agreed to a day's work for a penny ('denarius'). At nine o'clock the same morning, he hired more men, and then some more at twelve o'clock, and again some more at three o'clock. Almost at the end of the day, - five o'clock in the evening, - he went out and hired some more men.

He told the first group he would pay them a penny, and he told the rest he would pay them *whatsoever is right* (Mt. 20:4,7). At six o'clock, when the work was finished, he gave them all a penny ... But that is not fair! Some worked twelve hours, and some only worked one hour, and yet they all received a penny?! In this parable, Jesus was not teaching about the differences of rewards, but the equality of salvation, - it is the same for all. From God's perspective, *none* is worthy of salvation, and eternal life is His gracious gift to undeserving sinners for which only Christ could have paid the cost. Therefore, as far as He is concerned, He gives to all His children *whatsoever is right*.

Before receiving Him, we were all equally lost, and now we are all equally saved. Salvation is the greatest gift. The thief on the cross who repented in the last hours and minutes of his life is as much saved as Peter or Paul, James or John. ... So how do you show your gratitude? ... You don't do it to impress those around you, but you do it for the Lord Who has redeemed you. As Paul says, **Phil. 2:12** Wherefore, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. **13** For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. ... And when He *does* hand you those rewards, you will look at them with the greatest joy for all He has privileged you to do for Him ... and then you will lay them at His feet, and you will enjoy His presence forever.