

Life vs. Reward

If we are going to be good students of the word of God we must try the things that differ. Popular Bible teaching today seems to grasp the concept of salvation by grace alone, but there seems to be a dearth of teaching on the concept of reward by works. Let's examine passages that speak of both, and I think the Scriptures will loudly proclaim the distinction.

Eternal life is a free gift of God, wrought solely by the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is by grace alone, and no works on our part can add or subtract from our perfect standing in Christ. The believer's life is hid with Christ in God. (Col. 3:3) No being in heaven or on earth can touch that life. We are securely in the Father's hand.

Once saved, believer is exhorted to walk worthy of the great gift of salvation that he has received. This added bit is our works, which in no way impacts our salvation but does have a bearing on the possibility of reward. Notice, it is just the possibility of reward, and conversely the possibility of loss of reward. Often, the Scriptures speak of this as the prize, the crown, or the reward. Sometimes, a particular promise is given based on a specific act by the believer. All our works must stand the test of judgment, and there is the very real possibility of failure and loss. Let's examine these passages carefully and search and see if this is so.

Life

The Free Gift

Salvation is a free gift totally irrespective of our works, and wholly through the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

(Rom 11:5-6 KJV) "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. {6} And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

(Eph 2:8-9 KJV) "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."

(Acts 4:12 KJV) "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

(Acts 16:31 KJV) "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

(Rom 3:23-24 KJV) "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; {24} Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

(Rom 4:3-5 KJV) "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. {4} Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. {5} But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

(Rom 5:1-2 KJV) "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: {2} By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

(Rom 5:6-8 KJV) "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. {7} For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. {8} But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Salvation Assured

Our salvation is sure and cannot be revoked or affected by anyone or anything.

(John 10:27-29 KJV) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: {28} And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. {29} My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

(Rom 8:31-34 KJV) "What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? {32} He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? {33} Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. {34} Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

(Rom 8: 35, 38) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Perfect Standing in Christ

(Col 1:12-14 KJV) "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: {13} Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: {14} In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"

Notice the Father has already made us "meet" (fully equipped, all sufficient), "to be partakers of the inheritance" (to have a full share), "of the saints" (with Heaven's holiest of all- also used in Heb. 9:8, 12,23), "in the light" (the great light of God from which all is visible and exposed.) Surely, this can only be by the over abounding, loving work of our Redeemer to present us so perfectly. This is pure grace. This spotless presentation and standing is wonderfully repeated in the following verse as well.

(Col 1:22 KJV) "In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:"

Reward

(Psa 58:11 KJV) "So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

(Isa 40:10 KJV) "Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him."

(Isa 62:11 KJV) "Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him."

(Mat 16:27 KJV) "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."

(2 Cor 5:9-10 KJV) "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. {10} For 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."

Let's carefully examine this other side, reward by works. The first important point is that God graciously accepts our works done out of our desire for faithful service. There is also such a great element of His grace and mercy even in this, for what can we do that is truly worthy, apart from His Holy Spirit operating in us? The Spiritual side of our nature is also a gift from God upon salvation. Therefore, the very fact that we can walk in the Spirit at all is also from Him.

Still, He not only accepts our attempts at truly serving Him, but He will judge our service and add or take away rewards based on that service. Because we have a part in this equation, it is by no means a sure thing. As always with our human frailty, there is the real possibility of failure.

Beware:

As we just saw in the last section, Colossians begins with our perfect presentation. However, Colossians 1 is not even completed, and we start to receive warnings about being beguiled of our reward.

(Col 1:28 KJV) "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:"

(Col 2:6-10 KJV) "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: {7} Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. {8} Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. {9} For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. {10} And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

(Col 2:18 KJV) "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,"

What are you going to do?

Notice how passages dealing with reward always are closely tied to the believer *doing* something. Moreover, often there is often a promise of reward, if a person does a specific thing.

(Col 3:23-25 KJV) "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; {24} Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. {25} But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons."

(Prov 11:18 KJV) "The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward."

(Prov 25:21-22 KJV) "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: {22} For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee."

Though not written for our current dispensation, the Sermon on the Mount is full of specific promises of reward for specific acts of service.

(Matt 5:1-12 KJV) "And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: 2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, 3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. 10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

(Mat 5:44-48 KJV) "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; {45} That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. {46} For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? {47} And if ye

salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so? {48} Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

(Mat 6:1-6 KJV) "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. {2} Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. {3} But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: {4} That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. {5} And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. {6} But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which **seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.**"

(Mat 6:16-18 KJV) "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. {17} But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; {18} That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

(Mat 10:40-42 KJV) "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. {41} He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. {42} And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

(Mark 9:41 KJV) "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."
(Notice that he won't *lose* his reward.)

(Luke 6:22-23 KJV) "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. {23} Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your **reward is great in heaven**: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."

(Luke 6:35 KJV) "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."

(1 Cor 9:17-18 KJV) "**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. {18} What is my reward then? *Verily* that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel."

(1 Tim 5:18 KJV) "For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, **The labourer is worthy of his reward.**"

(Heb 10:35-36 KJV) "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. {36} For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

(1 Pet 1:16-17 KJV) "Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. {17} And if ye call on the Father, who without **respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work,** pass the time of your sojourning *here* in fear:"

(2 John 1:7-8 KJV) "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. {8} Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, **but that we receive a full reward.**"

(Rev 11:18 KJV) "And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that **thou shouldst give reward** unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy

name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

(Rev 14:13 KJV) "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their **works** do follow them."

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Works that Stand vs. Works that Burn

There is an old saying that states much fact: "One life and soon it is past, but only what's done for Christ will last." Our works will be judged by fire, and only works wrought in faith have the possibility of reward, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him." These next verses address this directly.

(1 Cor 3:8-15 KJV) "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. {9} For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building. {10} According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. {11} For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. {12} Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; {13} **Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.** {14} **If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.** {15} **If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."**

Notice that the believer's life is untouched, but he gains or suffers loss of reward based on the foundation of his labors. The principle of perfection (going on to completion) versus perdition (suffering waste or loss) is the theme of the book of Hebrews. Chapters 11 and 12 are a wonderful parade of examples, climaxing in the perfect faithful service of the Lord Himself. Here are just a few of the examples that speak specifically of the reward in view.

(Heb 11:4-6 KJV) "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. {5} By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. {6} **But without faith it is impossible to please him:** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and **that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**"

(Heb 11:24-26 KJV) "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; {25} Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; {26} Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: **for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.**"

(Heb 12:1-2 KJV) "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience **the race that is set before us**. {2} Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The Crown and Reigning with Him

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I frequently hear people talk about all of us wearing a crown and reigning with Christ, however, does Scripture say that all believers do so? No indeed, this is a special reward tied to specific worthy service. Also, notice crowns are called by different names: crown of life, crown of glory, and crown of righteousness. Does that mean that there are many types of crowns possible? Can one person earn more than one crown? It would seem so. Moreover, Paul sometimes uses the term prize. Is there a distinction? In 1 Cor. 9: 24-27, Paul uses the terms interchangeably, but no matter what the case, it is all definitely tied directly to service.

(James 1:12 KJV) "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."

(1 Pet 5:1-4 KJV) "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: {2} Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; {3} Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. {4} And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

(Rev 2:10 KJV) "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

(Rev 2:26 KJV) "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:"

(Rev 3:10-12 KJV) "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. {11} Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. {12} Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."

(Rom 8:16-18 KJV) "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: {17} And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. {18} For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Notice here, if you are saved, then you are a child of God and an heir of God; however, you are only a *joint-heir with Christ if you suffer with Him*, or in other words suffer for His name's sake. This is repeated in the next verse from 2 Timothy 2:11-12.

(2 Tim 2:11-12 KJV) "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: {12} If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny *him*, he also will deny us:"

Striving for the Prize

The metaphor of the striving for the prize being likened to a race or a fight or a journey is very typical of Paul's teaching on this. It is also abundantly clear from these next passages that attaining that prize is by no means assured.

(1 Cor 9:24-27 KJV) "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. {25} And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. {26} I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: {27} But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

When Paul says "I keep under my body," the original literally means, "I blacken my own eye and keep my body under bondage." Paul understood, as we should also that the biggest obstacle to winning the prize is ourselves! Paul also says "lest I be a castaway." This phrase literally means lest he be disqualified. Disqualified from life? Unthinkable! No, as the context demands, disqualified from the prize. Paul repeats much the same lesson in the following passage from Phil.

3.

(Phil 3:8-21 KJV) "Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, {9} And be found in him, 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: {10} That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; {11} **If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.** {12} Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. {13} Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I *do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, {14} I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. {15} Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. {16} Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. {17} Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. {18} (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: {19} Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) {20} For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: {21} Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

There are several key points in that passage. First, in verse 9, Paul makes it clear that all righteousness is found in Christ alone; and in terms of salvation all works are dung in that light. But in verse 10, he again brings up the point of suffering for Christ being tied to a prize. The specific prize in view is "if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead." Surely, this cannot mean the hope of resurrection unto eternal life, which is the sure promise of salvation. Indeed, this is not the case. The words in the original are that he might attain the "ek Anastasis ek nekron," the *out-resurrection out from among the dead.*"

Christ uses this expression of Himself in Mark 9:9-10, when He says He will arise "out from among the dead." Upon hearing this, the disciples questioned among themselves what rising out from among the dead should mean. Obviously, this expression was distinct from the common Jewish belief which Mary, the sister of Lazarus, expressed when she told the Lord, "I know he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. (John 11:24) When did Christ arise? Of course, He arose out from among the dead three days after His death. The "ek Anastasis" also occurs in Luke 20:35, again in the contest of reward for specific service.

"They which are found worthy to obtain that world and **the resurrection from the dead**, neither marry nor are given in marriage." (Luke 20:35)

Therefore, Paul is pressing toward a prize of an earlier or somehow better resurrection. Remember, this idea of earning a better resurrection also occurs in another important book of service, the book of Hebrews.

"Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might attain a better resurrection." (Heb 11:35)

Finally, Paul finishes this discourse in Phil 3 by speaking sorrowfully of others who minded earthly things, got off track and whose end is destruction, literally perdition or waste. In other words, their walk was such that they were actually enemies of the cross and will suffer loss; but the context leaves the very real possibility that it is believers, who are being spoken of, not unbelievers.

Paul did not feel assured of earning the crown until he arrived at the very last of his life and was about to be martyred. If that is the case with perhaps the Lord's most ardent servant ever, how can we speak with surety about earning the crown or prize in our walk? It is clearer to me all the time why Philippians 2:12 says to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

(2 Tim 4:6-8 KJV) "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. {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.**"

Conclusion

Blessed be the Lord God Almighty, who by His grace alone saves us completely and presents us without spot or blemish or any such thing. Yet praise be His name even more, because he graciously accepts and judges our walk, and gives the possibility for even further blessings of rewards for faithful service. Truly, He gives exceeding abundantly beyond anything that we can ask or think. May we walk worthy of such a high calling and such exceeding grace in our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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

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2/3/03

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