

## Salvation, Rewards, Grace and Works—Huh?

Confusion usually comes to people from not understanding the differences between SALVATION and REWARDS. Salvation is a free gift, but rewards come from our works after we are saved. No one's works will ever earn them salvation—the only ones that count are the ones we perform after becoming a Christian. Salvation is a present reality, but our rewards will be given in the future, in heaven. They will be given at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Greek, *bema*), when our works (NOT our sins, which were paid for at the Cross) will be tested and judged.

**JUDGED—II Corinthians 5:10** says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* Similarly, **Romans 14:10-12** says, *“10) Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; 11) for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” 12) So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”*

**REWARDS—Matthew 5:11-12** *“11) Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* The question that begs to be answered by this verse is: Will we all receive this reward?

**Matthew 10:41-42** *41) The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. 42) And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”* There is here a descending climax—“a prophet,” “a righteous man,” “a little one”; signifying that however low we come down in our services to those that are Christ's, all that is done for His sake, and that bears the stamp of love to His blessed name, shall be divinely appreciated, and owned and rewarded.

**THE TEST—I Corinthians 3:9-15** describe what will happen: *9) For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. 10) According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11) For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12) Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw-- 13) each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14) If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15) If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.* God will test our works by the fire of motive. If we did things in His strength and for His glory, they will pass through the refining fire and emerge as gold, silver and costly stones. If we did things in our own flesh and for our glory or for the earthly payoff, we will have gotten all our rewards on earth, and the works will be burned up, not making it through the testing “fire.” (Those works are referred to as wood, hay and straw, which are easily consumed by flame.)

**JUDGED BY WHAT WAS GIVEN—Matthew 25:14-30** 14) *“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15) To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16) He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17) So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18) But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19) Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20) And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' 21) His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 22) And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' 23) His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 24) He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25) so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' 26) But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 27) Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28) So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29) For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30) And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

**TYPES OF REWARDS**—There are various kinds of rewards, but the Bible doesn't give a lot of information. **Matthew 10:41** (above) talks about a prophet's reward, a righteous man's reward, and a disciple's reward. **Revelation 2:10** refers to the “crown of life.” (Some have called this the martyr's crown.) **II Timothy 4:7-8** refers to the “crown of righteousness.” Crowns symbolize dominion and authority over people, and sure enough, God's rewards include dominion and authority: **Revelation 2:26-28** 26) *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27) and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28) And I will give him the morning star.* This goes along with one of the parables in **Luke 19:17** where the master rewards the servant who was a faithful steward of his money; he says, “because you were faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.”

**Revelation 2:17**—In this book written to people undergoing persecution, Jesus promises, “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name, written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”

**WE CAN LOSE OUR REWARDS**—We can also lose our rewards (**II John 8: Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.**), and it's possible for someone to

take our crown (**Revelation 3:11**: *I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*). So, no wonder God calls us to be faithful and persevering all the way to the end!

**CHRIST ALSO TAUGHT REWARDS**—Christ taught that there will be rewards in heaven. Each person will receive a certain “bonus” according to his deeds. Listen to this: **Matthew 6:19-21** “19) *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20) but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”

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**HOW DOES THIS WORK?**—What do we do with this? Had I been with Jesus as He preached this, I would have asked Him some questions:

**1. “How do we get these rewards?”**

If it is of grace then it is not of works; otherwise, grace is no longer grace (Romans 11:6) Therefore, the answer to the first question would have to be “good deeds.”

**2. “I thought redemption—everlasting life—was the reward. Are you saying we are going to have rewards on top of this reward? A ‘heavenly bonus’?”**

**Matthew 6:1-9** “1) *Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2) “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 5) “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7) “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9) Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”* The context to the statement in Matthew is that there will be rewards in addition to eternal life, that will be given because the motivation is not the praise of others or self, but selflessness.

**3. “Does everyone receive the same rewards?”**

That everyone does not get the same amount of rewards is evident. Not only does the passage above necessarily imply this, but Luke 19 recounting the parable of the minas teaches us as much also. As well, Paul instructs the **II Corinthians 3:9-15** (above) that there will be a time of reckoning for what we have built on the foundation of faith. At this time, some believers’ works will be tested and found wanting. Though their salvation is secure, some believers’ rewards will be lost (i.e., they will not get much of a bonus). This would include those people who fast and pray for the praise of men. Their heavenly reward will be burned up, though their eternal life is secure in God.

#### 4. “Which is the cause of these rewards: our works or Your grace?”

It is the fourth question (“Which is the decisive cause of these rewards: our works or God’s grace?”) that causes the most confusion. Since my salvation is by grace alone without any reference to works (**Romans 11:6**), then are we saying that the added bonus we receive after the resurrection is by works?

While works are necessary for these rewards, in the end we will see that it was the grace of God alone that fueled our works. Therefore, God is the one who ultimately receives the glory. This is why when we are in the presence of Christ, we will cast our crowns at His feet, in recognition that He was responsible for all our rewards (**Revelation 4:10**).

Or to use Christ’s language, **Luke 19:17-19** 17) *And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.'* 18) *And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.'* 19) *And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'* Service produces “cities” (i.e., authority, responsibilities, rewards).

**JUDGED ACCORDING TO WHAT WAS ENTRUSTED, BUT FAITHFULNESS ENABLED BY GOD—Luke 12:48b** *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.* And Paul writes: **I Corinthians 15:10** *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

**Romans 2:6-11** 6) *He will render to each one according to his works:* 7) *to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;* 8) *but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.* 9) *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,* 10) *but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.* 11) *For God shows no partiality.*

**OUR MOTIVATION IS THANKFULNESS FOR WHAT GOD HAS GOD FOR US—**Only works proceeding from gratitude are genuinely good works. Even in our secular relations, when a person is very willing to render services to another because he hopes for a reward, we denounce him as a miserable cheat who pretended love to us, while he speculated on financial gain and simulated disinterested service for pay. Such a person nauseates us: he figures on getting more from us than what he put in, and he becomes malicious and hostile to us when his hopes are frustrated. **Philippians 2:13:** *For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* God has kindled in our hearts the beginning of true godliness, and that He will further strengthen us.

Since conversion is instantaneous, taking place in a moment, the life that follows is not a condition of salvation, but the resulting fruit of faith flowing from forgiven sinners. A Christian performs acts of love toward God and love toward neighbor with the sole motivation of loving thanks for what God did for them, “*for the love of Christ compels us*” (**II Corinthians 5:15**).