

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 2

There are different rewards given for various kinds of faithfulness in service. There are at least five specific crowns described in the New Testament.

• **1 Corinthians 9:25** describes the *Imperishable Crown* for those Christians who live self-controlled, disciplined lives. “And everyone who competes for the prize is *temperate* [self-controlled] *in all things*. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” A good example of a disciplined attitude was expressed to me years ago this way: “Pray when you feel like it, pray when you don’t feel like it, and pray until you *do* feel like it!” Another Biblical way to view it is in Christ’s question to His disciples in Luke 6:46 when He said, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not *do* the things which I say?”

In describing the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22, 23, the apostle Paul includes what I call “the neglected fruit of the Spirit” — self-control. Christians in the western world seem little interested in self-discipline. We’d rather attend a weekly praise meeting, get our spiritual “fix” for the week, and live out the rest of the week unchanged by anything so radical as *discipline!* But how did Paul describe his means of qualifying for this Imperishable Crown? Read it carefully and with an open heart. “Therefore I run thus [in this manner]: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (verses 26, 27). Paul’s bodily appetites and desires did not control him; he controlled them. And it is for such a disciplined life that this crown is reserved.

• **1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20** describes the *Crown of Rejoicing*. Paul the apostle asked, “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.” Paul considered those whom he had won to Christ to be his crown at the coming of the Lord, so some have called this the *Soul Winner’s Crown*.

• **2 Timothy 4:7, 8** mentions the *Crown of Righteousness*. “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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.” It appears that the evidence or proof that one “loves His appearing” is that the qualities Paul mentions in verse seven are characteristic of the believer — “fighting the good fight,” by which I think he is referring to what Jude calls “contending for the faith” (Jude 3); “finishing the race,” which indicates steadfastness in fulfilling God’s purpose throughout one’s entire Christian life; and “keeping the faith,”

which may be another way of expressing our loyalty to God’s truth without compromise. Such a committed child of God will naturally be longing for the Lord’s return, loving His appearance. Others, less dedicated, will not be too eager to meet the Lord face to face.

• **James 1:12** refers to the *Crown of Life*. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation (or trials); for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” As with the crown of righteousness, it seems that the genuine evidence of truly loving the Lord Jesus Christ is the believer’s willingness to go through trials, even severe ones, for His sake. How much I am willing to suffer for Him is the measure of my love for Him.

• **1 Peter 5:4** promises the *Crown of Glory* for faithful shepherds over the flock of God. “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.” In verses 1–3, Peter, a fellow elder, admonished other elders to be good shepherds over the local flocks which God had put under their charge. He tells them not to serve “by compulsion but willingly;” and “not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (v. 2). They were not to be “lords over” those entrusted to them, but to be “examples to the flock” (v. 3). Then he gave this promise in verse 4: “and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” If God has placed you over a group of fellow believers — entrusting to you their spiritual care — then you may qualify for this crown of glory by being the kind of under-shepherd that God describes in this passage. Though addressed to “elders” or pastors, I think it is safe to apply the principles here to anyone to whom God has entrusted the spiritual care of some of His sheep.

Different crowns or rewards for various areas of loyalty to the Lord will be given to those who qualify. May we all seek to be crowned because such crowns then (“in the sweet by and by”) will be evidences of the love and loyalty to the Lord we had “in the nasty here and now.” *Crowns for us will bring glory to Him* as indicated in Revelation 4:10, 11: “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.’”

Serving the Lord for rewards is a proper and legitimate motivation. There are at least two reasons why this is so. First,

we've already seen that Jesus Himself used the reward motive over and over again when He taught on the necessity of faithfulness on the part of His children. Consider any of the parable passages we've already covered to see this. Secondly, God gives us the example of none other than the great lawgiver, Moses, to illustrate the legitimacy of serving Him for the prospect of future rewards. Here's what Hebrews 11:24–26 records: "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for *he looked to the reward.*"

Years ago I knew a man who scorned the idea of serving Christ for reward. He felt it was a carnal and unspiritual reason for serving the Lord, yet the chorus of his favorite hymn said, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!" Doesn't that express the thought of being somehow rewarded when we see Him?

I think the apostle Paul expressed this sentiment quite well in two of his letters. In Romans 8:18 he wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And what was it that Moses was willing to endure for future reward? Doesn't Hebrews say he chose to "suffer affliction with the people of God... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt?"

Later, Paul wrote, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18).

God rewarding His faithful children is a phenomenal demonstration of His amazing grace. Here are some truths upon which I want you to meditate, and in doing so you will see my point.

- God clearly reveals His will in His Word, so we are not in the dark as to what He expects from us. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18; Matthew 28:18–20; and all other commands He has given His children.)
- He has equipped or gifted each one of us so that we may serve Him effectively. (See Romans 12:38; 1 Corinthians 12:4–31; Ephesians 4:7, 11–16; 1 Peter 4:10.)
- He empowers each believer by His Holy Spirit to enable us to obey His will. (See John 7:37–39; 14:16–18; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:30; 5:18.)

So here's the picture: God tells us what to do, fully equips us to do it, empowers us from within so that we need not fail, and then — on top of all of that — He rewards us for doing it! If that isn't grace, I don't know what is! He is the "God of all grace."

In conclusion, there is no excuse for any child of God to hold back from totally devoting himself or herself to the Lord, particularly in light of all we know about rewards. I realize that we give many seemingly plausible excuses for our failure to be fully surrendered to Christ, but that's all they are — excuses. Let's examine a few:

- *Temptations are so great.* But God's Word says, "No temptation has overtaken you except as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- *Sin is everywhere — it's rampant all over the world.* But God's Word says, "For as by one man's [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's (Christ's) obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But *where sin abounded, grace abounded much more*, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:19–21). Then, in 6:12, 14, Paul added, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts... *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law but under grace.*"
- *I'm so weak in my flesh.* But God's Word says, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).
- *Even dynamic Christian leaders fail, so there's no hope for me.* But God's Word says "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will *strengthen* you, yes, I will *help* you, I will *uphold* you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).
- *It's so hard to live the Christian life.* But God's Word says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is *easy* and My burden is *light*" (Matthew 11:28–30).

Rather than making excuses for not serving the Lord, rejoice that He is totally adequate to save us, keep us, discipline us, and use us. Then if we allow Him to use us, He will reward us, both now and in eternity. The key is our own submission to Him. This verse says it about as clearly as any I know: "Do you not know that to whom you present [yield] yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Romans 6:16). Whatever or to whomever you yield yourself, you become that one's slave. Therefore, dear child of God, habitually yield or submit yourself to the Lord. As you do, great blessing will be yours now and certain future rewards will follow.

Richard A Seymour

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