

CLARITY TRUMPET

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. — I Corinthians 14:8, 9

Understanding Rewards—Part 1

To properly understand the subject of rewards there are some essential points that should be covered.

Rewards are earned. It is important to realize that, unlike salvation which is a gift, rewards are earned; they are not freely given to all. God's Word states, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). You earn a crop; it is not just handed to you. In verses nine and ten the apostle Paul wrote, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." There must be the sowing before there is the reaping, but the reaping certainly does come. It is determined by what is sown and how the seed is cared for or managed. The crop is the reward for one's diligence and effort.

A good example of rewards being earned rather than being outright gifts is the parable of the minas recorded in Luke 19:11–27. In this parable Jesus mentioned a nobleman going on a long journey and giving one mina to each of ten servants (vs. 12, 13). Each mina was worth about three month's salary. Upon returning from his journey, he called the servants together "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading." One servant had gained ten minas from one; another gained five minas from one (vs. 15–19). The nobleman rewarded both of these faithful servants by giving them authority over ten and five cities respectively (vs. 16–19). But there was a third servant who did nothing. He simply held onto the one mina his master had originally given him. To this servant the nobleman responded with this stinging rebuke: "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant" (v. 22). He then commanded that because this servant had not multiplied the one mina, it should be taken from him and given to the one who had ten (vs. 23–24). The lesson of the parable is given in verse 26: "I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." The reward of ruling over cities was obviously earned by the faithful and wise investment the two servants made, while what could have been a reward to the third servant was denied and given to another.

Rewards are only for believers in Christ. They are not offered to anyone else. God does not promise any rewards for unbelievers. Paul was speaking to fellow believers in the fourteenth chapter of Romans when he said, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...so then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (vs. 10, 12). He further elaborates on this theme in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15. He emphasizes in verse 11 that there is only one foundation upon which believers may build — the Lord Jesus Christ. On this foundation each believer may build works that are described as either "gold, silver or precious stones" or "wood, hay or straw." Those who build things of

high quality (the gold, silver and precious stones) will receive a reward (v. 14). But such a reward is reserved for believers in Christ and no one else.

Rewards are based upon the believer's works after salvation. Notice the following passages.

- "Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 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" (1 Corinthians 3:13–15)
- "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Rewards are based upon the quality of a believer's works.

Every believer will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is an evaluation judgment, revealing the quality of our works, whether little or much. The last phrase of 1 Corinthians 3:13 makes this clear when it says, "...and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." *Sort* speaks of quality, not necessarily of quantity. God is more interested in the value of our works than in the quantity of them, though this does not mean that small equals quality and large equals inferior works. There may be value or no value in much or little. Therefore the character of the work is what determines its worth.

Rewards are also based on the Christian's words, thoughts, and hidden motives. Not only will the Christian's works be exposed and evaluated, but also his words, thoughts and hidden motives will be judged. This may be the scariest part of having our lives weighed before Christ.

- Jesus Himself stated, "I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).
- The apostle Paul adds this: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels [motives] of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5).
- Add to all of the above this very solemn revelation in Hebrews 4:13 concerning how God sees us: "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

Rewards will not be given to all believers. Some will lose rewards they *could* have had, while others may lose rewards they

may already have had at one time. All such Christians will feel shame before their Lord when He comes for them. Standing before the Lord then will be a pretty drastic time for some. Two of the letters of the apostle John also reveals some sobering thoughts upon this topic. In 2 John 8 he writes, “Look to yourselves that we *do not lose* those things we worked for, but that we may receive a *full* reward.” Earlier, in 1 John 2:28, he says this to his spiritual children, “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be *ashamed before Him at His coming.*” God adds a further warning in Revelation 3:11 in a letter to the church in Philadelphia, where He says, “Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, *that no one may take your crown* [speaking of reward].”

The reward of an inheritance in Christ’s earthly kingdom will not be given to all believers. Although all believers in Christ enter God’s spiritual kingdom the moment they believe in Him, and though all believers will enter the physical earthly kingdom of God in the future, not all of God’s children will have an inheritance in His earthly kingdom. In other words, *only faithful believers will have an inheritance in the kingdom of God*, ruling and reigning with Christ during His 1,000 year reign on earth. Many believers have never even considered this possibility that we all may be in the kingdom, but not all will be enjoying rewards there; that is, having an inheritance. Consider these verses:

• In **Matthew 25:14–28** (similar to the parable of the minas in Luke), Jesus begins the parable by saying, “The *kingdom* of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.” To one he gave five talents (money), to another two and to another one. The servants who had five and two talents each doubled the amount they had when their lord returned from his journey. To each of these he said, “Well done, *good and faithful* servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you *ruler* over many things. Enter into the *joy* of your lord” (vs. 21, 23). The remaining servant did nothing with his lord’s money and suffered severely for it, losing even the one talent he had been given and ending up being labeled as an “unprofitable servant” who will weep and gnash his teeth (vs. 24–30).

• **Romans 8:16, 17** contains one of the most neglected truths along this line. People seem to just fly by it as they read it without the solemnity of the statement sinking in. The apostle wrote: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and *if children, then heirs* — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him*, that we may also be glorified together.” Do you see the possible distinction between being an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ? If we are God’s child then we are an heir of His; we are a joint heir with Christ if we suffer with Him. Not all Christians suffer with Christ even though we are appointed to it (see Philippians 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Peter 2:19–22). On the contrary, I’m afraid many of God’s children do all they can to avoid any kind of suffering or persecution that is related to their faith in Christ.

• **Revelation 20:4** describes those who will be beheaded “for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And *they* lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Who does it say will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years? Those who were faithful to their martyred deaths. This certainly does not describe all believers, does it? Some of God’s children will reign in the kingdom while others will be there but not be reigning.

Rewards are determined or based upon each believer’s capacity, knowledge or ability. The rewards are fairly distributed based upon what God has imparted to each of His children and their response to His provision. Luke 12:35–48 is a very revealing passage that teaches this truth. Jesus gave another parable, this time concerning faithful and unfaithful servants who either serve Him or who do not. I want us to pick up the story in verses 45–47: “But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers (literally, the unfaithful). And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.” So far in the parable we have an illustration of one who was well aware of what his master expected of him, but did just the opposite of that. The result was that he suffered severely for his laxness and unfaithfulness. But what of a servant who may not know what his master expects? Will he be dealt with in the same way? Jesus goes on to say this in verse 48: “But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” That last sentence is the point of the entire parable. The more light or knowledge we have of God’s will, the more accountable we are to obey it. God is completely just in the manner in which He metes out or withholds blessings and rewards.

This same principle is also mentioned in James 3:1 where it says, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” The more we know, the more accountable we are to live up to that knowledge. This being true, it is foolish to compare ourselves or our ministries to others. In fact, God warns of doing so in 2 Corinthians 10:12: “For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, *are not wise.*” We are each responsible to live up to the light that we have, and to use what gifts or abilities God has given us. That’s all. What God does with others, or how He chooses to use them, is really none of our concern. We should focus on whether or not we are doing His will as we understand that will.

Richard A Seymour

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