

God's Eternal Plan #18
The Believer's Rewards
2 Corinthians 5:10

In our last study we looked at the Judgment Seat of Christ and the bases of the believer's rewards or losses. In this study we will look at the rewards themselves.

When Paul writes to the Corinthian believers concerning the Judgment Seat of Christ, he reminds them of the severity and awesomeness of that particular event. Then in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 he gives us a deeper insight into the matter, "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

We talked about the Greek word translated "judgment seat" is a little word "bema." And the word "bema" carried with it the idea of prominence, dignity, authority, honor, and reward, rather than the idea of justice and judgment. In other words, the Judgment Seat of Christ will be the time when believers will stand before Christ to be rewarded for their faithfulness and stewardship towards the ministry of Christ in his or her life.

A study of the Judgment Seat of Christ introduces us to a subject about which the Scriptures have a great deal to say – the subject of crowns. To better understand this matter of *crowns* we will need to look at some of these together.

In the original Greek language there are two different words translated into our one English word "crown." For instance in Revelation 19:11-12 we are told, "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself." And then in verse 16 of that same chapter, we are given this information, "And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." **In verse 12 John tells us that when Christ comes to this earth the second time, He will be crowned King!** The word translated "crown" in Revelation 19 is the word from which we get our English word "diadem" and it refers to *crowns* worn by the highest authority.

The second word translated "crown" is the Greek word "stephanos." This crown was given as the victor's crown in the Olympic games, and is associated with honor and dignity bestowed on the overcomer. Although we

will reign with Christ, the kingly crown is His alone. The victor's crowns are ours.

So for the next few minutes I want to direct your attention to five New Testament passages that speak of different crowns that will be given to believers if they are deemed worthy of a crown at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The first of these passages is found in James 1:12 and has to do with the "crown of life." This crown is for those who have endured trials and testing, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." The Greek word translated "temptation" is not that which entices us to commit that which is *sin*, but is used as a time of *testing* or a time of *trial*.

Now watch this – it is not the fact that one is tested that brings him a reward. The *reward* or *crown* is only for those who have been an overcomer in that testing. Therefore, our reward will be determined on how we handled the testing of our faith.

But what constitutes the trial of one's faith? How does God go about to test a person's faith? Let me make it as simple as I can. Anytime you are disappointed is a test of your faith. Anytime you are *discouraged* is a test of your faith. Let me try to explain what I am saying right here.

Lets suppose you have been praying for something and you didn't get what you have been praying for, and you are disappointed about your situation. You didn't get what you asked for, but what are you going about it? Are you going to stop praying and say that prayer doesn't work? Or are you going to wait on the Lord? That is a test of your faith.

Lets suppose you didn't get the job, or the raise, that you wanted so badly, and you are disappointed. You were sure that it was God's will for you to have a new job, you even promised to give Him all the tithes. But the job didn't come. That is a test of your faith.

Lets suppose there is a person in the church that you have lots of confidence in as a Christian, and then one day that person says something, or does something that causes you to lose confidence in his, and you're disappointed and hurt. That is a test of your faith.

Anytime there is disappointment and/or discouragement in your life that is a test of your faith. And turn of events, or any circumstances, or any person that leads to disappointment and hurt is a test of your faith. And when

that happens God is saying, “Alright, now that you are hurt and/or disappointed, or discouraged, are you still going to believe me, and are you still going to serve me?”

Therefore, the question that you and I must ask ourselves tonight is this – “Does my love for Jesus Christ overshadow my circumstances and trials?” And your answer will determine if you will receive the “**crown of life**” and the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The next crown is an “incorruptible crown,” and this crown is for those who can overcome the pull of the flesh. Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:25, “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” This passage of Scripture is made much more clearly in the Greek, “All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.”

In Paul’s day, no man ever ran in the Olympic races and quit halfway through. It was a matter of *honor*. It was a matter of *integrity*. It was a matter of total *commitment*. **Regardless of what kind of physical ailment he or she might develop in the middle of the race.** Even if he came in dead last, he ran all the way. And the problem that Paul was addressing was the problem of *quitting* when we are only halfway through.

In my years of ministry, and in every church, there have been those people who are always exploding with a great new idea; they are just walking in the clouds because of their new revelation. They make a little start and then they have another *word from God*, and another great idea. The problem is, they never seem to get very much accomplished because they are always chasing a *new idea*.

Then there are those people, who will start a job and/or get involved in a ministry, and they are really faithful for a few months, but then they seemingly lose interest in that particular ministry. And then you look around and they have stopped all together.

Therefore, the “**incorruptible crown**” is for those who are committed to the task of faithful service.

The next crown is the “crown of rejoicing,” also known as the soul winners crown. 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 gives us this insight, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.” This crown has two very distinct characteristics: the life that is changed because of the message, and the joy it gives the one who has shared the message.

Although this is often called the soul winner's crown," we must realize that although every believer is called to be a witness, not every believer is called to be a soul winner." A *witness* is simply someone that shares what they know (what Christ has done for them). But the person that has been called to be a *soul winner* has a special calling on their life, and it is a natural thing for them to share the Gospel even with a stranger. **And sometimes believers will hear a sermon on soul winning and feel guilty, or condemned, because they aren't out telling people about Christ.** And unless that is what God has called you to do, then just let your life (attitude, love and compassion, etc.) be your witness. And when the door opens to share what Christ has done for you – do so.

The next crown is the "crown of righteousness." This *crown* is for those who love the appearing of Christ, as seen in 2 Timothy 4:8, "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." This is a reward that every child of God will receive. **Why?** The answer is given for us in Romans 3:21-22, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe." 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption - that, as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." Look also at 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Look at Paul's statement in Philippians 3:9, "...not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." **I don't care how badly you may have messed things up yesterday or how many mistakes you have made today, the Bible teaches that every believer is righteous!** You are righteous, not because of anything you have done but because of your simple child-like faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The very moment you asked Jesus Christ to come into your life, forgive you of your and make you a Christian, you, by your faith, received the very righteousness of God.

And the normal response of a righteous person to the doctrine of the Return of Christ to rapture His Church is that of expectancy. Why? Because, to the believer prophecy is a comforting hope, not a time of fear and dread.

The last crown is a special crown called the "crown of glory." This crown is revealed to us in 1 Peter 5:1-4, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you,

serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”

The crown of glory will be given to God’s faithful under-shepherds, the ministers who preach the Word of God in truth and purity, who are committed to faithfully feed to sheep with the living Word. Notice the minister is to take the “oversight,” that is, he is to *watch over* the business, administration, vision, and direction of the local fellowship of believers to which he has been ordained and called of God to lead.

The wording Peter uses in quite interesting. The King James Version says, “not for filthy lucre,” and the New King James Version says, “not for dishonest gain.” The Greek says, “not for shameful or dishonest gain.” In other words, no preacher should preach just for the sake of a salary, and that usually is not a problem in a Baptist Church. The Baptist prayer is, “Lord if you will keep him humble, we will keep him broke.” I must confess, Mountain Grove has been very good to me when we have had it to give and I am thankful.

Now we come to the results of the rewards received at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Revelation 4:9-11 puts it this way, “Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.” What we have is the “twenty-four elders,” which represent the church, giving their crowns as a Thank Offering to the Lord Christ who gave us those crowns in the first place.

It is clear from the Scriptures the believer was redeemed to bring glory to God. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” Today, we give our money as an act of thanksgiving and worship, but on that day, we will give our crowns as an eternal act of thanksgiving and worship.