

Doctrine of Human Behavior and Consequence

Lesson 12 – Rewards

2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or worthless.

INTRODUCTION

We have traced human behavior from creation’s original design, through the fall, the restraint of the Law, the perfect example of Christ, the formation of the church, and the instructive consequences that shape us under grace. Most recently, we considered what our behavior ought to be.

Now we address one specific aspect of that future perspective: the evaluation of the believer’s works and the reality of divine rewards. This topic does not threaten our secure position in Christ. Romans 8:1 remains true: there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Salvation is a free gift received by grace through faith, entirely apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Rewards, however, are distinct. They concern what we have done with the life, time, opportunities, and spiritual gifts entrusted to us after we were placed into Christ.

The New Testament repeatedly affirms that every believer will stand before the Lord Jesus and give an account of his service, not to determine entrance into heaven, but to receive appropriate acknowledgment and recompense for faithful labor. This evaluation is never punitive; it is the righteous response of a faithful Master to the faithfulness (or lack of faithfulness) of His servants.

THE REALITY OF REWARDS IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture speaks of *rewards* far more often than many realize. The Greek term μισθός (misthos) appears repeatedly for something earned through action or attitude. Related verbs such as ἀποδίδωμι (apodidōmi – to give back what is due) and κομίζω (komizō – to receive back or obtain what was laid out) emphasize repayment for service.

Jesus Himself taught this principle plainly: Matthew 6:1-4 – “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven... your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

The same idea appears when giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. Hypocritical acts receive their full “payment” in human praise; secret, Godward acts receive recompense from the Father.

Old Testament examples also illustrate the principle for those already in covenant relationship with God: Abraham’s faithfulness after receiving promises (Genesis 15:1), the proper treatment of enemies (Proverbs 25:22), and the comforting promise to the remnant (Isaiah 40:10-11). These passages show that God notices and responds to the heart-motivated obedience of His people (Hebrews 11:6)

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WHO CONDUCTS THE EVALUATION AND WHEN?

The evaluator is Jesus Christ Himself. 2 Corinthians 5:10 – “...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...” Romans 14:10 – “...we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”

The term βῆμα (bēma) refers to the raised platform from which officials awarded prizes in Greek games. It is never used in the New Testament for the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15, which concerns unbelievers whose names are not found in the book of life. Believers appear before Christ’s bēma for evaluation of service, not for determination of eternal destiny.

WHAT IS EVALUATED?

1 Corinthians 3:9-15 sets the clearest framework. Every believer is building on the foundation of Jesus Christ. The materials used are tested by fire:

- Gold, silver, precious stones → endure the fire and receive reward
- Wood, hay, straw → burned up, resulting in loss of what would have been

The passage does not contrast good works versus sins. Both categories of material have apparent value to human eyes, but only quality endures divine testing. The revealing fire exposes motivation above all (1 Corinthians 4:1-5 – “the motives of men’s hearts”). Service done for self-promotion, human approval, or fleshly gain burns; service flowing from love for Christ and desire to please Him remains.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 adds that we make it our ambition “to be pleasing to Him,” because we will be evaluated for “the things done in the body, whether good (agathos – intrinsically good according to God’s standard) or worthless (phaulos – inferior, base, of poor quality).” Again, the issue is not condemnation for sin (that was settled at the cross), but the quality and motivation of our deeds.

WHAT FORM DO REWARDS TAKE?

The New Testament most frequently describes rewards in terms of crowns (στέφανος – stephanos), a victor’s wreath, a symbol of glory and authority:

- Crown of righteousness – 2 Timothy 4:8 – for those who have loved His appearing and guarded the faith to the end.
- Incorruptible crown (1 Cor 9:25) – for disciplined self-control in the race
- Crown of life – James 1:12; Revelation 2:10 – for those who persevere under trial
- Crown of glory – 1 Peter 5:4 – for elders who faithfully shepherd the flock

Other passages link faithfulness to authority or ruling responsibility in the coming kingdom: Luke 19:11-19 – the parable of the minas shows faithful servants receiving cities to govern.

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Revelation 2:26-27 – the overcomer receives authority over the nations; 2 Timothy 2:12 – “If we endure, we will also reign with Him”

In Scripture, crowns frequently symbolize delegated authority. The reward appears to center on greater capacity to reflect God’s righteous rule in the kingdom age and, potentially, in fulfilling humanity’s original mandate to exercise dominion under God (Genesis 1:26-28).

MOTIVATION UNDER GRACE

Because salvation is secure, some ask why service matters. Four biblical motivations remain:

1. Grace itself instructs us to live rightly (Titus 2:11-12).
2. Natural consequences still operate in this life.
3. Future evaluation and reward stir us to please the Lord who bought us.

The promise of reward is not a bribe; it is the righteous delight of a Master who says, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” God will not be out-given. What we “lose” or sacrifice for His sake now returns multiplied in eternity.

CONCLUSION

Rewards do not secure salvation; they acknowledge faithful stewardship after salvation. The evaluation at Christ’s judgment seat will reveal the heart-motivation behind every deed done in the body. What endures is service flowing from love for Christ, dependence on His Word, and desire to honor Him.

The crowns and authority promised are not about competition or envy (sinful attitudes that will be absent in the kingdom). They are God’s generous way of expanding our capacity to reflect His glory and exercise righteous rule in the age to come.

Knowing this, we have every reason to live intentionally now, not out of fear, but out of grateful love for the One who will one day look us in the face and evaluate what we did with the life He gave us.

BEYOND SALVATION: THE REALITY OF ETERNAL REWARDS

THE NATURE OF THE EVALUATION



THE BEMA SEAT

A raised platform for awarding prizes, not for determining eternal destiny or condemnation.



QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Fire tests works to reveal their enduring value (gold/silver)

A future evaluation where believers are rewarded for their stewardship, acknowledging faithful service and heart-motivated obedience at the Bema Seat, distinct from the free gift of salvation.

THE FORM OF DIVINE REWARDS



Self-Control

Shepherding

Perseverance

Guarding the Faith

Victor's Wreath

THE FOUR CROWNS

Symbolic victor's wreaths awarded for self-control, shepherding, perseverance, and guarding the faith.

DISTINGUISHING STANDING & SERVICE

SALVATION	REWARDS
 Basis: Grace through faith	 Basis: Deeds done in the body
 Source: Free gift of God	 Source: Earned recompense (<i>misthos</i>)
 Security: Eternal and secure	 Security: Subject to loss or gain



MOTIVES OF THE HEART

Rewards are based on service flowing from love rather than self-promotion.



DELEGATED AUTHORITY

Faithfulness results in ruling responsibility and governing cities in the coming kingdom.



EXPANDED CAPACITY

Rewards increase a believer's ability to reflect God's glory and exercise righteous rule.