

## GOD REWARDS THE FAITHFUL: SO WHAT ABOUT ME?

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*by Dr. Henderson Ward*



However hard we try there is always a pestilential, nagging doubt that somehow we are missing the mark. It is not so much that we are second guessing ourselves on anything and everything we do or that we are not confident in our own skin. No, it seems to be something more elusive, something we can't see and put our fingers on but something there nevertheless and it's totally discomfiting because we can't rationalize a reason why it should be there and yet we are sure it is registering in our consciousness.

Is this, we wonder, that caused the Apostle Paul to cry out, *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24)*

and for the apostles to respond to Jesus' pronouncement on the rich man with amazement, *"And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26)*

and for Job to berate God for his agonies,

*"Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me: Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me." (Job 9:33-35)*

and for King Solomon to assert,

*"And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." (Ecclesiastes 1:13-14)*

Everywhere and in everything there is the undertones of dissatisfaction with what is and a sense of helplessness with getting to what should be and our part in helping or hindering the situation. There is an element of finality, of smallness in the face of what seems to be infinite

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challenges too great to be confronted never mind daring to conquer or control and the greatest opponent of all is ourselves.

Every Christian because of his relationship to Christ strives for perfection (*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect - Matthew 5:48*)

) but however hard he tries he knows the process is unending and he can never reach that goal. Yet he feels that he is missing a mark that he should in all honesty hit full centre and any rewards coming his way is tied to his achieving that goal.

Let us unravel this a little bit because it is getting too complex.

God requires perfection for all his children but not in the way we normally understand the word. Every time a Christian fails, every miss-step we make, every sin we commit we torment ourselves that we could and should have avoided the offense and yet we have no assurance that we will not fail in that same way again. The strongest most committed determination to do right does not translate into always doing right. When we are at our strongest we are still weak and the weakness does not intrude from the outside but flows from our very nature, from the very substance of our being a product of Adam and a member of fallible mankind.

Perfection therefore can never be accomplished but wholeness can. We can love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and our neighbor as ourselves and in so doing be in perfect compliance with God's requirement. This is Christian perfection and speaks to our wholeness, our completeness, our total absorption in Christ and hence nothing can be added to make us more perfect. This matchless state is not rewarded by God because no one will ever merit this status in Christ. This distinctive state is acknowledged by God and assigned the gift of eternal life and rest solely on the work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

No matter how committed you are to God he does not reward you for that. What you get for being saved is eternal life and eternal life is not a reward; it's a gift from God for being saved. Here is how the Bible puts it, *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23) and *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."* (Ephesians 2:8)

The Bible refers to four crowns of salvation and many people confuse these crowns with rewards and clearly they are not. There are many crowns mentioned in the Bible; crown of pure gold (King David's), holy crown of pure gold (the High Priest's), crown of gold (Mordecai's), crowns of gold (the 24 Elders'), etc but just four are related specifically to salvation and in every case they relate to being saved/salvation/eternal life and is the gift of God. Here are the four.

### **The crown of glory**

"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Peter 5:4)

### **The crown of Rejoicing**

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"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?" (1Thessalonians 2:19)

### **The crown of life**

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12)

### **The crown of righteousness**

"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." (2Timothy 4:8)

In all these cases the crown is given to all those who are saved and remain faithful to the end because these crowns are called by different names but are all the same thing: eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ. So if the crowns are not rewards what are the rewards and who gets them?

The distinction here that must be recognized is that the crowns, eternal life, is based on the sole efforts of Jesus Christ and not on any effort on man's part. Man has nothing to boast about, nothing merited or earned in the slightest with respect to his salvation. However with respect to rewards the situation is totally different. Heaven's rewards are based solely on the efforts of believers and nothing else. Here are some scriptures confirming this.

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:27)

"For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." (Mark 9:41)

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Revelation 22:12)

God requires production, effort, good and extensive work on our part and in recognition thereof he is going to amply reward us. Think about this and see it stands to reason. Do you think it is fair and reasonable that a young man gets saved at sixteen, commits himself to God's service with enthusiasm, helps the people in his community from day to day, visits homes, hospitals, prisons and other institutions doing God's work, commits himself to evangelism and missionary work for all his life and dies at the age of eighty in a foreign mission field having led thousands to Christ and he then receives from God exactly the same reward as a young man who gets saved at sixteen and for the rest of his life remains an inactive back-bencher in his local church? No, it won't be fair.

Do you think someone who is saved and does nothing to help others should get the same reward as a hard and diligent worker like the evangelist Dr. Billy Graham? Do you think that

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God will give the same award to the Apostle Matthias (who replaced Judas) of whom we have heard nothing as he will to Apostle Paul? Most certainly God will not.

This is therefore a call for all believers to get cracking and do as much as you can when you can to as many as you can. It is a mistake to think that you have to be commissioned or be selected or appointed by somebody to engage in meaningful work for God. Let me say it loud and clear that is not so. There is a lot you can do right where you are; without training, without detailed planning all because the Spirit of God is with you and the Bible tells us, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way." (Psalm 37:23)

There are people all around you that need a little help; prayerful help, counselling help, warning help, a word of advice here and there, a little food and a little clothing, a sympathetic phone call, a school uniform here and a pair of sandals there and before you know it you are doing a lot of work for the lord. Of course some around you might be your enemy, "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." (Luke 6:35)

Remember you too can earn your reward if you persist, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Galatians 6:9)

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