



Conducted by
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“Does the Bible teach that Christians will receive rewards, and if so, where does judgment fit into the teaching?”

SOME IDEAS EXPLAINED

In our study of the subject of ‘rewards’, I believe certain ideas must be explained which, in some minds, might seem to have a bearing on the subject.

Right at the outset we need to say that salvation is not a reward for our believing in God and His Christ. Salvation is ‘a gift of God’, and the Greek word used emphasises its gratuitous character. In Eph. 3:8,9 Paul says, **“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”**. This by the grace already mentioned in v5 of the same chapter. Grace is God’s part; faith in Christ is our part. The statement also proves to us that salvation is not a ‘work’ on our part; grace precludes anything meritorious.

Similarly, we are not to be confused by the phrase **“the measure of the gift of Christ,”** which is found in Eph. 4:7. It was a practice in the East that when a monarch ascended his throne, that out of the munificence of his glory he dispensed gifts to his subjects. When Christ ascended to His Heavenly Throne, He also gave gifts, but these were for a special purpose. (Read Eph. 4:12). These were not ‘rewards’.

Blessings are not rewards. The verb ‘to bless’, EULOGEO, means, ‘to speak well of’. The noun EULOGIA means ‘good speaking, praise’. It is used of a benefit bestowed, e.g., Gal. 3:14, **“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the ‘Gentiles through Jesus Christ’**. Previously Paul had said, **“So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham”**. 3:9. These are benefits bestowed by Christ through the Gospel. Similarly, Paul wanted the ‘bounty’ of the brethren at Corinth to be ‘well

spoken of' See 2 Cor. 9:5,6.

WHAT ARE REWARDS ?

A dictionary definition would be, "Return or recompense for service or merit requital for good or evil". It seems quite obvious that as commitment to Christ differs among Christians, so will the value of the service they render. Some will yield a hundredfold, others only thirtyfold, but they would all be saved because, as we have said, salvation is by grace and cannot be achieved either by service or merit. Therefore, we rightly argue, I believe, when we assert that salvation is **not** a reward, but I contend that for the Christian it can be the **beginning** of rewards. It seems to me that the Scriptures indicate that requital can be for good service, or for wrongdoing. We shall look at the rewards for good service first.

In the first eighteen verses of Matt. 6 we are presented with a stark contrast between what the disciples and the people were being taught by Jesus, and the hypocritical attitude of those who were ostensibly making a great show of praising God. The contrast is presented using the subjects of doing alms, praying, and fasting. The rewards of the hypocrites are plain to see; they would receive the praise of their contemporaries for their outward show of piety, but they would also on the other hand, receive the scathing denunciation of Jesus for their hypocritical attitude. The lesson for us today is, of course, that Christians can have the undoubted reward of basking in the adulation of their fellow-Christians and people of the world, and yet their hearts and minds can be as void of love for Christ as some arid desert is of water. They can enjoy the adulation here and now, but the Lord will surely requite them for their hypocritical attitude and lack of love.

Paul makes the situation a little clearer in Rom. 4:4 when he says "**Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.**" In other words the 'workman' gets the 'wages' due to him by virtue of his work, **but it is not of grace.** He argues in vv1-3 that the Jews might glory in Abraham regarding the flesh, and Luke bears this out in Luke 3:8 when he records John the Baptist as saying to the people, "**begin not to say within yourselves. We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham**". They were boasting of the achievements of Abraham in the flesh as if this were the sum of what God expected, but Paul says, "**For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God**". Rom.4:2. Abraham no doubt earned great respect among his brethren, but this was not the crucial thing so far as God was concerned; the scripture says that "**he believed God**" and it was **that** which counted for righteousness. Brethren, we sometimes look for rewards in the wrong places, and of the wrong type. What greater reward can there be here and now in believing what the world considers to be unbelievable; in trusting someone whom the world considers to be a myth; in knowing that the inner peace and contentment does not depend just on a form of words, but in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit with us. These are the **real rewards, laid out** for us now; further rewards are also **laid up** for us in Heaven. On top of that, we can also earn the respect of our contemporaries by our diligence to the Lord's work; by our integrity, honesty, reliability, industry, trustworthiness, and all the attributes which spring from a right relationship with God. The Christian life is indeed a rewarding life.

Just one other example from Paul himself. In 1 Cor. 9:16 Paul speaks about having nothing to glory about in preaching the Gospel, indeed, necessity is laid upon him to do just that. In v17 he says, "**For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me**". In v18 he goes on, "**What is my reward then ? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel**". Apparently, the reward Paul had for his willing service in the gospel was that it should be 'without

expense'. He boasts of this in Acts 20:33-35, **"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"**. Now here is a grand concept. Willing work in the Gospel, done without incurring expense; providing help to co-workers through manual labour; working with the realisation that it is better to give than to receive. This makes a mockery of the 'what's in it for me' attitude, doesn't it? Have you ever considered these Christian attributes to be 'rewards', or have we gone about Christ's work reluctantly, and considered it to be a chore to be endured?

Rewards? Yes, they're here to be enjoyed in this life, and there will be more to come in the hereafter. It's a matter of knowing where to look, and to appreciate the nature of them, isn't it?

JUDGMENT

Judgment, by definition, is 'the sentence of a court of justice'; the Judge is the one who usually passes the sentence. In the Christian sense, God would seem to be the One to deliver the sentence.

A valid question may be posed at this point, i.e., if the righteous go to Heaven at death, what is the point of a judgment? Now even though this question may seem reasonable and valid, if it came from a Christian it would indicate a degree of scriptural immaturity, because it would mean that God knows nothing about the lives of His children until some final interrogation either at the end of time, or outside time. I personally cannot believe that at some unspecified time God will hold a 'one-off' tribunal of interrogation in order to determine who should or should not be saved. When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy he said, **"Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his"** 2 Tim. 2:19. The verb 'to know' (Gk. GINOSKO) indicates a relation between the Person knowing and the object known. In 1 Cor. 8:3 we read, **"But if any man loved God, the same is known of him"**. The relationship between 'knower' and 'known' is a 'sealed' relationship, and a continuous and timeless one.

Have you ever wondered how God could bless us, or answer our prayers, if He didn't know all about us? Peter says, **"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil"**. 1 Peter 3:12. Brethren, if we believe that the righteous have to wait for a final judgment before it can be decided if they go to Heaven, then we had better revise some of the words used at funeral services of the brethren, especially when we affirm that our departed brother or sister 'is now with his/her Lord', If we believe those words, then I contend we believe that judgment has been passed in respect of what has been done **in this life**. The Day of Judgment is not to decide if we are guilty, but the day of final sentence. It is not a day of interrogation to find out if we belong to the Lord — the Lord knoweth them that are his — but it is the day of final rewards. I do not believe there is some mindless, senseless 'limbo' somewhere 'midway' between Heaven and earth. Do you?

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